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THE HEART OF THE CITY: CIVIL RIGHTS, RESISTANCE AND POLICE REFORM
IN NEW YORK CITY, 1945-1966

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Dr. Mia Bay

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation uses New York City's July 1964 rebellions in Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant to explore issues of civil rights, liberalism, policing and electoral politics in New York City between 1945 and 1966. The city's rebellions, the first of the 1960s urban uprisings that would come to define the decade, had widespread repercussions and shaped political campaigns at the local, state and national levels. Looking both backward and forward from the rebellions, I examine the causes many observers gave for the rebellions as well as what outcomes the uprisings had. Using archival records, government documents, newspapers and correspondence between activists and city officials, I look at the social and economic conditions in which black New Yorkers lived during the postwar period, the various ways in which black citizens and their white allies tried to remedy pervasive segregation and its deleterious effects, and the results of those attempts at reform. In providing a previously unavailable narrative of the nearly weeklong July rebellions, I show the ways in which the city's black citizens expressed their frustrations with city officials, the police and local black

leaders and how each group responded. By 1964, many black New Yorkers were frustrated with the glacial pace of civil rights progress in the city and were searching for alternatives to integrationist movements, leading to activism and sentiments that would soon be labeled as Black Power. The civilian review board referendum of 1966 represents the last stand of the city's interracial liberal civil rights coalition. Exploring the campaigns for and against the board helps us to see the growth of white political conservatism, the previously unknown political power of the police, the decline of support for liberalism among black and white populations and the increase in racial hostility in New York City after 1966. Through looking at civil rights in the city during the postwar period, we can see the limits of liberalism. New York was considered one of the most liberal cities in the country during the postwar period, but its black citizens still faced the same issues as their counterparts in Chicago and Detroit.

Acknowledgements

First, I have to thank my advisor, Dr. Mia Bay. She has seen me through a lot in graduate school and has always looked out for me. She still kept working for me even when I gave her reasons to do otherwise. I really owe her. Her hard work on my behalf has paid tremendous dividends. I shudder when I think about the “finished” drafts I gave her. May no one else ever read them.

Dr. Beryl Satter has provided me with a wealth of knowledge on urban history. Her constructive criticism has pushed me to work harder and think differently. I know I’ve frustrated her pretty greatly at times, but she never gave up. I’m not sure I’ll ever know how she was able to turn around chapters back to me with detailed comments so quickly. I hope I can learn that skill someday.

I cannot thank Dr. Ann Fabian enough for coming through with the last-minute save. She somehow read everything, some of it multiple times, in a very short amount of time and gave me such helpful criticism. What I was previously trying to pass off as an introduction was a frightening mess when I handed it to her. Being incredibly insightful and generous, Dr. Fabian cut right through to what I needed to do, and stated it so clearly, even though she hardly knew me. I would definitely recommend everyone get someone on her or his committee who is a bit of an outsider to your work. What that reader may think is a “left field comment” will most likely be some of the most helpful things you’ve heard, because you aren’t just writing to your niche and need other people to understand your work.

Dr. Brian Purnell far exceeded my expectations of an outside reader and continues to do so. He has been so charitable with his praise that sometimes I think he is just being

nice. He has managed to pick me up from some serious depths of despair and frustration. The man is a recommendation-writing machine, even when he is ill and has many more important things to do. He has been so supportive of my work and especially my professional development. And he does it all while being real. I feel very fortunate to have him on my team. I aspire to develop his work ethic.

So to my committee as a whole, I thank you all for pushing me and giving me so much of your time and thought. Sometimes I think about what dissertations would be like without committees to rein in poor writing and outlandish drafts and I envision a kind of Wild West where anything goes. It's horrible.

Of course, I owe quite a bit of gratitude to the Rutgers University Department of History for granting me the opportunity to earn this degree, ensuring students can live without having to take away too much time from our research, seeking out faculty members of such a high caliber and its devotion to maintaining a robust and flourishing African American history program. In particular, I need to express my appreciation for Dawn Ruskai, Candace Walcott-Shepherd and Tim Alves. Graduate students in the department owe so much to Dawn. We would be lost without her.

Thanks are also due to Marsha Barrett and Leigh-Anne Francis, two of the rare people in life who understand. I would not be at this place at this time without Nancy Yaeger's help. Bean and Patti provided endless companionship and distractions.

The Jani family has given me love, belonging, concern and inclusion I have never known. They are truly great people and I am fortunate to know them. Wherever I may wind up, I look forward to spending many more holidays with them. I will always have a home.

And finally, to Alissa Jani, it's hard to put anything down here now. I thought it would be easy, but there is so much to say. I guess I will just tell you that your love and support have enabled me to be who I am today. You believed in me when I did not. I'm so glad I stole your seat. Thank you, and I love you. I did it, J.

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Introduction

“The real danger of Harlem is not in the infrequent explosions of random lawlessness. The frightening horror of Harlem is the chronic day-to-day quiet violence to the human spirit which exists and is accepted as normal.” – Dr. Kenneth Clark, July 1964¹

In July 1964, the streets of Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York City exploded in rebellion in response to the police killing of a fifteen-year-old African American boy. For six days, residents of the two neighborhoods fought police, looted stores and committed acts of property destruction. After nearly a week of upheaval, one man was dead, hundreds were injured, police had arrested more than five hundred and nearly seven hundred businesses were damaged, with costs to the city topping \$4 million. In the rebellions’ aftermath, the demand for a panel of civilians to review citizen complaints against police emerged as the most salient local outcome. The city’s police resisted civilian oversight and when a new mayor, John Lindsay, introduced private citizens into the complaint review process in 1966, the local police union and its allies waged a successful campaign to remove them via referendum and amend the city’s charter to prohibit civilians from serving on any police review board.

New York’s rebellions were the first of the urban uprisings that would come to define the 1960s.² The July 1964 upheaval in New York City was major news nationally and internationally, shaped political campaigns at every level and touched off a chain of rebellions throughout the nation’s cities. Beginning within days of New York’s uprisings,

¹ Kenneth Clark. “Behind the Harlem Riots – Two Views.” *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 1, 7.

² The upheaval in Birmingham, Alabama in May 1963 as documented in Glenn T. Eskew’s *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, was a mixture of the old “race riot” model of black self-defense against white terrorist violence and the coming model of property destruction, looting and battling the police in black neighborhoods with police and firefighters usually the only white people present.

at least six other northern cities experienced similar events before the end of the summer.³ Hundreds more would come over the course of the decade, forever altering the country's racial and political landscape. The ensuing review board battle determined the mayoral race and who would be police commissioner. The struggles to establish and prohibit civilian participation in police review marked a turning point for race relations and the civil rights movement in the city, resulting in bitterness and resentment toward the police and white voters among many black New Yorkers.

When first coming to this project, I wanted to know what happened in New York to cause these uprisings. The city had long served as a center of black culture and politics and had enjoyed liberal mayoral administrations since the 1930s. Postwar New York was a "city accustomed to seeing itself as a mecca of liberalism and racial enlightenment."⁴ 1964 was a time of national progress for the civil rights movement, with President Lyndon Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act into law two weeks prior to the rebellions. From where did such anger and rage come? Answering the first question led me to more: what was New York City like for African Americans in the years leading up to the rebellions? What was the political climate like in the city during the postwar period? What was the state of the civil rights movement in New York City in the early 1960s and how strong was it?

Then I began to think beyond the city. What were the links between the southern civil rights movement and the New York City movement? How did the national organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,

³ Rochester, NY, Elizabeth, Jersey City and Paterson in NJ, Dixmoor, IL, and Philadelphia, PA.

⁴ Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner. *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 199.

the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality respond to the uprisings? How strong were these organizations in the city? With many northern cities during the 1960s in the throes of what has come to be known as the urban crisis, what was New York's place in that crisis? What can its uprisings tell us about the health of the city, how it was addressing the various causes of the crisis and how successful it was in doing so?

Considering the rebellions' aftermath, I wanted to know what impact the uprisings had locally and outside of the city. How did the municipal government respond? What did civil rights groups do? Did the city's 1.1 million black residents see any substantial improvements in their lives? Did attitudes toward race and the civil rights movement change among various racial and ethnic groups in the city? Knowing New York's uprisings were major national news, did the federal government take action in response to them? With the presidential election only months away in November 1964, what effects did the summer of northern urban rebellion have on the major parties' campaigns? Given the city's postwar support for liberal politicians at home and at the state and federal levels, I found it curious that the police union's campaign to remove civilians from overseeing the police was not just successful, but received overwhelming support from voters. The anti-review board forces used law and order rhetoric and racially charged imagery and language to appeal to white voters' conservative impulses. How could such tactics win broad support in New York City? Finally, what were the referendum's long-term consequences?

Despite New York City's prominence as a global city, a black diasporic hub and the first city to experience an urban rebellion in the 1960s, its uprisings have drawn little

attention from scholars. There is no detailed historical analysis of the events or what led to them. The only full-length work devoted to the city's rebellions is a book by two white newspaper reporters published in 1964, a journalistic account that does not seek to contextualize the events, why the uprisings happened or why they are important.⁵ More recently, several scholars have tackled New York's rebellions in short examinations.⁶ Due to their brevity, the recent works on the city's uprisings fall short in giving the events the attention they demand.

Most narratives of postwar New York City do not cover the rebellions or civilian review board struggle in depth. A number of them help to lay out what life in the city was like for most black New Yorkers preceding the uprisings, but no book on postwar New York City covers them in much detail, if at all.⁷ A few New York historians agree with

⁵ Fred C. Shapiro and James W. Sullivan. *Race Riots, New York, 1964*. New York: Crowell, 1964.

⁶ Janet L. Abu-Lughod. *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Abu-Lughod squeezes a lot into her thirty page chapter on New York City – suburbanization, the racial diversity of the city's people of color, the transition of Bedford-Stuyvesant into a crumbling black neighborhood, the rebellions, the aftermath, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization strife and race relations in the city up through the police brutality case of Abner Louima in 1997 and the police murder of Amadou Diallo in 1999. She relies on Shapiro and Sullivan's book for an account of the uprisings; Michael Flamm. "New York's Night of Birmingham Horror: The NYPD, the Harlem Riot of 1964, and the Politics of 'Law and Order'." *Patterns of Provocation: Police and Public Disorder*. Eds. Richard Bessel and Clive Emsley. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000. Flamm discusses an organizational and procedural history of the NYPD at the time and his analysis of how the police responded to the upheaval from a top-down perspective.

⁷ For school desegregation struggles, see David Rogers' *110 Livingston Street: Politics and Bureaucracy in the New York City Schools*. New York: Random House, 1968, Clarence Taylor's *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools*. Columbia History of Urban Life. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997 and Adina Back's *Up South in New York: The 1950's School Desegregation Struggles*. Thesis (Ph. D.) – New York University, 1997. For housing, see Ronald Lawson and Mark Naison's *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986 and Craig Steven Wilder's *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. On policing, see Marilyn S. Johnson's *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City*. Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2003, Andrew Todd Darien's *Patrolling the Borders: Integration and Identity in the New York City Police Department, 1941-1975*. Thesis (Ph. D.) – New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 2000, Richard L. Bolden's *A Study of the Black Guardian Organization in the New York City Police Department from 1943-1978*. Thesis (Ph.D.) – Columbia University, 1980 and Paul Chevigny's *Police Power: Police Abuses in*

the authors of the 1968 Kerner Commission report on national urban unrest who saw the uprisings as justifiable expressions of frustration and anger.⁸ These authors are also in line with those who have studied the urban crisis and civil rights in other postwar northern cities. Examinations of Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia, all of which experienced urban rebellions in the 1960s, show African American residents living in similar conditions for the same reasons.⁹ Black citizens of these cities were experiencing

New York City. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969. On employment, see Joshua Benjamin Freeman's *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*. New York: New Press, 2000. For works that address numerous aspects of civil rights and in the city, see Brian Purnell's *A Movement Grows in Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Northern Civil Rights Movement during the Early 1960s*. Thesis (Ph.D.) – New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 2006, Sonia Song-Ha Lee's *Between Boricua and Black: How the Civil Rights Movement Changed Puerto Rican Identities in New York City, 1950s-70s*. Thesis (Ph.D.) – Harvard University, 2007 and Markowitz and Rosner's *Children, Race, and Power*; Vincent J. Cannato covers the review board struggle in a chapter of his *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*. New York: Basic Books, 2002. Cannato is generally interested in what it says about then-Mayor John Lindsay's political abilities and skills, as well as police department politics. Cannato has a negative perspective on Lindsay and views his liberal ideals as ill-conceived and destined to fail. He downplays the significance and legitimacy of black people's struggles for freedom; Ruth Cowan's dissertation is on the 1966 civilian review board referendum. It is a work of political science written soon after the election. She provides a detailed history of the Civilian Complaint Review Board and the various struggles for civilian participation in reviewing complaints against the police. The proximity of her writing to the referendum precludes her from placing the controversy into a longer context. *The New York City Civilian Review Board Referendum of November 1966 A Case Study of Mass Politics*. Thesis (Ph.D.) – New York University, 1970.

⁸ Martha Biondi's *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003, is the only book that presents a holistic view of the postwar civil rights movement in New York City. However, it stops at 1960. She mentions the July 1964 uprisings once at the end of the book, and gets the chronology wrong, stating Philadelphia's rebellions preceded New York's. Marilyn S. Johnson's *Street Justice* covers the rebellions in two pages and the review board struggle in twelve. Johnson attributes the uprisings to police brutality and does not examine issues of social and economic inequality. Craig Steven Wilder uses the rebellions to get at discussions of residential segregation. It is clear that Wilder views the rebellions as justifiable, describing the inequality segregation produced as "The conditions that brought on the 1960s riots." *A Covenant with Color*, 177.

⁹ Arnold R. Hirsch. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. James R. Ralph Jr. *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993. Hirsch looks at federal housing policies, local urban renewal policies and racist white ethnic residents as a collaborative force that kept black Chicagoans penned into rundown neighborhoods. Thomas J. Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton Studies in American Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996; Stephen Grant Meyer. *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. Meyer focuses on racist white residents as the main proponents

residential segregation, educational segregation, job discrimination and all of the concomitant effects of inequality – poor health, dilapidated housing, crumbling schools staffed with ineffective teachers, sparse municipal services, police hostility and low incomes. Each city had unique issues, but many of them could be traced to a combination of federal housing and lending policies, urban renewal legislation and practices, bank lending policies, discriminatory realtors and bigoted white residents. The evidence the authors studying the urban crisis present gives credibility to the idea of the 1960s urban uprisings as reactions against growing inequality and the failure of government at all levels to address it.

A number of scholars have looked at New York's rebellions and experience with the urban crisis and come away with the opposite conclusion. Works characterizing the rebellions as crime and coercion trace their lineage to Paul Screvane, Democratic city council president and acting mayor of New York during the July 1964 uprisings. It was Screvane who first advanced the "riffraff theory," which contends that those residents who participate in uprisings come from the bottom of society, are criminal opportunists and not representative of the black citizenry.¹⁰ Politicians and police officials throughout

of residential segregation; Matthew Countryman. *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. Countryman examines issues of education, employment and housing that affected black Philadelphians in the postwar period and sees the city's Black Power movement as a logical outcome of the frustrations integrationist activists experienced in dealing with the city government over time; Beryl Satter. *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009. Satter argues for looking at banks and mortgage brokers as the prime maintainers of residential segregation as opposed to bigoted realtors and racist white residents.

¹⁰ Robert M. Fogelson. *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 196. In contrast with Screvane, Mayor Robert F. Wagner who was in office at the time publicly described the July rebellions one year later as "a social revolution – a demand by a minority for equal rights."

the country quickly picked up Screvane's contention to explain rebellions in their cities, though research has demonstrated the concept is a troubled assertion.¹¹ The riffraff theory gained academic legitimacy when one political scientist analyzed New York's rebellions and saw black citizens participate "mainly for fun and profit."¹²

The books on postwar New York City that continue in this vein portray the 1964 rebellions as the results of both criminal urges and black attempts to extort money and services from local, state and national politicians.¹³ One author describes the uprisings as "a racial version of collective bargaining" in which liberals like Mayor Lindsay had to "be prepared to pay up or be prepared for trouble."¹⁴ Another writes of the events as efforts to extract benefits from "guilt-ridden white elites."¹⁵ A third describes many white New Yorkers seeing black New Yorkers as tending "to wallow in self-pity about exploitation long past."¹⁶ These authors argue that participants' articulation of ideals and injustices were actually covers for the desire to loot and destroy, while some took to the streets in a planned effort to essentially receive larger welfare checks. Perspectives such

¹¹ Allen D. Grimshaw. *A Social History of Racial Violence*. (New Brunswick, N.J: AldineTransaction, 2009), 314-315; John S. Adams. "The Geography of Riots and Civil Disorders in the 1960s." *Economic Geography* 48:1, 24-42. The Kerner Commission found occupational aspirations of participants in uprisings to be higher than of those who did not participate.

¹² Edward C. Banfield. *The Unheavenly City Revisited*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 212; Jonathan J. Bean. "'Burn, Baby, Burn': Small Business in the Urban Riots of the 1960s." *The Independent Review*. 5:1, 165-187.

¹³ Jonathan Rieder. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985; Jim Sleeper. *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990; Frederick F. Siegel. *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities*. New York: Free Press, 1997.

¹⁴ Siegel, 13.

¹⁵ Sleeper, 33.

¹⁶ Rieder, 108.

as these discount the social, political and economic realities black New Yorkers faced. Authors who write off the rebellions as crime and extortion miss out on what the rebellions say about the health of postwar New York and how committed its leaders and white residents were to ideals of racial enlightenment and liberalism. Instead, they focus on what politicians and hostile white citizens have said about the rebellions, which is only a small part of the larger picture. Through viewing the uprisings as strictly criminal in nature, these authors downplay the power of racism in American society and the profound negative structural implications the American racial caste system has had on people of color, especially black people. Narratives that deny the potential legitimacy of the rebellions perpetuate the idea of New York and the North as places free of systemic racial inequality and the American political and economic system as one that is just and open to all.

Numerous scholars who have studied urban rebellions in other cities during the 1960s concluded not just that the riffraff theory is invalid, but that the 1960s uprisings were a form of protest. A number of political and social scientists studied the decade's urban rebellions and published their findings in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁷ These studies tended to focus on the police as the primary cause of urban rebellions. While black New Yorkers had many complaints about the officers they encountered, the police

¹⁷ John S. Adams. "The Geography of Riots and Civil Disorders in the 1960s." *Economic Geography* 48:1, 24-42; Joe R. Feagin and Paul B. Sheatsley. "Ghetto Resident Appraisals of a Riot." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 32:3, 352-362; Robert M. Fogelson. "From Resentment to Confrontation: The Police, the Negroes, and the Outbreak of the Nineteen-Sixties Riots." *Political Science Quarterly* 83:2, 217-247. Robert Frankel. "Notes on the Harlem Riots: The Civil Rights Movement in New York City." Oberlin, Ohio: *The Activist*, 1964; Harlan Hahn and Joe R. Feagin. "Riot-Precipitating Police Practices: Attitudes in Urban Ghettos." *Phylon* 31:2, 183-193; Stanley Lieberson and Arnold R. Silverman. "The Precipitants and Underlying Conditions of Race Riots." *American Sociological Review* 30:6, 887-898; David O. Sears and John B. McConahay. *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.

were part of a larger picture of racial inequality, true of every city that experienced an uprising in the 1960s. As hated as the police were in places like Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, attributing nearly a week of chaos, destruction, looting and violence to conflict with the police misses issues of housing, employment and education. Without looking at a full picture of black New Yorkers' lives during the postwar period up through 1964, we cannot begin to understand what may have led thousands of residents to take to the streets in July.

A limited understanding of New York's rebellions in turn leaves us with a limited understanding of a formative moment in postwar American history. Not only were New York City's uprisings the first, but they also had profound repercussions. On July 16th, 1964, the same day of the police shooting in New York City that led to the rebellion, conservative Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater delivered his speech accepting the party's nomination in which he hammered home the need for law and order values. While Goldwater had been calling for law and order in reference to escalating crime rates in the nation's cities, the New York rebellions and those that followed over the summer gave the concept new meaning. Though Goldwater lost the election, his ideology proved victorious, for Democrats and Republicans alike soon had to demonstrate their adherence to law and order through tough anti-crime measures and crackdowns on urban unrest. Without the spectacle of the nation's cities on fire and under occupation, it is unlikely the doctrine of law and order would have permeated politics and culture as far as it did. New York's rebellions also forever changed policing. In September 1964, President Johnson ordered both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Army to offer all police departments across the country instruction in riot control

techniques. His order marks the beginning of the process of a national militarization of police forces we still see today.

As one historian has written of the 1965 Watts cataclysm, “Uprisings also can be inspirational.”¹⁸ New York’s were. Black people in Watts, Detroit, Newark and most every other site of upheaval in the country’s inner cities throughout the 1960s replicated what happened in New York City in July 1964 on different scales. The essence and the attitudes were the same, as were the tactics – fighting the police, smashing, looting and burning, along with communicating the reasons behind their rage. July 1964 was when black New Yorkers decided they had had enough inequality, injustice and indignity. Black citizens with similar problems in other cities saw this and made black New Yorkers’ actions their own.

In order to understand New York’s rebellions, we need a holistic view of the city at the time. We need to know how black residents lived in the 1960s, what challenges they faced leading up to 1964 and how they struggled against injustices. While scholars have been slowly excavating what life was like for black residents of postwar Brooklyn, Central Harlem, despite its historic prominence and centrality to the black experience in New York City, remains under studied. To begin to recover Central Harlem residents’ experiences, I have taken advantage of the records of the Harlem Neighborhoods Association, or HANA, at the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. HANA was a grassroots activist group of citizens, parents and social workers that toiled successfully for decades in Central Harlem on basic quality of

¹⁸ Gerald Horne. *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

life issues such as housing, school desegregation and decentralization, better hospitals, drug abuse prevention and rehabilitation, and youth services. In its records, we see the daily struggles of black parents to have their children receive the same educational opportunities as white students. Meeting minutes, memos and letters reveal the growth of the school boycott movement. Residents of decaying tenements speak out about their unscrupulous landlords and demand action from the mayor. HANA's records are indispensable in understanding life for Central Harlem residents in the years preceding 1964.¹⁹ While there were dozens of small political and community groups in Central Harlem during the postwar period, many of which appear in this study, almost none left organizational records.

Newspaper and magazine articles have been essential to reconstructing what transpired during the rebellions. Journalists' accounts provide insight into every aspect of the events. Not only do we read reporters' narratives of what was happening, but we also have access to the city's police stations and municipal offices. A number of police on the street during the uprisings spoke to reporters, revealing usually obscured perspectives. Locating voices of New York Police Department officers at all is quite difficult. Most of the department's postwar records remain sealed. Officers did not speak freely as individuals in the NYPD's official magazine, *Spring 3100*. Similarly, journalists' accounts of the uprisings provide what are often the only documented views of ordinary Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant residents. Unlike the city's police, these people had no compunction about expressing their views, but most of the time no one cared what

¹⁹ HANA has received little scholarly attention, yet it was a vital component of change in Central Harlem during the postwar period. Understanding HANA and its place in the local movement will help us develop a more full vision of what local activism with no connections to the major national organizations looked like in the urban North.

they had to say. In July 1964, people in Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant suddenly had a platform. Black mass meetings feature prominently in newspaper accounts, as do the views of many of black New York's civic, community and political leaders. Without the plethora of journalistic sources on the city's rebellions from the city's plentiful newspapers, the history would be lost forever.

Writing about the review board without the American Civil Liberties Union archives at Princeton University would have been impossible. ACLU archives contain many records of the New York Civil Liberties Union, which are not available elsewhere, as the NYCLU's papers are not yet open for research. The NYCLU was at the center of review board reform in the city from the 1950s onward, and especially so during the 1966 referendum campaign. The ACLU archives contain a trove of NYCLU memos, letters and lengthy reports on review board issues. Many police files that are still unreleased to the public found their way into NYCLU records, providing otherwise unobtainable insight into the department and the functioning of its Civilian Complaint Review Board. Copies of proposed city council bills appear here as well. Correspondence between the NYCLU and many elected officials at the federal level during its fight to preserve Mayor Lindsay's board illuminates the campaign's national scope.

Without an historical analysis of the 1966 civilian review board referendum that situates it within the contexts of civil rights, race relations and liberalism in the city, we are missing a crucial point of departure for all three in New York City. Current historiography dates the dissolution of the city's liberal civil rights coalition to 1968, with

the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization struggle.²⁰ Moving that point back two years helps us to see nuances historians have generally ignored. Virtually every civil rights and black community organization in the city came together to fight to keep the review board Lindsay created, even though most groups were unhappy with the new panel because it maintained three police members and added four civilians, as opposed to removing police from the process altogether. Black organizations worked with many white religious, civic, legal, political and civil liberties groups toward the common goal of preserving the board. New York's civil rights movement had a long history of interracial cooperation. From the Communist organizing in Harlem of the 1930s to the 1960s citywide rent strikes, black and white New Yorkers worked side by side. This changed after 1966. The failure to maintain what many proponents of review board reform saw as a panel that posed no threat to the police convinced many black people and organizations in the city that reform within the system was no longer desirable. The rancorous police-led campaign to defeat civilian participation in police review engendered a deep bitterness in many of the city's black citizens, feeling many of their white allies had abandoned them and an increase in hostility from other white New Yorkers.

²⁰ In May 1968, the black local school board, headed by Unit Administrator Rhody McCoy, dismissed nineteen white and mostly Jewish teachers from their district for poor performance. They were not fired, but instead to be reassigned somewhere else in the city. In response, the city's teachers union launched a series of strikes that dragged on for months, both revealing and creating fissures in the much-vaunted black and Jewish alliance that would result in its total collapse and the emergence of Jews as possessing a firmly white identity, both through acceptance and choice. The city's large white middle class population broadly backed the teachers and generally saw the issue as a racial attack on their fellow white people, which inevitably meant they would choose the side on which they perceived their best interests to be. This made an issue that was at its core about education and community power into one about black and white. See Jerald Podair's *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 and his "The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis: New York's *Antigone*." Gotham History Festival, October 2001, New York, New York. Unpublished conference paper.

As one historian of black Brooklyn has argued, the frustrations parents and activists experienced in fighting for school desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s “caused a crisis in black Brooklyn, a crisis that could only be answered with greater militancy.”²¹ The same was true for black New York as a whole regarding all fronts of the quest for equality. In studying the rebellions, the conditions participants and activists said gave cause to them and the review board referendum campaign, we can see black New Yorkers growing increasingly impatient with the pace of change in the city. As the 1950s turned to the 1960s, the national civil rights movement was making significant headway at the federal level, but few of these gains translated into improvements for black New Yorkers. In fact, social and economic conditions for most African Americans in the city only got worse with time.

Just as city leaders’ inefficacy in addressing racial inequality created the conditions for rebellion, it also convinced many black New Yorkers they could only move forward by turning inward and taking control of their communities and social and political institutions. They shifted away from imploring the local government to redress their many grievances and abandoned interracial coalitions and appeals to white empathy, believing these strategies had won them little over the past two decades. This transition is evident throughout my narrative, from the generally unsuccessful struggles for equality throughout the 1950s and 1960s to the rebellions and people’s behavior and commentary in them through the civilian review board referendum in 1966. In New York City, like in Philadelphia, Black Power was not the foil of civil rights but instead a progression of it

²¹ Wilder, 220.

that the failure of liberal political promises had drawn out.²² By the time Black Power spread as an ideology in the summer of 1966, black New Yorkers were ready for it, as they had been familiar with many of its tenets for some time, just not under that name.

All-black community groups and political organizations had existed in Harlem for decades by that point. New York had been a hotbed of black nationalism for most of the century.²³

²² Countryman, 7. While the only date one can put on the emergence of Black Power as a brand of activism is Stokely Carmichael's June 16th speech in Greenwood, Mississippi, Black Power was not an ideology Carmichael invented on the spot, nor was the phrase new. Black Power drew on long-standing traditions of black self-help, black nationalism and self-defense. Celebrated African American author Richard Wright published an account of his time journeying through the Gold Coast, soon to become Ghana, entitled *Black Power* in 1954. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. had used the phrase in at least one speech, a commencement address at Howard University that predates Carmichael's employment of it by several weeks. It is clear that many of the beliefs and practices that would soon come to comprise Black Power were alive in Central Harlem in 1964 and had been for decades, from the separatism of Marcus Garvey and the Nation of Islam to the self-defense of Malcolm X and black mothers demanding community control of local schools.

²³ Black Power cannot be understood apart from the civil rights movement, just as they cannot be understood to be the same movement. Black Power was only able to emerge through its relationships to the civil rights movement and identifying itself against integrationist goals. As Timothy Tyson argues through the life story of Monroe, North Carolina NAACP leader Robert F. Williams, "'the civil rights movement' and 'the Black Power movement' emerged from the same soil, confronted the same predicaments, and reflected the same quest for African American freedom." Timothy B. Tyson. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3. Peniel Joseph writes, "civil rights and Black Power, while occupying distinct branches, share roots in the same historical family tree." Peniel E. Joseph. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4. Think about it this way – when Stokely Carmichael gave his famous Black Power speech in Greenwood and declared he wasn't going to jail anymore, he wasn't just angry about being arrested, nor was he just angry with police violence. Carmichael was fed up with black marginalization in political, economic and social realms. He felt groups like the SCLC and NAACP did not have the necessary goals or tactics to win freedom for black Americans nor did they desire to win it quickly. Still, even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed black people should seek collective political and economic power as a group to secure equality. Tactically, the major differences between Black Power and integrationist ideologies were separatism vs. inclusion, disciplined nonviolence as a principle vs. nonviolence as one of many tactics and the speed at which freedom should be pursued. As Peniel Joseph points out, Black Power emerged out of frustrations with the mainstream civil rights movement. Peniel E. Joseph. "Black Liberation without Apology: Rethinking the Black Power Movement." *The Black Scholar* 31:3, 2-19. Militants were also frustrated with the American state's failure to respond adequately to black people's needs and demands, seeing liberalism as a failed ideology with only a rhetorical commitment to equality. It is important to remember that many black power activists came out of integrationist organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and CORE. For these activists, it was their experiences in life and in their work that pushed them to militant positions. It is impossible to separate Black Power from civil rights. Seeing them as distinct yet inextricably related movements does not confer the status of "vampire" upon them. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang. "The 'Long Movement' as

Examining the city during the review board referendum offers us new insights into why liberalism fell from prominence in the city and across the urban North. Many authors have looked at this issue through white residents' eyes and come away with similar, related conclusions. One contention is white residents feared crime, associated it with people of color and saw liberals as soft on crime. Another says white people watched the 1960s uprisings and saw only crime and opportunism with liberals again going easy on participants. White observers viewed black people as using the rebellions as bargaining tactics to win undeserved benefits from liberals who ignored white working people. The rebellions never ended and became a "rolling riot" of urban crime. Third and last, Black Power emerged and ruined the civil rights movement and interracial political coalitions with its bellicose and bombastic rhetoric, dividing black and white.²⁴

It is true that many white ethnic voters in 1960s New York City were abandoning their support for liberal politicians. They perceived Lindsay and his allies as "limousine liberals" who came from privilege and were out of touch with the majority of the city's population, interested in helping lazy black residents at the expense of hard-working white taxpayers. And yes, they feared crime, which had already by then gained its association with darker skin colors. However, no one has examined whether black New Yorkers were withdrawing their support for liberalism during the same period. They were frustrated with elected officials who sought to ally themselves with these same white voters and seemed to permit white prejudice to continue unchecked for fear of losing

Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." *The Journal of African American History* 92:2, 265-288.

²⁴ Rieder; Sleeper; Siegel, 9; Kenneth D. Durr. *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

votes. In the mid-1960s, New York's black citizens voiced a collective lack of faith in the city's Democrats, Republicans and Liberal Party politicians who had for decades pledged to remediate segregation and its deleterious effects and achieved little.

Finally, in analyzing the review board referendum, a new form of police power becomes apparent – political. While there are many volumes on police brutality, scholars have not recognized the more subtle forms of domination police are able to exercise. Books critical of the NYPD focus on violence and methods of coercion, as well as falsified charges, lying and social repression.²⁵ These allegations are well documented, but they do not encompass all of the power the police department has deployed. In its effort to destroy the hybrid review board in 1966, the police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, vowed to spend its \$1.5 million treasury on advertising. Working closely with a veteran Madison Avenue advertising executive and an external firm, the PBA was able to bring out white voters to defeat a liberal measure, the first time a progressive matter had lost at the polls in the city in decades. Running a racially coded campaign designed to incite fear of crime in white voters, the PBA, with no prior experience in politicking, was more successful than it had anticipated. In less than six months, the twenty thousand strong PBA was able to muster 1.3 million voters to ban civilian oversight of police and repudiate one of Mayor Lindsay's core programs. Police power in New York extends beyond how we commonly think of it.

The July rebellions should be understood as a product of rising expectations in a time of declining fortunes. During and after World War II, hundreds of thousands of black people had come to New York City from the South, looking for better lives.

²⁵ Chevigny, *Police Power*; Johnson, *Street Justice*.

Throughout the postwar period, the national civil rights movement was making great advances in defeating discriminatory laws and winning legislation declaring legal equality for Americans of all races. In the ten years preceding the uprisings, largely as a result of black people's activism, the Supreme Court had struck down state laws maintaining segregated schools, students had desegregated lunch counters, libraries and numerous other public places and interracial Freedom Riders had forced the federal government to enforce its ban on segregated bus travel between states. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality's collaborative and interracial voter registration, education and organization project, Freedom Summer, was well underway in Mississippi in the summer of 1964. The beginning of the month, July 2nd, 1964, saw Lyndon Johnson preside over one of the final legislative blows against Jim Crow when he signed the Civil Rights Act into law, the crowning accomplishment of which outlawed discrimination in all places of public accommodation.

African American New Yorkers enjoyed few benefits from the national civil rights movement's victories. Segregated transportation and laws that maintained separate learning facilities for black and white students were not northern issues. Black New Yorkers needed not equality before the law but equality before the employer or the mortgage lender, issues that were much harder to organize around and legislate against. Their struggles at home for integrated schools, open housing, better quality housing, decent employment opportunities and both respectful treatment and adequate service from the police left them deeply discouraged with the city. Attempts at reform and standard methods of redressing grievances, including letter-writing, electoral politics,

meetings with local politicians and peaceful demonstrations, had not gotten them very far in a city with one of the most liberal municipal administrations one could expect for the period. Nonviolent activism had repeatedly failed in the city and there were no other viable alternatives. After twenty years of local civil rights agitation, black New Yorkers were largely worse off in 1964 than they were in 1945. Meanwhile, the national narrative said black people were well on their way to freedom. Many of the city's black citizens became increasingly impatient with the slow pace of progress and intransigent government officials, pushing them to more militant positions. That frustration would explode in the streets of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in July 1964.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One

The first chapter looks at what living, working and learning looked like for most black people in New York leading up to 1964, the year of the uprisings. I use episodes from the late 1950s through 1964 to explore the kinds of living conditions, labor discrimination and educational segregation the city's black residents faced. Utilizing archival records and newspapers, I look at the local movements citizens built to combat this inequality, especially in Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, the two sites of rebellion. Before, during and after the rebellions, civil rights activists and black New Yorkers cited housing, employment and educational issues as primary sources of anger and frustration that would and did lead to upheaval in the streets. I also look at how black New Yorkers viewed and interacted with the police, as a police shooting led to the rebellions and police were the principle targets in them. In the section on policing, I lay

out a brief history of the struggle to implement an independent civilian review board in the city before the uprisings.

Chapters Two and Three

These two chapters cover the rebellions and present a previously unavailable narrative of the nearly weeklong series of events. I begin with James Powell's death, which spurred spontaneous protests at the scene and redirected previously planned civil rights protests around the city. Tensions increased markedly over the next two days, resulting in the outbreak of rebellion in Central Harlem late on July 18th and in Bedford-Stuyvesant two nights later. I mix accounts of the action in Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant at night with black protest meetings and how city leaders were addressing the catastrophe, as well as civil rights leaders' responses. I also analyze responses at the national and international level, including those from the president and the director of the FBI, as well as foreign newspapers. Chapter two explores the connections between the rebellions and Black Power. Chapter Three ends with a summary of the rebellions' outcomes in the months to come.

Chapter Four

The final chapter looks at the post-rebellion struggle for a civilian review board that functioned outside of the police department. No historian has examined the fight for civilian review reform and the referendum as a breaking point for race relations and the support for liberalism in New York City, nor have they been used to demonstrate the collective political power of the city's police officers. I begin during the rebellions when numerous political organizations and civil rights and civil liberties groups issued strident calls for immediate reform. The chapter then continues through the mayoral campaign of

1965 and John Lindsay's implementation of a compromise hybrid review board that retained the police members and added a plurality of civilians. It ends with an examination of the PBA's referendum to ban civilians from serving on the board and the widening racial divide the campaign around it exposed and fostered.



On the Title

The state of civil rights was the “Heart of the City” in New York. In one sense, it showed what the city's commitment to its liberal values of progress, fairness and justice really was. With African Americans at the bottom of the American racial caste system, how the city responded to their struggles for social justice demonstrated the extent of its dedication to these values. In another way, the city could never be a healthy organism with such intense pockets of untreated inequality within it. New York's massive and growing poor African American inner city neighborhoods tied together the city's many problems.

Chapter One – Black New York, 1964

New York City's 1964 uprisings were the first of hundreds that rocked America's cities during the 1960s. While the cities in which these disorders took place all had unique social problems, nearly all shared common characteristics. They included stiff residential segregation, expensive yet low-quality housing within segregated black neighborhoods, inadequate educational facilities for black students, poor employment prospects for black citizens and conflict between white police and black residents. New York was the first city in the country to experience the type of urban uprising that would come to define the decade. Police, firefighters and soldiers were usually the only white people involved, the action was confined to black neighborhoods and an incident between a white police officer and a black citizen almost always sparked the fire.

New York, however, was supposed to be different from other urban centers. It had earned a reputation as a liberal city with progressive race relations due to black New Yorkers' decades of civil rights agitation. This was the city where black communist Benjamin Davis Jr. was elected to represent the people of Harlem in the city council from 1943 to 1949. New York's reputation as a place of relative freedom is a significant part of why so many black people came here. During the war, the city's black population swelled as African Americans moved north from the American South. Other new residents arrived from the Caribbean. Black migrants made Central Harlem their first New York stop.¹ In the years between 1940 and 1945, the city's black population grew

¹ HARYOU (Organization). *Youth in the Ghetto: A Study of the Consequences of Powerlessness and a Blueprint for Change*. (New York, 1964), 122.

from 458,000 to 547,000.² Only five years later, three quarters of a million black people called New York City home. By 1960, that number was 1.1 million.³

At the same time as the city's black population was mushrooming, African American New Yorkers experienced measurable decreases in nearly every marker of quality of life from the end of the Second World War, continuing through 1964. Residential segregation had only increased. The factory jobs that had traditionally supplied new arrivals and young people with unskilled labor were vanishing, leaving for suburbs that excluded black people. The schools black students attended were more segregated than ever before. For nearly all African American New Yorkers, living in a country the Kerner Commission report described as one where by the 1960s "most whites and many Negroes outside the ghetto have prospered to a degree unparalleled in the history of civilization," New York was not the land where dreams were made.⁴

This chapter discusses the problems black New Yorkers faced in securing adequate housing, education and employment, as well as their experiences with both insufficient and oppressive policing. Viewing these issues together shows that New York's civil rights issues persisted throughout the postwar period, up through the 1964 rebellions, and gives us a new picture of the city during this time. Postwar New York City is under studied, especially with regard to its history during the 1960s. While several works have focused on civil rights issues in postwar Brooklyn, there has been very little

² Johnson. *Street Justice*, 192.

³ Eric C. Schneider. *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 33.

⁴ Fred Halstead, Anthony Aviles, and Don Charles. *Harlem Stirs*. (New York: Marzani & Mubsell, 1966), 18. United States, Tom Wicker, and Otto Kerner. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. (New York, N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 204.

written on Central Harlem in the same period.⁵ Looking at Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in the years preceding 1964, we can see residents' frustration with the goals of integration and their search for other avenues of securing freedom that made Black Power so readily accepted in New York City come its articulation in 1966. In a number of ways, such as community control of schools and police, insistence upon economic empowerment and the willingness to question and attack power structures, Black Power had been in the city for years.

Living

In 1955, a group of tenements slated for demolition in Central Harlem between Lenox and Fifth Avenues and 132nd and 135th Streets became the focal point for black New Yorkers' battle against the city's urban renewal practices. Developer Robert Olnick bought the buildings and land from the city as part an urban renewal project in 1952. By 1955, the site, variously known as the Godfrey Nurse Houses, Harlem Estates and Lenox Terrace was unchanged. Not only had no demolition or construction taken place, but there were still 1,200 families living in the buildings legally while Olnick, their new landlord, was supposed to be finding them new housing as required by law. The living conditions, however, were not legal. Residents had to live with falling plaster, with no

⁵ Most works covering specific neighborhoods or sections of the city in the postwar period focus on Brooklyn. Purnell, *A Movement Grows in Brooklyn*; Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*; Wilder. Adina Back provides vital attention to school desegregation in Central Harlem in her anthology entry "Exposing the 'Whole Segregation Myth': The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940-1980*. Eds. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, as well as her dissertation, *Up South in New York*.

plaster, faulty electrical wiring, leaky plumbing, rat infestations, unsafe gas conditions, holes in walls and no heat in the winter.⁶

Mrs. Anna Cox, a resident of the building, had been without heat since November 1954 when she went to court on January 25th, 1955. Though she had been complaining every time she paid her twelve dollar weekly rent, Olnick and his employees ignored Mrs. Cox until she filed a civil complaint the week before her court date. Repairs began as soon as Olnick received the summons and were completed before the scheduled court appearance. Olnick plead ignorance, saying “I only heard about that complaint Monday,” meaning January 24th, the day he received the summons.⁷

Mrs. Cox was not alone in her difficult living conditions. Her neighbors had filed “hundreds of valid complaints” with various city agencies. Scores of Olnick’s tenants were using kerosene heaters to keep warm, in the absence of functional heat in the buildings. A seventy-year-old woman burned to death in a fire related to her kerosene heater. Still, the city’s Bureau of Real Estate, tasked with supervising maintenance at urban renewal projects and overseeing landlords’ efforts to find tenants new housing, flat out refused to issue summonses to Olnick. The municipal Health Department was not even sending inspectors to investigate complaints. A spokesman explained the agency could not “send one man into those buildings alone because he may run across a vicious dog, or derelicts sleeping in hallways, or badly-lighted halls where he may meet all types

⁶ Letter from Rev. W. Eugene Houston, Chairman of the Central Harlem Housing Committee, Welfare and Health Council of New York to Robert Olnick, 7 March 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 3, Folder “CHCCP Housing Committee - 1955 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; “Tenants in Harlem Allege Ouster Plot.” *New York Times* 2 Feb 1955: 72.

⁷ Carl J. Pelleck and John T. O’Grady. “Sick of Housing Alibis, Harlem Group Cracks Down.” *New York Post* 26 Jan 1955: 37.

of characters. And we can't send two inspectors in together because we are too short-staffed." Even if the Health Department could find employees to investigate complaints, the spokesman divulged, "Our inspectors have been told not to issue summonses there because the city is involved" with constructing the project.⁸

Olnick denied responsibility altogether, asserting he was "doing everything humanely possible," but the odds were stacked against him. Explaining one of the dilemmas he faced, he said, "Let me give you an example – there are thirteen families in a building. I relocated nine of them. The building is left with only four families and the vandals rush in. They tear the place apart. I've got fourteen maintenance men working all the time. I'm doing everything I can." Claiming thieves and criminals were responsible for the living conditions, Olnick added, "Don't forget, these buildings were slums before I inherited them." Olnick portrayed himself as working tirelessly for his tenants against a number of forces out of his control. Though it had been three years since he purchased the property, he maintained, "I'm doing my best to get these people relocated. The sooner I do the sooner this project can begin."⁹

The work Olnick put in was not enough for tenants or their activist allies. With seemingly no end to the tenants' plight in sight, the chairman of the City Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems, a tenants' rights group, wrote to Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. on February 14th, 1955. Wagner was a liberal Democrat with a progressive pedigree. His Democratic U.S. Senator father, Robert F. Wagner Sr., was an

⁸ Joseph Kahn and Ted Poston. "Harlem Tenants Shiver without Heat as City Departments Refuse to Act." *New York Post* 6 Feb 1955: 4.

⁹ Pelleck and O'Grady. "Sick of Housing Alibis, Harlem Group Cracks Down," 37.

influential New Dealer from New York who during his four terms, beginning in 1926, became legendary for his championing of labor rights.¹⁰ Mayor Wagner began his political career as a state assemblyman in 1938 and after serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II, returned to politics in 1947. He held the positions of Buildings Department commissioner, chairman of the City Planning Commission, Borough President of Manhattan and won election to mayor in 1954, a position he held through the end of 1965. For a big city mayor in the 1950s and early 1960s, Wagner was about as liberal as anyone could expect. Like his father, he seems to have been genuinely concerned with the plight of poor and working people. He evinced consistent concern for the many problems black New Yorkers faced, but never succeeded beyond token levels in remediating segregation and its deleterious effects. Wagner was frequently wracked with indecision when faced with serious issues and adopted a habit of deferring decision-making through the use of commissions and panels. Fearful of alienating white voters, the mayor rarely put his civil rights sentiments into action. As a local civil rights leader explained, “You can spend two hours talking to him and come away thinking what a nice man he is. Then, when you get around to figuring out exactly what you’ve gained, you suddenly realize that he’s given you nothing at all.”¹¹

Harris L. Present, chairman of the City Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems, urged the mayor to involve himself with the situation, saying the lack of upkeep on Olnick’s apartments “has gotten so out of hand” that Olnick’s removal from

¹⁰ Senator Wagner was instrumental in writing the Social Security Act and sponsored the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act, which guaranteed private sector workers’ rights to unionize, collectively bargain and strike.

¹¹ Barry Gottehrer. *New York City in Crisis: a Study in Depth of Urban Sickness*. (New York: D. McKay Co, 1965), 16.

the project may be necessary “so that the tenants remaining on Godfrey Nurse site could at least be living under reasonable conditions.” As of Present’s letter, the city’s Department of Housing and Buildings had filed dozens of complaints against Olnick for the conditions to which he subjected his tenants, resulting in at least forty-four decisions against him. There were twenty-five more pending, as well as many complaints tenants had filed.¹²

The Reverend W. Eugene Houston, chairman of the Central Harlem Housing Committee, another tenants’ rights group, wrote to Olnick ten days later, informing the landlord the CHHC could “no longer, in good conscience, cooperate with you.” Reverend Houston explained after working with Olnick for the past two and a half years to resolve the issues at the Godfrey Nurse Houses site, “Our efforts, we feel have been fruitless in the total picture, a situation made all the more galling because we have been obviously misled, and some feel, obviously made dupes of.” Recounting a meeting three weeks earlier, Houston said, “You denied knowledge of and even the existence of complaints made by agencies in attendance....As late as February 21 two convictions were handed down against your corporation as a result of Tenants action brought in Magistrate’s Court. Various agencies and individuals continually report complaints with regard to lack of heat and other hazardous conditions.” Continuing to upbraid Olnick, Houston cited a mutual “understanding that certain legal maneuvers which amount to intimidation would not be again used in your relocation procedures.” However, tenants were reporting legal

¹² Letter from Harris L. Present, Chairman of the City Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems to Mayor Wagner, 14 Feb 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 3, Folder “CHCCP Housing Committee - 1955 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; Olnick was not removed from the project. He went on to become a major developer, building high-rise apartment buildings in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Florida and garden apartments in several Southern California locations.

notices from Olnick informing them they had thirty days to move with “no accompanying interpretation of your responsibility to relocate them.” After detailing the extent of his organization’s exasperation, the reverend told Olnick, “Consequently we have come to the conclusion that more authoritative action must be taken to resolve the maintenance and relocation problems at the Godfrey Nurse Site.”¹³

The same day, February 24th, Reverend Houston sent a letter to Mayor Wagner requesting a personal meeting with the mayor. The CHHC desired “to discuss with you the terrible conditions, vis. Lack of maintenance and relocation problems, on the Godfrey Nurse Site.” Houston told Wagner, “For nearly three years we have endeavored to work out the problems through many conferences between the Sponsor [Olnick] and our committee” to no avail “because of a consistent lack of good faith and the persistent run-around we have experienced with the sponsor, Robert C. Olnick.” Following its years of efforts, the CHHC was now of the “firm conviction that the present Sponsor should be removed because he has not lived up to the contract calling for maintenance and relocation procedures in accordance with the law.” Receiving no response, Houston sent the letter again on March 7th. With Wagner refusing to acknowledge Houston, much less intervene, the reverend wrote to the commissioner of the state’s Division of Housing on April 18th requesting a hearing on the Godfrey Nurse Houses problems. The deputy commissioner, Robert C. Weaver, responded to Houston, telling him, “While we would welcome any ideas relative to the planning of such a project from organizations such as

¹³ Letter from Rev. W. Eugene Houston, Chairman of the Central Harlem Housing Committee, Welfare and Health Council of New York to Robert Olnick, 24 Feb 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 3, Folder “CHCCP Housing Committee - 1955 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

yours, we are not of the opinion that it is customary to have the type of public hearing which you have proposed.” Present, Houston and their fellow housing activists were finding official avenues of change quite frustrating.¹⁴

While Olnick’s tenants and their allies had little luck in finding elected or appointed officials who would help them directly, their years of efforts had some effect in the short term. The unwelcomed publicity these living conditions drew to municipally overseen urban renewal efforts forced the city to make an example of Olnick. Judges reversed their previous courses of minimal fines and suspended sentences against offending landlords, with various city courts fining Olnick thousands of dollars. In February, a judge offered Olnick the ability to avoid a \$325 fine by living in one of his apartments for sixty days. Olnick did not respond.¹⁵ By April, Olnick’s actions brought attention to similar conditions at several other renewal projects in Harlem. To stanch the flow of sentiment against his renewal efforts, Robert Moses, head of the city’s urban renewal efforts intervened, vowing to “be tough” on Olnick and others who dallied in their legal responsibilities to relocate tenants living in buildings slated for demolition and allowed their facilities to deteriorate so greatly. Aside from the fines and comments from municipal officials that tenants and activists forced, little came from the debacle. As of November 1956, over a year and a half after the powerful Moses pledged to get tough on

¹⁴ Letter from Rev. W. Eugene Houston, Chairman of the Central Harlem Housing Committee, Welfare and Health Council of New York to Mayor Wagner, 24 Feb 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 3, Folder “CHCCP Housing Committee - 1955 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; Letter from Robert C. Weaver to Rev. W. Eugene Houston, Chairman of the Central Harlem Housing Committee, Welfare and Health Council of New York, 21 April 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 3, Folder “CHCCP Housing Committee - 1955 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

¹⁵ “Pays Fine Rather than Live in Home.” *New York Amsterdam News* 12 Feb 1955.

several developers and Olnick specifically, a number of families were stilling living in the same state at the Godfrey Nurse Houses site. It was business as usual for urban renewal in the city.¹⁶

The case of Olnick and his tenants could only happen in New York City, with its peculiar approach to urban renewal. Most cities in the country would empty apartment buildings marked for demolition, clear the land and transfer the lots to developers. Robert Moses, the man in charge of the city's urban renewal program, however, was adamant that the sites' new owners receive the buildings not just intact but full of rent-paying tenants. He said it was the only way builders would commit to projects. Razing the buildings and resituating the tenants was then done at the property owners' discretion, effectively creating new slumlords who went on collecting rents on decrepit buildings for years before finally getting the clearance underway. Tenants had few choices in alternative accommodations, which made them easy targets for unscrupulous landlords who could extract month after month of rent from their captive residents and expend virtually no capital in upkeep. Occupants had little power to force repairs on buildings marked for demolition. Developers could get rid of assertive tenants quickly by offering unsuitable apartments in the same building. If anyone being relocated refused any

¹⁶ Central Harlem Council for Community Planning of Community Council of Greater N.Y. Summary of Minutes of Housing Committee Meeting. 15 Nov 1956. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; "Moses to 'Get Tough' on Developers." *New York Amsterdam News* 16 April 1955.

dwelling, regardless of reason, the landlord was legally permitted to evict that person or family.¹⁷

The city's approach to urban renewal was disastrous for tenants. From 1949 to 1964, the city had christened forty-one Title I projects; by 1964, only three were completed, leaving untold thousands living in condemned buildings for years with nowhere else to go.¹⁸ As the 1950s opened the city was adding 2,500 housing units a year, but in 1953 and 1954, the city lost three thousand apartments a year as landlords began to demolish housing in favor of commercial space, indicative of a trend that would lead to the New York we know today. Urban renewal had displaced twelve thousand Manhattan families in 1955, "predominantly among the moderate- and lower-income families, few of whom can pay the monthly rentals of \$60 or more per room which are being charged for new developments." Their numbers would rise over the following years.¹⁹ The Executive Director of the New York City Housing Authority accurately predicted the future of Manhattan in 1955. He foresaw its future as a hub of business and management with only high-rent housing, while poor neighborhoods increased in other boroughs.²⁰

¹⁷ Letter from Rev. W. Eugene Houston and Mrs. Mildred B. Fischer, 20 Sept 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

¹⁸ Gottehrer. *New York City in Crisis*, 103-108; Robert A. Caro. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. (New York: Knopf, 1974), 20.

¹⁹ "Statement of the State Rent Administrator on Relocation of Tenants Displaced by Private Demolition for Residential Building." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

²⁰ "SLUM CLEARANCE OR PEOPLE CLEARANCE? (Fact Sheet on 'Title I' Urban Redevelopment)," June 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central

Olnick's tenants were able to draw attention to their conditions because of their buildings' status as an urban renewal project, but many of their neighbors lived similarly. In 1964, Central Harlem was the most crowded, run-down, segregated and economically depressed black neighborhood in Manhattan. That year, 232,792 people lived within the community's three and a half square miles, 94 percent of them black and making for a population density of one hundred people per acre.²¹ The housing in which local residents lived was generally in deplorable shape. Out of the area's 87,369 housing units in 1964, 90 percent of them were in buildings more than thirty-three years old, with half built before the twentieth century. The 1960 U.S. Census listed 11 percent of the community's housing as dilapidated, meaning it "does not provide safe and adequate shelter." An additional 38 percent was classified as deteriorating, meaning it would "need more repair than would be provided in the course of regular maintenance."²² Because of the many landlords who failed to provide consistent heat, Central Harlem had the highest number of wintertime residential fires and deaths by gas poisoning in the city.²³ For all of this, renters in Central Harlem surrendered 45 percent of their income as rent, while people in the rest of Manhattan paid 20 percent.²⁴

Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

²¹ HARYOU, 99, 116. Nine percent of Central Harlem's population in 1964 was classified as either "foreign born" or "of foreign parentage."

²² HARYOU, 101-105.

²³ "District Health Administration – Central Harlem – Quarterly Report – October, November and December 1954." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

²⁴ Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 115.

While most of Central Harlem's residents did not have much choice but to live in Central Harlem, they did not accept their living situations as unchangeable. In 1959, Jesse Gray led fifty or so buildings in Central Harlem on a coordinated rent strike for the first time in the area's history.²⁵ Gray was a former member of the American Labor Party, a worker-centered socialist political organization in New York. Hailing from Louisiana, he became involved with housing struggles in the 1950s, organizing the Lower Harlem Tenants Council to aid Harlem residents with improving their living conditions and fighting evictions. With a flair for the public spectacle, Gray reveled in organizing sensational events, including the dramatic eviction of a wheelchair-bound woman. Tenants emerged from the strike with some concessions, plenty of experience and the Community Council on Housing that Gray directed, a volunteer group that served tenants with housing issues and little knowledge of how to address them.²⁶

In September 1963, tenants in Harlem began a long-term organized rent strike.²⁷ The strikes spread throughout Harlem over the next few months and grew into a major issue over the winter, with numerous pickets, marches, a riotous rent control hearing at city hall and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller entering the debate when he

²⁵ Gray also organized the profoundly sardonic "World's Worst Fair" on 117th Street in Central Harlem, protesting the city's \$24 million expenditure on the 1964-1965 World's Fair in Queens and the fair's one-sided representation of life in New York. Gray's fair opened May 30th, 1964, about a month after the World's Fair, and featured sidewalk exhibits of "pictures showing broken walls and ceilings and faulty plumbing fixtures" in local apartment buildings, as well as an appearance by boxing legend Joe Louis. Its slogan was "We Don't Need a World's Fair – We Need a Fair World." "Rally to Protest Housing Is Held on Harlem Block." *New York Times* 31 May 1964: 45; Gray continued working as a housing activist, forming the National Tenants Organization. He ran for several offices, including city council, Adam Clayton Powell's seat in the House of Representatives and successfully for state assemblyman in 1972.

²⁶ Halstead, et al, 50.

²⁷ McCandlish Phillips. "Harlem Tenants open Rent Strike." *New York Times* 28 Sep 1963: 1, 44.

publicly lambasted Mayor Wagner for allowing any of this to happen in the first place.²⁸

After months, the strikes produced municipal reforms and important court cases decided in favor of tenants withholding rent. The effectiveness of the strikes went beyond the participating buildings and reached similarly unscrupulous landlords who made some basic repairs, hoping to ward off such actions from their tenants. They were also successful in that they showed poor people throughout the city, typically regarded as voiceless, that they could find power through sustained coordinated action.²⁹

Rent strike rallies drew hundreds, featuring speakers such as Harlem native and seminal novelist James Baldwin and John Lewis, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Lewis' speech at one public meeting in January 1964 showed Harlem's issues did not stay local:

Those of us who live and work in the Deep South have been following the struggle here in Harlem with great interest. This [rent strike movement] represents something very new and meaningful not only to the state of New York but to the whole nation. Some of us have been saying all along that when the masses get moving in Harlem, the masses in the whole nation will move. I think 1964 is the year for us to move and you are moving. At the present time, and I think I am right here, this community is the only community in this nation at the present time that is mobilized and prepared to move.³⁰

²⁸ Lawrence O'Kane. "City Hall Crowds Disrupt Hearing on Rent Control." *New York Times* 24 Jan 64: 1, 17. "Governor Assails Wagner on Slums," 1. Rent strikers' demonstrations included an audacious simultaneous picket of the 28th Precinct in Harlem and police headquarters downtown on February 8th, 1964. The Community Council on Housing accompanied the demonstrations with copies of the following leaflet: "The police department in Harlem is here to protect the slumlords, not the tenants. These facts clearly show why: 1) When the slumlords are guilty of no heat, no hot water, and the rats biting our children, the police department does nothing. This goes on year in and year out. 2) When tenants are being robbed, or when apartments are broken into, where are the police? Somewhere drunk? In some woman's apartment? In a garage asleep? Collecting graft and payoffs from prostitutes? Payoffs from number men or dope peddlers? But when it is time to illegally evict a tenant for a slumlord, the *whole* police department acts with great speed." This shows that the rent strikers saw a complex picture of who was responsible for maintaining the city's slums. Halstead, et al, 99.

²⁹ Halstead, et al, 101.

³⁰ Halstead, et al, 64.

Lewis' words illuminate the often hard to discern national importance that black New Yorkers' civil rights movement had. Fundamentally a man of the South and a major figure in the national movement, Lewis had his eye on developments in the city before they had garnered much national media attention. His interest in New York predated the July uprisings, the 1966 civilian review board referendum and the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville school board battle. Lewis shows that many people in the South who had a great deal else about which to worry gave time and thought to different, yet related struggles in what was supposed to be another world. This is a testament to the national expanse of the civil rights movement and New York's importance in that web, despite the city's decidedly low visibility in most histories of the movement.

As for Bedford-Stuyvesant, the other site of rebellion, its housing differed from Central Harlem in substantial ways, but also maintained many similar characteristics. Bedford-Stuyvesant originated as a quiet residential area dominated by single family homes and small multi-family whitestones, with five or six floor tenements on main streets.³¹ Most of the black purchasers of the overpriced homes blockbusting initially produced had to carve these homes into "rabbit warrens," or many smaller quarters, which they rented out to afford their mortgage payments.³² Other single-family houses contained two or three black families who moved in together to make ends meet. One lifelong Bedford-Stuyvesant resident recalls growing up in the 1950s:

It was a cold-water flat with a coal stove for heat, and the wind blew right through the place. I used to sleep with my two older brothers in a pull-out couch and, man, I hated to get out of bed. What saved me from freezing was those quilts my mother made. All in all, it was about the same way my friends lived. In

³¹ Community Council of Greater New York, 98; Purnell. *A Movement Grows in Brooklyn*, 22.

³² Manoni, 4.

the big families, with ten kids, say, they were on relief and the kids would have to go out and steal.³³

As of the 1960s, 90 percent of the housing had been built before the end of the First World War and fully one-third of it was officially labeled “dilapidated, with inadequate bathroom facilities, woodburning stoves, and a rapidly swelling population of rats and roaches.”³⁴ Like Central Harlemites, black residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant, with had no better options available to them, paid very high rents for terrible housing that only continued to fall further into neglect. Also like the people of Harlem, private housing would provide no escape, since of the two hundred thousand units built in Brooklyn between 1946 and 1955, developers allowed only nine hundred nonwhite people to purchase any of it.³⁵

Unfortunately, private housing was not alone in its exigencies. New York’s public housing in the early- to mid-1960s was in a catastrophic state. The city had 140,000 public housing units, needing at least 200,000 more.³⁶ By 1964, 520,000 New Yorkers lived in public housing, with more than 660,000 on waiting lists.³⁷ In the preceding years, the city had been building about 3,500 units a year, which means that its public housing scarcity would have been sorted out in seventy-five years, assuming that everything else stayed the same. Affordable housing was fundamentally the city’s problem, as private enterprise did not build low-cost housing in New York, nor did the federal government;

³³ Eliot Asinof, *People Vs. Blutcher: Black Men and White Law in Bedford-Stuyvesant*. (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 30.

³⁴ Asinof, 30.

³⁵ Wilder, 210.

³⁶ Schneider, 45.

³⁷ Gottehrer, *New York City in Crisis*, 196.

President Johnson's Housing Act of 1965 pledged a scant few thousand units annually, but those would take years to come.³⁸

The City Planning Commission found less than 30 percent of 170,000 dislocated tenants were able to gain access to public housing and admitted it had absolutely no idea what happened to those who did not.³⁹ The city routinely violated clearance laws with impunity which required it to provide the displaced with new homes. Instead, it forced them to find their own places to live, providing them with relocation stipends, which tenants received only if they passively accepted their dislocation, with the threat of revocation hanging over their heads as a stick against resistance. The lack of public housing coupled with the city's refusal to help ejected tenants find new homes forced poor black New Yorkers to do the dirty work of expanding the city's slums by moving into remaining older neighborhoods. Racial tensions increased in tandem as black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, both disproportionately displaced groups, moved into older working-class white neighborhoods.

By 1956, 55 percent of all public housing in Manhattan was in Harlem, bolstering urban renewal critics' complaints that the city used its clearance power as a method to remove people of color from integrated areas and place them in already segregated, overcrowded neighborhoods.⁴⁰ By 1964, New York City had simultaneously made public housing not just overwhelmingly black and Puerto Rican, but also highly selective. The

³⁸ Halstead, et al, 17.

³⁹ Schneider, 45. Schneider writes that "While only about 13 percent of the city's population in 1950 was Puerto Rican or African American, these groups comprised 37 percent of the displaced."

⁴⁰ Urban League of Greater New York press release, 22 March 1956. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 2, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1956." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

city revised its list of exclusionary criteria in April, which became known as “the Thirty Hurdles of Public Housing” to those who dealt with it regularly. The list was split into the categories of “Clear and Present Dangers” and “Conditions Indicative of Potential Problems.” Applicants possessing qualities from the former group were excluded outright from public housing, while those who demonstrated tendencies consistent with the latter had to submit to a thorough and generally humiliating examination before they could hope to be approved. A number of the hurdles punished people for being poor, such as not having enough furniture, moving often or not having steady employment industry. Others were morality barriers – single-parent households, couples who cohabitated without being married, or having children out of wedlock. These measures served to eliminate “the vast majority of people who need public housing the most.” The final hurdle allowed for Housing Authority personnel to reject applicants “for any possible personality problem, as determined by the Authority, and never be told why he has been rejected.”⁴¹ Those who did not qualify were offered no further assistance in finding housing.

⁴¹ Gottehrer, *New York City in Crisis*, 123, 124. The eight Clear and Present Dangers were: “contagious diseases which create a hazard for other tenants; past or present engagement in illegal occupations; evidence that an individual is prone to violence; confirmed drug addiction; rape or sexual deviation; grossly unacceptable housekeeping; record of unreasonable disturbance of neighbors or destruction of property; and other evidence of behavior which endangers life, safety, or morals.” The twenty-two Conditions Indicative of Potential Problems were: “alcoholism; use of narcotics; record of anti-social behavior; membership in a violent teenage gang; record of poor rent payment or eviction for nonpayment; highly irregular work history; frequent separations of husband and wife; husband or wife under 18 years of age; placement of children; out-of-wedlock children; common-law relationship where there is no impediment to marriage; presence of one or more children who are not the offspring of the applicant; family with minor children which does not include both parents; lack of parental control; mental illness which required hospitalization; unusually frequent changes in place of residence; poor housekeeping standards, including lack of furniture; elderly persons whose ability to care for themselves on the premises is questionable; apparent mental retardation; obnoxious conduct during process of application; and recent discharge from service with other than honorable discharge.”

The city was not living up to the vision of federally-assisted urban renewal, as decreed through Congress' language in 1949, "the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."⁴² Recent scholarship suggests New York's system was "public housing that worked." It worked well for those who were able to gain access to it, but it did not work very well for those who needed it the most. It certainly did not work for the many tens of thousands forcibly displaced from their homes so the city could build segregated public housing. The idea of it working is based on the housing authority's solvency and lack of concentrated poverty and crime in massive blocks of towers, stacked to the brim with families relying on public assistance, a la Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes. New York's public housing program was an aberration in that it was not housing for citizens on welfare, like it was in most other major cities. Part of this is because the city never built housing projects on a large scale, and also because the city's housing authority was run like a business from the 1940s, as opposed to a charity agency. However, public housing in New York was also funded differently than in most other cities, taking money from the city, state and federal government, resulting in a much larger budget. Because of the program's ample funding, the maintenance force charged with keeping the buildings in good repair dwarfed those of other cities. Implying that keeping most of those in desperate need of quality housing out of public housing was fundamental to the program's success is an oversimplification. While the New York City Housing Authority may have performed well compared to its peers nationally, it was also clearly a

⁴² Banfield, 16; As Arnold Hirsch notes regarding those who have labeled the Housing Act of 1949 as a failure or an example of distorted implementation, the legislation "merely did what it was intended to do. If anything was distorted, it was the judgment of those who attributed goals to the program that were not contemplated by the powers directing it." Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 272.

tremendous failure in other arenas. That the city was able to much better maintain a public housing program than others does not mean it is the only way to do so, especially when most other cities all ran their programs the same way.⁴³

Working

On April 30th, 1964 forty-one white union men with Local 2 of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters refused to work on the massive Hunts Point Terminal Market construction project in the Bronx, a 126 acre produce market. That day, three Puerto Rican men and a black man also showed up for work, but they were not yet members of the union. The plumbing contractor for the job had brought in the four men of color as per an agreement with the City Commission on Human Rights, the municipal interracial committee charged with addressing discrimination in housing and employment, to try to give more men of color access to the lucrative construction industry. The white union workers stated they would not work on any site with nonunion laborers and argued they had a right to refuse to work altogether. However, both law and the union's collective bargaining agreement permitted a contractor to hire qualified workers who did not belong to the union as long as they joined within thirty days. In essence, the union men were operating on a closed shop basis, meaning employers could

⁴³ Nicholas D. Bloom. *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Bloom views the city's public housing in a positive light for not falling into "welfare housing." While it is true that public housing in New York City afforded a higher standard of living to residents than most other cities did, huge numbers of people, the most needy, were deliberately excluded and left to fall through the safety net; D. Bradford Hunt. *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. New York's public housing program differed greatly from Chicago's. The New York City Housing Authority was run like a business, there was no room to build massive housing projects in New York and the NYCHA performed detailed screening of its applicants, rejecting most.

only hire those already belonging to unions, though this practice had been outlawed since the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.⁴⁴

The CCHR and civil rights groups asserted the men's refusal to work was based in racial prejudice and had nothing to do with labor standards. The union, with fewer than twenty members of color out of 4,100, and plumbers, who verbally assaulted the nonunion men with a variety of racial slurs at the worksite, all denied race played any part in the controversy. They stated the plumbing contractor had "broken a traditional agreement on hiring practices by taking on nonunion men." One of the white plumbers argued he was not racist, as he had "fought in World War II with Negroes." However, he did not like the idea that the state, under pressure from civil rights groups, pushed unions to do targeted hiring of racial minorities beginning in 1961. Tommy saw civil rights advances to be "getting to the point that if I'm eating steak and someone else is eating chicken, he's go to come into my house and eat steak."⁴⁵ Another white union plumber, demonstrating the strict control construction unions exercised over employment, had no problem telling a reporter "If they [nonunion plumbers] were blond and blue-eyed, we still wouldn't work with them. In fact, if they were whites, they probably would get their heads busted."⁴⁶ The four nonunion men of color, like most black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, did not have access to the best construction jobs because unions refused to work with nonunion laborers, and charged the unions would not admit them as even its lowest members because they were not white.

⁴⁴ Sydney H. Schanberg. "Plumbers' Dispute May Halt Project." *New York Times* 6 May, 1964: 1, 32.

⁴⁵ Sydney H. Schanberg. "City Rights Panel Balked on Walkout of Plumbers." *New York Times* 5 May, 1964: 1, 28; A.H. Raskin. "Labor and Civil Rights." *New York Times* 20 May, 1964: 33.

⁴⁶ Schanberg. "Plumbers' Dispute May Halt Project," 32.

The CCHR held a meeting on May 4th in an attempt to reach a settlement after it became clear the white plumbers would continue in their refusal to work. The commission's chairman, Stanley Lowell, a Harvard-educated Jewish civil rights lawyer with a decade of municipal service, met behind closed doors with the plumbing contractor and the president of Plumbers Local 2, Jack Cohen. One of the union officials present shouted, "You continue in this practice and you will be known as a union-busting committee, not a human relations committee!" After nearly four hours of yelling and "repeated table-banging," a dejected Lowell told the press, "I am not optimistic. I had no success." The contractor concurred, shaking his head in defeat. Cohen, clearly agitated, distributed a prepared written statement declaring the union's history of opposing racial discrimination in employment, left with his entourage of ten aides and said nothing.⁴⁷

The plumbers and their union were acting strategically, for if they continued to refuse to work on the \$25 million project, all construction would have to stop within a matter of days. While carpenters and electricians had been able to work through the dispute, what they could accomplish was quickly coming to an end. Of the twelve 550 foot by 150 foot buildings comprising the market, only one had complete plumbing. Without plumbing in place, it was impossible to pour concrete for the foundations and with no foundations, no further work could be done. The contractor could not fire the plumbers for not working because they were unionized and had extensive legal rights. Local 2 understood the power it was wielding.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Schanberg. "City Rights Panel Balked on Walkout of Plumbers," 1, 28.

⁴⁸ Schanberg. "Plumbers' Dispute May Halt Project," 32.

The conflict soon drew in a number of local organizations and figures, including the Congress of Racial Equality, the Urban League, Mayor Wagner and the District Attorney, Frank Hogan. Wagner, a Democrat whose U.S. senator father, Robert F. Wagner Sr., was an organized labor hero, convened a number of meetings with various parties in the conflict, repeatedly trying to broker deals “behind the scenes.” District Attorney Frank Hogan, at the request of the Congress of Racial Equality, opened an investigation into whether or not the union was violating state antidiscrimination laws. The Urban League filed charges against Local 2 with the National Labor Relations Board.⁴⁹

After the plumbers had stayed off of the job for seven work days, President Lyndon Johnson intervened. On May 8th, he instructed Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz to “see what could be done” to resolve the dispute as soon as possible. How did this otherwise ordinary local issue gain national prominence in such a short amount of time? In another time and place, it would not have. However, not only was his chance at election six months away, but Johnson had been working furiously for months to get the votes together to see the Civil Rights Act through Congress. Organized labor was a key ally in this task, with its lobbyists working overtime on Capitol Hill to ensure inclusion of union-friendly fair employment practices in the act. Organized labor advocates were doing this work alongside the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and national CORE officials, while local chapters of the civil rights groups were

⁴⁹ “Plumbers Stay off City Job in Bronx.” *New York Times* 8 May 1964: 66; Sydney H. Schanberg. “President Enters Plumbers’ Dispute.” *New York Times* 9 May, 1964: 1, 13.

demonstrating against local unions' alleged racial discrimination in New York and other northern urban centers.⁵⁰

The New York controversy was “particularly embarrassing” to Johnson and the AFL-CIO’s high command for revealing the disjuncture between the AFL-CIO’s position and what its locals practiced, as well as the fractures in the liberal civil rights coalition. The AFL-CIO’s constitution prohibited any of its locals from denying benefits or membership to any worker because of skin color. Local 2, along with 116 other unions under the AFL-CIO umbrella, signed pledges with the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity to not discriminate. Place was crucial to the controversy’s significance. As part of America’s developing Cold War narrative of freedom and race relations, crude discrimination was a southern matter that could and would be eliminated. However, a situation many characterized as prejudice was publicly taking place day after day in New York, not just a northern city but also one of the Democrats’ national hubs of power.⁵¹

CORE began picketing Local 2’s office at Fourth Avenue and Twelfth Street on Saturday, May 9th, continuing the action for several days. On May 11th, eight members from the Bronx and East River chapters of CORE began a sit in in the building’s lobby after union officials refused to speak with them. Some of the union men coming to and from the office responded by stepping on demonstrators’ heads and hands and kicking a woman. Police on the scene did nothing. James Farmer, CORE’s executive director, joined the several dozen demonstrators on the sidewalk supporting those in the lobby.

⁵⁰ A.H. Raskin. “Union Discrimination Is Hard to Erase.” *New York Times* 10 May 1964: E5.

⁵¹ Schanberg. “President Enters Plumbers’ Dispute,” 1.

Displaying his characteristic wit, Farmer said national American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations President George Meany, himself a member of Local 2, “ought to take his plumber’s wrench and lead Local 2 back to work.”⁵²

CORE responded to the plumbers’ violence by blockading the union’s office twenty-four hours a day, successfully preventing all union officials and workers from entering. Twenty-seven-year-old Blyden Jackson of East River CORE vowed “The day we let them in will be the day they go back to work with the three Puerto Ricans and the Negro up at that Bronx construction site.” A number of men tried to break through the human line of twelve demonstrators locked arm in arm, but they were unsuccessful. Police broke up these attempts before the workers began assaulting demonstrators. Though police made clear their willingness to arrest the CORE protesters if the union made a complaint, no complaint was lodged, as the union had to appear as friendly to civil rights as possible, given the claims it was making about the nature of its Bronx job site dispute. Having the demonstrators arrested would play into CORE’s tactics and help to validate what Local 2’s critics had been saying about its racial prejudice.⁵³

Meany, also involved with brokering an end to the impasse, made Johnson’s effort for a united front against Local 2’s actions impossible when he came out on May 14th fully in support of the striking plumbers. Declaring the white plumbers “were completely justified in refusing to work,” Meany asserted, “as far as I’m concerned, they’re going to stay off. This union won’t work with nonunion men.” Further emphasizing his point, he said, “If they were to go to work with those nonunion men, I’d

⁵² Sydney H. Schanberg. “CORE Pickets Plumbers Union Office.” *New York Times* 12 May, 1964: 29.

⁵³ Sydney H. Schanberg. “Pickets Blockade Plumbers’ Office.” *New York Times* 13 May, 1964: 41; “Plumbers’ Office Blockaded Again.” *New York Times* 14 May, 1964: 26.

resign from the union.” For Meany, this was unquestionably an issue of labor rights and not civil rights. “It would be different if we had kept Negroes and Puerto Ricans out,” he explained. “But we have no record of this – we’ve taken every Negro and Puerto Rican who applied.” Meany did not address why there were fewer than twenty men of color in a union over four thousand strong.⁵⁴

The white plumbers went back to work on May 18th, after three weeks of conflict. The involved parties had worked out a compromise in which the four nonunion men would take qualifying exams for union membership. However, the issue languished for some time, with the men initially refusing to take the union’s entrance exams, citing the tests as violating labor laws. Three of them changed their minds, took the exam under local and federal pressure to bring a positive ending to the matter, and failed.⁵⁵ The NAACP sponsored the men for ninety days of training. Two of them underwent training, but subsequently refused to take the exams at end of their training period, citing concerns of fairness on the part of the union.⁵⁶

For all the outcry, conferences and public statements, the union won without question. Not only did Local 2 succeed in keeping the four nonunion men off of the job, but all construction unions continued to have command over who would have access to the best-paying physical labor in the city, with short workweeks, guaranteed overtime and many other benefits. It kept these black and brown men out of lucrative skilled jobs they

⁵⁴ Layhmond Robinson. “Rights Unit Ends Effort to Solve Plumber Dispute.” *New York Times* 17 May 1964: 1, 46; Sydney H. Schanberg. “Meany Supports Bronx Plumbers.” *New York Times* 15 May, 1964: 1, 71.

⁵⁵ Martin Arnold. “3 to Be Coached on Plumber Test.” *New York Times* 20 May 1964: 33.

⁵⁶ Damon Stetson. “3 Negroes Pass Plumbers’ Test.” *New York Times* 7 August 1964: 12.

could pass down to sons and nephews, ensuring a degree of social mobility for future generations. Instead, as the industrial job market was collapsing in the city, people of color were systematically excluded from trades that allowed white ethnic New Yorkers to gain political power and economic mobility. African American New Yorkers did not dominate any well-paying industry or middle-class profession in the city as so many other ethnic groups did.⁵⁷

Between 1945 and the mid-1960s, New York City's economy was in a state of profound transition, on its way from a manufacturing hub to becoming the world's first great service city. New York City gained 122,000 service sector jobs during this time, primarily in finance, law, insurance and government, jobs which were closed off to most African American New Yorkers, due to a combination of poor education and employment discrimination.⁵⁸ The city simultaneously hemorrhaged manufacturing companies and the jobs they provided, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, jobs that were central to black New Yorkers' economic wellbeing. From 1954 to 1958, New York City watched as other places pulled seventy-four thousand manufacturing jobs away. Between 1958 and 1965, the city had permanently lost eighty thousand manufacturing positions, with thirty thousand of them in the garment industry. In early 1965, the New York State Department of Commerce declared that the city had lost 227 manufacturers to other places in the state since 1960. Between 1950 and the early 1960s,

⁵⁷ As Nancy Banks argues, those involved with resolving the dispute "were more concerned about taking credit for hammering out an agreement quickly than advancing the cause for racial justice or providing the four minority workers with a fair chance at union membership." Nancy Ann Banks. *"The Last Bastion of Discrimination": The New York City Building Trades and the Struggle over Affirmative Action, 1961-1976*. Thesis (Ph. D.) – Columbia University, 2006.

⁵⁸ Schneider, 31.

eighty-six companies which had previously employed nearly eleven thousand New Yorkers departed for Connecticut. Long Island could claim 119 former New York City firms and New Jersey provided the new home for over two hundred. Accordingly, the city had an overall employment growth rate of 1.6 percent between 1958 and 1963, while the rest of the country averaged 11.1 percent.⁵⁹

Deindustrialization hit black workers the hardest, leaving them worse off than white workers in 1960 than they had been in 1945. The jobs they had were increasingly concentrated in lines of work vanishing to automation.⁶⁰ Of the 1,617 businesses in Central Harlem in 1964, just 4 percent of Central Harlemites either owned or helped to run one of them.⁶¹ The median income for Central Harlem families in 1964 was \$3,480, 68 percent of what average New York City families brought in. Thirty-eight percent of neighborhood men held unskilled jobs in 1964, 12 percent more than the city average. Growing unemployment throughout the 1960s meant young Central Harlemites were having more difficulty finding jobs each year.⁶² Men in Bedford-Stuyvesant had a 17.3 percent unemployment rate, versus 5 percent citywide.⁶³ Bedford-Stuyvesant residents earned one thousand dollars less per year than the average Brooklyn family, with one half supporting families on yearly earnings below three thousand dollars. Like Central Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant was thoroughly overpopulated with bars, liquor stores and

⁵⁹ Gottehrer, *New York City in Crisis*, 92-95. New Jersey was offering construction costs up to \$1.75 less per square foot than in parts of New York, taxes nearly half that of the city and cheaper land.

⁶⁰ Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 270.

⁶¹ Gottehrer, *New York City in Crisis*, 16.

⁶² HARYOU, 110-113, 133, 246-259.

⁶³ Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 270.

churches to temporarily dim the fire of desperation.⁶⁴ With employment dwindling, many black New Yorkers who the city's schools had served poorly, leaving them with few skills and little prospect for further education, would soon give up looking for work, leaving them to spend their time in hallways and on corners, becoming increasingly discontent.

These problems had been unfolding and worsening for some time, but the city government seemed frozen with indecision. The city had killed off anywhere between eighteen thousand and fifty thousand entry-level industrial jobs through its zealous urban renewal. Defense contractors had been leaving the city for lower taxes, more and cheaper space and unorganized workers since the war ended, helping to double Nassau County, Long Island's population from 660,000 in 1950 to 1.3 million in 1960.⁶⁵ As the chairman of the city Planning Commission pointed out in 1963, developers had demolished 5.8 million square feet of loft and factory space since 1960. It was not until 1962 that the Wagner administration created the Department of Commerce and Industrial Development to "foster, retain, attract, and expand business, industry and commerce." Incredibly, the head of the department asserted it "first had to learn the causes of the outflow" before anyone could take action. The Department of Commerce and Industrial Development spawned the New York City Industrial Development Corporation in an attempt to persuade new manufacturers to set up shop and old ones to expand with sweet loan deals. Two years later, about ten companies had taken advantage of the financing. The program that was supposed to deliver so much had created or saved two thousand jobs. The city

⁶⁴ Asinof, 30.

⁶⁵ Schneider, 31, 44.

planned four industrial parks throughout Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, starting in 1959. Only one had reached the planning stages by 1964. In April 1964 the city hired a Boston-based consulting firm to figure out some way to address industrial flight.⁶⁶

In the early and mid-1960s, the Wagner administration professed repeated concern for racial discrimination in hiring, pay and promotions, dedicating particular attention to what it saw as a burgeoning youth employment crisis among the growing number of black high school dropouts.⁶⁷ The city had the power to shut down protests at jobs sites and arrest demonstrators but rarely used similar force when it came to remediating discrimination and getting black people into new fields of employment in substantial numbers. Stanley Lowell, the head of the City Commission on Human Rights, faced vicious public attacks when he suggested in 1963 that the city adopt a policy of “preferential treatment” for integrating its labor force and received little support from the Wagner administration.⁶⁸ Whether or not racial hatred motivated the white plumbers in the Terminal Market dispute, many people, black, white, and Puerto Rican, believed it did and believed it to be emblematic of a broad trend in organized labor. The plumbers’ refusal to work, which the *New York Times* characterized as “a sordid combination of bigotry, sophistry and intraunion politics,” fostered existing resentment in the city’s black and Puerto Rican population toward organized labor, as well as a lack of faith in the

⁶⁶ Gottehrer, *New York City in Crisis*, 94-101. Companies were able to obtain second mortgages up to 30 percent of their first through a city and state partnership. The city used half of the department’s budget in 1964-1965 to promote tourism.

⁶⁷ Clayton Knowles. “Job Planning Body to Help City Youth.” *New York Times* 1 July 1963: 1, 19; Clayton Knowles. “Civil Rights in the City.” *New York Times* 15 July 1963: 19; Homer Bigart. “Wagner Promises Drive for Jobs for Negro Youths.” *New York Times* 16 August 1963: 10.

⁶⁸ Clayton Knowles. “Wagner Says City Has Not Discussed Negro Preferment.” *New York Times* 29 Oct 1963: 1, 19; “Rights Unit Head Backs Job Stand.” *New York Times* 18 Nov 1963: 24.

government – local, state and federal – and conventional means of protest to effectively address the crisis in employment.⁶⁹

Learning

Complaints of overcrowded, segregated public schools in the city date back to at least 1940, though it were not always so.⁷⁰ Up to the Great Depression, black New Yorkers attended integrated schools. As the city's black population and residential segregation increased, educational segregation emerged and with it, inferior black schools.⁷¹ Dr. Kenneth Clark, psychology professor, consultant to the *Brown* decision and indefatigable civil rights advocate, began organizing against segregation in the city's public schools in 1954, taking impetus from the Supreme Court's ruling against segregated education and his role in that case. Mayor Wagner, in February 1955, created a committee charged with better utilizing school buildings to relieve overcrowding. At that time, Wagner publicly stated that students, most of whom were black or Puerto Rican, in 225 of the city's 566 elementary schools learned in overcrowded facilities while the rest of the schools offered an incredible eighty thousand empty seats.⁷² His vow to pursue integration no matter the obstructions was unsuccessful.

A report later that year from a New York University think tank demonstrated that New York's predominantly white schools, by any standard, were significantly better than

⁶⁹ "Time for a Crackdown." *New York Times* 6 May 1964: 46.

⁷⁰ Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 52.

⁷¹ "The PUBLIC and the SCHOOLS – Bulletin of the Public Education Association, March 1955." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁷² Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 54.

those schools with largely black and/or Puerto Rican student bodies. White schools had smaller class sizes, younger buildings, better maintenance services and newer equipment. Minority schools spent about twenty dollars per child, while white schools expended over sixty-five dollars. Ten times as many white schools could count 80 percent of their educational staff as tenured.⁷³ One Harlem school had two teachers licensed to teach junior high school out of twenty-three eighth grade classes. Minority schools commonly saw many full-time teachers leave for “better” schools after taking principal’s tests and other supervisory examinations as soon as regulations allowed.⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, pupils in majority black or Puerto Rican schools performed well below their white peers. Overall, the city’s school system, the largest in the country, only had 544 black teachers out of the over fifty thousand educators it employed in 1955, and 312 of them were substitutes.⁷⁵

By the fall of 1955, the Urban League of Greater New York was already pushing the Board of Education to implement an “emergency program to desegregate New York City’s Public Schools.” The League called for “immediate attention to correct the shocking inferiority of educational standards, teacher quality and turnover, aspirational levels, physical and instructional equipment and over-all capital expenditures in presently de facto segregated Negro and Puerto Rican schools.” In its letter to Charles Silver,

⁷³ Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner. *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 93, 97.

⁷⁴ “CENTRAL HARLEM COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING – SUMMARY OF MINUTES of Meeting of BOARD OF DIRECTORS,” 9 Feb 1956. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 2, Folder “Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1956.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁷⁵ Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 52.

president of the Board of Education, the group proposed broad reforms to destroy the city's profound educational segregation, including rezoning neighborhood schools to include children of varied race and ethnicity, busing children "to increase integration in 'core areas' where geographic zoning could not achieve the purpose" and the Board of Education working with the City's Housing and Planning Bodies to tear down residential segregation.⁷⁶

Black New Yorkers' action against their children's segregated schools would greatly intensify as the decade came to an end. In August 1957, black parents, teachers and civil rights leaders presented Mayor Wagner with a list of the ways in which the Board of Education was failing black students. "I want you to know," the mayor assured them, "that I will do everything in my power to see that every child in the city gets an equal opportunity for a good education." He pledged to "follow up on the issues...and get in touch with the Board of Education immediately." The group gave the mayor one month to produce something tangible and vowed to return as demonstrators should he fail.⁷⁷ When the city took no action, hundreds of black and Puerto Rican parents picketed City Hall a month later, demanding an end to "the substandard conditions existing in schools attended by our children, and the delayed implementation of the recommendations of the [Board of Education's] Commission on Integration." Wagner again met with some of them, including the deeply influential civil rights activist Ella Baker, who had recently begun her tenure at the Southern Christian Leadership

⁷⁶ Urban League of Greater New York press release, 10 Nov 1955. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 1, Folder "Central Harlem Council Board of Directors 1955." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁷⁷ Benjamin Fine. "Integration Plea Charges City Lag." *New York Times* 12 Jul 1957: 13.

Conference, and scheduled what proved to be a fruitless conference between protest leaders and Board of Education personnel the following week.⁷⁸

When school opened in September of 1958, the Board of Education announced in its “Report on Integration” that it was making great strides in addressing school segregation and its outcomes. Parents, activists and one city judge, however, felt otherwise. At least nine different African-American parents refused to send their children to three “inferior, below-standard, segregated” Harlem junior high schools, while the parents of seven African-American children in Bedford-Stuyvesant did the same. Parents quickly arranged daily six-hour tutoring sessions for their children, led by volunteer teachers. Responding to a plea from the parents’ lawyer, the State Education Commissioner refused to intervene in the case, declaring the state could only involve itself in a local matter if the Board of Education asked it to. The city Superintendent of Schools, Dr. John Theobald, also declined to assist the students. Seven of their mothers met with him, asking for their children to be reassigned to more adequate and integrated schools, but Theobald refused, saying that he was unable to take action on anything other than “educational grounds.” In October, four of the parents filed a million-dollar lawsuit against the city for its alleged “sinister and discriminatory purpose in the perpetuation of racial segregation.” The following day, Theobald asked the State Education Department to study “the problems and needs of schools in so-called difficult areas,” which included the three Harlem junior high schools parents were boycotting.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Parents Picket City Hall over Delay in Integration.” *New York Times* 20 Sep 1957: 1, 15.

⁷⁹ Letter from Mrs. Carrie E. Haynes and Mrs. Ruby Sims to Mrs. Harriet Pickens, 21 Oct 1958. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 2, Folder “CHCCP Board of Directors 1957 to 1958.” Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black

By the middle of November, the city had issued eight of the children's mothers with summonses for refusing to send them to their Harlem schools.⁸⁰ Four were found guilty, one was placed on parole after returning her child to the offending school, another had her charges dismissed on a technicality and two had their charges dismissed altogether.⁸¹ While the judge who found the four guilty said he had to decide the case without considering the quality of the students' education, Justice Justine Wise Polier, who dismissed the charges against two of the mothers, asserted they were doing the right thing in the fact of their children receiving "inferior educational opportunities by reason of racial discrimination." Polier held that the parents "have the constitutionally guaranteed right to elect no education for their children rather than to subject them to discriminatorily inferior education." She castigated the Board of Education for contending "that one arm of the state – this court – must blindly enforce the unconstitutional denial of constitutional rights by another arm of this state – the Board of Education."⁸²

Polier's decision not only galvanized parents and activists but also convinced state legislators that the city's school system needed to be investigated for racial discrimination. Superintendent Theobald retorted, "Only a lack of understanding of the facts would lead anyone to say that New York City discriminates against Negro and

Culture, The New York Public Library; "7 Negro Children Attend Tutoring." *New York Times* 12 Sep 1958: 15; "Harlem Action Barred." *New York Times* 18 Sep 1958: 21; "Pupils' Plea Denied." *New York Times* 25 Sep 1958: 23; "State Will Study 3 Harlem Schools." *New York Times* 30 Oct 1958: 26.

⁸⁰ "6 Mothers Summoned." *New York Times* 12 Nov 1958: 16.

⁸¹ "4 Mothers Guilty in School Boycott." *New York Times* 4 Dec 1958: 29.

⁸² Leonard Buder. "2 Harlem Schools Called Inferior as Court Frees Two in Boycott." *New York Times* 16 Dec 1958: E1.

Puerto Rican children.”⁸³ Black parents in the city disagreed and took Polier’s decision as a legal affirmation of what they already knew and used the case to build momentum for their struggle to desegregate and integrate New York City’s public schools.⁸⁴

The mothers’ boycott would be the first of several that African American parents and civil rights activists would lead over the next few years to force the Board of Education to improve their children’s learning environments. The Parents’ Workshop for Equality in New York City Schools, a grassroots group that empowered parents to challenge Board of Education policies, was crucial to these protests. After its threatened boycott in 1960 resulted in some African American children transferring out of their inferior schools, the group organized parents in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant and Williamsburg in Brooklyn to lead a five-day boycott at the start of the 1961 school year in which hundreds of mostly black children stayed home from segregated schools. The parents succeeded in securing transfers for their children.⁸⁵ Similar scenes would play out throughout 1961 and 1962, including both planned and averted sit-ins at the Board of Education headquarters in Brooklyn.⁸⁶

⁸³ Warren Weaver Jr. “2 Bid State Study City School ‘Bias’.” *New York Times* 28 Jan 1959: 33.

⁸⁴ Adina Back sees parents’ activism in Central Harlem as having a “measurable impact on the Board’s general resistance to implementing substantive desegregation programs.” I agree the protests and boycotts had an impact on the board’s rhetoric, but I do not see the school board as taking action that helped more than a handful of the city’s black children. The people in charge of the school system often put the responsibility for desegregation on black parents through implementing “voluntary” programs that were poorly advertised. As for mandatory transfers, school board officials either transferred only a few students or reversed course altogether, citing opposition from white parents. *Up South in New York*, 308.

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 102-113.

⁸⁶ Robert H. Terte. “30 Begin a Sit-in at School Board.” *New York Times* 18 Sep 1962: 41. Robert H. Terte. “Students in Sit-in to Get Transfers.” *New York Times* 19 Sep 1962: 41.

The Parents' Workshop joined with a new grassroots activist group focused on school desegregation, the Harlem Parents Committee, and several chapters of CORE and the NAACP to form the New York Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools in 1963.⁸⁷ Its goal was "to see that the 1954 Supreme Court Decision is applied in New York to wipe out the last vestiges of 'de facto' segregated schools."⁸⁸ Building on the work of Dr. Clark, the Urban League, CORE and the Harlem Neighborhoods Association, the member groups exerted pressured the board to take real steps to integrate schools.⁸⁹ After the superintendent of schools, Calvin Gross, told civil rights leaders at a late August 1963 meeting that he would not permit involuntary student transfers to take place to integrate schools or even provide a desegregation timetable, the NYCCIS announced that it would be organizing a school boycott in all five boroughs at an unspecified date later in the school year. The group vowed to "launch a large scale citizens [sic] effort to eliminate the illegal and immoral Jim Crow School System of New York City."⁹⁰ The strike would also

⁸⁷ Harlem Parents Committee press release, undated. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, June 1963 – July 1963." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. "Why We March." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, June 1963 – July 1963." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁸⁸ "Questions and Answers." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, August 1963 – 1965." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁸⁹ Consider that during this time, on July 17th, 1963, a United States District Court Judge ordered the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board in Louisiana "to start desegregation this fall by advising all 12th grade students, regardless of race, that they may apply for transfer to any school of their choice." Nothing similar would ever take place in New York. See "Baton Rouge Gets Order on Schools." *New York Times* 18 July 1963: 10.

⁹⁰ Harlem Parents Committee press release, 31 July 1963. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, June 1963 – July 1963." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

serve a second purpose, exerting economic coercion. A Presbyterian minister in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Milton Galamison, chaired the NYCCIS, which along with the Harlem Parents Committee, believed keeping students out of school for an indefinite amount of time was the only way to win, as low attendance figures would decimate the state's financial award to the board the following year. However, moderate influences within the Committee won out and the NYCCIS decided on an initial one-day boycott. With civil rights icon Bayard Rustin contributing his organizing services, Galamison secured substantial attention for the movement.⁹¹

Throughout the summer and the 1963-1964 school year, many groups, parents, children and activists continued to pressure the Board of Education to finally act in the face of this looming threat. They maintained a high profile for their cause through pickets, sit-ins, rallies featuring nationally known figures like the National Director of CORE, James Farmer and legendary jazz vocalist and actress Abbey Lincoln, leafleting, provisional freedom schools, meetings, conferences, civil disobedience and other methods.⁹² The school board reacted with immediate promises to draw up formal desegregation plans, giving several dates by which it would provide these plans and falling through on all of them.⁹³ No one was surprised, given the board's history, as well

⁹¹ Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 121-123.

⁹² Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 124-144; "Statement on the Establishment of the Harlem Freedom Schools." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, August 1963 – 1965." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁹³ "Received by Hand from Stanley Lowel [sic]," 5 Sep 1963. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, August 1963 – 1965." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

as Board of Education President James Donovan's November 1963 statement that "This is a Board of Education, not a board of integration, nor a board of transportation."⁹⁴

With the cry of "Boycott Jim Crow Schools," the Harlem Parents Committee enjoined every mother and father of a school-age child to "Join the thousands of Harlem parents who refuse to send their children to inferior Jim Crow Schools."⁹⁵ By this time, the Harlem Parents Committee was also leading a struggle for "a commitment to a new educational concept, an educational concept which is nurtured in true democracy and cultural pluralism; that is to say: outlaw all history and philosophy of public education that has excluded the Negro and other minority groups' true role in the evolution of our society."⁹⁶ The 1963-1964 boycott movement had many components to it, drawing from liberal, progressive and radical traditions. Its revolutionary demands for public education that discarded Euro- and Anglocentric models of history in favor of one which taught black and Puerto Rican history in a proportional way anticipated similar calls from Black and Brown Power activists by several years.

The New York Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools' one-day February 3rd 1964 boycott kept over 360,000 students out of public school beyond the one hundred

⁹⁴ "100 Years...What Is 'All Deliberate Speed?'" flier, 29 Nov 1963. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, June 1963 – July 1963." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁹⁵ "Boycott Jim Crow Schools" flier. Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, June 1963 – July 1963." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁹⁶ "Statement of the Chairman, Mr. Robinson Delivered before the Public Meeting Held with Dr. Calvin Gross, Superintendent of Schools, August 14, 1963, P.S. 108, Man. 108th Street and Madison Avenue, N.Y.C." Harlem Neighborhoods Association records, 1941-1978, Sc MG #364, Box 6, Folder "HANA Committees – Harlem Parents Committee, August 1963 – 1965." Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

thousand who stayed at home on any given day.⁹⁷ Overall, the absentees constituted 45 percent of the school system's total enrollment of slightly over one million children. The teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers, did not endorse the boycott, but almost triple the number of teachers were nevertheless absent. On a day when temperatures never topped twenty degrees, thousands of parents and their children spent the day picketing over a third of the city's schools, culminating their demonstrations in a march 3,500 strong to the Board of Education headquarters at 110 Livingston Street in Brooklyn.⁹⁸ Galamison organized a second boycott for March 16th. Despite less public support for the event, 268,000 students stayed at home that day, 168,000 more than the daily absentee average.⁹⁹

In January of 1964, the Board of Education, pushed by the threatened black and Puerto Rican student boycott, announced that it would begin instituting "pairings," or the "Princeton plan," where it would rezone and consolidate two nearby elementary schools, one largely black and the other mostly white. The schools would then exchange students for three years at a time, so that each student would spend half of her or his six elementary school years in each school. The board initially had more than twenty pairings, but it reconsidered at the urging of white parents and school officials at every level, soon reducing it to five. In terms of new schools for the school year 1964-1965, the school board planned to construct thirty-nine of its 106 building projects in areas that

⁹⁷ Halstead, et al, 104. Significantly, between one hundred thousand and 150,000 of them were Puerto Rican.

⁹⁸ Leonard Buder. "Boycott Cripples City Schools; Absences 360,000 above Normal; Negroes and Puerto Ricans Unite." *New York Times* 4 Feb 1964: 1, 20.

⁹⁹ Halstead, et al, 104.

would guarantee 90 percent or more African American and Puerto Rican enrollment. The Board of Education continued this course for the rest of the decade.¹⁰⁰

After all parents and activists had done, by 1964, New York City's public schools were failing to provide for their black students more than ever before. Teaching in Central Harlem frequently looked like this, as an educator explained:

When I came to school "X," I had never seen anything like that school. I cried, they behaved so badly. I soon learned that the boys like to be beaten; like to be spoken to in the way in which they are accustomed, and when I learned to say things to them that, to me, would be absolutely insulting and to hit them when they needed it, I got along all right and they began to like me. Somehow that made them feel that I liked them. I talk to them in the terms and in the way to which they are accustomed, and they like it.¹⁰¹

Due to similar approaches and many underqualified teachers, gaps between white and black students' achievement scores were growing in the early 1960s. In 1962, African American eighth graders were averaging three and a half grades behind their white peers on standardized exams. As they progressed through the city's schools, black students fell further behind. In 1963, nearly seventy thousand black junior high students were more than two grade levels behind, while ten thousand black seventh graders were unable to get through a third grade book. African American third graders were 13 to 39 percent below grade level in reading comprehension that year, while 60 to 93 percent of sixth graders could say the same. In 1964, three quarters of students in Central Harlem's junior high schools tested below grade level in reading comprehension and word knowledge.¹⁰² Students in Bedford-Stuyvesant regularly tested two grade levels behind their white peers

¹⁰⁰ Rogers, 18, 24-34.

¹⁰¹ HARYOU, 231.

¹⁰² Halstead, et al, 14.

in both reading and math scores.¹⁰³ By 1964, Bedford-Stuyvesant schools, compared to any area in Brooklyn, could claim the most overcrowding, half day sessions, substitute teachers, nonresident educators and least experienced teachers.¹⁰⁴

In April 1964, the State Education Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions labeled the Board of Education as continually hewing to a "pattern of building on sites within the most segregated areas." Unable to find faith in the school system's ability to integrate itself, the state declared:

We must conclude that nothing undertaken by the New York City Board of Education since 1954, and nothing proposed since 1963, has contributed or will contribute in any meaningful degree to desegregating the public schools of the City. Each past effort, each current plan, and each projected proposal, is either not aimed at reducing segregation or is developed in too limited a fashion to stimulate even slight progress toward desegregation.¹⁰⁵

Black and Puerto Rican parents, students, activists, and their white allies, as it turned out, had been right all along. The board had made little progress on either rezoning neighborhood schools for integration or transferring experienced teachers to neglected schools, two of its own Commission on Integration's proposals from 1955. Contrary to the Board of Education's claims, the State Education Department found in 1964 that segregation had increased in the city's schools even since 1958.¹⁰⁶ Despite school integration proponents' best efforts, including multiple boycotts, sit-ins, conferences,

¹⁰³ Purnell, *A Movement Grows in Brooklyn*, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Milton Galamison. "Bedford-Stuyvesant – Land of Superlatives." John Henrik Clarke. *Harlem, U.S.A.* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 205.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ Markowitz and Rosner, 105, 106.

pickets, legal intervention and more, schools were more segregated and children of color were worse off than they were in 1954.

These years of struggle took a toll on those seeking change and pushed them to exhaustion not just with the Board of Education, but with the city in general and established avenues of reform. It seemed as though nothing would move the New York City school system administrators, nor would those running the city intervene. With all other options exhausted, parents and activists came to accept segregated schools as unavoidable for the time being. However, they moved to take control over the schools in their neighborhoods, wanting to decide who ran them, who the teachers were and what they taught. In 1968, this predominantly black movement would collide dramatically with the mostly white and Jewish teachers union in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area of Brooklyn. As for the students who came of age in these schools in the 1950s and 1960s, they experienced poor teaching and deplorable facilities first-hand. They saw their parents fight to secure better educations for them, only to come away defeated again and again. Black students in New York City's schools during these years learned that the accepted methods of protest did not work for them.

Policing

Black New Yorkers, especially those living in poor neighborhoods, had three principal complaints against the police in 1964: a lack of black police, inadequate police presence, and an excess of police brutality and harassment. New York City had the world's largest municipal force of over twenty-seven thousand, but black officers

comprised just over 5 percent of all police in a city that was 16 percent black.¹⁰⁷ Fifteen years earlier, black officers made up 3 percent of the force. Progress was slow. Police officials generally relegated black officers to low-prestige duties in high-crime black neighborhoods, hoping to use them as “riot insurance,” meaning the presence of black officers would placate black residents. Proportions of black officers decreased with rank, to the extent that the city had never had a black precinct commander until after the 1964 rebellions.¹⁰⁸

Residents of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant frequently criticized the police department for inadequately patrolling their neighborhoods and allowing crime and vice to thrive. Black New Yorkers in 1964, especially in Harlem, felt the police ignored much of the criminal activity in the neighborhood. They contended the same police would quickly act upon the same behavior in a white section of the city, but allowed it to flourish in Harlem because it was a black neighborhood.¹⁰⁹ The more the police ignored crime in an area, the more they encouraged it, giving credence to the belief that the city’s black neighborhoods were inherently laden with vice and depravity. While New York’s police often seemed to behave as spectators when crime presented itself openly in black neighborhoods, they participated very actively in these same communities in other ways.

Though police professionalization over the years had addressed some of the NYPD’s more egregious offenses, such as “third-degree” interrogation tactics, black people in New York still had quite a bit to fear from their public servants, whether at

¹⁰⁷ United States, Wicker and Kerner, 321, 322.

¹⁰⁸ Darien, 203.

¹⁰⁹ Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*, 66.

home or in the streets. The police were overwhelmingly white, increasingly suburban and as numerous studies have documented, often racist.¹¹⁰ Even moderate civil rights activist and former baseball star Jackie Robinson spoke of being “familiar with the kind of frenzied and sadistic brutality that many of the New York City police force feel they can get away with in dealing with Negro and Puerto Rican citizens.”¹¹¹

Though black New Yorkers did not have the same experiences African Americans in Oakland or Los Angeles did, where police forces during these years were often comprised of white southern migrants, their relatively better situation was not one to appreciate. New York never had a significant influx of white southerners in the postwar period. Other cities like Chicago and especially places in California did, thereby recreating the same dynamic of crude oppression and violence African American migrants were seeking to escape. While comprised mostly of locals, the NYPD had still developed a reputation, especially within black communities, as rude, hostile and arbitrary. Southern or not, the ways they often treated African American New Yorkers, a good number of whom were from the South or of recent southern extraction, struck the same nerve as it did on the West Coast, breeding intense resentment.

A civilian review board was the most sought-after police reform in the postwar period. Civil rights activists, civil libertarians, politicians and police officials proposed many iterations of a review board over time, but the basic concept was to have a

¹¹⁰ United States. *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: A Report*. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1967; Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*; Freeman, *Working-Class New York*; United States, Wicker and Kerner; Biondi. *To Stand and Fight*; Johnson. *Street Justice*; Gottehrer. *New York City in Crisis*; Police Department, City of New York summary of the work of the Civilian Complaint Review Board; 8 Sep 1958; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 489, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

¹¹¹ Jackie Robinson. “Goldwater Ammunition.” *New York Amsterdam News* 1 Aug 1964: 19.

permanent official body to receive and adjudicate citizens' complaints against officers. Civilian review proponents believed the board would serve to keep the police accountable to the citizens of New York, reigning in abuse and discourteous behavior. In 1953, NYPD Commissioner George Monaghan established the city's first board in the aftermath of a scandal involving the NYPD and several attorneys at the Justice Department. The previous July, Monaghan had instructed two of his top men to make a deal with the federal lawyers in which all civil rights violations filed with the Justice Department against the NYPD would not be pursued but instead turned over to the NYPD for self-investigation. When news of the deal leaked to the press in February 1953, the commissioner and other police officials found themselves explaining their actions before Congress.¹¹²

In an effort to diminish the scandal's negative effects on the department, Monaghan created the Civilian Complaint Review Board, comprised of three extant police commissioners, including one of the men who had made the deal with the Justice Department. In the event of a complaint from a citizen, the officer working the front desk of the accused officer's precinct would take the complaint and names of witnesses, locate the witnesses and record their addresses, and draw up a report in triplicate. He would then send two copies to his precinct commander and the third to the review board, whose members would quickly analyze the case and inform the police commissioner of their conclusions. If the commissioner deemed a complaint valid, he would then initiate a

¹¹² "Brutality Charges against City Police under U.S. Inquiry." *New York Times* 17 Feb 1953: 1, 24. Charles Grutzner. "Monaghan Denies Police-F.B.I. Deal to Hide Brutality." *New York Times* 18 Feb 1953: 1, 22; Charles Grutzner. "Halley Urges City Sift 'Deal' on F.B.I.; Mayor Disagrees." *New York Times* 19 Feb 1953: 1, 18; Charles Grutzner. "Monaghan Ouster Sought over 'Deal' in Brutality Cases." *New York Times* 20 Feb 1953: 1, 14; Russell Porter. "Monaghan Barred F.B.I. Questioning, House Group Hears." *New York Times* 28 Feb 1953: 1, 18.

departmental trial against the accused, who, if found guilty, would face anything from a verbal reprimand to dismissal from the force. Aside from a few reforms Monaghan's successor made in 1955, the CCRB remained unchanged and unchallenged for nearly ten years.¹¹³

In 1961 and 1962, two events in the city, because of their prominence and proximity in time, brought renewed attention to the matters of civilian review and police brutality. In August 1961, Guinea's deputy ambassador to the United Nations was involved in a minor traffic accident in Harlem with a taxi driver. The police charged the diplomat began screaming at the responding officer, a detective and the taxi driver in French and physically assaulted all of them simultaneously. The Guinean government accused two officers of having "brutally beaten" its ambassador in the back of a squad car en route to the local precinct. On March 3rd, 1962, several thousand people occupied Times Square and Duffy Square, the inverted triangle between 45th and 47th Streets that touches Times Square where Broadway crosses over Seventh Avenue, to try to stop the resumption of American nuclear weapons testing. After the all-day silent vigil began to wind down, a number of small groups of people sat down in civil disobedience, blocking traffic on several major thoroughfares. Police began arresting those engaging in direct action, charging forty-two altogether. Many demonstrators complained of police brutality, both from officers on foot and horseback. Newspapers covering the event documented the claims, helping to spread them, which resulted in Mayor Wagner and

¹¹³ "Police Unit to Scan Brutality Charges." *New York Times* 23 May 1953: 17; "2 New Aides Urged to Scan Brutality." *New York Times* 2 May 1953: 11.

NYPD Commissioner Michael Murphy receiving hundreds of letters from dismayed and angry citizens regarding the alleged conduct of the police.¹¹⁴

The two events coincided with efforts throughout the country to create independent civilian review boards, ones that functioned without police involvement. By the spring of 1962, activists in Detroit, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Seattle and other cities were heavily involved with such endeavors. Each was modeled on a system that Philadelphia had implemented in 1958. Established October 1st, 1958, the Police Advisory Board of the City of Philadelphia was the first all-private citizen police review panel in the country. It took complaints against the police “based upon a charge of brutality, racial or religious discrimination, or violation of state or federal constitutional rights.” Evaluating the board’s efforts over the three years since its inception, the 1961 *Report of the President’s Commission on Civil Rights* found “The Board has had the additional effect of increasing public confidence that citizen’s complaints are impartially handled; it has also apparently increased public confidence in the Police Department itself.” This was a compliment no one but the police department would give the New York City board.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Robert Conley. “Guinea Charges Police Bias Here.” *New York Times* 29 Aug 1961: 1, 19; “Guinean in Fracas Back at U.N. Post.” *New York Times* 23 Aug 1961: 7; “City Asked to Sift Envoy Bias Charges.” *New York Times* 3 Sep 1961: 49; New York Civil Liberties Union letter from Executive Director George E. Rundquist to Professor Norman Dorsen Re: Civilian Complaint Review Board; 21 May 1962; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 68, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Will Lissner. “Brutality Study Pushed by Police.” *New York Times* 17 March 1962: 8; Farnsworth Fowle. “3 Atom-test Foes Convicted Here.” *New York Times* 22 May 1962: 12.

¹¹⁵ New York Civil Liberties Union letter from Executive Director George E. Rundquist to Professor Norman Dorsen Re: Civilian Complaint Review Board; 21 May 1962; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 68, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; The Third Annual Report of the Police Advisory Board of the City of Philadelphia; 1961; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin

After watching the Philadelphia board for several years, the New York Civil Liberties Union, the city's leading civil liberties group, came to favor an independent board and the Guinean ambassador and peace demonstration incidents compelled the organization to act. The NYCLU was founded in 1951 as a chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. Like its parent organization, the NYCLU at the time was comprised mostly of white progressives and intellectuals, including a number of lawyers and law school faculty. It engaged in legal battles against laws it held were unconstitutional and in defense of people accused of violating such laws, no matter how unpopular their views, including communists and neo-Nazis, as well as taking up fights for the open availability of contraception and against prayer in schools. In May 1962, the organization's executive director, George E. Rundquist, began sending out the Philadelphia Police Advisory Board's 1961 report on its operations along with a letter proposing such a panel in New York City to all city council members and select others who may be sympathetic, such as law school faculty. The city council Republican minority leader, Stanley Isaacs, who had championed a local bill banning discrimination in the sale and rental of housing that went into effect in 1958, was an early and strong supporter of the review board. Isaacs' 1962 death left a legislative void into which Councilman Theodore Weiss, a white Jewish reform Democrat elected from the Upper West Side the same year, eagerly entered, giving numerous presentations to various civil rights and good government groups in support of the board.¹¹⁶

Years, Box 68, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

¹¹⁶ Cowan, 116-119; "The Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs Bill – New York City's New Fair Housing Law: a Summary and Analysis"; 16 Dec 1957; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin

Continued allegations of police brutality during this time of building a support structure for a new board, particularly from the city's African American and Puerto Rican communities, strengthened the reformers' cause. In November 1963, a police officer shot and killed two Puerto Rican men in the back of his patrol car, claiming one of them pulled a gun. Demonstrations and activists' press releases regarding the incident declared the police had shot the men in cold blood. The National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights formed in the aftermath of the shooting, with police brutality as its main initial focus, including a demand for precinct-level civilian review boards. Puerto Rican New Yorkers interviewed during the NYPD's ensuing public relations crisis expressed an extremely low opinion of those who policed their communities. One declared, "We are not citizens to the cops – we are spics. We pay their salaries for them to insult us and push us away from our own stoops." A friend insisted, "The murders were bound to happen. Negroes are lynched in the South; Puerto Ricans are shot here. It [the shooting] would not have happened to two white boys." When asked for their names, one of the men responded, "What do you think, we're crazy? The police will be banging at my door at 2 in the morning. They'll harass me here to hell." Gilberto Gerena Valentin, head of a local Puerto Rican civil rights group, promulgated a concept of the police as a controlling force: "The police do not protect us. They try to keep us in line. They run the West Side like a plantation." The men's linking of their conditions to southern African Americans' throughout history was not coincidental and demonstrates the commonality of oppression people of color felt in the city at the time. Deputy Commissioner Walter Arm ruefully

observed the shooting wiped out ten years of whatever progress had been made in relations between the city's police and burgeoning Puerto Rican community of 650,000.¹¹⁷

The NYPD responded with sensitivity training for its officers to stem the “wisecracks and sneers by some patrolmen,” as Arm put it, along with flooding the offices of schools and civic groups in Puerto Rican neighborhoods with a Spanish language pamphlet entitled “Your Friend, the Policeman.” The department also vowed to try to increase Puerto Rican representation on the force of 27,000 above the two hundred at which it currently stood, less than eight tenths of a percent, through targeted advertising and bringing in high school students to do office work in local precincts. A white officer interviewed offered his opinions on the matter, flatly stating after six years of working in a Puerto Rican neighborhood: “We treat them the same as anybody. I don’t know why they’re complaining, except maybe they are sensitive. You know, a little on the temperamental, hot-blooded side.”¹¹⁸

In February 1964, the African American president of the Greenwich Village-Chelsea branch of the NAACP charged a police officer had beaten him in St. Vincent’s Hospital. James Yates, fifty-seven, reported he suddenly found himself ill and unable to walk while in his apartment. His neighbors called an ambulance, which took him to the hospital. According to Yates, the doctor who examined him could find nothing wrong

¹¹⁷ Samuel Kaplan. “Police Move to Win Puerto Rican Amity.” *New York Times* 15 Jan 1964: 1, 21; Samuel Kaplan. “Police Parley Set on Puerto Ricans.” *New York Times* 16 Jan 1964: 27; The “West Side” refers to the city’s Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood, once an area popular with recent Puerto Rican migrants, from 34th to 59th Streets and Eighth Avenue west to the Hudson River. This is the setting for the play and film *West Side Story*.

¹¹⁸ Kaplan. “Police Move to Win Puerto Rican Amity,” 21; “Accord Reached on Puerto Ricans.” *New York Times* 18 Jan 1964: 48.

and had him sit on a bench, at which point a nurse demanded that he leave. He protested that he was unable, but his assertions went unheeded, as two hospital employees dumped him off the bench and began to drag him from the hospital. At that point, Yates claimed, two police officers rushed in and “one, Ptl. Dennis O’Brien, kicked me in the head, mouth, and face, and they let me lay outside on the cold sidewalk. When I couldn’t move, O’Brien told me I was under arrest.” Yates’ account concluded with the officer calling a cab, taking Yates home and carrying him up to his apartment.¹¹⁹

By 1964, the NYCLU’s efforts coupled with Councilman Weiss’ hard work, civil rights activity and the string of high-profile brutality incidents, created a situation in which Weiss felt the time was right to introduce independent review board legislation in the city council. Introduced to the council on April 7th, 1964, The Weiss bill would prohibit police officers and officials from serving on the board, which would be comprised of nine civilians, all of whom the mayor would appoint for three-year terms. With a salaried executive director and other paid staff, just like the Philadelphia board, the board would be authorized to begin discussions with the mayor and other city officials on “ways and means of developing effective city policy” against police brutality, to encourage legislation along these lines and perhaps most importantly, to publicize its own existence. Overseeing Housing Authority and Transit Authority police as well as NYPD officers, it would retain the same name as its all-police predecessors, the Civilian Complaint Review Board, but would send recommendations to the mayor, as opposed to the head of whichever agency employed the officer in question. Finally changing the

¹¹⁹ “NAACP President Beaten in Greenwich Village.” *New York Amsterdam News* 22 Feb 1964: 1.

caveat that had stood since Monaghan's 1953 board, hearings would no longer have to wait until a pending criminal case against an officer related to the complaint concluded.¹²⁰

Due to the city's history of Democratic machine politics, Mayor Wagner's long involvement with those politics, his concomitant hold over the Democratic majority city council and his opposition to review board reform, the Weiss bill never had a chance of passing, and everyone involved knew that. Despite the Weiss bill's anticipated defeat, its supporters nevertheless went to work. CORE's executive director James Farmer arranged meetings with various city officials, including Commissioner Murphy, who was known to be hostile toward any change in the department's review process. The NYCLU and NAACP spoke in favor of the bill, while CORE members picketed police stations. The *New York Amsterdam News*, the city's most prominent African American newspaper, published an editorial May 30th entitled "What's to Hide?" strongly supporting the Weiss bill. Manhattan Borough President Edward R. Dudley, an African American man, the New York Committee for Democratic Voters, the New York County Democratic Committee and the Liberal Party, a small but frequently powerful player in New York state and city politics, all gave official endorsements in favor of the Weiss bill, as did the decidedly non-militant national NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Fred Powledge. "Brutality Cases Urged for Study." *New York Times* 7 April 1964: 24; "Seek Board to Review Cop Cases." *New York Amsterdam News* 11 April 1964: 5; Cowan, 117.

¹²¹ Cowan, 132; Fred Powledge. "Farmer and Murphy Discuss Complaints Board." *New York Times* 28 April 1964: 30; "What's to Hide?" *New York Amsterdam News* 30 May 1964: 22; "Deplores Delay on Review Panel Bill." *New York Amsterdam News* 6 June 1964: 16; Thomas Buckley. "Unofficial Citizens' Panel to Study Accusations of Police Brutality." *New York Times* 23 May 1964: 11; Martin Gansberg. "CORE Sets up Panel to Hear Police Charged with Brutality." *New York Times* 5 June 1964: 16; "New Police Panel Urged by Dudley." *New York Times* 1 June 1964: 23; James Booker and Les Matthews.

Opposition to the bill was strong, especially from the police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. John J. Cassese, PBA president, appeared on ABC television to discuss his opposition to the Weiss bill. Cassese asserted the all-civilian board would "immobilize" the city's entire force through fear of punishment from outsiders who did not understand their job or culture, despite the fact that the board would have no power to discipline officers and could only make recommendations to the commissioner. It would also weaken the commissioner's power through submitting to outside oversight. Cassese said the new board was unnecessary, as the commissioner was "more stringent and tougher than any nine civilians," which would seem to make a civilian panel a relief for police officers, not something to be feared. A few days later, Murphy and Cassese got the support of pro-police demonstrators from the New York Committee to Support Your Local Police chanting "Fight the Reds, support the Blue" in front of police headquarters, respectively referring to communists and the police. They made sure to alert their fellow New Yorkers, via signs, that "The Police Are Our Last Line of Defense against Communism."¹²² State Senator Constance Baker Motley, born to Afro-Caribbean immigrant parents in Connecticut, already known for being the first African American woman to argue a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, attested, "The police in New York's Negro communities often use more force than necessary in

"Civilian Review Board Is Backed." *New York Amsterdam News* 16 May 1964: 28; "More Harlemites Back Civilian Review Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 23 May 1964: 4.

¹²² "Civilian Board of Review Opposed by Head of P.B.A." *New York Times* 11 May 1964: 24; "Pickets Oppose Civil Review of Complaints against Police." *New York Times* 17 May 1964: 74.

arresting suspected criminals or disorderly persons. The seriousness of the situation outweighs any potential dilution of police authority.”¹²³

By early June, city council members loyal to Wagner had been delaying holding a vote on Weiss’ bill for two months, hoping the issue would pass with time. On June 16th, the council held a public hearing on the bill. A long list of organizations favoring the bill sent representatives, but their numbers paled in comparison to those of the opposition. Most notably, more than 1,200 uniformed off-duty police officers made a show of force, both inside and outside city hall. Commissioner Murphy and John Cassese gave lengthy statements imploring the council to dispose of the bill. Murphy sketched a dismal future for the city should the police be subject to civilian review, one where “police officers would hesitate to act, fearful of the second-guessers and the Monday-morning quarterbacks.” The council voted two days later to hold the Weiss bill for “further consideration” with no timeframe for action on it.¹²⁴

¹²³ “Mrs. Motley Speaks for Civilian Bd.” *New York Amsterdam News* 23 May 1964: 5; Constance Baker Motley led a storied life of achievement and firsts. In addition to writing the original complaint in *Brown v. Board of Education*, she argued ten cases before the Supreme Court, all successful, including James Meredith’s suit for admission to the University of Mississippi. Ms. Motley was the first woman to work for the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the first African American woman state senator in New York, the first African American woman to be borough president of Manhattan, and in 1966, Lyndon Johnson appointed her the first African American woman federal judge, which she remained until her death in 2005 at the age of 84.

¹²⁴ “News of the Week.” *New York Amsterdam News* 20 June 1964: 1; Cowan, 137-141; Police Department, City of New York, Arguments of Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy against the Weiss Bill Which Proposes the Formation of a Civilian Complaint Review Board outside the Police Department before the Committee on City Affairs of the New York City Council, June 16, 1964 at City Hall; 16 June 1964; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1080, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Charles G. Bennett. “Democrats Back Board on Police.” *New York Times* 16 June 1964: 53; Charles G. Bennett. “Police Decry Bill for Review Panel.” *New York Times* 17 June 1964: 1, 45; Martin Gansberg. “Council Shelves Bill for Civilian Review.” *New York Times* 19 June 1964: 21; Cassese told the council members if they approved the Weiss bill, “You will have done for Russia – and she should give you a medal for it – what she hasn’t been able to accomplish for herself.”

As would be the case hundreds of times over the decade throughout the country, direct conflict with the police touched off the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant uprisings. In New York City, this came one month to the day the city council voted to take no action on a bill creating an independent civilian review board. There had been no movement on the bill in the interim, but as we will see in Chapter Four, the rebellions gave the independent review board cause a sense of urgency.

Conclusion

Though black New Yorkers had been organizing to claim their rights for two decades by 1964, little had changed for the better. Despite living in a state with the earliest and strongest civil rights statutes on the books,, black people in New York were worse off than they were twenty years earlier in nearly every measurable way. African American neighborhoods in New York City typically ranked at the top throughout the city for the highest rents, most crime, highest unemployment, lowest median income, fewest parks, oldest housing, worst living conditions, cases of tuberculosis, lowest number of licensed teachers, number of remedial classes, high school dropout rates, most overcrowded schools, lack of city services, most inflated prices for the lowest quality consumer goods, least political representation and lowest rate of business ownership. School segregation had increased, both in terms of quantity and its deleterious effects, housing segregation was more pronounced, unemployment had grown and racial economic disparity had widened, all while the national civil rights movement made significant gains in legal equality.

By 1964, black New Yorkers' unsuccessful struggles to get state antidiscrimination laws enforced were nearing the two-decade mark. The New York City

Board of Education, despite its enthusiastic embrace of the *Brown* decision, had not only failed to integrate its schools in the following decade, but had intentionally pursued policies that made them more segregated. City and state laws prohibiting public and private housing discrimination accomplished little, as the bureaucrats in charge of enforcement and the courts in charge of adjudication were reluctant to act. Few politicians in the city or state were interested in doing anything to get at the root of racial inequality, which would require them to address its structural nature and the business and financial institutions from which it emanated. Black New Yorkers had plenty of laws on their side, but few people in power willing or able to enforce them.

The tactics and goals of the integration-oriented civil rights movement were largely ineffective in New York City. Civil rights activists had a hard time finding issues on which they could build sustained, high profile campaigns. Unlike the southern arm of the civil rights movement, New York had no arch racists in government. The police never engaged in mass acts of violence during the postwar period, as law enforcement officials did in places like Montgomery and Birmingham. In the South, bellowing white demagogues blocking school doorways and police dog attacks on children understandably attracted global media coverage. No issues the northern movement addressed had that kind of appeal. Black New Yorkers had no unjust laws to overturn, just the same *de facto* segregation-producing financial and educational policies as many other northern cities. Northern politicians and bureaucrats denied that race played a part in the creation and maintenance of their region's segregated schools and neighborhoods, and New York City was no different. African Americans' fight for better lives and futures in New York had not gotten them very far and the prospects for future

improvement seemed dim. As a result, many black New Yorkers felt compelled to take more militant approaches toward securing freedom.

African American New Yorkers' long struggles for social, economic and legal justice show the limitations of legal equality in 1964. They had tried everything at their disposal to improve their status in the city with little success. Individual victories were hard-fought and seldom had any wide effect. Bitterness was widespread among the city's black communities, especially its largest ones, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Central Harlem. Frustration mounted in the city's black neighborhoods with no constructive outlet for release. By July 1964, the situation was explosive.

Chapter Two – Rebellion

“Does anyone believe that a much decorated policeman with seventeen years’ experience on the force and nineteen citations had to shoot down and kill a 15-year-old school boy under the circumstances admitted to by the Police Department last Thursday? Nobody in Harlem does.” – *New York Amsterdam News* editorial¹

New York’s experience with the July uprisings and how people acted and reacted provides us with insights into the local and national civil rights movements as well as African American New Yorkers’ attitudes toward integration-oriented movement goals. From the moment of the shooting, we can see the anger African Americans in New York, especially the young, had been carrying with them and the forthrightness with which they expressed it. Unlike cities where the southern movement was strong, nonviolence did not predominate as a strategy in New York. Black New Yorkers did not embrace violence, but many found physical attacks on the police appropriate, especially in the face of what they characterized as police murder. Black high school students at the scene of James Powell’s death had no compunction about throwing cans, bottles, concrete and whatever else they could find at officers. This is a trend that would continue throughout the rebellions, with thousands of Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant residents fighting the police. Some citizens claimed they used physical force only as self-defense against rampaging officers, but their actions violated the tenets of nonviolence nonetheless. Many more citizens willfully attacked the police from afar, lobbing projectiles at them, while others did so from strategic locations such as rooftops and windows. These were

¹ “Harlem’s Plea.” *New York Amsterdam News* 25 July 1964: 1.

tactics of warfare. Night after night, people waited for their chances to attack the police. Black New Yorkers set the model for the urban rebellions to come in other cities.²

Black New Yorkers' physical attacks on police demonstrate how little restraining influence national civil rights groups like CORE and the NAACP had in the city. No doubt many black southerners also wished to physically resist the police, but they rarely did so, partially because of how strong and organized the nonviolent movement was at the local level. New York activists, by contrast, knew the tactics that were so successful in the South, such as sit-ins, boycotts and provoking white violence were not effective in the city.³ Though the heads of three out of the four major national organizations lived in or around the city, they and their groups never dominated civil rights activism in New York, nor did their ideologies of gradualism and integration.⁴ They were unable to offer black New Yorkers many tangible achievements in terms of jobs, better housing or desegregated education, which precluded the established groups from building a strong

² Gerald Horne argues that uprisings' "dramatic nature grabs and holds attention and can motivate sweeping social reform....Uprisings also can be inspirational....The character and tactics of Watts 1965 were imitated in Newark, Detroit, and a host of other cities." I agree with this, but argue it should be applied to Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in 1964. As I will show, New York's rebellions were major news. Watts was but a larger conflagration. Horne, 41-42.

³ Black New Yorkers and their white allies had used these tactics for several decades, but won little. For example, they sat in at municipal offices and union halls, boycotted stores in black neighborhoods whose owners would not hire black workers and boycotted schools to secure desegregation. The tactics were largely ineffective, as there were no discriminatory laws to defeat or crudely racist officials to expose to the world, as was the case in the South. While southern activists had clear targets in Jim Crow laws, there was no written system of oppression in the North. Northern segregation was diffuse, not centralized.

⁴ Whitney Young of the Urban League, Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality all called the New York area home. Only Dr. King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference lived elsewhere, in Atlanta. While Young, Wilkins and Farmer may have not been present in the city often during the early 1960s, frequently away for various campaigns and engagements, their decisions to make New York City home nonetheless highlight their lack of national influence outside of the South, as well as almost total lack of influence in New York.

base in the city's black neighborhoods they could have used to quiet the rebellions once they began.

In fact, many residents of Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant vocally rejected anyone preaching nonviolence and restraint during the rebellions, not just on the streets, but also at demonstrations, in mass meetings, and at Powell's funeral. Groups of people regularly shouted down as Uncle Toms and liberals those pleading for calm or speaking of voter registration, whether national movement veteran Bayard Rustin or an unknown local worker. The same people enthusiastically applauded militant and black nationalist speakers who excoriated the police and advocated guerilla warfare. During the first hours of rebellion, African American teenagers shouted "We want Malcolm X!" while standing face to face with police, showing no fear. A group of young Bedford-Stuyvesant residents attempted to overturn an NAACP sound truck broadcasting messages expressing faith in the local government.

Throughout the rebellions, and again, from the moment of the shooting, demonstrators, witnesses and participants made continual links between the civil rights movements in New York City and in the South. The connections they expressed show that while there were distinct regional wings of the movement, African Americans commonly viewed it as one struggle. People from school children to seasoned organizers frequently referred to race relations in the city as being equivalent to or worse than Mississippi. Mississippi was widely understood to have the worst record on civil rights in the country, the most violence against African Americans and to be the most dangerous place to do civil rights work. New York was supposed to be different, but many people were not so sure. The southern movement and the violence its participants faced were

frequently on the minds of many of New York's black citizens in 1964, both as a comparison and a source of anger. What happened in the South mattered in the North.

Killing

Thursday, July 16th, 1964 started out as an ordinary summer day in Manhattan's Yorkville neighborhood. It was hot and humid, as it typically is in New York City in July, with the temperature already at 76 degrees by 9 A.M. and reaching 85 before the end of the day. That morning, James Powell and Thomas Gilligan crossed paths in ways that no two people ever should and through doing so, forever changed the city's history. Powell, a fifteen-year-old African American boy from the Bronx, was attending summer school at Robert F. Wagner Junior High School on East 76th Street, between Second and Third Avenues in the city's Yorkville neighborhood. He had enrolled voluntarily in a supplemental reading course that began ten days earlier. The previous summer, he had worked as a local youth organizer for Bayard Rustin's March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.⁵ Neighbors and friends characterized Powell as "a nice guy" who stayed out of trouble.⁶ Gilligan, thirty-six years old, having spent the last seventeen of those with the New York Police Department, had the day off from his job as a lieutenant in Brooklyn's 14th Division. A military veteran, the lieutenant was a decorated member of the police force, awarded with nineteen citations for outstanding police work, four of them for disarming men with guns. While in a television repair shop across from the school, he heard some commotion outside. Powell and two other students, waiting for school to

⁵ Herb Goldstein and Edward Cumberbatch. "After a Boy's Funeral, A Rights Leader Weeps." *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 4; Though the city's neighborhood borders tend to be fluid over time, Manhattan's Yorkville section was recognized in 1964 as the area spanning the distance between 72nd Street, East Harlem at 96th Street, Third Avenue and the East River.

⁶ Theodore Jones. "Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police." *New York Times* 17 July 1964: 1, 31.

start, had gotten into an altercation with an apartment building superintendent, Patrick Lynch, after he sprayed them with a hose.⁷ The boys, unhappy with being sprayed, chased him back into his building, where he locked himself in his first-floor apartment and called the police.⁸

According to the NYPD, Gilligan emerged from the repair shop to investigate the audible commotion and saw Powell and his two friends “banging on an apartment door with a garbage can lid.”⁹ Gilligan’s subsequent testimony before a grand jury was in conflict with this, asserting that what he saw was much more serious – Powell running after Lynch with a three and a half inch pocketknife. As the official version continued, Gilligan stood in front of the apartment building, displaying his badge and gun to Powell with the verbal warning “I’m a police officer. Come out and drop it.” Despite having a gun pointed at him, Powell responded by charging head on out of the building hallway, knife drawn. Powell, five feet six inches tall and 122 pounds, lunged at Gilligan once, grazing his arm and drawing blood.¹⁰ The lieutenant, six feet tall and weighing two hundred pounds, fired a warning shot, but Powell persisted in his attack. Gilligan then fired three shots at Powell.¹¹ The first missed, the second, proving fatal, struck him in the right wrist, severing an artery just above his heart, coming to rest in his left lung, and the

⁷ Sue Reinert. “Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman.” *New York Herald Tribune* 17 July 1964: 1, 2.

⁸ Theodore Jones. “Teen-age Parade Protests Killing.” *New York Times* 18 July 1964: 1, 23.

⁹ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

¹⁰ Martin Arnold. “Police Board Absolves Gilligan in Slaying of Negro Teen-Ager.” *New York Times* 7 Nov. 1964: 1, 13; Sue Reinert. “The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police.” *New York Herald Tribune* 18 July 1964: 1, 2.

¹¹ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

third passed through his abdomen, striking the largest vein there.¹² By 9:20 A.M., James Powell was dead.

Other witnesses provided a different account of the morning's events. Some students claimed Patrick Lynch, the apartment building superintendent, called the boys "dirty niggers," following with the proclamation "I'll wash you clean" as he deliberately sprayed them.¹³ Others quoted him as saying "I'm going to wash all the black off you."¹⁴ A nurse who witnessed the events said she saw Lynch "spraying a bunch of colored kids and as the kids moved back, he went after them with more water."¹⁵ Lynch plead otherwise, quietly asserting he had never had problems with any of the students, calling them a "good bunch" whom he permitted to sit upon his building's steps to eat lunch every day. He swore that he did not speak a mean word to the boys and had accidentally sprayed them after he "asked them 10 times to move."¹⁶ Some of Powell's schoolmates reported he and his two friends threw garbage can lids and bottles at the superintendent.

A fourteen-year-old girl who was also waiting for school to start that morning told a reporter, "I saw the boy [Powell] go into the building and he didn't have any knife then. When he came out, he was even laughing and kind of like running." As other students contended, "when he came out of the hallway, he didn't have a knife." Gilligan appeared unannounced and with no warning, shot young Powell. The aforementioned nurse

¹² Arnold. "Police Board Absolves Gilligan in Slaying of Negro Teen-Ager." ¹³ Theodore Jones. "Few Present as Boy Shot by Policeman Is Buried." *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 23.

¹³ Reinert. "Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman." 1, 2.

¹⁴ Jones. "Teen-age Parade Protests Killing." 1, 23.

¹⁵ Jones. "Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police." 31.

¹⁶ Jones. "Teen-age Parade Protests Killing." 1, 23.

corroborated this, asserting “this tall man with black hair [Gilligan] came out of the radio shop and he had a little black revolver...As the boy came out, he shot him twice and then the boy fell to the sidewalk, and this man stood there for maybe 10 minutes just staring at the body. The boy never had any words with the man.”¹⁷ He then kicked Powell’s body or turned it over with his foot, depending on the account. One of the two boys who Lynch had sprayed along with Powell maintained Gilligan called Powell a “dirty nigger” after killing him.¹⁸ Noticing students crowding around him, he waved his gun around to convince them to move across the street.¹⁹

Of all those who witnessed the incident, Gilligan only had one or two of them and an insignificant cut on his finger to back up his assertion that Powell had a knife.²⁰ One of the dead boy’s friends claimed he had been holding a knife for Powell that morning, which Powell took from him before the shooting, but never used.²¹ Lynch, who Powell had supposedly menaced with the knife, said he never saw anyone with a knife when interviewed the next day, but “had been told about it.”²² A teacher found a knife eight feet away from Powell’s body, between two parked cars, but the police never definitively connected it to Powell, nor did they say much about it publicly.²³ They also refused to

¹⁷ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

¹⁸ Ralph Blumenfeld and Kenneth Gross. “City Probes Slaying Of Boy, 15, by Cop.” *New York Post* 17 July 1964: 3.

¹⁹ Reinert. “Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman.” 2.

²⁰ “New York: Unanimous Decision.” *Time* 11 Sep 1964.

²¹ Reinert. “The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police.” 1.

²² Jones. “Teen-age Parade Protests Killing.” 23.

²³ Reinert. “The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police.” 2. In 1961, Gilligan shot a 16-year-old boy in front of Gilligan’s house whom he said had broken into a car. When Gilligan confronted him, the boy supposedly

allow reporters on the scene to photograph it.²⁴ An NAACP investigation gathering information from fifty witnesses concluded Powell was holding a soda can and was walking away from Gilligan when shot.²⁵

Within minutes, a large, mostly black crowd gathered at the scene of the shooting in this overwhelmingly white neighborhood to boisterously protest Powell's death. These were young people arriving for school, as teachers managed to maintain order in the twenty-five classes already in progress inside the building. The few police on the scene pushed them away from the area and told them to either go into the school or go home. This response not only failed to disperse them but elicited cans, bottles and chunks of cement sailing through the air in the direction of the patrolmen. The crowd grew to an estimated size of three hundred, despite the best efforts of several teachers and Max Francke, the summer school principal. Using a police megaphone, Francke urged the students to clear the area, but none of them seemed to heed his wishes. As the crowd grew, so did the intensity of emotions, with "young girls [becoming] hysterical, tears streaming down their cheeks." Some students reportedly screamed "This is worse than Mississippi!", evincing a visceral sense of the interconnectedness of civil rights struggles throughout the country, while an African American teen girl, in what would become the

hit him in the hand with a fire hose nozzle, breaking two fingers. Gilligan then shot him, but the boy "was not seriously injured." It would not be until 1967 that the NYPD would restrict the use of deadly force to either life-threatening situations or in the interest of taking violent felons into custody.

²⁴ Blumenfeld and Gross. "City Probes Slaying Of Boy, 15, by Cop," 3.

²⁵ "Why Not Suspend the Cop?" *New York Amsterdam News* 25 July 1964: 16.

most sensational quote of the morning, taunted police to “Come on, shoot another nigger!”²⁶

It took about one hundred steel-helmeted police two hours to disperse the crowd.²⁷ Most of the students belatedly filed into the school. Some walked around the surrounding area engaging in petty vandalism, such as pushing over flowerpots, and a group of young people went into the 77th Street and Lexington Avenue subway station two blocks away, banging on train doors and disturbing a newspaper stand. Nearly two hours after Gilligan shot Powell, East 76th Street was once again clear. One police officer was hit on the head with a soda can and received treatment at a hospital. The police took three “screaming girls” into custody and released them “after they had calmed down.”²⁸ For the next twenty-four hours, the police kept a “special detail” of twenty-five patrolmen in the three blocks around the school to guard against further protest.²⁹

Francke, the older white principal of the summer school, was exceptionally sympathetic toward the protesting students and saw both Patrick Lynch, the building superintendent, and the police as sharing substantial responsibility for what had transpired that morning. The students’ reaction in the street, in Francke’s analysis, was “produced because a white adult,” Lynch, “didn’t use his good sense.” Francke viewed Lynch as having hosed the students “with malice aforethought.” The principal further indicted Lynch as causing the entire chain of events, implying he was partially

²⁶ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

²⁷ Reinert. “Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman.” 1.

²⁸ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

²⁹ Reinert. “Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman.” 1.

responsible for Powell's death: "What could have been handled very promptly and efficiently [the students sitting on the apartment building steps] by the school turned into a tragedy."³⁰ An important part of this becoming a "tragedy" was a white man aggressively using a hose against black youth, which the world had seen Sheriff Bull Connor deploy in detail just one year prior in Birmingham, Alabama. Francke argued the police could have prevented the school children from massing in the street and confronting the police "if someone had acted sensibly. If only a couple of police cars had arrived, and if the boy [Powell] could have been removed immediately, along with the lieutenant and key witnesses, none of the disturbance would have occurred."³¹ Francke also defended the general population of the summer school students, protesting, "They gave up a summer's vacation because they wanted to improve themselves. These children are not hooligans. They're dedicated to improving themselves and we never had any trouble with them."³²

Within two hours after the shooting, representatives from the national office of CORE, the city's East River chapter of CORE and the New York branch of the NAACP arrived at the NYPD's nearby 19th Precinct on East 67th Street, all with similar demands. As with all homicides, District Attorney Alexander Herman's office launched an investigation into the shooting, but civil rights groups and many individual citizens wanted more. After meeting with police and hearing the official version of Powell's

³⁰ Reinert. "Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman." 2.

³¹ Jones. "Teen-age Parade Protests Killing." 23.

³² "The Slain Boy: Neighborhood Views Conflict," 16.

shooting, the groups emerged with joint demands for a more probing investigation.³³ National CORE field secretary Blyden Jackson told reporters the shooting required a “civil investigation...independent of the police.”³⁴ East River CORE announced a demonstration for noon on the next day, Friday, July 17th, at the 19th Precinct to push the city to create a “disciplined and impartial committee” to review the shooting.³⁵ The local NAACP declared their insistence for “an immediate investigation by the District Attorney aimed at a possible murder indictment.”³⁶ In a letter to Mayor Wagner, the New York Civil Liberties Union reasoned “that a 6-foot, 220-pound man should be able to relieve a 15-year-old-boy of a pocketknife without killing him or even resorting to the use of firearms.”³⁷

Protest

Friday, July 17th brought with it another day of heat and humidity. At 8 A.M., when around seventy-five people, again mostly black and young, gathered to march and sing in protest front of the school where Gilligan shot Powell on East 76th Street, it was already 74 degrees, with the relative humidity the same number. The NYPD was aware of the CORE-organized demonstration ahead of time and sent fifty police to wait for the students two hours before it began. Initially with nightsticks at the ready, a member of the City Commission on Human Rights convinced the officers’ superiors it would be in everyone’s best interest to keep the weapons out of sight. The students picketed for four

³³ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

³⁴ Reinert. “Near Riot – Student Slain by Policeman.” 2.

³⁵ Jones. “Negro Boy Killed; 300 Harass Police.” 31.

³⁶ Blumenfeld and Gross. “City Probes Slaying Of Boy, 15, by Cop,” 3.

³⁷ Reinert. “The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police.” 2.

hours without incident, chanting such slogans as “Killer cops must go!” and holding signs reading “Save Us From Our Protectors” and “Stop Killer Cops.” While the protesting students “jeered and hooted” at the police monitoring them, there were no physical interactions between the two groups.³⁸

When the summer school session let out at noon, 150 students joined the demonstrators. By this time, it had reached 86 degrees, though the humidity had dropped considerably to 42 percent. Downtown CORE Chairman Chris Sprowal worked diligently to keep the protests within the law, giving police no legal excuse to act against the picketers. He urged them, via megaphone, “to behave like ladies and gentlemen.” Sprowal reasoned “People around here just want you to get into trouble so they can point and say, ‘See, I told you so.’ But we’re going to fool them, and we’re going to show them that we’ve had some training.” Within a few minutes, the much larger group marched nine blocks to the 19th Precinct, only to be corralled behind a barrier down the street. Order, the police said, would not be maintained with so many people protesting in the area. They asserted that order was vital, given that a firehouse, the Soviet Mission to the United Nations and the Kennedy Child Study Center all called the short stretch of East 67th Street home. Eventually, police allowed twenty-five from the group to picket in front of the police station. After an hour, the protesters went home. Sprowal left them with the imploration that they continue picketing the school until Powell’s funeral, at which time they should “empty the school” to pack the boy’s funeral service. As the demonstration wound down, a white man yelled, “He deserved killing!” at a group of students who were

³⁸ Reinert. “The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police.” 1; Jones. “Teen-Age Parade Protests Killing.” 23.

leaving. When a few of them went after him, police grabbed the man and told him to leave the area.³⁹

The CORE-led demonstration attracted people from other strains of the city's ideologically diverse black freedom struggle. Several CORE staffers reported observing three men from Malcolm X's post Nation of Islam group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, interviewing students. Members of the communist Progressive Labor Party were also at the scene and eager to organize. A fifteen-year-old black boy, claiming to be from Monroe, North Carolina, home of African American armed self-defense icon Robert Williams, told students "In Monroe, if the cops shoot a Negro, we arm ourselves and get that cop worse than he got us." Someone from CORE was quick to counter the boy's claims in the interest of heading off any further violence and asserted "the situation is different" in Monroe. He told the crowd that Monroe police were on the front lines of propping up *de jure* segregation while in New York City, "Not all police are racists, although racists predominate."⁴⁰

Resistance

Tensions in Central Harlem had grown markedly by Saturday the 18th, when James Powell's body was first put on display for public viewing. Though not horrifically mutilated, Powell's open casket echoed Emmett Till's funeral in 1955, with his mother wanting the world to see her son as he was. Over three hundred people attended the afternoon viewing at a funeral home on Seventh Avenue, between 132nd and 133rd Streets

³⁹ Reinert. "The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police." 2.

⁴⁰ Reinert. "The Bitter Students...the Watchful Police." 2.

in Harlem.⁴¹ By 6:30 P.M., large crowds began gathering in Central Harlem in front of the Hotel Theresa on 125th Street at Seventh Avenue for a CORE-sponsored protest rally. The temperature read 89 degrees and the sun would not set for another two hours. Seventeen-year-old Judith Howell from Bronx CORE opened the rally by declaring “James Powell was shot because he was black.” She then argued, “We got a civil rights bill, [federal Civil Rights Act, passed two weeks prior] and along with the bill we got Barry Goldwater and a dead black boy.” Now speaking to two hundred people, some of whom challenged speakers with exclamations such as “White people dictate your policy!”, Downtown CORE chairman Chris Sprowal fulminated “It is time to let the man know that if he does something to us we are going to do something back. If you say ‘You kick me once, I’m going to kick you twice,’ we might get some respect.”⁴² Sprowal also reportedly told the audience, “I belong to a nonviolent organization, but I’m not nonviolent. When a cop shoots me, I will shoot him back,” to which some of those in attendance responded “That’s right, brother” and “Blood for blood.”⁴³ Charles Saunders from South Jamaica CORE posited “45 per cent of the cops in New York are neurotic murderers,” though the ninety-five killed by members of a twenty-seven thousand person force that year did not hold up his claim.⁴⁴

Once the CORE rally was finished, people stayed to listen to speakers from James Lawson’s United African Nationalist Movement and the Harlem Progressive Labor

⁴¹ “Mother Hysterical at Boy’s Bier.” *New York Times* 19 July 1964: 54.

⁴² Paul L. Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 1, 16.

⁴³ Paul Montgomery and Francis X. Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” *New York Times* 19 July 1964: 1, 54.

⁴⁴ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

Movement. The final speaker, Reverend Nelson C. Dukes from Fountain Spring Baptist Church in Harlem, ended the gathering with a twenty-minute speech that roused the crowd to action. The people responded well to his call for a march to the NYPD's 28th Precinct at West 123rd Street and Eighth Avenue to demand Lieutenant Gilligan's arrest, shouting, "Let's go!" and "Let's do it now!"⁴⁵ Perhaps 150 of them began the march around 8:45 P.M.⁴⁶ Though the sun had set, the oppressive heat persisted in the mid-80s, and the stone facades that had been soaking up sun all day and the poor ventilation of Harlem's tenements and row houses ensured that interior temperatures were much higher. They gathered another 100 people on their way to the station, two blocks away, chanting such slogans as "We want freedom," "We want protection" and "Down with police brutality."⁴⁷

Some from the crowd attempted to gain entry to the stationhouse to demand Gilligan's arrest for murder. Five policemen locked arms to keep the demonstrators out. Additional police came and forced the protesters across the street. Many more residents had gathered near the precinct, both to participate and to spectate.⁴⁸ A few citizens sporadically threw bottles and garbage can lids at the police, who responded by putting on helmets and sweeping rooftops for those throwing objects. Some people in the protest group shouted that "[Police Commissioner Michael] Murphy must be removed" while

⁴⁵ Montgomery. "Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally." 16.

⁴⁶ Montgomery and Clines. "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt." 54.

⁴⁷ Joseph Endler and James W. Sullivan. "Harlem Explodes: Negroes Battle Police." *New York Herald Tribune* 19 July 1964: 3.

⁴⁸ Montgomery and Clines. "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt." 54.

others castigated the twenty police in front of them as “Killers, murderers” and “Murphy’s rats.” The police remained still.⁴⁹

The Reverend Dukes, Ernest Russell of East River CORE and a few others formally presented their demands to Inspector Thomas Pendergast, in charge of the precinct at the time. They wanted Commissioner Murphy to appear at the station and publicly announce that Lieutenant Gilligan was being suspended. The spokespeople said the demonstrators would not move until then. At 9:20, the police began setting up barricades to keep the protesters away from the station. Demonstrators and police began to scuffle when the police tried to confine them. Inspector Pendergast ordered the men under his command to begin arresting anyone in the crowd who was showing outward signs of resistance. Sixteen of the demonstrators, including two who had spoken at the earlier CORE rally, immediately sat down on the sidewalk in nonviolent civil disobedience. Police took them “roughly” and as quickly as possible into the station to try to head off what they realized was on the verge of sliding out of control. Predictably, those in the street were unhappy with this action and became much more agitated. They increased both their verbal and physical assaults on police, with the physical component still mainly bottles, debris and garbage can lids. Many more police emerged from the station, anticipating battle. One of them took a bottle to the head and was hospitalized. Reverend Dukes lamented, “This has got out of hand. If I knew this was going to happen, I wouldn’t have said anything.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

⁵⁰ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

Police pushed demonstrators to the ends of the block, away from the stationhouse located between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. A group of young Central Harlemites on Seventh Avenue and 123rd Street surrounded two white people in a car, in the wrong place at the wrong time, and beat on the car with their fists, leaving the couple shaken but unharmed. In the midst of this, a bus arrived carrying forty-eight officers from the NYPD's elite Tactical Patrol Force, a unit of two hundred men trained in martial arts, under thirty years old and all standing over six feet tall.⁵¹ Inspector Pendergast ordered them to charge and swing clubs at those who remained in the streets. Demonstrators were now fighting with police – some in self-defense, some on the attack. All the while, anonymous residents continued raining down bottles and garbage can lids on police.⁵² The volleys from the rooftops helped to fan a physical response to police attempts at crowd control. Roughly a hundred more Tactical Patrol men disembarked from two buses and immediately joined in the battle with their overwhelming show of force.⁵³ Ed James, an African American photographer for the *New York Post*, wrote the next day of witnessing the following scene: "A young Negro, trying to run, fell. A cop beat him with his club until his head bled and then handcuffed him. Those who didn't run fast enough got the club."⁵⁴ The police managed to quickly clear the section of 123rd Street that housed the precinct and establish barricades at either end. They set up a mobile police emergency truck with a searchlight to block Seventh Avenue, ringed by riot-ready police.

⁵¹ Montgomery. "Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally." 16.

⁵² Montgomery and Clines. "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt." 1, 54.

⁵³ Ed James. "Harlem: By 2 Who Were There." *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 2.

⁵⁴ James. "Harlem: By 2 Who Were There," 2.

A growing crowd of Harlemites easily surpassing five hundred surrounded the increasingly uneasy police.⁵⁵

Shortly after 10 P.M., with the temperature at 80 degrees and the relative humidity quickly rising past 65 percent, the new police official in charge, Deputy Chief Inspector Harry Taylor, was gathering manpower in the form of off-duty police and reinforcements from other precincts in all five boroughs. Deputy Chief Inspector Taylor ordered the Tactical Patrol Force to break up the crowd surrounding the emergency truck, which they did by jumping over barricades and running into the gathered people, nightsticks swinging, replete with the battle cry of “Charge!” While the police dispersed the mob, they were not successful in getting them to go home; rather, those in the street broke into smaller and more inflamed groups that spread about the neighborhood. Police began shooting at 10:30, firing into the air in response to a Molotov cocktail thrown at a police car filled with five patrolmen. This essential, endlessly repeated component of the uprisings, police gunfire, meant that what would be known as the Harlem Riot was in full swing, radiating outward from West 123rd Street and Eighth Avenue.⁵⁶

A few blocks north and one east, the corner of 125th Street and Lenox Avenue was ground zero for the rebellion on the first night. People had begun looting there by 11 P.M. and it would not take long until it was described as a “disaster area...littered with broken glass and debris” where “screaming crowds occupied each corner, pushing toward a ring of police cars and patrolmen crouched behind them. The police fired volley after volley into the air and over roofs as the crowd raced wildly back and forth.” More police

⁵⁵ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

⁵⁶ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

came and began charging the crowd and indiscriminately clubbing anyone in the way, regardless of whether or not they resisted, talked back or fought. One detective advised a reporter to not believe charges of police brutality stemming from the rebellion, explaining, “We asked them to move. They didn’t. They became abusive. We had to get a little tough.”⁵⁷ This was a place with “smears of blood up and down the sidewalks,” one where “spent cartridges littered the pavement.”⁵⁸ These cartridges were remnants of a sound that would be repeated so often throughout the night that “it sounded like an endless chain of firecrackers.”⁵⁹ People had torn the protective gates away from many stores in the area, so that they could smash the windows and gain entry, including grocery stores, an insurance agency, men’s clothing stores, pawnshops and liquor stores.⁶⁰ At least thirty-two stores were looted in total, most white-owned.⁶¹

The disturbance spread rapidly during the night, drawing in thousands to participate in one way or another, some voluntarily, some clearly not of their own volition. As patrons from the nearly fifteen-hundred-seat Apollo Theater on 125th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues left a performance, they were met with people on the street speaking stories of police beatings and shootings. The same was true for people getting off the subway at 125th Street and Eighth Avenue. In Central Harlem, people

⁵⁷ Francis X. Clines. “Policemen Exhaust Their Ammunition in All-Night Battle.” *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 1, 16.

⁵⁸ Montgomery. “Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally.” 16.

⁵⁹ Bill Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 7.

⁶⁰ Fred Ferretti and Martin G. Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 1, 6.

⁶¹ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 16.

fought with police, looted stores, smashed windows, set trash cans alight and vandalized cars. Others made the actions a spectator event, laughing and applauding as police and more active citizen participants chased and fought one another in a high-stakes version of cat and mouse. Those who sought respite from the calamity would typically flee into buildings, places where most police, at least in these circumstances, feared to tread. In what would become an oft-repeated scene over the next week, someone claiming a position of authority, in this case a police officer, asked or told neighborhood residents to go home, to which someone in the crowd responded “We are home – this is our home.”⁶²

As the night of the 18th wore on, it became undeniably clear that parts of Harlem were in open rebellion. The cycle of bottle throwing, looting, vandalism, massing of police, police violence against anyone in the area and scattering crowds continued for hours throughout an eight block section of Central Harlem between Eighth and Lenox Avenues and 123rd and 127th Streets. Anxious police closed off the streets of Harlem to vehicular traffic between 110th and 135th Streets and Lenox and Eighth Avenues.⁶³ They kept pedestrians from 125th Street between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, beginning at 1 A.M. Also at that time, the police called in fire trucks to block streets and requested Transit Authority police to guard Harlem subway stations and keep city buses out of the area.⁶⁴ At the rebellion’s height, the NYPD had at least fifty squad cars in the area.⁶⁵

⁶² Montgomery and Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” 1, 54.

⁶³ Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” 7.

⁶⁴ Montgomery and Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” 1, 54.

⁶⁵ Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” 7.

The police response quickly intensified, yet those in charge encouraged officers on the street to practice restraint. A black sergeant told the men in his command, five black and five white, that they had to “be extra careful,” advising them “You’re gonna be called a whole lot of names and you’re gonna be provoked. I want you to lean over backward. But if anybody puts his hand on you, crack his skull. Try to do this thing peacefully, but if you have to, go hard.”⁶⁶ Many did indeed go hard, with one reporter noting, “Those who attempted to pass these corners [that police were occupying] were often greeted with a shout and a curse, and maybe a shove.” An African American man, surely one of many, “who did not move along quickly enough from a corner was shoved hard by an officer and then hit in the back with a nightstick.” A nearby police officer, momentarily mindful of public relations, told the reporter, “I hope you’re not quoting all my comments. We just have to be firm with these [black] people.” Another warned against wading too deeply into the crowds, cautioning that the newsman that would be in danger not from those residents making the rebellion, but police gunfire.⁶⁷

No longer using their guns to practice crowd control, the police in Harlem had begun firing at rooftops, aiming to stop the frequent barrage of bottles, bricks, garbage can lids and whatever else was available.⁶⁸ In doing so, the NYPD had decided to skip a step in standardized police methods of crowd control, moving from nightsticks to live ammunition, including shotguns and machine guns, without using tear gas. The NYPD’s decision was a noticeable contrast to the number of police forces in the South who had

⁶⁶ George Barner. “Three Violent Days.” *New York Amsterdam News* 25 July 1964: 1, 30.

⁶⁷ Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” 7.

⁶⁸ Montgomery and Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” 1, 54.

rejected gunfire in favor of fire hoses, tear gas and dogs to subdue and disperse African American demonstrators over the past year.⁶⁹ Surely southern law enforcement had earned its reputation for violence and inhumanity, but its methods of suppressing crowds were generally non-lethal. A Swedish reporter for the evening newspaper *Expressen* who was in the thick of the upheaval accused the police of firing with deadly intent: “A water-filled bottle smashed on the pavement and more than 10 policemen drew their revolvers and fired almost simultaneously....They were shooting to kill, not to scare. I was standing in the middle of them and I could not have made a mistake.”⁷⁰ A photographer for the *New York Post* made a similar statement, holding that after an hour or two of being in the rebellion, “the cops were still firing, but they were aiming and firing lower.”⁷¹

The hundreds of police striving desperately to repress the uprising in Central Harlem had exhausted their ammunition by 3 A.M. Two policemen, one with a machine gun and the other a shotgun, drove a truck laden with replenishments down from the Bronx and through the streets of Harlem, delivering munitions to their visibly relieved brothers.⁷² The temperature had fallen to 74 degrees, but the humidity was peaking at over 80 percent. By 4:30 A.M., the area had quieted considerably and the disturbances in the streets appeared to cease for the night.⁷³

⁶⁹ R.W. Apple, Jr. “Police Defend the Use of Gunfire in Controlling Riots in Harlem.” *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 1, 22; Ted Poston and Ralph Blumenthal. “Riot Toll: 1 Killed, 119 Hurt.” *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 3, 40.

⁷⁰ “Says Police Shot to Kill.” *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 23.

⁷¹ James. “Harlem: By 2 Who Were There,” 2.

⁷² Clines. “Policemen Exhaust Their Ammunition in All-Night Battle.” 1.

⁷³ Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” 7.

After a nearly two hour lull, crowds began forming again, increasing in size until by 7 in the morning on the 19th, physical violence between the police and people on the street resumed to the point that “it appeared for several minutes that the situation might become worse than it had been during the night.” This continued until about 8:15, when reinforcements arrived. Demonstrating curiously different methods than they had throughout the night, the police helped to quiet the situation rather than intensify it. They walked slowly through the crowds, with no weapons in their hands and refraining from shoving anyone, simply asking people to keep walking. Within half an hour, though there was much debris and evidence of a night of chaos, the sidewalks and streets were flowing as they usually did on Sunday mornings.⁷⁴

During the course of the night, at least twenty-three stores were looted.⁷⁵ Over seven hours, the police, numbering over five hundred, had shot fifteen people, killing one, beaten hundreds and arrested at least thirty. One arrestee was Charles Humber, claiming he was on assignment for *Life* and had the credentials to prove it, accused of “failure to move along when ordered to by police.” They beat many Harlemites for being on the street, guilty of running.⁷⁶ The *New York Times* reported that “Scores of persons with bloodied heads were seen throughout the eight-block area” where the uprising took place. Twelve of the NYPD’s own had been injured, including one who had the

⁷⁴ Whitworth. “Tinderbox Harlem: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.” 7.

⁷⁵ Terry Smith. “How Some of the White Merchants Fared – Disastrously.” *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 7.

⁷⁶ Montgomery and Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” 1, 54; Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

misfortune of catching a Molotov cocktail to the leg.⁷⁷ A police officer shot the dead man, Jay Jenkins, a forty-one-year-old black man from Central Harlem, in the forehead while he was allegedly in the process of tossing brick after brick down from a rooftop.⁷⁸ At least two of the gunshot victims were men who police had shot in the back, both unarmed and reported at the time as in critical condition. One, Abe Rick, twenty-five years old, was accused of being in the process of stealing two watches from a pawnshop. The other, Thessolonia Cutler, thirty-four, was standing in a doorway.⁷⁹

Those who took to the streets also injured a few white people that night, in what would be exceedingly rare occurrence over the next week. A CBS photographer was knocked out and had his arm broken.⁸⁰ In another instance, a group of Central Harlem residents attacked two white people driving through the area who were stopped at a red light at 3:30 Sunday morning. The twenty-four-year-old female passenger, a British woman, suffered several cuts to her head and reported her purse, keys, immigration papers and \$25 in cash as stolen. The male driver, twenty-nine, received a dislocated shoulder. Both were hospitalized after police came to their aid.⁸¹

A reporter for the *New York Amsterdam News* provided the following firsthand account of an incident of police violence that night:

You rush inside a bar at 125th St., and 7th Ave, and witness Police Car 1938 drop off a Negro male, blood rushing from his eyes and his white shirt and handkerchief dripping with his life.

⁷⁷ Montgomery and Clines. "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt." 1, 54.

⁷⁸ Ferretti and Berck. "Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce." 6.

⁷⁹ Apple, Jr. "Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged," 16.

⁸⁰ Edward Cumberbatch. "Harlem: By 2 Who Were There." *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 2.

⁸¹ Poston and Blumenthal. "Riot Toll: 1 Killed, 119 Hurt," 3, 40.

A friendly passing male seeks to help him, but his female companion frenziedly grabs at him to let the man alone as the helmeted Cossacks rush to yell at the crowd to “move on, get the hell out of here.” The police car, with a Negro and a white officer, speeds away having dispatched its passenger.

The bleeding victim sat crying for minutes on the sidewalk until a waiter from the restaurant went out and dragged him inside the bowling alley, away from possible further bruises.

The reporter went on to describe the atmosphere in Central Harlem that night as one in which residents of all ages stood on the street in small groups “wondering what the cops are going to do next, and why.” That evening, he said, “Negroes were not fighting Negroes, they were defending themselves against the hordes of blue shirts, helmets, billies, and gun shots.”⁸²

Not surprisingly, many Harlemites suffered serious injuries that night. Harlem Hospital reported treating seventy-five people for bruises, cuts and stab wounds, and seven for gunshots, while another Harlem Hospital, Sydenham, admitted thirty people for various injuries, and also another seven whom had been shot. Louis Smith, a CORE field secretary who had just returned to New York from Mississippi referred to the scene in Harlem Hospital’s emergency room as “worse than anything I ever saw in Mississippi. Even the ambulance driver cried... They had to mop the blood off of the floor of the ward.”⁸³

Melvin Drummond, a twenty-four year old black Central Harlemite who was on his way home from working for the Peace Corps in Europe, related the story of his

⁸² “Another Look at “Why the Harlem Riots?”” *New York Amsterdam News* 1 August 1964: 3; “Cossack” was a term communists and radical labor organizers popularized earlier in the twentieth century as a derogatory reference to the police. For the reporter, the situation is one of endless antagonism, where Harlemites must be ready at every moment to defend themselves against the city’s police force, which he likens to the ethnic soldiers famous for their brutality while suppressing insurrection during the Russian revolution of 1905.

⁸³ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

beating to the *New York Herald Tribune*. He claimed that as he exited the subway station at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue, he entered a crowd. As a police sergeant was telling everyone to keep walking, someone threw a bottle. Suddenly, Drummond received a blow to the back of the head from a policeman's club. Then, four or five more police joined in beating the now handcuffed man until another sergeant told them to "Stop hitting this man; he didn't do anything."⁸⁴ Despite being someone who "didn't do anything," the police charged him with "felonious assault and interfering with an officer attempting to make an arrest."⁸⁵

Drummond's arrest was one known as a cover charge, essentially a lie to excuse police misconduct. As veteran New York civil liberties lawyer Paul Chevigny argues, "The New York police are sophisticated enough in drawing charges and making them stick not to need an actual act of physical violence to arrest anyone. If they feel that a man is a troublemaker, they can, unfortunately, charge him with resisting arrest, without the necessity of risking injury to an officer." Though the man very likely may have committed no crime and violated no order, he was now in the hands of the legal system and would have a very difficult and expensive time extracting himself without a permanent record. Chevigny continues:

Once they have arrested him, of course, lying becomes an inevitable part of the procedure of making the quarrel look like a crime, and thus the lie is the chief abuse with which we must come to grips. If the police simply hit a man and let him go, there would be an abuse of the authority...but not the compound abuse of hitting a man and then dragging him to court on criminal charges, really a more serious injury than a blow. One's head heals up, after all, but a criminal record never goes away. There is no more embittering experience in the legal system

⁸⁴ Ferretti and Berck. "Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce." 6.

⁸⁵ Apple, Jr. "Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged," 16.

than to be abused by the police and then to be tried and convicted on false evidence.

Chevigny identifies enduring this experience as one that “feeds the impulse to riot,” for “once respect for the legal process is gone, grievances can only be expressed by force.” The charges Drummond faced, “together with a story to establish them, constitute the system for covering street abuses.” In other words, Drummond experienced what countless black New Yorkers had at the hands of a police officer, a significant factor driving so many Harlemites out into the streets during the rebellions. The officers attacked Drummond for no reason and then once they were done, they arrested him to protect themselves from accusations of wrongdoing. The police concoct cover charges to inoculate themselves from legal charges, lawsuits and complaints with the city’s Civilian Complaint Review Board, which would all be viewed as highly suspect coming from a convicted felon.⁸⁶

A thirty-six-year-old African American cab driver from the Bronx, Matthew Perry, likewise charged that police had beaten him that night. According to Perry, after he let out a passenger at 128th Street and Lenox Avenue and went into a bar for a drink, he came out and saw a black man lying wounded on the street. When he attempted to load the man into his cab and drive him to the hospital, policemen nearby told him he was not allowed to do so and should move on. Perry insisted upon staying, at which point he said police set upon him, beating him about his head until he fell to the ground. Turning to get up, he reported “twelve pistols looking me in the eye and telling me not to move.” A

⁸⁶ Chevigny, *Police Power*, 141-143.

sudden ruckus across the street sent the police running, allowing Perry to flee, leaving the wounded man behind.⁸⁷

Ed James, the *New York Post* photographer, spent all of Saturday night in Harlem covering the events, trying to safely navigate the streets without being perceived as with the police or with the people in the streets. Being a member of the press, he was able to gain access to the precinct at 123rd Street, where “The cops brought in several men; all were bleeding. One Negro broke and ran. He was a youngster. The cop caught him twice and rapped him twice on the head. I heard him screaming from inside the stationhouse.” Later, out on the street, he saw “a cop club a Negro to the ground and another cop crack him on the legs, but he didn’t move.”⁸⁸ Edward Cumberbatch, a black journalist also with the *Post*, witnessed a group of ten African American teenagers shouting “We want Malcolm X!” face to face with as many police, then watched as one of the boys tripped when police chased them and “saw three cops pound his skull and back with clubs.” The teens, though young, were obviously politically aware and believed Malcolm X, Harlem’s much-respected black Muslim cleric, would bring some kind of clarity to the streets of Harlem. The press often portrayed the neighborhood’s youth as utterly apathetic and alienated. While this may have been the case in terms of most electoral politics as well as common social institutions such as school and church, it was absolutely untrue when it came to grassroots leaders who gave people hope and dignity.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sue Reinert. “CORE’s Harlem Office – Where the Wounded Talk.” *New York Herald Tribune* 22 July 1964: 7.

⁸⁸ James. “Harlem: By 2 Who Were There,” 2.

⁸⁹ Cumberbatch. “Harlem: By 2 Who Were There,” 2.

James Farmer, National Director of CORE, was witness to the evening's events. Farmer was a long-time pacifist and believer in civil disobedience who had helped found the organization in 1942. He became the group's first African American National Director in 1961 and was instrumental in planning student sit-ins and the 1961 Freedom Rides throughout the South. By this time, Farmer, who was living in New York City, was a nationally known and respected civil rights leader. On WABC television, he declared that Saturday evening was a "blood orgy on the part of the police." He provided his most serious accusation when he told the audience, "I saw a woman who walked up to the police and asked them for their assistance in getting a taxicab so that she might go home. This woman was shot in the groin and is now in Harlem Hospital." According to the *New York Times*, Harlem Hospital treated a woman that night for "a superficial gunshot wound in the left thigh."⁹⁰

Barbara Barksdale, twenty-three, charged that a police officer shot at her five times, hitting her once in the left thigh. Intending to pick up her four-month-old son from her husband's aunt's apartment, Barksdale decided it was too dangerous to bring the boy into the street and attempted to take a bus home. Buses had stopped running in the area where she was, on 128th Street near Lenox Avenue. Hoping a policeman would help her find a cab, she instead "saw this cop cross over from the traffic island. He came at me with his gun in his hand." She ran and he gave chase, finding her behind a parked car. According to Barksdale, the white officer then shot at her and beat an African American teenage boy who tried to aid her. When she screamed "You shot me! You shot me!" she

⁹⁰ Fred Powledge. "Screvane to Meet Rights Leaders." *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 1, 17.

related the policeman responded “Well, lay down and die then.” She contended the officer “was hating all of us Negroes” when he shot her.⁹¹

Elsewhere, Farmer publicly alleged the city’s police had decided “indiscriminately to shoot into hotel windows and tenement houses” in the heat of Saturday night’s action, though casualty figures did not seem to back up his statement, at least not on a large scale. Police officials fervently denied Farmer’s accusations at every turn.⁹²

A nineteen-year-old African American man chastised black police for what he perceived as their eager participation in subduing the unrest: “Some of the Negro cops, I suppose, got to prove to the white cops they’re not biased. So they overdo it.”⁹³ In a related but more extreme vein, an African American woman supposedly told a black police officer in Harlem that night, “If you were my husband, I’d beat you to death.”⁹⁴

Daybreak – Sunday, July 19th

Flailing to prevent further unrest, Deputy Police Commissioner Philip Walsh met with a small hodgepodge of leading Harlem citizens, including the executive director of the City Commission on Human Rights, a criminal court judge, James Lawson of the United African Nationalist Movement and Bishop Alvin Childs, the “honorary area mayor of Harlem.”⁹⁵ Commissioner Murphy arrived to meet with the men around 4:30 in

⁹¹ Edward Cumberbatch and Alfred T. Hendricks. “Woman Accuses Cop in Shooting.” *New York Post* 21 July 1964: 2; “Harlem: Hatred in the Streets.” *Newsweek* 3 August 1964: 17.

⁹² Apple, Jr. “Police Defend the Use of Gunfire in Controlling Riots in Harlem,” 1.

⁹³ Clines. “Policemen Exhaust Their Ammunition in All-Night Battle.” 16.

⁹⁴ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

⁹⁵ Montgomery and Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt.” 1, 54.

the morning on Sunday, the 19th. Their meeting ended after he wrote a statement that he requested be read at every Harlem church service later that morning. Commissioner Murphy held a 7 A.M. press conference, where he read his statement, which was also given to the media.⁹⁶

Commissioner Murphy, not in touch with the city's civil rights movement, understood the uprisings as linked solely to Gilligan shooting Powell, as opposed to that incident being the breaking point for so many African American New Yorkers who had run out of patience for the daily inequality and indignities they suffered. He assured New Yorkers that he "ordered the civilian complaint review board to step in at once" and that "Extra investigators were assigned to get all the witnesses and obtain the truth, which is what we all want." After spelling out the intended depth and speed of the District Attorney's impending investigation of Gilligan's actions, he got to his main point: "Some persons have used this unfortunate incident as an excuse for looting and for vicious, unprovoked attacks against police. These crimes have been met by swift and necessary police action. In our estimation this is a crime problem and not a social problem." Finally, in an effort to limit the power of rumor, the commissioner explained, "one man was killed by the police as he threw bricks from a roof at passing motorists and pedestrians and refused to cease when warned to do so" and provided an underestimation of the number of civilians injured.⁹⁷

Commissioner Murphy's message did not reach many of the active participants in the uprisings who did not attend church. And even for those who were churchgoers, at

⁹⁶ Clines, "Policemen Exhaust Their Ammunition in All-Night Battle." 16.

⁹⁷ "Behind the Harlem Riots – Two Views." *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 1, 7. Commissioner Murphy claimed sixteen civilians were injured, when newspaper headlines and articles refer to "scores."

least one clergyman, the Reverend Richard A. Hildebrand, president of the Manhattan NAACP, followed his reading of the commissioner's statement with:

I'm sure we're as anxious as the Police Commissioner to stop violence. But in order to maintain peace, the Commissioner must do something to restore confidence in the police department. Whether it is true or not we read in the papers about policemen who get rich off the crime and violence that goes on in our community and it does appear that they are overzealous when it comes to brutality against Negroes. So who has respect for the police?

Reverend Hildebrand finished his sermon in stifling heat, warned those in his flock at Bethel AME on West 132nd Street in Harlem to take care of themselves and announced the cancellation of his evening service, anticipating a second night of unrest.⁹⁸ The temperature, both inside and outside, was soaring, on its way to a high of 91.

Ten blocks away and an ideological world apart from Reverend Hildebrand's church, Harlem rent strike leader Jesse Gray addressed an emergency meeting of five hundred people billed as "Is Harlem Mississippi?" at the Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church at 122nd Street and Mount Morris Park West in Harlem. Not just disconnected individuals making the comparison any longer, a mass meeting was devoted to the likeness Harlem bore to Mississippi. With a bandaged and swollen face he said the police gave him the previous night after recognizing him, Gray boldly announced "We have one of the most corrupt, rotten police departments in this country. [Police Commissioner] Murphy is nothing but a crumbsnatcher and a stoolie." Continuing, Gray asserted, "Last night the police looked no better than German storm troops," referencing Hitler's private armies responsible for securing his rise to power and terrorizing

⁹⁸ Ferretti and Berck. "Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce." 6.

dissidents and Jews, with which many in attendance were still familiar.⁹⁹ Significantly escalating the intensity of his rhetoric, he declared, “There is only one thing that can correct the situation, and that’s guerilla warfare,” though he later explained in court he was referring to guerilla war in Mississippi. Mapping out his vision of armed insurrection, Gray asked for “100 skilled black revolutionaries who are ready to die” to step forward as platoon captains, who would then each recruit another one hundred men until they had amassed a force of “50,000 well organized Negroes” who would “determine what will happen in New York City.” Gray lambasted the city’s police department as “deeply rooted with hatred and racism.” The audience reacted with thunderous, prolonged applause. Gray finished by telling those in attendance he intended to head a demonstration at the United Nations to request the organization’s assistance against “police terror in the United States.” Gray was known as a militant, but his statements during the uprisings indicate a previously unknown fire within.¹⁰⁰

Marshall England, head of Harlem CORE, found himself in the unfortunate position of following Gray in the pulpit. Visibly crying, he mustered the suddenly irrelevant and hopelessly inadequate utterance that the “Negro people must vote and

⁹⁹ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

¹⁰⁰ Junius Griffin. “‘Guerilla War’ Urged in Harlem.” *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 16; Jesse Gray, in a courtroom hearing a week later, testified that he was referring to the possible necessity of guerilla warfare in Mississippi, not New York. In his words, “I introduced the speakers at the meeting in Mount Morris Presbyterian Church and then I said that people in New York and Chicago were saying that guerilla warfare might be the only solution in Mississippi. To change the situation it might be necessary to shoot and kill. I told the audience, about 600 people, that I, too, felt that in Mississippi guerilla warfare might be the only solution, but I did not know what should be done in New York, did not know the solution.” As for the one hundred black revolutionaries, he attested “I did call for 100 men to die for freedom if necessary – 100 key people, each something like a platoon leader. They must be trained to organize because lack of organization was the weakness in Harlem. Each leader would get 100 others and we would have a well-trained force to protect us and to achieve our rights in housing, jobs, schools and against police brutality.” – Henry Beckett. “Jesse Gray Back on Stand.” *New York Post* 29 July 1964: 3.

organize.” He was immediately booed, with several in the crowd calling out the correction that “We are black men, not Negroes!” Amid a “roar of jeers,” England left as quickly as he had appeared, realizing he had no place at the meeting.¹⁰¹ Inserting himself into the storm to redirect its energy, Edward Mills Davis, head of the African Freedom Movement, popular black nationalist street speaker in Harlem and mainstay at Lewis Michaux’s National Memorial African Bookstore on 125th Street, calmed the riled audience with the dictate that “You are not going to solve the problem by an emotional outburst or by undirected violence.” He scolded local civil rights organizations for counterproductive infighting when they could instead be organizing for black freedom, which many in the crowd thoroughly applauded. Concluding his remarks, Davis injected further militancy into the meeting when he declared “all you black people that have been in the armed services and know anything about guerilla warfare should come to the aid of our people.”¹⁰²

James Farmer made a surprise appearance. His arrival elicited a chorus of jeers from the audience, but he seemed unperturbed, telling them, “That kid James Powell was my son and your son and the son of every black man.”¹⁰³ In reference to the Alabama city made infamous the previous year for its especially violent and racist police department, he termed Saturday night “New York’s night of Birmingham horror.” While it may not have been in Mississippi, Birmingham, or “Bombingham” as it had come to be known for its level of racial violence, the national head of CORE likened the police in the streets of

¹⁰¹ Griffin. “‘Guerilla War’ Urged in Harlem,” 16.

¹⁰² Griffin. “‘Guerilla War’ Urged in Harlem,” 16; Poston and Blumenthal. “Riot Toll: 1 Killed, 119 Hurt,” 40.

¹⁰³ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

Harlem to those of that southern city. Describing the police in Harlem as “hysterical,” Farmer pointed his finger high, declaring, “The Police Commissioner, in the posture which he had adopted in the last few months of self-congratulations for the Police Department, must assume part of the responsibility” for his officers’ behavior and violence.¹⁰⁴ He also repeated the by then already common demand that Lieutenant Gilligan be arrested for murder, at which point a number of those in attendance responded by rising from their seats and rhetorically asking the rest of the room “Let’s go, what are we waiting for?” Farmer, striving to prevent further bloodshed, admonished them: “If you go out of here,” he calmly stated, “one running one way, one running another, it will be slaughter.” All remained in the room.¹⁰⁵

Bayard Rustin, the legendary civil rights organizer, was the final speaker. Rustin could claim a lengthy list of civil rights activism and leadership: cofounder of CORE, early Freedom Rider, essential to the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, key advisor to Martin Luther King Jr., and organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom eleven months earlier. His presence and oratory drew a bitterly negative reaction from the attendees, who saw him as a member of the old guard pacifist movement – weak, ineffectual, eager to compromise and accommodating. Rustin, of course, had faced far worse in the nation’s jails and at the hands of violent police and thugs. Cutting through their boos and insults with sober determination, Rustin asserted his authority with the declaration, “There is nobody in this room who cares more than I do that a young boy was shot down like an animal....There is nobody that has gone

¹⁰⁴ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 16.

¹⁰⁵ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

to jail more often than I have.” Continuing for as long as the crowd permitted, he told his audience, “I am not ready to die. I want no human being to die or be brutalized,” and contributing to these “monstrous deeds” though retributive violence “is to make an animal of me as the police were animals.” Rustin’s appeal to turn the proverbial other cheek brought further hostility, to the point that he was booed from the pulpit, ending the rally.¹⁰⁶

The news of the uprising horrified Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, who was vacationing in the quiet splendor of Wyoming. He implored, “I don’t care how angry the Negroes are. For the sake of the city and its people and getting to a solution to see that this kind of thing [Powell’s death] doesn’t happen again, we’ve all got to keep our heads. We can’t leave it to the bottle droppers and rock throwers.”¹⁰⁷ Wilkins had much about which to be anxious: the wellbeing of black New Yorkers, the image of the NAACP as the leading African American voice for progress, his position as one of the country’s eminent black leaders with access to the halls of power, the continued advancement of the civil rights struggle nationally and the ability to continue to get support for civil rights from local and federal authorities. However, he had very little currency with many people in Harlem, especially those out in the streets the night before.

Sunday night, local courts began the lengthy process of prosecuting citizens arrested in the uprisings. The city arraigned over thirty people in connection with the rebellions that night, all of whom were arrested Saturday night into Sunday morning, on such charges as “felonious assault, burglary, resisting arrest and inciting to riot.” Those

¹⁰⁶ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6; Rustin’s open homosexuality was a likely factor in the degree of enmity he experienced during the rebellions.

¹⁰⁷ Powledge. “Screvane to Meet Rights Leaders,” 1.

on the front lines of the judicial system were also busy that day, with four hundred police officers from all five boroughs occupying Central Harlem, still wearing their steel helmets and keeping their holsters unsecured for quicker access to their guns.¹⁰⁸

The Second Night

Shortly before Powell's 8 P.M. funeral service on Sunday, July 19th, more than one thousand people thronged the street outside while 150 mourners gathered inside the Levy and Delaney Funeral Home at 132nd Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem. Dozens of police watched, waiting for confrontation. It was still 85 degrees outside, with the humidity climbing past 60 percent. The police were anxious about the large crowd outside the funeral home, especially given the previous night's tumult and the symbolic importance of the funeral. They began trying to get people to move away from the funeral home, instead of trying to prevent the buildup in the first place.¹⁰⁹

Verbal attempts at dispersal quickly gave way to the police shoving the mourners with their nightsticks, which caused a stampede of attendees, including the Manhattan Deputy Borough President and one of Governor Rockefeller's former personal assistants. Some members of the crowd responded to the police by showering the patrolmen with a hail of bottles. The police then "charged into crowds, waving nightsticks" to extinguish the incipient rebellion as citizens "pour[ed] out from behind barricades." The officers' gunshots into the air and three buses full of Tactical Patrol Force officers, the NYPD's

¹⁰⁸ Apple, Jr. "Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged," 16.

¹⁰⁹ "Another Look at 'Why the Harlem Riots?'"

elite combat unit, managed to quell the disturbance for a little while longer.¹¹⁰ Police stopped and repelled a group of perhaps one hundred black youth as they tried to cross Seventh Avenue to reach the funeral home, a number of them armed with large pieces of wood. One member of the group managed to land a bottle on a police sergeant before they fled and dispersed, but there was no further confrontation at that time.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, inside the funeral home, the Reverend Theodore Kerrison softly eulogized James Powell against an aural backdrop of gunshots and smashing bottles outside. Annie Powell, mother of James, “was near collapse and sobbed hysterically” as the service concluded. Bayard Rustin, who had attended the funeral along with the Reverend Milton Galamison, organizer of the year’s school boycotts, arranged for a sound truck to be on the street in front of the funeral home to quell the expected crowds. Rustin, again pleading forcefully with Harlemites to refrain from a second night of rebellion, spoke from the truck “I urge you to go home. We know there has been an injustice done. The thing we need to do most is respect this woman whose son was shot.” Members of the crowd denounced him as an “Uncle Tom.”¹¹²

Unfazed, Rustin responded, “I’m prepared to be a Tom if it’s the only way I can save women and children from being shot down in the street, and if you’re not willing to do the same, you’re fools.” A number of those in the vicinity had no patience for such advice and once again responded with scornful boos. A few other speakers followed Rustin with similar warnings, but the dominant voices surrounding them shut them down

¹¹⁰ R.W. Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged.” *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 1, 16.

¹¹¹ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 1, 16.

¹¹² Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce,” 6.

with demands for Malcolm X. Malcolm X, like Harlem's Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Mayor Wagner, was out of the country when the uprising began. Reached for comment the next day while attending the Organization of African Unity meeting in Cairo, he expressed surprise "that the trouble has been contained to the degree it has." Attributing the outbreak to the NYPD's use of "outright scare tactics," Malcolm X credited the city with having "used wiser methods than any other city to deal with racial problems" until Commissioner Murphy took office in 1961, since which time "for some strange reason, tactics have changed." He advised Commissioner Murphy and others that police scare tactics, on which he did not elaborate, "won't work, because the Negro is not afraid. If the tactics are not changed, this could escalate into something very, very serious." As usual, his insight was not far from the mark, but he left his allies and followers with no advice, just another warning to the ruling elite.¹¹³

Rustin left the funeral and after accompanying an injured resident to the hospital, went to the 28th Precinct on 123rd Street with James Farmer. There he told the chief inspector, "There is a social necessity for his [Gilligan's] suspension now, without prejudice. Only when the Negro leadership is able to go to the people of Harlem with a suspension in their hands will they be able to take the first step toward the conclusion of these tragic occurrences." Police politely brushed aside the wisdom of a dedicated activist seeking peace, to which he responded with the prescient warning, "I don't think it's a quieting crowd. Resentment is still boiling up. This situation is going to become even more violent."¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ferretti and Berck. "Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce," 6; "Malcolm X Lays Harlem Riot to 'Scare Tactics' of Police." *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 22.

As night fell, so did the temperature, dropping to an overnight low of 78 while the humidity rapidly ascended on its way to 72 percent, the police worked frantically in anticipation of another night of unrest. They cordoned off fifty-seven blocks of Central Harlem, between 116th and 135th Streets and Eighth and Lenox Avenues, the same area, but slightly smaller, that they had occupied the night before. On this night, police took the action prior to any real disturbance, calling it “a temporary measure occasioned by the crowds that gathered for the Powell funeral.” Police commanders mobilized the entirety of their force, more than twenty-seven thousand, to work indefinite twelve hour on and off shifts until they deemed the situation in Harlem sufficiently under control. The Transit Authority directed its drivers on the IND line of the subway system to deny all service to passengers at the 125th Street station in Central Harlem until around midnight. The agency also increased police presence on trains passing through Harlem and stations there.¹¹⁵

As many had feared, the previous night’s activities commenced once again, though they turned out to be less intense. A reporter for the *New York Times* described the essence of the citizen/police conflict that night as “missiles and gasoline-filled bottles thrown at the police, with shots returned.” Police shot at least seven people and reported twelve others injured, though that number was surely much higher, given the frequently mentioned beatings they were doling out.¹¹⁶ The city’s police officers were also returning

¹¹⁴ Goldstein and Cumberbatch. “After a Boy’s Funeral, A Rights Leader Weeps,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 16.

¹¹⁶ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 16.

in kind, reported to have “picked up bricks, bottles and stones that had been thrown at them and threw them back at the rooftops.”¹¹⁷

Journalists described Harlem Hospital as “a battle-zone field hospital” where “Every 15 or 20 minutes an ambulance sirened up to the emergency entrance with another blood-spattered, moaning stretcher case.” Police officers dropped off arrestees they had injured, while some of their other victims walked in with “T-shirts soaked crimson, open slashes on heads and faces leaking blood freely.”¹¹⁸ Doris Berry, an African American woman from Central Harlem, claimed a white policeman deliberately shot her in the knee while in the street looking for her mother. Berry said “I thought he was just shooting blanks until I got hit in the leg. The cops just left me there. I had to find a taxi to get to the hospital.”¹¹⁹

A white police officer shot another fifteen-year-old African American boy toward the end of that night’s upheaval, shortly after midnight. Officer William O’Carroll said he witnessed John Vaughan attempting to break into a television store at 118th Street and Third Avenue. O’Carroll stated that he ordered Vaughan to stop, but the boy ran. He fired a warning shot, which struck Ava Robles, a thirteen-year-old African American girl, who had been sitting on her fire escape, in her leg and lodged in her back. After Vaughan kept running, O’Carroll admittedly shot him in the back. The bullet passed through, exiting his stomach and critically injuring the boy.¹²⁰ Reporters from the *New York Post* were present

¹¹⁷ Ferretti and Berck. “Tinderbox Harlem: New Outbursts Snap Uneasy Truce.” 6.

¹¹⁸ Leonard Katz and Normand Poirier. “Crowd Awaits the Injured at The Hospital.” *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 4.

¹¹⁹ Poston and Blumenthal. “Riot Toll: 1 Killed, 119 Hurt,” 40.

when Vaughan arrived at Harlem Hospital, unconscious and bleeding profusely. A group of about twenty-five local residents witnessed this and screamed “Rotten butcher bastards!” at police on site.¹²¹

Shortly after midnight, the police department issued a press release stating that “groups of hoodlums are still roaming the streets but the situation is improving very rapidly.” Around the same time, most bars and restaurants in Central Harlem shut their doors hours before they usually would in a concerted effort to get people to their homes earlier and in a less drunken state. By 1:30 A.M., the streets of Harlem were once again quiet, and of course still hot and sticky.¹²²

The list of people whom police had arrested during the past two nights runs the gamut from a thirty-six-year-old photographer for *Life* to a twenty-year-old Army private to a forty-nine-year-old man to a sixteen-year-old-boy. All were African American. The *Life* photographer, Frank Dandridge, husband of notable Maryland civil rights activist Gloria Richardson, was arrested late Saturday night when he refused to stop photographing a woman in the process of being arrested. He quickly posted \$500 bail and was freed pending a hearing nearly two months later. The private was arrested and charged with resisting arrest, disorderly conduct and assault. Police charged the forty-nine year old man with looting, and the same was true for the sixteen-year-old boy. Of the forty-three people reported arrested those two nights, nearly all were from Central Harlem, with five giving addresses in the Bronx, one in Brooklyn, and another in

¹²⁰ Poston and Blumenthal. “Riot Toll: 1 Killed, 119 Hurt,” 3; Paul Hoffman. “A Second 15-Year-Old Is Shot.” *New York Post* 20 July 1964: 20.

¹²¹ Katz and Poirier. “Crowd Awaits the Injured at The Hospital,” 4.

¹²² Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 16.

Newark, New Jersey. Most were charged with some combination of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, burglary and assault. Police charged an eighteen-year-old man with receiving stolen property when he picked up a pair of pants from the ground. A twenty-four year old woman was charged with assault and inciting a riot, though her \$500 bail makes the charges seem much less serious than the \$1000 to \$5000 many defendants were facing for looting. A nineteen-year-old man was charged with attempting to take a policeman's nightstick from him.¹²³

The next day, New Yorkers outside of Central Harlem would awake to discover another night of tumult had taken place in its streets. The revolt now threatened to become an event of indeterminate length. Anxieties throughout the city as well as urban centers throughout the country heightened substantially. No one knew what would come next, and many feared the worst. City leaders desperate to quell the chaos scrambled for solutions and explanations. Civil rights leaders, concerned for both their status as men who were able to control local African American populations as well as the physical safety of those people, were similarly frantic in their search for relative calm. That night, the 20th, would show that any hopes for an immediate cessation were in vain and that the rebellions would spread beyond the confines of Central Harlem.

Conclusion

The rebellions in Harlem demonstrated some of the stark contrasts between the northern and southern arms of the civil rights movement. While full equality was a common goal for black people throughout the country, the tactics and obstacles were often quite different from one region to another. Black New Yorkers saw that nonviolent

¹²³ "'Casualty' List in Battle of Harlem." *New York Amsterdam News* 25 July 1964: 1, 2.

tactics like the sit-in and boycott had not done very much for them, and northern civil rights activists had not been able to provide effective alternatives to combat segregation. Even massive school boycotts involving hundreds of thousands of children and parents failed to achieve discernible change. Southerners, however, were achieving great success in their pursuit to destroy Jim Crow and had won many fundamental judicial and legislative victories by July 1964. All the while, New York's black population saw its social and economic conditions decline. Over time, black residents of the city became more frustrated with their living conditions, their economic conditions, the police who served their neighborhoods both inadequately and too aggressively, the politicians who oversaw it all and the seeming permanence of these states. When Lieutenant Gilligan shot and killed James Powell and neither the NYPD nor the mayor's office appeared willing to question the lieutenant's story, much less reprimand him, it proved to be too much for many of the city's 1.1 million black residents.

When Central Harlem residents took to the streets on the night of July 18th and the several nights after, they confirmed longstanding fears white politicians and black leaders had been holding for years. Both groups had known that African Americans in the urban North were discontented with housing segregation, poor economic prospects and a different kind of second-class citizenship than what so many northern migrants had fled in the South. Most black leaders saw this and recognized northern segregation as being part of the same system but profoundly different at the same time, resting on banking policies and urban renewal practices as opposed to legal apartheid. These leaders also knew the fight in the North would be much more difficult and could not be won in the same ways as in the South. Cold War anticommunist repression precluded them from

making economic critiques, so they were left trying to negotiate with northern politicians who ranged from sympathetic but ultimately ineffectual, like New York's Mayor Wagner, to outwardly hostile, like Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley. In every northern city, the outcome was essentially the same – token progress. Because mainstream civil rights leaders had won little progress toward equality in northern cities, they were unable to command much respect from black citizens in places like New York and Chicago and thus had little influence over the rebellions once they began.

While nonviolence was not a sure bet anywhere in 1964 America, this was especially true in northern urban areas where black citizens and activists had little reason to adhere to the strict discipline pacifist direct action requires. During the SCLC's Birmingham, Alabama campaign the previous spring, some demonstrators abandoned nonviolence and fought back against violent police, but movement leaders were able to exercise their restraining influences and keep the protests overwhelmingly nonviolent, even though the police were brutalizing children. If African American Birmingham residents reacted physically in large numbers, not only would it give the police the justification they wanted to attack every black person in sight without restraint, but it would also destroy the moral authority of a nonviolent movement. Black New Yorkers had no movement image to protect and no campaign progress to jeopardize. Decades of agitation for civil rights in New York City had led to little positive by 1964, so there was not much to lose by looting and attacking the police. As James Baldwin presciently wrote in 1963, "The Negroes of this country may never be able to rise to power, but they are

very well placed indeed to precipitate chaos and ring down the curtain on the American dream.”¹²⁴

In Central Harlem’s streets and churches, we can see how the Black Power movement was emerging from the civil rights movement well before Stokely Carmichael’s 1966 public employment of the phrase. The neighborhood’s long history as a cradle of black activism and black nationalist organizing coupled with the decades of unsuccessful integration-oriented activism made Central Harlem a prime social and political location from which Black Power could evolve. As several historians have noted, the living conditions of the postwar “second ghetto” served to foster militancy, and this is certainly true in New York City.¹²⁵ By 1964, black New Yorkers were clamoring for new paths to freedom that established civil rights organizations could not offer, so they began turning more toward men like Malcolm X and Jesse Gray.

Militant black political and cultural consciousness was flourishing in Central Harlem in 1964. When a group of black men disavowed the term “Negro” in favor of “black men” during a meeting at Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church, it showed a type of cultural militancy not typically associated with the pre-Black Power era. Time and again, residents of Harlem, as well as Bedford-Stuyvesant, responded to implorations to “Go home” from various people, whether James Farmer or a police officer, with the declaration that they were home. Black New Yorkers were claiming the neighborhoods in which they lived as their own. Though most people did not live in

¹²⁴ James Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time*. (New York: Dell Press, 1963), 88.

¹²⁵ Kenneth L. Kusmer. *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976; Komozi Woodard. *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1999

Central Harlem or Bedford-Stuyvesant through free will, nor did they own their homes, they nonetheless asserted ownership over the communities and articulated a rejection of the police occupation of them. The ways in which black New Yorkers in the uprisings shouted down integrationist voices, no matter how esteemed, while fervently applauding militant rhetoric calling for intraracial organizing and guerilla warfare, demonstrates the broad dissatisfaction with the goals of the integrationist movement in New York City.

Chapter Three – Spreading Anxiety

By Monday, July 20th, New York's rebellions had already become international news, with papers across Europe covering them in front-page stories. When uprisings broke out in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn later that night, this marked their transition into something unprecedented. No longer contained to Central Harlem, the revolts threatened to spread to every poor black neighborhood in the city. While the city had experienced uprisings in Central Harlem in 1935 and 1943, neither lasted nearly so long nor moved beyond the neighborhood. Once the city's upheaval crossed the East River into Brooklyn, President Johnson and the director of the FBI became directly involved. No longer just nationally newsworthy local events, the rebellions were now causing concern and prompting policy changes at the highest levels of government.

The city government struggled to address the rebellions. City leaders knew they could not respond with overwhelming force from the police. They expected this would only serve to escalate tensions in the streets and elicit an increase in violence. They also knew rampant shooting of looters would bring condemnation locally, nationally and abroad, especially with southern police violence a prominent current issue. Heavy-handed treatment of looters and people in the streets would also jeopardize delicate political alliances within the Democratic Party. Mayor Wagner, New York's U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and president Johnson were all Democrats and relied on one another for support, and overt police violence locally would put Johnson and Kennedy in positions where it would be difficult for them to not condemn what was happening. The city knew it had to use its police with restraint and accompany physical force with offers of police reforms and social programs. The solutions the city offered to its black citizens'

economic and social woes did not extend far beyond what it had promised and failed to deliver on in the previous years. Once again, there were more panels and committees set up to study problems when civil rights activists had been identifying the issues plaguing their communities for years. The Wagner administration's response to the rebellions and the circumstances creating them convinced many black New Yorkers the city would never listen to them.

Day Three – Monday, July 20th

On Monday morning, the 20th, James Powell was laid to rest. When the Powell family arrived at the Levy and Delaney Funeral Home at 9 A.M., approximately one hundred police were already outside in the warm and humid morning. It was 78 degrees, the same it was all night, with humidity having slightly declined to 74 percent. They were also met with the drone of a hovering police helicopter, looking for wider signs of trouble. Mrs. Annie Powell, James' mother, left the car crying out "My baby, my baby, oh my God, I want to see my baby" as tears streamed down her face and two men physically supported her.¹

About one hundred black people had gathered outside the home, as well as a significant number of policemen, photographers and reporters. There were a few minor disturbances at the funeral home this morning, such as when an African American woman, reacting to the sight of Powell's coffin leaving the building, exclaimed "Oh, why did they have to shoot the boy!" and made a fleeting attempt to attack a nearby white policeman. A sympathetic black man held her back, trying to calm her as he told her "There's nothing you can do." The procession then departed for a small service at

¹ Jones. "Few Present as Boy Shot by Policeman Is Buried," 23.

Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York. Located about fifteen miles north of the city, the Powell family had a plot there where the boy's father, Harold, had been interred three years earlier. Before only twelve or so family members and close friends, as well as the watchful eyes of three black Westchester County sheriff's officers, Powell's body was lowered above his father's. Mrs. Powell exclaimed "Oh God, look how I brought my boy to you! Harold, Harold, look how they've sent you my baby!"²

Back in the city, Paul R. Screvane, City Council president and acting mayor while Mayor Wagner was vacationing in Spain, held two meetings with a number of government officials and civil rights leaders. Screvane, who maintained "that as long as people can sit down and discuss the problems, something can be worked out," quickly amassed a contingent of city officials to meet with the activists, including Deputy Mayor Edward Cavanagh Jr., Manhattan Borough President Edward Dudley, Cleveland Robinson, commissioner of the City Commission on Human Rights, Madison Jones, the executive director of the City Commission on Human Rights, Commissioner Murphy and several of the mayor's aides.³ They first met with a nine-member delegation that James Farmer headed, including L. Joseph Overton from the National Negro American Labor Council, Alexander Allen representing the Urban League, the Reverend Eugene Callender from the NAACP and Percy Sutton, a CORE lawyer. That group demanded the

² Jones. "Few Present as Boy Shot by Policeman Is Buried," 23; Sue Reinert. "Harsh Words, No Violence at Boy's Funeral." *New York Herald Tribune* 21 July 1964: 9.

³ Powledge. "Screvane to Meet Rights Leaders," 1, 17; The City Commission on Human Rights dates back, in various forms, to Mayor La Guardia's administration in 1944. Taking its current name in 1955, it was a frustrated agency strictly able to deal with housing discrimination and even then could take enforcement action only after first obtaining a court order to do so. It was mainly an investigatory body and also held hearings. If someone came to it with a complaint regarding prejudice in the workplace, for example, the CCHR could take no action but refer the individual to the State Commission for Human Rights. This did not change until late 1965. Peter Kihss. "New Law Increases Powers of City Rights Board." *New York Times* 16 Dec 1965: 40.

immediate suspension of Lieutenant Gilligan, his arrest for murder, an independent civilian review board, Mayor Wagner's return and an increase in the number of African American police in Harlem, where Farmer said "practically all" officers were white.⁴ At this meeting, Farmer claimed to have information that Lieutenant Gilligan, a former military man, was receiving mental health treatment at a Veterans Administration hospital, implying he was unfit for service.⁵ Reverend Hildebrand from Bethel AME led the second meeting, accompanied by eight others. They pressed upon the municipal contingent the need to implement their three-point program: "the formation of a committee from outside the city government solely to investigate the Powell shooting, the relieving of Lieutenant Gilligan of duty for the present and the assignment of more Negro policemen to Harlem in all ranks."⁶

Much like Mayor Wagner, Screvane was a gracious and amiable host, but did not respond to the groups' demands in any substantial way. After the meetings, Screvane announced a grand jury would begin considering an indictment of Gilligan for murder the next day, Tuesday the 21st. In his statement, Screvane used the grand jury to quiet Harlem's anger, promising "all the facts will be brought out and the grand jury's judgment as to Gilligan's guilt or innocence will be promptly given, with all the safeguards provided by law." However, this was the city's standard procedure whenever

⁴ Peter Kihss. "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty." *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 1, 22.

⁵ Maurice C. Carroll and Edward J. Silberfarb. "Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain." *New York Herald Tribune* 21 July 1964: 1, 11; A representative for the VA later denied this, but did acknowledge that the lieutenant had been receiving and would continue to receive a \$77 monthly disability check for an undisclosed condition related to his time in the service.

⁶ Kihss, "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty," 1.

a police officer killed someone. The only difference was the quickness with which the district attorney convened the jury, described as “somewhat speedier than usual.”⁷

In what was apparently a day of programs, Screvane also declared the advent of a few other palliative measures, which he called “programs of action.” First, Deputy Mayor Cavanagh was to undertake a review of the Civilian Complaint Review Board’s procedures and all cases before it charging police brutality. He would send the results of his work to the mayor, who would then discuss the findings with the police commissioner. Next on the list, the police department would temporarily increase the number of African American police in Harlem and remove their white coworkers from the area. Commissioner Murphy described this measure as just “to meet a special circumstance at a special time,” reiterating its impermanent nature. Thirdly, the city would establish a body of high-ranking police officials, known as the Community Affairs Committee, which would “meet regularly with community leaders at designated places within Harlem and other communities.” The fourth program aimed to aggressively recruit racial minorities to work on the police force, as “part of the city’s anti-poverty program.” Finally, the city sought to relieve pressure in black and Puerto Rican areas of the city through “the encouragement of the submission of complaints and protests” to sundry city offices throughout the city. Citizens would be able to address a complaint to any city agency or department, as well as the mayor, and hand it in at one of many designated municipal government appendages acting as couriers. It was to be a sort of local postal service.⁸

⁷ Kihss. “City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty,” 22.

⁸ Kihss. “City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty,” 22.

These responses politely denied the civil rights groups' demands with a paternalist hand, taking little action in the face of massive problems. Regarding Deputy Mayor Cavanagh's impending review process, which may seem to be the most significant step of the lot, this was nothing new, as the review board already reported to the commissioner, who approved of its conduct, as was true for the mayor. And of course, it was a far cry from the independent civilian review board, the demand for which the uprisings were rapidly reviving. As for Mayor Wagner's return, this was not something to which he would agree until Screvane called him in Spain during the third night of rebellion and strongly pressed him to come back. The city was not willing to accede to any demands from civil rights groups. Commissioner Murphy could have suspended Lieutenant Gilligan as a temporary measure to quiet the panic in the streets of the city, but he refused. Wagner could have created an independent review board with the stroke of a pen, but he as intransigent as Murphy, just with a more genial visage.⁹

Others involved with the meeting had statements as well, none of which was supportive of the city's response as found in Acting Mayor Screvane's press release, which James Farmer characterized as "welcome but inadequate in this hour of crisis." He provided a point-by-point rebuttal to each of Screvane's new programs of action:

One, we are pleased that more Negro police will be used in Harlem. This should reduce tension. Two, the grand jury investigation of the murder of James Powell is welcome, though far too long delayed. Three, review by the Deputy Mayor of the Police Department's complaint board findings is insufficient to insure fair play for the minority community. A real independent civilian review board is a necessity now. Four, the authority of the proposed city affairs committee must be defined. Five, the intensive recruitment of Negro police is desirable. CORE points

⁹ Carroll and Silberfarb. "Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain," 11.

out that there are other areas of city government where Negroes should be recruited.¹⁰

The only measure he fully accepted was the increase of African American police in Harlem, and that was a temporary change. Everything else fell short of even beginning to get at the basic problems in Harlem and the rest of New York's black neighborhoods. People like Wagner and Murphy refused to accept moderate civil rights leaders' advice. Groups like the NAACP, CORE, HARYOU, the Harlem Neighborhoods Association and small grassroots organizations had long apprised city leaders of the major issues in their communities, but endless committees and studies always substituted for progress. Various city agencies could have taken serious steps to alleviate the deplorable housing conditions by penalizing slumlords or could have integrated schools in a meaningful way, but with Wagner's blessing they had not.

Cleveland Robinson, the forty-eight-year-old Jamaican-born commissioner of the City Commission on Human Rights and labor leader with the thirty-thousand strong District 65 of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Employees Union and national co-chairman of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, provided a broad critical analysis of the general social and economic situation in Harlem. Viewing the uprisings from a holistic perspective, he told reporters Harlem faced "not just the question of police brutality but the whole social structure – housing, education, lack of jobs," but offered no specific proposals at the time, as he partook in the conferences with the two above groups as a city official with few powers. Turning to why people were rebelling in the streets, Robinson asserted, "It's important to know that the people in the streets acting unlawfully

¹⁰ Kihss. "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty," 22.

and seizing the opportunity to vent pent-up emotions are leaderless. They don't even have faith in Negro leadership." Due to the lack of leadership, Robinson continued, "This is not the time for street rallies and open demonstrations for the simple reason that there is that element which is leaderless and uncontrolled." Finally, he addressed the matter of corrupt policing in the community, relating many black New Yorkers felt "Harlem is a lucrative field for police who are paid off and who do not pay attention to crime."¹¹

Senior civil rights and labor dignitary A. Philip Randolph, with the authority conferred by living in Harlem for fifty years, provided a statement to the press that day from Los Angeles. Randolph pleaded vainly for those African Americans participating in the rebellion to stop, bluntly stating, "Violence and bloodshed is not the remedy. It will destroy our community and hurt and set back the Negro cause. It only plays into the hands of our enemies." Randolph then changed his focus to the national stage and the coming presidential election, and expressed his worry that continued unrest "could elect [Republican candidate] Senator Goldwater, who voted against civil rights legislation, President, which would be the greatest disaster to befall Negroes since slavery."¹² Randolph's message, like those from other civil rights leaders, had only limited impact at best, given the fact many black New Yorkers had little interest in nonviolence. The bulk of the people in the streets the past few nights were out as individuals with no larger social goal, so political appeals to them were of little meaning.

Jesse Gray, on the other hand, had no interest in trying to tamp down the unrest. People from most political and ideological perspectives criticized him for inflaming

¹¹ Kihss. "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty," 22.

¹² Kihss. "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty," 22.

tensions and keeping the uprisings stoked. One such measure was the rally against police brutality he held at United Nations headquarters on the afternoon of the 20th, with an estimated attendance of 250. Gray told the people “there will be more demonstrations and riots whether we like it or not.” He was right. Other groups were also encouraging further action the same day. The Harlem Defense Council, a group sharing office space with the militant communist Progressive Labor Club at 336 Lenox Avenue, began spreading leaflets throughout the community at some point during the day, demanding residents “defend each block from the cops” and calling for a demonstration against police brutality at the 32nd Precinct on 135th Street for Saturday, July 25th.¹³

James Farmer, CORE’s National Director, made attempts to reach Governor Rockefeller, vacationing in Wyoming, to request the deployment of the National Guard to Harlem. Farmer asserted the force was necessary “to protect the people of Harlem,” due to the NYPD’s inability to do its job. This is notable not just for what it said about Farmer’s view of the police, but much more for the fact that in the rebellions to come throughout the country, especially in places like Watts, Newark and Detroit, the calling up of the National Guard quickly became feared and synonymous with intense violence. Farmer seems to have believed the National Guard would have done a better and more impartial job of maintaining order in the streets of Harlem. At this time, military intervention still had a positive connotation, such as in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 to integrate its Central High School or to keep James Meredith enrolled at the University of

¹³ “Violence Erupts for Third Night.” *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 22; Carroll and Silberfarb. “Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain,” 11; Peter Kihss. “Screvane Links Reds to Rioting.” *New York Times* 22 July 1964: 1, 18.

Mississippi in 1962.¹⁴ In Los Angeles, LAPD Chief William H. Parker drew the same conclusion from an opposite ideological perspective. Before the annual gathering of the National Conference of Police Associations, Parker told his audience “Perhaps it would be better if the Harlem situation was turned over to the military. Officers are working 12 hours a day amid bloody battles and it’s too much to expect of them on a non-relieved basis.” The chief received a standing ovation.¹⁵

Store and business owners in Harlem estimated that day they had sustained at least \$50,000 worth of property damage from the two nights of unrest. Some said they would stay closed until the tumultuous atmosphere of the past few days quieted down, while others said that they needed to get their businesses up and running as quickly as possible in order to maintain a cash flow. Police had forty-six local businesses on record as having been damaged on the nights of the 18th and 19th, with five looted. White people owned every one. Worst hit was the A&P supermarket at Eighth Avenue and 131st Street, which someone had tried to burn down with a Molotov cocktail. Though police quickly extinguished the fire, looters had broken out 439 square feet of quarter-inch plate glass windows that would cost \$15,000 to replace. The white manager of the store sounded hopeful about the community in which he worked, voicing his certainty that “winos and junkies” were responsible for the damage, not local families. An African American teen nearby told a *New York Times* reporter “The only thing I regret is that they broke into the cleaners and took clothes. They are just harming our people who live in

¹⁴ Apple, Jr. “Violence Flares Again in Harlem; Restraint Urged,” 1.

¹⁵ Warren Berry. “Coast Police Asks Troops for Harlem.” *New York Herald Tribune* 21 July 1964: 10.

this neighborhood when they do that. I don't care about the bar [one of two bars in the area extensively damaged]. It's owned by whitey anyway.”¹⁶

About a mile southeast, a number of young Puerto Rican men in East Harlem were conducting peace patrols to try to make sure such cataclysm did not spread eastward. The twenty-five young men came together Sunday night, after some of the helmeted police fighting in Central Harlem intruded into their community of about 80,000. One of the founders of the patrol, Victor Alicea, a twenty-four year old Columbia University graduate student, described the general reaction to that incursion as “When we see helmets, we think of war.” He went on to say, “It was very unwise of the cops to walk through here wearing helmets when there was no violence. They were coming to the worst conclusions about us.” Fearing the aggressive police presence would only serve to touch off a rebellion, Alicea and some concerned friends got together to walk and drive the streets from dusk to dawn, doing what they could to keep tensions down. One peace patrolman, Anibal Solivan, a twenty-one year old Columbia pre-law major, said their major point was to communicate to the youth in the streets that “We can never win against the cops. With a war against the cops, we've been telling these kids, you win nothing but publicity – bad publicity. The kind of publicity that will hurt us, will make some say of us we're a bunch of animals.”¹⁷

It worked. There were no uprisings in East Harlem. The streets stayed quiet. Still, Solivan cautioned, “Violence is a tool that we do not want to use, but it could have been

¹⁶ Junius Griffin. “Harlem Businessmen Put Riot Losses at \$50,000.” *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 22.

¹⁷ Gay Talese. “Puerto Rican Peace Patrol Acts to Keep East Harlem Calm.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 13.

very bad here Sunday, when the cops started walking through here wearing helmets.”¹⁸

For these men, like many civil rights activists, especially in the North, nonviolence was conditional, one tactic among many and not by any means a core principle. Self-defense and self-preservation were the highest obligations.

That day, many Harlemites gathered on stoops and corners, in barbershops, beauty salons, restaurants and bars to socialize as they usually did, especially in the summer. This was the season when repressive heat and humidity pushed people out of their tenements, with terrible airflow and brick exteriors that radiated heat inward. Air conditioning was not even a question. Many of their conversations, if they did not begin that way, quickly turned to the upheaval in the streets, like they had the day before. Today though, it was not the day after a one-time flare up like the previous disturbances had been in 1935 and 1943. This was now two nights of unrest, which made it a major event. People were now expecting it, but at the same time, did not know what to expect. The streets were electric.

The Third Night – Spreading Conflict

Following a second day of intense yet ultimately fruitless meetings between city officials and designated black leaders, Harlem rose up for a third time. On this day, people did not wait for the cover of nightfall to make their rebellion. Newspapers reported that sometime in the early evening, around 6 P.M., a group of black Harlemites, mostly teens, took to the streets and made an ad hoc march from 125th Street and Seventh Avenue that spanned fifteen blocks or so. The police boxed them in, containing the group from the front and back. On 116th Street, some people on the sidewalks began throwing

¹⁸ Talese. “Puerto Rican Peace Patrol Acts to Keep East Harlem Calm,” 13.

bottles at police, who then converged on the march and ended it by force, whether or not anyone in the march was throwing bottles. Another group of African Americans, estimated to number around fifty, congregated at 127th Street and Seventh Avenue. Elements of that crowd threw bottles at some of the police officers who had been occupying Harlem that day. The police scattered them by force as well.¹⁹

At 6:30, two fires broke out on Seventh Avenue between 125th and 126th Streets. The first was on the second floor balcony in a movie theatre, the RKO Alhambra. It was quickly extinguished. The second was on the second floor of 2105 Seventh Avenue, notable at the time for its first floor tenant – Lewis Michaux and his National Memorial African Bookstore, also known as “The House of Common Sense and Home of Proper Propaganda.” Michaux’ store was a Harlem landmark, having been in operation since 1930, functioning as the hub of cultural and intellectual dissemination in the community. The shop served as Malcolm X’s usual street speaking location for several years, where he would draw throngs of listeners. Housing several hundred thousand books, as well as works on and of black people throughout the diaspora of every other medium available at the time, his store was known throughout the world and had received visits from several African heads of state, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and the Congo’s Patrice Lumumba. Whether this fire was intentionally set or not is unknown, but it was nevertheless put out before it did any real damage.²⁰

Around 8 P.M. on Monday, July 20th, several small groups of African American marchers took to the streets, walking Seventh Avenue with 125th Street as their center,

¹⁹ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

²⁰ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

perhaps just to demonstrate that the streets were theirs. This area was where the most looting and fighting had taken place over the two nights before and had therefore attracted the heaviest police presence and response. Others on the street began taunting police and throwing a few bottles their way. The police responded with truncheons and revolvers in their hands, though they held their fire for the time. A few people set fires in garbage cans and buildings, but nothing came of them.²¹

A few minutes past 9, a group of African American teens, estimated to number around 150, marched down 125th Street, chanting “We want justice!” Some carried signs with a large picture of Lieutenant Gilligan with the caption “WANTED FOR MURDER – GILLIGAN, THE COP.” Six police cars followed them until the group disbanded without incident.²²

By 9:30, the streets of Harlem were once again full of people interested in the uprisings for a variety of reasons – airing grievances, releasing anger and hostility, taking property for personal gain, fighting the police or simply witnessing those more actively participating in it all. The temperature had fallen to 71 degrees while the humidity rapidly ascended to just short of 100 percent. Police met a rapidly growing group of one thousand or more young Central Harlemites marching the length of 125th Street. At Second Avenue, police “indiscriminately” clubbed the crowd off of the streets, while also gunshots over people’s heads, which made it easy for people to think they were being shot at and spread rumors accordingly. Preparing for a third night of confrontation, the police blocked off Central Harlem on 125th Street between Amsterdam and Fifth Avenues

²¹ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

²² Carroll and Silberfarb. “Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain,” 11.

with the help of fire trucks and also between Fifth and Lenox Avenues, from 116th Street to 135th Streets.²³ Civil rights activists endeavoring to clear the streets drove a sound truck through the area, urging those within earshot to “return to your homes.” They encountered stiff resistance when a group of African American teens set upon the truck and rocked it back and forth in an effort to flip it. Upwards of one hundred policemen and fifteen patrol cars scattered the attackers with gunshots.²⁴

Around 10:45, James Farmer appeared before a group of 150 mostly young African American people that had amassed outside local CORE headquarters on West 125th Street, a block over from the Apollo Theater. In another attempt to keep Harlem quiet that night, or at least reduce the number of people participating in the uprisings, Farmer told the crowd Mayor Wagner would be back in the city soon and more importantly, Lieutenant Gilligan would be appearing before a grand jury deciding whether or not to indict him for crimes related to Powell’s death.²⁵ These two announcements had little effect upon the people gathered before him. Few people had much faith in Wagner to attend to civil rights matters and a grand jury was not the same as an arrest. Farmer had nothing of substance left to say to the people looking for leadership. Like others the previous nights, he told them to go home. And like those others had heard, people in the crowd told him “We’re not going home. We are home.” That was not something Farmer, who lived downtown, could say for himself.²⁶

²³ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

²⁴ Carroll and Silberfarb. “Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain,” 11; Ted Poston. “50 Injured in Harlem.” *New York Post* 21 July 1964: 2, 53.

²⁵ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

Farmer then joined with Bayard Rustin and L. Joseph Overton, National Vice President of the Negro American Labor Council, in a final effort to lead the people gathered in front of the CORE office away from the area that had proven to be so explosive over the past two nights. The three men walked arm in arm at the front of the group in the classic style of so many civil rights marches before, chanting “We want freedom.” The idea was to march the group around the neighborhood, and as individuals passed their homes, they would fall out of the march and go inside, off of the streets. The march was both a way to let off some pressure and to get people home without threatening them with physical violence.²⁷ But, the march only made its way about half a block before it fell apart into the disorder that had by then become familiar. The police followed the group and sent flares skyward so that they could clearly observe the situation, and then began shooting. Predictably, those following the three men scattered into the night as quickly as they could. Farmer said to an officer, “What’s the matter, can’t you see what we’re trying to do?” The policeman asked him if he had heard the bottles crashing. Farmer replied he “hadn’t heard a single bottle” until they began shooting. The officer’s only response was that Farmer should tell “those people” to stop throwing bricks and bottles.²⁸

Just before the final minutes of July 20th, policemen charged a group of “shouting youths” at 125th Street and Eighth Avenue. As the police clubbed their way into the

²⁶ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

²⁷ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22; Carroll and Silberfarb. “Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain,” 11.

²⁸ Ted Poston. “50 Injured in Harlem,” 53; James Farmer. *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement*. (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 282, 283.

young people, they unsurprisingly elicited a hail of bottles, bricks and garbage. Police injured at least five in that fracas, all of whom received treatment at the CORE office up the street. Shortly after midnight, police arrested eight African American teenagers accused of “shoving and punching passengers” on a subway train they boarded at 125th Street.²⁹

Sometime after midnight, the police reported a consistent barrage of bricks and rocks from the rooftops of buildings on Eighth Avenue between 130th and 131st Streets. While some of the many bars in Harlem selectively admitted customers that night, a number of others in the area decided that opening for business was more potential trouble than it was worth. Sam’s West Side Bar and Grill, located on that block of Eighth Avenue, was open for business, though it would have done better to keep its doors shut. Multiple squad cars of police officers converged on the block to provide backup for their compatriots on the receiving end of the bricks. After allegedly witnessing two black men smash a grocery store’s windows and flee into Sam’s when spotted, the police went after the men, only to be met by a locked door. Police broke down the door and began attacking people inside and smashing up furniture in their pursuit of the men.³⁰

The process of forcibly entering and closing Sam’s proved to be difficult as many patrons strongly resisted the policemen’s violence, perceiving no reason for it. Police entering the bar later reported that those inside met them with punches and shoves, which they returned. Some officers fired into the establishment, through the windows, from the street. At least six patrons, all African American, were seriously injured. Two suffered

²⁹ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

³⁰ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22; “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area.” *New York Times* 22 July 1964: 1, 19.

concussions and one had multiple broken bones, versus one officer with a cut on his hand and another who sprained his thumb. The police succeeded in ejecting a mass of angry and agitated people, many likely in some state of intoxication, out onto the street in the midst of a third night of rebellion. Not only had they all either been attacked or witnessed the violence, they now stood outside the devastated bar in the presence of their attackers, unable to legally defend themselves or pursue any kind of justice.³¹

Unsurprisingly, many of them were not eager to go home and instead remained in front of the bar, not just willing to battle with police, but also voicing their intent to do so. Bayard Rustin came when he got word of the event and tried to calm the crowd. Once again, he and his peaceful ways were shouted down, with one person yelling “We don’t want no liberal niggers here!”, indicating a wish for more radical leadership and a disdain for moderate integrationist attitudes. Rustin soon left to accompany the injured to the hospital. Tensions had grown so high by this time that the officers called in the Tactical Patrol Force whose members exited their three buses and physically dispersed the crowd with military precision.³²

At least five hundred police officers attempted to keep people anywhere but in the streets of Harlem that night, again cracking the air with their bursts of gunfire time after time. Overall, at least twenty people were arrested and seventeen had to be hospitalized, including three police officers.³³ CORE reported having treated forty-five Central

³¹ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22; Ted Poston. “50 Injured in Harlem,” 53.

³² “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area,” 1, 19.

³³ “Violence Erupts for Third Night,” 22.

Harlemites for injuries at its headquarters.³⁴ Police shot two African American men standing on the corner of Lenox Avenue and 118th Street in Harlem with “stray bullets”. One man was “grazed on the back” while the other “suffered a wound of the right hip.” Both men, twenty-eight years old, received treatment at Harlem Hospital.³⁵ At some point during the night, a person or people fired guns into CORE’s 125th Street office while it was empty. CORE maintained police did it out of spite.³⁶

Meanwhile, sentiments of rebellion were rising anew in Bedford-Stuyvesant on the night of July 20th. An untimely late-night CORE rally at the intersection of Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue demanding justice for James Powell quickly spun out of control. Despite CORE’s pleas to the crowd, most of those gathered had no interest in returning to their homes when the rally ended at 12:30 A.M. and began chanting “Killer cops” at the twenty officers watching them. A group of about one hundred demonstrators marched a six-block square and returned to the intersection another four hundred strong. Black nationalist street speakers of no particular affiliation began giving speeches to the much larger crowd until about 1:30 in the morning, at which point the demonstrations ended for the evening. For reasons that remain unclear, people on the street then began throwing bottles at the police, which brought forty reinforcements and rapidly increasing violence and disorder. People in the crowd, which numbered upwards of one thousand, broke the windows of about thirty stores, looted some, and completely burned out a

³⁴ Ted Poston. “50 Injured in Harlem,” 2.

³⁵ “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area,” 19.

³⁶ Reinert. “CORE’s Harlem Office – Where the Wounded Talk,” 7; Maurice C. Carroll and Edward J. Silberfarb. “Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City.” *New York Herald Tribune* 22 July 1964: 1, 10; “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area,” 19.

police car. By 2:30 in the morning, when the area had calmed for the night, police had arrested at least thirty people there and listed one as injured. They fired no shots.³⁷

City officials and civil rights activists had been worried about unrest in Bedford-Stuyvesant for some time.³⁸ The deplorable conditions among the area's African American residents were well-known and only worsening. On the first night of the uprisings in Harlem, there was an unrelated incident in the streets across the river in Brooklyn, but the city's papers covered in conjunction with news of the rebellion. In Brownsville, the section of Brooklyn that abuts Bedford-Stuyvesant on its southeast corner, police reported a "running, five-hour battle" between groups of black men and Puerto Rican men. It ended with the arrest of seven men on gun charges, including possession of rifles and shotguns, and a dozen injuries, with two men shot. An eighteen-year-old Puerto Rican man was the victim of an acid attack to his face. This was a particularly vicious manifestation of the competition for economic and spatial resources between the two groups occupying the lower rungs of New York's social ladder. Massive Puerto Rican immigration into the city over the last two decades had led to escalating tensions and resentment, as Puerto Ricans and African Americans often had to live in adjoining neighborhoods and contend for the same jobs. In response to the violence and fearful it could lead to full-scale uprisings, the Brooklyn headquarters of the NYPD announced it would be taking "extraordinary" unidentified precautions to prevent such a situation.³⁹

³⁷ "Violence Erupts for Third Night," 22; "Manhattan Rioting Crosses Bridges, Spreads to Brooklyn." *New York Amsterdam News* 25 July 1964: 25.

³⁸ R.W. Apple Jr. "The Chief Policeman Talks about His Beat." *New York Times* 21 June 1964: 10, 34, 35.

Day Four – Tuesday, July 21st

After three nights of spreading unrest in the largest city in the country, President Johnson directed the Federal Bureau of Investigation to probe the uprisings alongside the NYPD. With his office up for election in three months, Johnson had to appear vigilant, especially given Republican candidate Barry Goldwater's relentless attacks on Johnson for not taking the issue of "security from domestic violence" seriously enough. Also wary of what a prolonged "race riot" would do to his ability to continue to pass civil rights legislation, Johnson needed to take action. His aides had been sending memos around the White House since the day after James Powell's death, making statements like "a great deal of the Negro leadership simply does not understand the political facts of life....They are not sophisticated enough to understand the theory of the backlash." By Monday morning, Johnson's staff warned him on-the-fence white voters would want to know why he had not responded to these uprisings, after being forceful in Mississippi and Georgia. Johnson responded by taking the cautious step of publicly announcing the FBI investigation.⁴⁰

The previous day, the white mayor of Natasulga, Alabama, James Rea, telegrammed President Lyndon Johnson, requesting the deployment of federal troops to Harlem "to protect the lives and property of the white minority in the area and to restore law and order." Five months earlier, Rea had gone to great lengths to prohibit six black students from entering a local high school, including passing several ordinances and then

³⁹ Bill Whitworth. "...And in Brooklyn." *New York Herald Tribune* 20 July 1964: 7; "7 in Brownsville Seized in Battle." *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 17.

⁴⁰ Taylor Branch. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 417, 418.

physically blocking the entrance to the school. Since Rea was involved with disobeying federal law, federal officials became involved to secure the students' enrollment. The mayor told Johnson "that since you alerted several thousand soldiers for possible use in our community last February, you should be willing to send some to Harlem, where a large number of persons have been killed and injured." He communicated that residents of his town were "greatly alarmed at the apparent breakdown of law and order" in Harlem.⁴¹

Johnson instructed FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to reach out to NYPD Commissioner Murphy and Governor Rockefeller of New York to "offer them our complete cooperation" in discovering "who was responsible for doing what" and determining whether or not federal laws had been violated.⁴² Hoover also called Governor Rockefeller in Wyoming to discuss who was likely behind the rebellions. They both were certain that communists were active in inciting people to rise up, but Rockefeller also had a second suspect – extreme conservatives. He told Hoover that Goldwater acolytes had personally and repeatedly predicted racial unrest in the state, almost threateningly; Hoover promised the governor he would follow that lead. Nothing came of it.⁴³

The president called Acting Mayor Screvane the morning of July 21st to communicate his personal "willingness to cooperate in every way possible to help him in this time of agony." Johnson, demonstrating his belief in positive government action that

⁴¹ "Send Troops to Harlem, Alabama Mayor Urges." *New York Times* 22 July 1964: 18.

⁴² E.W. Kenworthy. "Johnson Orders Full F.B.I. Inquiry in Harlem Riots." *New York Times* 22 July 1964: 1, 18.

⁴³ Branch. *Pillar of Fire*, 418.

would become the cornerstone of his Great Society, asserted federal cooperation included “help in correcting the evil social conditions that breed despair and disorder.” He had not considered sending in federal troops or marshals so far. Officials at the Justice Department stated no federal laws had been broken as far as they knew, so they would not become further involved at this time. They explained it was standard for the FBI to investigate serious, recurring episodes of disorder.⁴⁴ The number of agents assigned to this case was confidentially put as high as two hundred, showing a tremendous fear of the unknown destructive power of black inner city neighborhoods.⁴⁵

President Johnson was undoubtedly aware of the international implications of the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant rebellions. The United States had been under increasing pressure since the end of World War II to present itself as the model of democracy and freedom to the rest of the world, especially countries emerging from colonialism where the U.S. feared the spread of communism. As the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union escalated, so too did communist propaganda attacks aiming to reveal the hypocrisy of American race relations. Soviet newspapers in particular, and many other communist and left-radical organs in other countries as well, ran countless stories of lynchings, racist beatings, segregation, violence and all other measures of racial discrimination. Many other established newspapers across the globe covered these stories too, albeit in a less sensational way. The president and his advisers knew that every day these disturbances featured in the world’s newspapers was one day too many. They had

⁴⁴ Kenworthy. “Johnson Orders Full F.B.I. Inquiry in Harlem Riots, 18.

⁴⁵ Peter Kihss. “Wagner Asserts Disorders Harm Negroes’ Cause.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 1, 12.

to act, get the rebellions extinguished and appear to be doing something to remediate the circumstances that led to such an unbecoming episode.

By Monday, papers throughout Europe were running front-page stories on the uprisings. Many of the headlines were exclamatory and dismal – “Mob March, Blood and Ruin!” – “In Harlem, the Devil Is Loose” – “A Cancer Called Harlem” and “Night of Terror in the Negro Quarter of New York.” And those were from papers that were not communist-affiliated. Communist headlines read things like “Harlem in State of Siege – Police Continue Repression against Negroes” and “Bloody Street Slaughter in Harlem”. Britain’s *Guardian* asserted Senator Goldwater’s “extremism” bore heavy responsibility for the conflagration. The *London Daily Sketch* printed a series of “pictures to show the ticking time-bomb that is America now.” The Soviet Tass news agency charged “The authorities refuse to punish those responsible for the bloody events.” Austria’s communist *Arbeiter Zeitung* bluntly stated:

The conflict between colored and white is becoming a more serious problem. It is possible that problem will replace the East-West conflict. Considering the poverty of many Negroes amidst an affluent society it is not surprising that there are young Negroes who hate their white fellow citizens and support such organizations as the Black Muslims.

The Soviet Union provided the most acerbic condemnation of American race relations and police behavior as seen through the uprisings. Running the headline “Harlem Drenched in Blood,” *Izvestia* reported:

The truncheons of the swaggering New York policemen failed to keep the Negroes off the streets. The streets of Harlem were full of people and I saw that every one of those faces was a mask of hatred of the police. The Negro masses do not, as before, listen to the sermons of the advocates of non-violence.

Like the *Guardian*, *Izvestia* also heaped a portion of the blame on the Goldwater campaign, writing that African Americans saw his run for office as “a counterattack by the racists.”⁴⁶

This press was bad news for Johnson and the Democrats. While Goldwater was already successfully taking shots at liberals for what he articulated as their permissive approach to social issues, he suddenly had urban rebellions in one of the northern Democrats’ seats of power as ammunition. With the election less than four months away, Johnson and his allies were desperate to get the uprisings under control, out of the press and forgotten. Many African American leaders shared that desire, seeing Goldwater as the worst possible option. Expecting severe regression of black civil rights under a potential Goldwater administration, Whitney Young, Dr. King, Roy Wilkins and A. Philip Randolph issued a united call for a national moratorium on all demonstrations until after the election. James Farmer and John L. Lewis, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, both rejected the moratorium on the grounds that black people had no other legitimate tools. Milton Galamison, school boycott leader, declared these men’s irrelevance to the northern cause, saying, “The people in the streets throwing bottles won’t listen to these leaders any more.” Malcolm X, with his characteristic biting critique, took another path to deriding the four national leaders, saying they “have sold themselves out and become campaign managers in the Negro community for Lyndon Johnson.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Harlem Riots Make Headlines in Europe.” *New York Herald Tribune* 22 July 1964: 9.

⁴⁷ R.W. Apple Jr. “Negro Leaders Split over Call to Curtail Drive.” *New York Times* 31 July 1964: 1, 11.

James Farmer, again demonstrating his faith in state action, applauded FBI involvement and encouraged as lengthy an investigation as permissible. Reacting to the news, Farmer said, “The FBI should launch a full and thorough investigation of all of the circumstances surrounding these terrible incidents. There has been provocation and brutal behavior by the police – by all the circumstances we mean both the bottle throwing and the billy swinging.”⁴⁸

Speaking to reporters in City Hall, Screvane expressed his gratitude to President Johnson, as well as his hopes and expectations for what the federal investigation would find. Sure that the groups holding rallies were receiving funds from various individuals to do so, though he left it unclear as to why there was any real need for money to conduct such an event, Screvane was optimistic that the FBI could determine who these funders were. He believed that people at these rallies should be investigated for criminal conduct related to allegedly making “very inflammatory...anti-American...and seditious statements.” Finally, he declared that “fringe groups, including the Communist party” were intentionally inciting the rebellions, though he offered no evidence, only supposition. He told reporters “I don’t think there’s any question about” the party’s responsibility and that the uprisings had been “agitated by and sponsored by and participated in by the fringe groups in the community.”⁴⁹

Beyond that, Screvane spent the better part of the day successfully avoiding a group of about thirty-five African American civil rights activists from Harlem, led by Isaiah Robinson, Chairman of the Harlem Parents Committee, whom had been picketing

⁴⁸ “President’s Warning.” *New York Herald Tribune* 22 July 1964: 1, 10.

⁴⁹ Kihss. “Screvane Links Reds to Rioting,” 18.

City Hall since 5 A.M. They sought a meeting with him to discuss the uprisings, their causes and what the city needed to do to address the issues at hand. After waiting for twelve hours, five of them, including Robinson, entered the building and refused to leave at its 5 P.M. closing time. They were then peaceably arrested for obstructing free movement in the hub of city government and “thereby endangering the safety of the people.”⁵⁰

When he exited the Iberia Airlines plane that afternoon into the sticky July air of New York City, Mayor Wagner resumed his role as chief elected official. After stepping to the tarmac at John F. Kennedy International Airport at 4:04 P.M., Wagner gave a brief press conference, declaring his “deep faith in Commissioner Murphy and the ability of the Police Department to contain the situation.” He then met with the highest-ranking city officials for close to an hour and departed for Gracie Mansion. There, he convened a meeting with ten aides who briefed him in detail on the past three nights’ events. They then collectively considered how to best implement Screvane’s five-point program from the day before. After two and a half hours, at about 9 P.M., the meeting ended and Wagner went to bed, saying that he had been up since 2 A.M.⁵¹ Outside, the temperature was still 77, with matching humidity.

Civil rights demonstrators picketed NYPD headquarters, City Hall, Governor Rockefeller’s city residence and several police stations. At police headquarters, they encountered a group of 250 or so angry white teenage counterdemonstrators, throwing rotten eggs at them as well as a slew of insults, ranging from “Goldwater for president!”

⁵⁰ Kihss. “Screvane Links Reds to Rioting,” 18.

⁵¹ Carroll and Silberfarb. “Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City,” 10.

to “You nigger loving bastards go home!” Police attempted to keep them away from the civil rights demonstrators, fearing more violence. The white teens resisted the police, throwing eggs at them as well. Policemen on the scene chased them to a further location, but did not attempt to disperse or arrest any of them. When the civil rights picketers at police headquarters ended their protest at 11 P.M., the counterdemonstrators were still there. The white teens followed them to the subway station and heckled and insulted them all the way, despite a police escort for the civil rights demonstrators. The police did not interfere with the white teenage mob.⁵²

Despite the last night’s chaos in Bedford-Stuyvesant, city leaders seemed to anticipate a tapering off of such activity, or at least wanted to give off the public appearance of believing it so. Police officers, for the first time since Saturday, were no longer working twelve-hour emergency shifts, instead returning to their standard eight-hour workdays. Deputy Commissioner Walter Arm told the press that conditions in Harlem were “slowly returning to normal.”⁵³ However, a group of thirty-five African American community leaders in Bedford-Stuyvesant told the police that they did not believe that they, as a group or as individual leaders, could serve any effective purpose as a restraint on the explosive forces in the streets that presented themselves last night.⁵⁴

The Fourth Night – Fighting on Two Fronts

Harlem continued its uprisings the night of July 21st. After another relatively quiet time during daylight, with the exception of two African American teenage boys arrested

⁵² Carroll and Silberfarb. “Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City,” 10.

⁵³ Kihss. “Screvane Links Reds to Rioting,” 1.

⁵⁴ “Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 1, 13.

for attempting to remove banjos from a smashed pawnshop window at 8:30 in the morning, people came out to create and participate in rebellion for the fourth night in a row. Police again closed off the streets and awaited the resumption of the upheaval. It came repeatedly throughout the night in the form of more looting, more bottle throwing, more running, more window smashing and more fighting the police. Until midnight, the temperature stayed in the upper seventies, while the humidity climbed into the eighties. Just as the humidity escalated, so too did the action in the streets. Shortly after the sun went down, two police officers caught two black men who were allegedly in the process of looting a clothing store on Lenox Avenue between 111th and 112th Streets. A crowd of Harlemites surrounded the police, intent on freeing the two men. Police responded by firing their guns and calling reinforcements who scattered the mob.⁵⁵ A group of African American teenagers marched back and forth along several blocks of 125th Street with the “WANTED FOR MURDER – GILLIGAN THE COP” posters.⁵⁶

The looting on this night was more scattered than previous nights when it had been fairly centralized around a few main blocks. It could be that police were guarding those areas more intently than before, or perhaps the businesses in that part of Central Harlem were largely looted out. The people in the streets this night were said to be moving in groups between ten and thirty, mostly comprised of teenagers, with a few adults. At 118th Street, 150 police chased looters who had set upon a dry cleaning establishment on the corner of Lenox. As soon as that crowd diminished, another formed two blocks down at 116th and Lenox and began the same process at another cleaning

⁵⁵ “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area,” 19.

⁵⁶ Carroll and Silberfarb. “Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City,” 10.

store. Then at 122nd Street a short distance off of Lenox, looters formed a human chain to get clothing out of the building more efficiently. The roving looters were emblematic of the frustrations the police had been experiencing since Saturday night – they could break up a crowd fairly easily and generally could dispel a mob of looters without much trouble, but many of the people involved would just move to a new location where there were no police or people would wait for the police to leave and resume their activities.⁵⁷

In the midst of this, Mayor Wagner took an unannounced one-hour tour of Harlem at 11 P.M., accompanied by Commissioner Murphy. Though he had publicly announced he was going to bed at 9 P.M., the mayor traveled Central Harlem up and down from West 110th to 135th Streets, from Central Park North to Harlem Hospital, and across Lenox, Seventh and Eighth Avenues. Along the way, he reported “boarded-up windows,” “itinerant gangs” and “some of the debris of battle,” along with people fearfully looking out of their windows at streets where teenagers with helmets and walkie-talkies roamed, whom he termed “the loose gun powder of our day.”⁵⁸ Following his tour, Wagner voiced his conviction “that the overwhelming majority of those who live in the Harlem community neither participated in nor appreciated the violence and disorder.” After all, according to the mayor, “Of all groups in America, Negroes have the most to gain from law and order.” To demonstrate this, he pointed to such landmark events in the civil rights movement as the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education*

⁵⁷ Carroll and Silberfarb. “Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City,” 1, 10.

⁵⁸ “Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area,” 19.

and the two-week old Civil Rights Act, as well as the city's laws prohibiting housing discrimination.⁵⁹

Bedford-Stuyvesant on this night was much more chaotic than it had been the night before. Around 9 P.M., an African American street speaker was addressing a crowd of about two hundred at the corner of Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue. As he spoke, someone smashed a drugstore window. People immediately ran, to which the speaker replied "No! No! That's what the man wants you to do....He wants you to riot so he can shoot you down!" People generally heeded his warning, if only briefly, slowly returning to the corner. As they did so, the same "WANTED FOR MURDER – GILLIGAN, THE COP" flyers began appearing.⁶⁰ Police then charged the crowd, swinging nightsticks with abandon. This became a template for the night – police perceiving provocation or danger, and then charging and beating whomever was closest.⁶¹

Near 9:30, the police had begun non-violently dispersing a different crowd circulating a rumor that a policeman had shot a young boy. One of a group of teenagers in the crowd threw a bottle at the police and ran. The police either did not realize or did not care who threw it and responded by firing their guns at a roof where they saw flashlights. The flashlights belonged to two police officers who were trying to tell the officers on the ground where the group of teenagers had gone.⁶²

⁵⁹ Kihss. "Wagner Asserts Disorders Harm Negroes' Cause," 12.

⁶⁰ Carroll and Silberfarb. "Wagner Takes over in Riots; Johnson Orders FBI to City," 1, 10.

⁶¹ Alfred T. Hendricks. "Looters on Brooklyn Rampage." *New York Post* 22 July 1964: 2.

⁶² Hendricks. "Looters on Brooklyn Rampage," 2.

According to Inspector Walter Clarke of the NYPD, the fury of upheaval began a few hours later when a person or people set off firecrackers at the intersection of Fulton Street and Arlington Place, a side street between Nostrand and Bedford Avenues. Apparently, both police and people milling about on the streets thought the sounds to be gunfire. People ran in the interest of personal safety and police ran to stop their movement. Predictably, fighting ensued. Police then began firing crowd control shots. Things quickly spiraled out of control, with officers on the scene having called for reinforcements four times by 11 P.M. Crowds estimated at one thousand roamed a sixteen-block area around the same epicenter as the night before, the intersection of Fulton and Nostrand, fighting police, smashing windows and looting. The NYPD directed the Transit Authority to close two subway stations in the vicinity at 10:45 P.M. By midnight, the one hundred police fighting the mobs had spent their ammunition and had to call for an emergency supply, with one officer having fired 150 rounds.⁶³

The fury continued for over twelve hours, until 10 A.M. Altogether, two hundred police officers, helmeted and guns drawn, struggled to clear the streets. A police chaplain who was witness to the events described Tuesday night's actions as "much more serious" than what had been taking place in Harlem. A sergeant verified this when he described the night as "pure, undiluted hell." Forty stores within a few blocks of Fulton and Nostrand had been looted to some extent. Along just one block of Fulton Street, between Bedford and Nostrand Avenues, twenty stores suffered smashed windows. Two hundred windows were broken out overall. Police described the extensive looting as "organized

⁶³ "Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area," 19; "Manhattan Rioting Crosses Bridges, Spreads to Brooklyn," 25.

by hoodlums...who had taken advantage of emotions stirred up by the events in Harlem and the previous night's outburst" in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The alleged organizers were "former runners in the illicit policy numbers racket" as young men who became involved in more serious criminal activity as adults. Police arrested more than fifty, mostly for burglary and assaulting an officer. One teenager was arrested for hurling a Molotov cocktail at a gathering of police. Police shot and critically wounded two men, one of whom, twenty-three, police said leapt at an officer when caught looting and was shot in the stomach. The second man, thirty-six, stood accused of hitting a policeman in the chest with a can of vegetables, who then shot him in the abdomen.⁶⁴

Day Five – Wednesday, July 22nd

In Washington, D.C., Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the Democratic Congressman from Harlem, gave a press conference from on the uprisings Wednesday. Powell presented a list of steps the city should take that would put an end to the uprisings "before the sun goes down tonight." First and paramount was to establish a true civilian review board. Following that, the NYPD should transfer one of the city's three black police captains to the 28th Precinct on West 123rd Street in Central Harlem, suspend Lieutenant Gilligan, cease assigning rookie officers to Harlem and prohibit the use of live ammunition in future disturbances. On this final point, the congressman remarked "What has happened in Harlem is without precedent in the history of any police department in any city, including the Deep South. New York City ought to hang its head in shame." When queried as to when he would return to Harlem, Powell replied that he had no

⁶⁴ "Mobs Fight Police Again in Brooklyn and Harlem Area," 1, 19; "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13.

intentions, saying he would not be able to help matters there. He was also avoiding arrest on a warrant for failing to pay the judgment against him in a civil defamation suit.⁶⁵

Reports emerged Wednesday that the uprisings were damaging the city's lucrative tourism industry. The president of the Hotel Association of New York, Inc., related that people had canceled nearly five hundred hotel reservations in the last three days due to fears of the rebellions. Failure to stanch the nightly upheaval would certainly be "economically calamitous," he said, not just to the hotel industry but the entire city. Mayor Wagner agreed, stating, "Our city depends upon its visitors for a part of our income and for our jobs and for the general level of economic activity." In order to ensure the continued health of tourism, New Yorkers "must repair the reputé of our city by all of the measures that are necessary." Officials associated with the World's Fair in Queens were particularly fearful, given the fair's already lackluster attendance since opening in April.⁶⁶

Communists in the city publicly responded to Deputy Mayor Screvane's charges that communist groups had incited the rebellions. Robert Thompson and William L. Patterson, spokesmen for the New York District Communist Party, declared the party's firm disapproval of "violence as a means of eliminating ghetto life." They characterized these allegations as "Mr. Screvane's big lie," one which they saw as an effort to "hide the hell of ghetto life" and "an incitement to a police force that cannot but reflect the racist policies of an administration callous to the democratic demands of its Negro citizens." The Progressive Labor Movement, headed in Harlem by William Epton, wearily

⁶⁵ Warren Weaver, Jr. "Powell Says Riots Can End if Mayor Meets 5 Demands." *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 13.

⁶⁶ R.W. Apple, Jr. "Tourism in City Hurt by Rioting." *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 1, 12.

lamented blaming “outside agitators” as “the oldest trick in the book.” The primary goal of this tactic, according to the group’s spokesperson, is “to divide the people of Harlem against themselves.”⁶⁷

Civil rights activists throughout the city universally denied communists played any but the most minor part in the uprisings. Even Roy Wilkins, known as among the most cautious and conservative of major civil rights leaders, declared, “Raising the Communist cry won’t solve very much at this time.” Instead, he suggested that the police should “improve their relations with the community.” The people of Harlem, according to Wilkins, were in dire need of “some indoctrination on the function of the police so they will respect them.”⁶⁸ Reverend Hildebrand, president of the city’s NAACP chapter, told reporters he was “very disturbed that this might be used to divert attention from the real problem, and from the responsibility of the Mayor and the city government to change the situation that led to such unrest.” He allowed that the issue of communist involvement should be investigated, but should not be inflated and used as a straw man to obscure the reality of police brutality.⁶⁹ New York State Senator Constance Baker Motley protested that one need look no further than “privation and despair” in the city’s ghettos to see the basic causes of the rebellions.⁷⁰ Regarding community attitudes toward the police, she explicated “Whether it’s true or not, Harlem believes the police are their enemy. They think they’re not there for their protection....They have no confidence in impartial action

⁶⁷ Kihss. “Wagner Asserts Disturbances Harm Negroes’ Cause,” 12.

⁶⁸ Kihss. “Wagner Asserts Disturbances Harm Negroes’ Cause,” 12.

⁶⁹ Bill Whitworth. “Rights Chiefs Deny Reds Incited Riots.” *New York Herald Tribune* 23 July 1964: 5.

⁷⁰ Kihss. “Wagner Asserts Disturbances Harm Negroes’ Cause,” 12.

with respect to any police action or complaint.” James Farmer explained, “It is an oversimplification to blame the riots on a Communist plot. The Communists have not made inroads in Harlem since the early 1940s, not since the Hitler-Stalin pact.” CORE’s public relations director Marvin Rich argued that the city would never have to worry about communists creating disorder if elected officials would take responsibility for conditions in their city, keep their promises and actually do something about living conditions in places like Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant.⁷¹

Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland, a crude racist and one of the most powerful men in the Senate, spoke on the Senate floor about the ongoing rebellions. He was adamant that “evidence of Communist participation and leadership in civil rights demonstrations is being brought into the open.” Eastland’s form of proof was recalling that that Jesse Gray had plead the Fifth Amendment when forced to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1960. Dr. King, addressing a rally later in the day in Eastland’s home state, laughed off his charges: “There are as many Communists in this freedom movement as there are Eskimos in Florida.”⁷²

Also on Wednesday, numerous organizations throughout the city began publicly voicing support for civilian review board reform. The New York Federation of Reformed Synagogues not only said a new board was necessary, but that “Mr. Screvane has unwittingly played into the hands of those who dismiss civil rights as a Communist plot.” The New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee agreed with the need for review board reform, as did a group of fifteen Harlem clergy, headed by the Reverend

⁷¹ Whitworth. “Rights Chiefs Deny Reds Incited Riots,” 5.

⁷² Whitworth. “Rights Chiefs Deny Reds Incited Riots,” 5.

Eugene Callender, who also decried the “unnecessary use of gunfire” and police violence in general during the upheaval.⁷³ The mayor’s Committee of Religious Leaders, a 7500 strong organization of Christian, Muslim and Jewish clergy, also asked the mayor to form a review board. The community empowerment agency HARYOU-ACT, now under the control of Congressman Powell, demanded a civilian review board.⁷⁴

James Farmer revealed that provocateurs had been making deceptive phone calls in his name to civil rights activists throughout the city yesterday, pushing them to hold demonstrations in volatile areas. Farmer stated that he was not opposed to demonstrations “outside the ghettos,” but as he had stated earlier in his appearance at Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church on Sunday, it would be foolish for black people to take to the streets and fight the police – they could only lose. As for CORE, the organization he headed, its workers were patrolling the streets as peacekeepers trying to get people off of the streets and when that failed, as witnesses to violent events and first aid providers in their aftermath.⁷⁵

That afternoon, Brooklyn Borough President Abe Stark held a conference at Brooklyn Borough Hall with sixty African American representatives from Bedford-Stuyvesant. Expressing that he was “deeply concerned about what effect this rioting will have on the nationwide progress of the civil rights movement,” Stark wanted to try to get solutions first hand. At the meeting’s conclusion, the participants decided on four key courses of action to both end the uprisings and prevent them from recurring. First, local

⁷³ Kihss. “Wagner Asserts Disturbances Harm Negroes’ Cause,” 12.

⁷⁴ “To End Riots...” *New York Herald Tribune* 23 July 1964: 5.

⁷⁵ Robert W. White and Fred C. Shapiro. “The Protest.” *New York Herald Tribune* 23 July 1964: 1, 5.

clergy and public officials should have access to a sound truck to make public appeals for calm. Next, radio stations with significant teenage audiences should regularly broadcast public service announcements over the next several days urging their listenership to stay off the streets. Third, all participants agreed that they and their respective organizations, including Brooklyn CORE, Brooklyn Urban League and the Bedford YMCA would not hold demonstrations or mass meetings for an indefinite period. Finally, the group put in a collective request to Mayor Wagner for the following – increased police presence, a civilian review board, a larger proportion of African American police officers in the community and a pledge from the mayor that he would make legitimate efforts to address issues among youth that it felt made the rebellions possible, especially high unemployment, drug use and a lack of engaging activities in the neighborhood.⁷⁶

The New York branch of the NAACP revealed that it had so far interviewed more than thirty witnesses to James Powell's death. Its executive secretary and head counsel, M. Douglas Haywoode, said that they had unanimously stated that the boy was unarmed and shot with no warning. The District Attorney's office responded that it had contradictory evidence, though it did not state what.⁷⁷

At 6:45 P.M., with the temperature slowly falling to 76 degrees and the humidity rapidly climbing past 79 percent, Mayor Wagner delivered a speech aired on television and radio addressing the uprisings. Speaking live from a studio in Liederkrantz Hall at 111 East 58th Street in Manhattan, the main thrust of his speech was a compassionate version of much of what Senator Goldwater had been propagating on the campaign trail –

⁷⁶ "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13.

⁷⁷ Kihss. "Wagner Asserts Disturbances Harm Negroes' Cause," 12.

law and order. Confidently stating, “Law and order are the Negroes’ best friend,” Wagner declared, “Without law and order Negro and civil rights progress would be set back half a century.” By the mayor’s estimation, what was happening in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant was “mob rule,” which “is the way of the Ku Klux Klan and the night riders and the lynch mobs.” He then went on to assure the city that “individuals or groups of hoodlums, rowdies, trouble-makers bent on destruction, theft or incitement to riot, drawn as they have been from all parts of the city, will be brought to a halt, and the guilty will be punished to the full extent of the law.” Altogether, he used the term “law and order” at least nine times in the first minutes of his twenty-three minute speech.⁷⁸

Following this segment of his address, the mayor strove to placate civil rights activists and the city’s African American population in general with a series of announcements on the actions he would direct city officials to take. Starting this portion of his speech with “two firm convictions,” Wagner declared his “complete confidence in Police Commissioner Murphy” who was adamantly opposed to any permutation of civilian review. In a bit of rhetorical acrobatics, the mayor tried to convince proponents of civilian review that such a system already existed, since “the ultimate authority and responsibility for the police force rests in civilian hands – the Mayor himself.” This was his second firm conviction. Accordingly, he promised that not only would Deputy Mayor Edward Cavanagh personally review “every case in charges involving alleged police brutality brought before the police board,” but also the mayor would begin accepting

⁷⁸ “Text of Wagner’s Radio-TV Appeal for Restoration of Law and Order in City.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 12.

complaints of police brutality in his office and “that all such cases of complaints will be acted upon promptly.”⁷⁹

Curiously, he did allow that any number of police officers in the city, without indicating he believed the amount to be small, were racist and were bound to “act as the individuals they are,” particularly “in times of stress and danger.” Referencing his opposition to civilian review reform, Mayor Wagner took the time to “emphasize that, in taking any of the steps we are taking, we are not bowing or surrendering to pressure. We will not be browbeaten by prophets of despair, or by peddlers of hate, or by those who thrive on continued frustration.” The mayor concluded by appealing to every resident of New York City to “give me your hand and help in this critical situation.”⁸⁰

The mayor’s speech gave little ground to civil rights activists’ demands. Of the nine dicta he listed as points of action, the first two promised a restoration of law and order and swift retribution against all lawbreakers. Beyond his assurances of heightened attention to police brutality complaints, Mayor Wagner mostly rephrased City Council President Screvane’s words from Monday about recruiting minority police and bettering relations between the city, especially the police, and minority neighborhoods. The only new directive he mentioned was a vague and noncommittal plan to have Screvane, in cooperation with the Poverty Operations Board and the Poverty Council, both brand new city antipoverty agencies, “step up these programs which will involve and engage the unemployed young people of our city in constructive counseling, training and work.” Mayor Wagner deployed a classic political maneuver allowing himself a way out of

⁷⁹ “Text of Wagner’s Radio-TV Appeal for Restoration of Law and Order in City,” 12.

⁸⁰ “Text of Wagner’s Radio-TV Appeal for Restoration of Law and Order in City,” 12.

responsibility for seeing this through, the only potentially meaningful action the city would be taking at this time, with the caveat that “Some of these programs, of course, depend upon Federal funds, which have not yet been made available.”⁸¹

At 9 P.M., with the temperature holding steady at 75 degrees and the humidity hovering around 82 percent, an interracial group of CORE demonstrators picketed NYPD headquarters at Broome and Centre Streets in downtown Manhattan for the second night running. White counterdemonstrators returned to meet them, though this time they were not primarily teenagers and were considerably more violent. As many as five hundred white people from the predominantly Italian American neighborhood came out to heckle, lambast and attack the picketers. As the CORE members marched quietly with signs reading “Jim Crow must go,” “Freedom now” and “Gilligan must go,” they endured a two hour long collective tirade, including “Communists go home!”, “Go back to Harlem!”, “White trash go home!”, “Niggers must go!” and “Niggers go home!” Entire families participated in the verbal portion of the assault, including young children, just as they did in cities throughout the country, wherever white ethnics feared African Americans. An old white man, a lifetime resident of the neighborhood, told a reporter “They come down here and disturb us. They’re an outside element. They ought to go home.” His statement was similar to what many southern white people said about civil rights activists.⁸²

When they did go home at 11 P.M., two-thirds of the white mob attempted to prevent them from doing so. Despite the protection of eight police cars and seventy-five

⁸¹ “Text of Wagner’s Radio-TV Appeal for Restoration of Law and Order in City,” 12.

⁸² “White Youths Clash with CORE Pickets.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 1, 13.

policemen on foot, this group of two hundred white people, mostly teenage boys, threw bottles, eggs and firecrackers at the picketers and police en route to the Spring Street stop of the Lexington Avenue subway line. Police counterattacked with nightsticks, swinging wildly at the white teenagers, after having already pushed them back one block as a precautionary measure at 10:30. One of the bottle throwers managed to strike a CORE picketer on the head as she made her way down the subway steps and one policeman was hit in the eye with broken glass. Both required hospitalization. The two-block trip from headquarters to the subway station, normally a four-minute walk, took fifteen minutes, with the white teenagers attacking the entire way.⁸³ One teenage Italian American boy refused an African American officer's order to move, threatening him with "Hit me, nigger, hit me and you're dead." A number of policemen dealt with the boy, who then screamed "The nigger cop hit me! An Italian cop can hit me, but not a nigger!"⁸⁴

The Fifth Night – Harlem Ebbs, Brooklyn Gushes

In Central Harlem, steel helmeted police, in the smallest number since the uprisings began, were again at the ready all day, anticipating conflict in the streets for the fifth consecutive night. Instead, there was only sporadic trouble in scattered pockets throughout the neighborhood. A policeman was hit in the hand with a bottle during daylight at 129th Street and Fifth Avenue. Later on, there were a few arrests and some looting. Police shot two men in separate incidents involving looting. They said one man, twenty-three years old, tried to run from a dry cleaning establishment. He was shot in the stomach and critically injured. The other man, forty-six, supposedly charged a policeman

⁸³ "White Youths Clash with CORE Pickets," 1, 13.

⁸⁴ Kenneth Gross. "Whites Stone CORE Pickets." *New York Post* 23 July 1964: 3.

when discovered leaving a liquor store with two bottles of alcohol and was shot in the leg. A sizeable group of African American teens gathered on 125th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. They were reported to be “shouting and yelling and apparently looking for trouble,” but quickly split up when upwards of thirty police cars suddenly appeared. The largest incident took place at Lenox Avenue and 127th Street when fifteen or so people broke through plywood covering smashed out windows and looted a grocery store.⁸⁵

Most notable this night was the arrest of an African American teenage boy who was handing out flyers with the headline “Bulletin No. 1, July 1964. Harlem Freedom Fighters: How to Make a Molotov Cocktail” and illustrated instructions on how to do just that. By 10:30 P.M., with the temperature the same it had been two hours earlier, 75, the streets were nearly devoid of anyone, save for police, one of whom described the evening as “quieter than a normal Wednesday night in Harlem.”⁸⁶ Bedford-Stuyvesant, however, was still in the throes of chaos.

Between 6 P.M. and midnight, people in the neighborhood called in sixty-two false alarms to the fire department, contributing to a general atmosphere of disorder, with fire trucks constantly racing through the streets, sirens blaring. Meanwhile, members of the Brooklyn NAACP handed out leaflets on the corner of Nostrand Avenue and Fulton Street reading:

⁸⁵ “Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters,” 13; White and Shapiro. “The Protest,” 5; Dry cleaning businesses were popular targets during the rebellions. They likely represented easy and poorly defended targets. While your neighbors’ used clothing may not have been an ideal prize, it filled the need to acquire upon which some were acting during these events.

⁸⁶ “Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here.” *New York Times* 24 July 1964: 9.

Cool it, Baby. The message has been delivered....We have been screaming for jobs, decent schools, clean houses, etc. for years....Some folks just wouldn't listen....We've been telling them that all hell was liable to break loose....Today, everybody is listening with big ears....The message has been delivered. Now it is time to let it sink in; violent demonstrations and looting hurt our cause. Folks like Senator Goldwater, Governor Wallace of Alabama, the John Birchers and extremists are fixing to do us up, and if we don't play it smart we'll give them the excuse they've been looking for.⁸⁷

The leaflet is noteworthy for the legitimacy it provides for the uprisings. While discouraging a continuation of such behavior and declaring it only has negative effects on civil rights efforts, part of the local NAACP's appeal is for people to stop looting and fighting the police because they have already made their point. Most importantly, according to the flier, those in power were now listening after years of ignoring civil rights organizations only because people took to the streets as a destructive force.

At a midnight meeting of an emergency umbrella organization comprised of virtually every pro-African American group in Harlem, from the Urban League and the NAACP to the Nation of Islam and United African Nationalist Movement, the participants collectively declared that Wagner's response was wholly insufficient. Exceptional times created a degree of unity, though always tenuous, among organizations that normally sniped at one another relentlessly in the press and had profound differences in beliefs. Tonight though, they came together in the common interest of black survival. They drew up new demands, which they sent in a telegram to the mayor's office – Commissioner Murphy, Deputy Commissioner Arm and the police inspector commanding the police in Harlem all must be fired. By the end of the three-hour meeting, the representatives had also decided to send a five person committee to the next day's

⁸⁷ "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13; White and Shapiro. "The Protest," 5.

HARYOU meeting to learn how to best gain access to the mayor and others in City Hall.⁸⁸

James Farmer, not present at the meeting, sent a message to city leaders through the press:

Wagner did not go far enough. He should have condemned Powell's killing, Gilligan's action. He should have given us an independent civilian review board. Something concrete has to be done. We cannot restrain the people of Harlem without something concrete from the Mayor. We have to have a leadership conference with the Mayor and all Harlem leaders to prevent further violence and rioting.

Reverend Hildebrand concurred, despairing that "There was nothing new in Wagner's statement. There's no condemnation of Powell's killing, nothing. There's no longer any need to deny police brutality. It exists – just as plain as the news pictures from Harlem. There must be a civilian review board."⁸⁹

After Tuesday night's marathon explosion, police had been preparing for an epic battle in Brooklyn. Officers occupied nearly every corner throughout the area that had been affected last night. They set up a mobile command unit on the corner of Macon Street and Nostrand, one block north of Fulton Street. There, along with their communications truck, they had massed police not just in cars and on foot, but also anywhere between twenty and forty on horseback, the first time in years that mounted police had appeared in Bedford-Stuyvesant.⁹⁰

A sound truck, as requested earlier in the day, crawled the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant, broadcasting its occupants' pleas for peace and an end to the rebellions.

⁸⁸ Ralph Blumenfeld. "Negroes to Mayor: 'Not Enough'." *New York Post* 23 July 1964: 3, 42.

⁸⁹ Blumenfeld. "Negroes to Mayor: 'Not Enough'," 42.

⁹⁰ "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13; White and Shapiro. "The Protest," 5.

Demonstrators held signs written hastily on whatever they could find, with one reading “WE GOING TO FIGHT UNTIL LT COP THAT KILLED THE NEGRO BOY IS BEHIND BARS.” While not all were receptive to the message emanating from the truck, some were outwardly hostile to it, especially after an NAACP official attempted to provide a defense of “the patrolman on the beat.” At 9:30 P.M., police had to rescue the truck when a particularly opposed group of young African American residents began rocking the truck back and forth, trying to push it over. This came in response to the speaker’s assurance that “Mayor Wagner and the city will see that Jimmy Powell and his family get a square deal.” Many African American youth in New York, as well as most any other city, had grown up to have a complete lack of faith in the police department. In such an excited state, the last thing they wanted to hear was praise for the police who treated them as subjects at best, especially from other black people. After the crowd had been dispersed, police ordered the truck to leave the area and not return.⁹¹

Twenty minutes later, police began firing at the corner of Franklin Avenue and Fulton Street in an effort to break up a rowdy crowd. This signaled the beginning of the furor in the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant that would take hold for at least the next two hours. Groups of mostly teens and young adults, generally male, waged another night of hit and run battle that kept police on the move and profoundly frustrated. Just as it had been in Harlem and last night in Bedford-Stuyvesant, as soon as the police managed to send a group of people running in different directions, another one would form a block away where the police had not yet been or had just left. Shortly before midnight, a few

⁹¹ “Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters,” 13; White and Shapiro. “The Protest,” 1; Alfred T. Hendricks and Edward Cumberbatch. “More Looting In Brooklyn; Harlem Quiet.” *New York Post* 23 July 1964: 2.

female residents attacked a policeman on foot with their hands. He was ultimately saved when mounted police rode in with clubs swinging. Less than half an hour later, heavy, steady rain fell on the city and cleared many people off of the streets. The temperature was slowly slipping below 70 degrees while the humidity was on its way to the ceiling. Bedford-Stuyvesant was quiet.⁹²

Over the course of the night, those people making the uprising had broken at least two hundred store windows, some in the interest of looting and most as simply nihilism, in a ten-block area that radiated outward from the same epicenter as the two prior nights, Nostrand and Fulton. Police shot three men, arrested 122 and injured an untold number. Police said one of the gunshot victims was caught looting a dry cleaning store, and another was accused of looting a check cashing shop – both nonviolent property crimes.⁹³

At 3 A.M., the NYPD raided Malcolm X's empty Organization of Afro-American Unity offices in the Hotel Theresa at 125th Street and Seventh Avenue while he was still in Egypt. They claimed to have seized, without giving reason, a loaded single-shot bolt-action rifle and 115 rounds of ammunition. Spokesmen for the police department noted that owning such a rifle and keeping such a quantity of ammunition was not a crime.⁹⁴

Day Six – Thursday, July 23rd

Thursday would prove to be a much cooler day in every way – from the weather to the action in the streets of Harlem and Brooklyn. The highest temperature was an

⁹² White and Shapiro. "The Protest," 1, 5; "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13.

⁹³ "Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters," 13; "Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here," 1.

⁹⁴ Peter Kihss. "Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases." *New York Times* 24 July 1964: 1, 8.

unseasonably cool 69 degrees, nine degrees below average. A steady breeze of around 15 miles per hour kept up all day, into the night.

Deputy Mayor Cavanagh chose six established, respectable men to serve as his staff in reviewing new complaints against the city's police. After the mayor's legislative assistant, Cavanagh chose five unnamed men from the city's Law Department, responsible for representing the city in all legal matters – an investigator, two white lawyers and two African American lawyers. They were to assist the deputy mayor in his new role, which he described as having two chief tasks. The first was to review the decisions of the Civilian Complaint Review Board. Then, he was “to make recommendations as to the form and procedure of the present board,” meaning he would consult Mayor Wagner as to whether or not reforms should be made to the board, either in its composition or procedure. During the attempt to establish an independent review board through city council legislation a few months earlier, Wagner made clear his opposition to reforming the board. Cavanagh's recommendations were unlikely to sway Wagner.⁹⁵

Deputy Police Commissioner Arm addressed the oft-repeated demand that a black man be appointed to head at least one of Harlem's three police precincts. The NYPD had three African American captains in total – Lloyd Sealy, Eldridge Waith and Arthur B. Hill. None of the three, according to Arm, was ready to head a precinct. Though they all had the necessary rank, he claimed none had enough experience and would all require an

⁹⁵ Kihss. “Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases,” 1, 8.

unspecified amount of time continuing to work their respective details before any of them could be ready to run a stationhouse.⁹⁶

At 1:30 P.M., a group of four activists, including Maris Cakars who would later become an important grassroots organizer against the Vietnam War and editor of *WIN*, the first magazine to publish excerpts of the FBI files on its illegal surveillance programs such as COINTELPRO, began a Ghandian hunger strike for peace in New York City. Reasoning that “Hundreds of citizens have been shot and clubbed in Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant,” the demonstrators vowed to “fast until peace is restored in New York City.” They saw problems on all sides in the outbreaks, from CORE picketers being attacked at NYPD headquarters to police violence to their perception that the African American population of the city “lacks organization and motivation to deal with the problem in spite of a sincere desire for the end of the trouble.” Committed pacifists, the four explained, “In the absence of any successful efforts, we as individuals have taken it upon ourselves to fast until this violence ceases. Violence multiplies violence....Disputes are settled by conversation, mutual understanding and concession. Agreements, we repeat, can’t be reached until the violence subsides.” To speed this end, they urged city politicians to withdraw the Tactical Patrol Force from Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant and reform the civilian review board. Critical of Mayor Wagner’s Wednesday evening address, the hunger strikers exhorted him to give another statement “stressing conciliation rather than intimidation.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Kihss. “Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases,” 8.

⁹⁷ Untitled press release, July 1964; Arnie Goldwag Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) collection, ARC.002, Box 3 and Folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Reverend Hildebrand, president of the New York NAACP and leader of Bethel AME, had enough criticism for those involved in the uprisings to go around. Excoriating the “reckless provocation of police officers” as responsible for escalating the intensity of the rebellions, Hildebrand chastised those Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant residents and who veered from self-defense into property destruction and looting as harming “the cause of racial justice.” Still, he seemed to find that regarding the shortest term causes of the events, when one examined police behavior, there was an “urgent need to curb the reckless and panicky violence which characterized so much of the police activity during the disorders.” As a result of their behavior, the reverend relayed, “there has been a loss of confidence in the Police Department from the Commissioner down to the officer on the beat” throughout the city’s African American neighborhoods. This would be an oft-repeated contention for the next two years, one that would help bring the city to another kind of racial battle.⁹⁸

CORE, amassing over 250 picketers for the third consecutive night of protest outside NYPD headquarters at Broome and Centre Streets in lower Manhattan, demonstrated for Lieutenant Gilligan’s prosecution and against police brutality. Once again, white neighborhood residents, mostly Italian American, came out to meet them with violence and invectives. Police kept the hundreds of angry white residents further away than they had the last two nights, hoping to prevent another near-bloodbath. Police arrested six teenage white boys for disorderly conduct after they drove past the CORE demonstrators and threw a cardboard sign at them reading “Get the smelly black bastards

⁹⁸ Kihss. “Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases,” 1.

away from this block” with a hand-drawn representation of a black man, apparently wearing a turban, with a dagger through his heart.⁹⁹

As the picketers left at 11 P.M., police walked them to different subway stations than the one they had been using the two prior nights, in an effort to avoid repeat violence. Still, the white throngs gathered at intersections and attacked, throwing eggs, rocks and garbage, sending a police inspector to the hospital after he was hit in the eye with a rock. Police again attacked to push the white mobs back to secure the demonstrators’ safe passage to the subway, which they accomplished, thereby ending the white riot.¹⁰⁰

Commissioner Murphy walked through the white crowds while this was happening, unrecognized for a time in his civilian clothes. After a few minutes, some realized who he was and began shouting at him for having his police protect the CORE people. After narrowly dodging a few eggs from the white mob, the commissioner told reporters “Compared to what’s been happening in Harlem, I don’t consider this violence at all. There’s a lot of talking and a lot of shouting, but no violence down here.”¹⁰¹

Harlem CORE’s Roy Innis, who would become the organization’s National Director in 1968, offered two explanations for the white community’s vehement reaction. First, he believed that on the surface, “These people mistakenly are connecting us with looters in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant.” In a deeper analysis, Innis insightfully and

⁹⁹ “Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here,” 1, 9.

¹⁰⁰ White and Shapiro. “Violence Subsides on 6th Night; Police Brace for Weekend,” 2; “Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here,” 1, 9.

¹⁰¹ “Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here,” 9.

sensitively saw that “this community feels threatened. The people down here are not the most affluent in town and I think they feel threatened by the civil rights movement.”¹⁰²

Whether or not they felt threatened, many in the neighborhood definitely felt strongly about CORE picketers and the character of Little Italy. One resident, Ernest Fiore, a graduate of Harvard Law, declared that the violence against the CORE picketers “wasn’t really racial. No matter who was making that kind of noise would have been attacked. They should quit by 9 o’clock. We are a quiet community.” One would imagine that the hundreds of residents screaming epithets in the streets night after night were considerably louder than the CORE picketers, and that living next to the city’s police headquarters would be less than idyllic. Al Santora, on the other hand, was adamant about the racial nature of the attacks. He proudly proclaimed “I am a descendent of the man who discovered America [presumably Columbus]. What my people are, we have gotten by work, not by sit-ins, marches and unjust demands. I have more of a right to this government than those niggers do. This country belongs to the Indians, the Spanish and the Italians.” Now shouting, Santora continued on about the living conditions of his neighborhood: “This is not a ghetto! This is a community. This is where you can walk the streets and not be mugged. This is where the streets are clean. The people themselves decide whether something is a community or a jungle. We’ll fight for Goldwater. We’ll fight in the streets and in the mountains.” Frank Brunetto, an electrical engineer, had little more than pure hate to offer:

I came here tonight to watch the cannibals. I lived with them savages for nine years in a housing project. I know. I’m for Social Security, I’m for Medicare, I’m

¹⁰² Robert C. White and Fred C. Shapiro. “Violence Subsides on 6th Night; Police Brace for Weekend.” *New York Herald Tribune* 24 July 1964: 2.

for unions, but damn it, I'm gonna vote for Goldwater to show the politicians we're sick and tired of the cannibals.

A young man from the neighborhood standing nearby interjected that Goldwater was an "extremist." A crowd shouted him down and began chanting "Goldwater for President!"¹⁰³ This is the essence of the "white backlash," but it was there all along.

The Sixth Night – Harlem Rests, Brooklyn Sputters

For the first time since Saturday, there were no reported disturbances out of the ordinary in the streets of Central Harlem. No sizeable crowds formed, no one looted, no one smashed windows, no one marched, and no one engaged in running battles with the police.

Some people in Bedford-Stuyvesant, though, still had not had their fill of such activities, and others sensed this. As darkness fell, with a temperature of 65 degrees, an NAACP sound truck slowly made its way through the streets of the neighborhood, with the by now usual implorations to stay off the streets blaring from the roof. Just as the night before, the crew in the truck initially met with some friendly reception but had to quickly leave the area to avoid a potentially explosive situation. Some residents made their feelings toward the NAACP's efforts visually apparent, carrying signs reading such things as "We Want NAACP to Stay Out of This," "We will fight now and pray later" and "Murphy's cops are youth killers." After about an hour of the organization's sermon of peace, people on the street, mostly teens, escalated their taunts and tongue lashings both in amount and volume to the point that NAACP staff felt it was no longer safe for them or the vehicle to remain in Bedford-Stuyvesant. In addition to the NAACP, as many

¹⁰³ "Behind Little Italy's Riot: Pride – and Prejudice." *New York Post* 26 July 1964: 3.

as forty African American clergy walked and drove the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant that night, pleading, reasoning and arguing with people to stop fighting the police, smashing and looting. Meanwhile, large numbers of helmeted police patrolled anxiously, backed up by twenty-two officers on horseback.¹⁰⁴

The first hint of resumption came when someone broke a drugstore window at Lewis and Gates Avenues, about a mile northeast of Nostrand and Fulton. When a white newspaper photographer took a picture of the looting from his car, his flash gave him away. Some people involved in the looting immediately turned on him, throwing bottles, cans, and a brick that shattered his windshield. By the time police had come, ready for battle, no one was in sight and the window display merchandise was gone. Similar situations took place throughout the night, like a skipping record that never makes it past the first few grooves. Police fired a handful of shots to break up crowds they found threatening, and only engaged in relatively minor scuffles with people on the streets, ultimately arresting nineteen and injuring eight. There was neither major looting nor prolonged fighting. Another condition that separated this night from the previous three was that instead of a fairly heavily localized area of action, tonight's geography of rebellion stretched twenty blocks north to the edge of Williamsburg, ten blocks east, twenty blocks south into Crown Heights and ten blocks west, nearly crossing into Prospect Heights. On one of the two prior nights, such a spread would have been utterly

¹⁰⁴ White and Shapiro. "Violence Subsides on 6th Night; Police Brace for Weekend," 2; "Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here," 1.

disastrous, but given the continually incipient nature of the night's happenings, it was comparatively an inconvenience.¹⁰⁵

The Toll

Over the course of five nights, from Saturday, July 18th to Wednesday, July 22rd, the official NYPD assessment of destruction in Harlem was as one dead, eighty-five citizens injured, thirty-eight police injured, 202 arrests and 122 damaged, vandalized or looted businesses. In Bedford-Stuyvesant, where citizens rose up for four nights, from Monday, July 20th through Thursday, July 23rd, there were no reported deaths, ten injured civilians, twelve injured police officers, 302 arrests and 556 damaged, vandalized or looted businesses, with most of those numbers coming from Tuesday and Wednesday nights. The recorded injury count for citizens includes only those requiring hospitalization.¹⁰⁶ The police department estimated it spent \$1.5 million to handle the uprisings, 90 percent of which went to overtime costs. Ammunition, vehicle repairs and medical bills comprised the rest.¹⁰⁷

Gangs were notably absent from the uprisings, especially in Bedford-Stuyvesant, where there were more than twenty at the time. Most of the looting occurred in sections of the neighborhood that had no organized gangs. This was largely due to the work of two Youth Board supervisors, Eddie Allen and Frank Chandler, and the eleven who worked under them. Once the uprisings began in Harlem, the Youth Board workers went

¹⁰⁵ White and Shapiro. "Violence Subsides on 6th Night; Police Brace for Weekend," 2; "Relative Calm Is Restored to Riot-Torn Areas Here," 1.

¹⁰⁶ Kihss. "Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases," 1; "The Week's Riot Toll." *New York Post* 26 July 1964: 3; Given the level of violence, there were surely many hundreds more injuries.

¹⁰⁷ Emanuel Perlmutter. "Police Costs in Riots Put at \$1.5 Million." *New York Times* 26 July 1964: 1, 4.

to the various gang leaders and had long conversations with them on the utility of looting and fighting police, eventually managing to convince them it would be counterproductive. The Youth Board staff also worked with the parents of gang members, many of whom contributed by hosting small all-night gatherings at their homes where gang members could eat and play cards. Allen and Chandler also kept the Youth Board center at 129 Patchen Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, about a mile and a third northeast of Fulton and Nostrand, open late every night until 1 A.M.¹⁰⁸

Many in the city, from the police to those in city government to private citizens, anticipated a revival of chaos, violence and destruction over the weekend. The anxiety, already palpable on Thursday, had substantially increased by Friday. While there would be much to come in terms of social and political wrangling, the “Harlem Riot” was over. No resurgence ever came, a fact that had little to do with the NYPD ensuring that its Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant precincts were “stacked” with officers or clergy of all faiths pleading all weekend for a restoration of “moral and spiritual stability.”¹⁰⁹ The rebellions had run their course. People did not have the energy to maintain such an intense collective level of activity indefinitely. Many people are more willing to take part at the front end of a protracted uprising of this kind, as it is new and perhaps invigorating and exciting. The newness quickly fades in the face of serious violence, leaving fewer people night by night, eventually getting to a point where the chances of escaping unharmed become much slimmer.

¹⁰⁸ Alfonso Narvaez. “Why Gangs Shunned the Riots.” *New York Post* 26 July 1964: 14.

¹⁰⁹ Kihss. “Cavanagh Picks 6 to Aid His Review of Police Cases,” 1, 8; White and Shapiro. “Violence Subsides on 6th Night; Police Brace for Weekend,” 2.

Then there was the practical fact, especially in Bedford-Stuyvesant, that most stores had already been damaged or looted, and if a prime function of the uprisings was property crime, what else was left to do once most property had already been damaged? If one were inclined to participate in such activities and wished to continue them, it would have meant spreading out into other neighborhoods, which is fundamentally different than committing such acts in the familiar streets of your neighborhood. Far fewer people would have been willing to involve themselves as a part of some roving band of plunderers, so those who did proceed along such a route would be facing unfavorable odds in neighborhoods outwardly hostile toward them. Short of guerilla war, there was no way.

In the days to follow, business owners in Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant assessed their losses. At the end of September, two months after the uprisings ended, thirty-eight shop owners from the two neighborhoods had filed claims totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars against the city for negligence, using a disputed Civil War-era state law.¹¹⁰ By early October, insurers had already paid out more than \$750,000 in claims to businesspeople in both neighborhoods. An industry spokesman stressed the number would continue to climb as insurance companies processed more claims.¹¹¹ Due to the types of policies business owners had purchased, many were not covered by insurance and closed for good. In February 1965, 125th Street in Central Harlem, the

¹¹⁰ "Riot Claims against NYC in Millions." *New York Amsterdam News* 26 Sep 1964: 16; Charles G. Bennett. "24 Claims Filed Here over Riots." *New York Times* 1 Sep 1964: 20.

¹¹¹ "Assess Riot Losses in Harlem, Brooklyn." *New York Amsterdam News* 10 Oct 1964: 15.

neighborhood's main commercial artery, had twenty-six vacant stores along a nine-block stretch. One year earlier, there were only four vacancies.¹¹²

The city was also facing a number of personal injury claims related to the rebellions. Two African American women from Central Harlem filed lawsuits of \$500,000 each against the city, alleging police had shot them. One, Mrs. Barbara Barksdale, is the woman James Farmer said he saw a police officer shoot when she asked for a cab. Barksdale said the bullet struck her in the left hip and exited her left buttock, leaving her with permanent injuries. The other, Mrs. Minnie Dwight, a forty-six-year-old book binding machine operator, accused an unknown officer of shooting her in the back just past midnight on Tuesday, July 21st. Dwight said the shooting left her with constant flashes of pain through her back.¹¹³

In the weeks after the rebellions, the courts began processing the hundreds the NYPD arrested. Many of the arrestees were in their twenties, but ranged from teenagers to men and women in their late forties. Most faced charges of disorderly conduct, assault and burglary. Some had their charges dropped or were acquitted, but most could not afford lawyers and were convicted, serving from thirty to ninety days, depending on such factors as prior records and severity of the alleged offense. Because of most defendants' lack of money, they also were unable to appeal their convictions, meaning their sentences stuck.¹¹⁴ Arrests were not limited to the days of rebellion though. Through March 1965,

¹¹² Peter Kihss. "Harlem Planner Urges More City Aid." *New York Times* 12 Feb 1965: 26.

¹¹³ Sara Slack. "Woman Shot in Riot Sues for \$500,000." *New York Amsterdam News* 1 Aug 1964: 1, 2. George Barner. "Riot Victims Seek Million \$ Damages." *New York Amsterdam News* 30 Jan 1965: 1, 2.

¹¹⁴ Les Matthews. "What Happened to Those Arrested during the Riot." *New York Amsterdam News* 22 Aug 1964: 1, 46.

the district attorney arrested a number of people in waves for refusing to cooperate with a grand jury investigating William Epton.¹¹⁵

William Epton's trial, by far, was the most prominent court case to come from the uprisings. Epton, a Harlem native, the head of the Harlem Defense Council and a leader of the Maoist Progressive Labor Movement, was arrested July 25th, 1964, and charged under a turn of the century law with "criminal anarchy" and "conspiracy to overthrow the Government of the State of New York" for speeches he made during the rebellions. After many delays, having the criminal anarchy charge dropped in favor of "advocacy" of criminal anarchy and being rearrested in court, Epton's trial began in October 1965. The prosecution presented a recording it said was of Epton speaking during the rebellions in which he said, "We're going to have to kill a lot of cops, a lot of the judges, and we'll have to go against their army." He was found guilty of all counts on December 20th of that year, sent to jail and sentenced to one year in prison on January 27th, 1966. Epton became the first person convicted under the criminal anarchy statute since the Red Scare of 1919. Despite appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court, Epton's conviction stood and he served one year at the city's Riker's Island jail.¹¹⁶

In one of the Wagner administration's few positive responses to pleas from civil rights groups regarding the uprisings, Commissioner Murphy transferred more than fifty black police to Harlem in the month after the rebellions. Murphy moved forty-five patrol

¹¹⁵ "Four Are Arrested on Contempt Charge." *New York Amsterdam News* 31 Oct 1964: 17; "One Negro in Contempt in Riot." *New York Amsterdam News* 13 March 1965: 33.

¹¹⁶ William Epton. *We Accuse: Bill Epton Speaks to the Court*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Progressive Labor Party, 1966; Douglas Martin. "William Epton, 70, Is Dead; Tested Free-Speech Limits." *New York Times* 3 Feb 2002: 37.

officers, five sergeants and three lieutenants to four precincts throughout the neighborhood. Having more black police in Harlem was a key demand from many leaders and activists.¹¹⁷ Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan, James Powell's shooter, was never arrested nor did the department reprimand him. A grand jury exonerated Gilligan September 1st, 1964 and the Civilian Complaint Review Board did the same. Both the *New York Times* and the *New York Amsterdam News* expressed hopes for further investigation and action, but none ever came. The lieutenant remained on sick leave at full pay for another two months, until he returned to a desk job in November.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

New York's rebellions shine a light on conservatism, racism and hostility to civil rights in the city, especially within its white ethnic populations. For three nights in a row, Italian American residents from Little Italy, the neighborhood surrounding police headquarters, came out to attack nonviolent interracial demonstrators protesting police brutality. The neighborhood residents believed the CORE demonstrators to be part of a larger movement to extract undeserved economic gains from various levels of government. Locals frequently recalled how they and their families came to a new country with nothing and worked hard to earn their positions in society, never resorting to protest. They articulated that civil rights activity was a front for laziness, greed and lawlessness. Many white ethnic New Yorkers neither identified nor empathized with black residents. As the civil rights movement became more assertive, white ethnic

¹¹⁷ "45 New Patrolmen, 5 Sgts., 3 Lieutenants." *New York Amsterdam News* 22 Aug 1964: 1.

¹¹⁸ David Halberstam. "Jury's Exoneration of Gilligan Scored by Negro Leaders." *New York Times* 2 Sep 1964: 1, 23; "Negroes Denounce Gilligan Whitewash." *New York Amsterdam News* 5 Sep 1964: 2; "Gilligan Lands in Soft Spot." *New York Amsterdam News* 14 Nov 1964: 43.

hostility became more prominent, especially in the numerous Italian American enclaves of Brooklyn and Queens. People who had previously supported liberal Democratic candidates in significant numbers moved to the right, favoring presidential candidates Barry Goldwater and arch segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace. White ethnic hostility toward black New Yorkers continued to escalate through the 1960s, with the 1966 civilian review board referendum and 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization controversy as points that both showed and increased this hostility.

When the rebellions moved south into Bedford-Stuyvesant, the chaos in the streets there showed more clearly than in Central Harlem the lack of effective black political and social leadership in the city. Bedford-Stuyvesant did not have the history of leadership and organization that Harlem did. Black people of all backgrounds and ideologies had been competing for relevance in Central Harlem for most of the century, with the neighborhood being majority black since the 1920s. Bedford-Stuyvesant differed in that it did not become predominantly black until the 1950s.¹¹⁹ Not only did this young community not yet have the time for organic grass roots leadership to develop by 1964, but the black population also grew very quickly during the postwar period, making attempts at organization difficult to manage. Certainly, the neighborhood had civil rights activists, with Reverend Milton Galamison and Brooklyn CORE the most prominent, but Harlem was black New York's political center.

Because of the lack of leadership in Bedford-Stuyvesant, there was far more property damage than in Harlem. There were also more arrests and the intensity of fighting between citizens and the police was greater. Street rallies regularly turned into

¹¹⁹ Purnell. *A Movement Grows in Brooklyn*, 21, 22.

looting and fighting. People like James Farmer and Bayard Rustin, who walked the streets of Harlem night after night during the rebellions, never came to Bedford-Stuyvesant. As for the civil rights activists who did, residents were more hostile toward them than were the people in the streets of Central Harlem. No people or organizations had enough authority in Bedford-Stuyvesant to direct residents' energies away from destruction. Looting and destruction would have been much worse in Harlem without the power of men such as James Farmer and Edward Mills Davis who validated outraged citizens' anger but urged them away from chaos.

Finally, we see why civilian review board reform became so prominent an issue. Civil liberties and civil rights activists had been building a campaign favoring an independent review board for a few years, but the recent defeat of city council legislation a month before the uprisings left the campaign seemingly moribund. The conflict with the police that characterized the rebellions gave the issue new life. The police were not the primary cause of the rebellions, but they were both a contributing factor and the source of ignition. Many black New Yorkers felt contempt for the police well before 1964, for a combination of violence, arrests, rude behavior, inadequate policing and graft. These feelings of resentment combined with intolerable residential, educational and economic conditions to create a potent social explosive. When Gilligan shot Powell, it was part of a recent string of police shootings of African American and Puerto Rican New Yorkers. Powell's death incensed many black New Yorkers, but it was not until the police met a demonstration seeking Gilligan's arrest with perceived further brutality that the uprisings began. The police explained their violence during the uprisings as necessary in a time of catastrophe. Many residents and civil rights activists accused the police of using force

well beyond what was necessary to defend themselves or control a situation. While city officials denied these accusations, many citizens and organizations felt police behavior during the rebellions made review board reform more necessary than it ever had been.

Chapter Four – The Post-rebellion Struggle for Civilian Review Reform

Of all the rebellions' outcomes, none was more locally profound than the reinvigorated demand for an independent civilian review board. Civil rights and civil liberties activists had been pressing for review board reform for several years before the uprisings. With the New York Civil Liberties Union at the movement's forefront, activists slowly built a base of support throughout the city that included various political clubs, religious organizations, good government groups and a number of city politicians. The movement had hit a wall of intransigence in the mayor and the police commissioner, neither of whom would permit any change to the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board. Attempts to establish an independent review board both through persuading the mayor and passing city council legislation failed. Prior to the uprisings, the city council most recently took action on the bill proposing a new board when it held hearings in June 1964 and refused to vote on it. James Powell's death and police action during the uprisings gave the review board movement a new prominence. Support now grew to include state politicians and many more local organizations.

Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan, Powell's shooter, was never arrested nor did the department reprimand him. A grand jury exonerated Gilligan September 1st, 1964 and the Civilian Complaint Review Board did the same. Both the *New York Times* and the *New York Amsterdam News* expressed hopes for further investigation and action, but none ever came. The lieutenant remained on sick leave at full pay for another two months, until he returned to a desk job in November. Many black New Yorkers regarded Gilligan's exculpation as a departmental "whitewash," asserting the incident once again

demonstrated the NYPD's inability to police itself.¹ Proponents of independent review saw the lieutenant's lack of punishment as further evidence for the need of review board reform. The mayor and police commissioner remained unmoved on changing the CCRB throughout 1964 and 1965. Civilian complaint review came to be a primary issue in the 1965 election and shaped the mayoral race. A new mayor in 1966 reorganized the existing board and added four civilians to it. His action elicited a wave of opposition from the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association and conservative groups, who won a subsequent referendum prohibiting civilians from serving on the review board.

The 1966 referendum marked the end of the city's civil rights coalition among African Americans, white allies and Jews. While many New Yorkers felt review board reform was necessary, black New Yorkers especially believed so. Black community leaders and residents articulated civilian participation in the review of complaints against police would help to curb police behavior about which they had long complained – brutality, discourtesy and apathy toward crime in black neighborhoods. Many black New Yorkers, along with white civil libertarians, had come to regard the pre-1966 review board, comprised of three police commissioners, as chicanery, convinced the police would always judge one another leniently. Consequently, those against review board reform framed it as a civil rights issue, one that would disproportionately benefit black citizens, even though complaint statistics showed white people filed most complaints. Substantial numbers of white New Yorkers believed any change to the city's system of reviewing complaints against its police officers would be giving in to unjust demands

¹ David Halberstam. "Jury's Exoneration of Gilligan Scored by Negro Leaders." *New York Times* 2 Sep 1964: 1, 23; "Negroes Denounce Gilligan Whitewash." *New York Amsterdam News* 5 Sep 1964: 2; "Gilligan Lands in Soft Spot." *New York Amsterdam News* 14 Nov 1964: 43.

from civil rights activists, a movement toward which these white citizens were not sympathetic. With both pro- and anti-review board forces presenting complaint reform as fundamentally a matter of black civil rights, even though at its core it was an issue of civil liberties that white legal reformers had long championed, many of the city's white voters cast their ballots as though the referendum were on the civil rights movement itself.²

White voters, especially white ethnics, overwhelmingly chose to destroy the board. On the whole, Jews also voted against it, showing that Jewish support for issues marked as civil rights causes was no longer a given. The board's ultimate defeat after years of hard work was a bitter rebuke for the coalition favoring civilian participation in police review. Civil rights activists and many black New Yorkers took the defeat particularly hard, feeling they had not asked for much in desiring their public servants to have some accountability to the citizenry. The PBA's refusal to compromise on complaint reform and its racially charged campaign contributed to an increase in resentment between the city's black communities and the police. White voters' overwhelming support for the PBA pushed many black activists and citizens in the city to feel that relying on white people for support, which had often been tenuous, was no longer desirable. The racial acrimony the review board referendum fostered convinced significant numbers of black New Yorkers they would have to look inward to secure freedom and equality. Black Power ideologies began to emerge nationally during the

² Jewel Bellush and Stephen M. David write, "It can be argued that the CRB referendum was a critical election in that it provided a *legitimate* means for the direct expression by voters of race-related attitudes on a matter of public policy....Thus, the CRB election was the confirming event in the appearance of a new electoral etiquette that allowed for the open discussion of racial issues." Jewel Bellush and Stephen M. David. *Race and Politics in New York City; Five Studies in Policy-Making*. (New York: Praeger, 1971), 92-93.

referendum campaign, giving a name to the self-reliance and self-determination many black New Yorkers had already practiced. As a result, the city quickly became a hotbed of Black Power activism. Less than two years after the referendum, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization struggle showed the progress of this inward turn and how white New Yorkers reacted to it.³

The Uprisings and Review Board Reform

Calls for a new review board resurged from the outset of the uprisings. A number of black leaders, including James Farmer, Percy Sutton, L. Joseph Overton and others, met with a sizeable group of high-ranking city officials the morning of July 20th, with an independent civilian review board one of their chief demands. The New York Democratic Executive Committee, at an emergency meeting held the same day, unanimously voted in support of the immediate establishment of an all-civilian board. The next day, Deputy Mayor Edward Cavanagh announced he would review the Civilian Complaint Review Board's procedures and all cases alleging brutality currently before it. James Farmer responded with a public statement decrying Cavanagh's review as "insufficient," declaring "a real independent civilian review board is a necessity now." The day after, Wednesday, July 22nd, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., repeated the demand for a review board on which only civilians sat. It was also a key outcome of the convening of

³ Marilyn Johnson, in *Street Justice*, is the only historian who addresses the CCRB referendum in detail, doing so in twelve pages, but does not look what effects the outcome had beyond policing. Johnson's work is insightful, but there is much more at play in the review board struggle than can be covered in a short space, including civil rights, civil liberties, liberalism, Black Power, interracial integrationist activism and the growth of white conservatism in the urban North. She also does not make use of the wealth of information available in the ACLU archives, instead relying on newspapers and secondary sources. She argues the referendum campaign was a showdown between civil rights advocates and opponents, writing "race and civil rights were the most significant factors in the defeat of the referendum." While this is true, her analysis lacks nuance and does not properly examine the ways in which a civil liberties campaign became a vote on feelings toward the civil rights movement. *Street Justice*, 249.

sixty prominent black Bedford-Stuyvesant residents with Brooklyn Borough President Abe Stark. The United Council of Harlem Organizations, an umbrella group representing nearly seventy predominantly black community organizations, ranging from the NAACP to the Elks and the United African Nationalist Movement to the Central Harlem Mothers Association, released several statements demanding the immediate implementation of an all-civilian board that would report directly to the mayor.⁴

The NYCLU began planning on Monday, July 20th to reach out to mainstream civil rights groups with the intent of building a coalition to fight for an all-civilian board. It held a conference on the 27th of that month and drafted a statement two days later to be circulated among potential allies, making the case for civilian review. Referring to the uprisings, the NYCLU correctly predicted, “Similar incidents in the future will in all probability kindle similar and perhaps more violent outbreaks. The seething tensions that obviously now lie just below the surface await only a spark to erupt once again into more and greater rioting and disorder.” It reiterated the previous arguments as to why an independent board was necessary, such as improving relations between the police and minority communities, reducing distrust of the police and a way to lower the flame under the boiling inner city areas. For the first time, the NYCLU was not just supporting a new board but attacking the existing one, condemning the “secrecy which shrouds its

⁴ Maurice C. Carroll and Edward J. Silberfarb. “Harlem Seethes for 3d Night; Mayor Summoned from Spain.” *New York Herald Tribune* 21 July 1964: 1, 11; Peter Kihss. “City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty.” *New York Times* 21 July 1964: 1, 22; Warren Weaver, Jr. “Powell Says Riots Can End if Mayor Meets 5 Demands.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 13; “Brooklyn Riots Continue, Police Shoot 2 as Looters.” *New York Times* 23 July 1964: 1, 13; Requests Presented to the Mayor of New York City by the Steering Committee of the United Council of Harlem Organizations; 6 August 1964; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 661, Folder 11; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Resolution Submitted by United Council of Harlem Organizations – Civilian Review Board; undated; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 661, Folder 11; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

operations.” It pointed out the NYPD never voluntarily or publicly published the number of complaints it received, the nature of them or the cases’ outcomes. “In many instances,” accused the NYCLU, the “results of civilian investigations...are not even communicated to the complainant.” This deliberate screen around the complaint board created a situation in which “the public is unable to assess whether the present board is properly performing the functions with which it is entrusted.” Creating a board independent of the police department was now “a vital necessity.”⁵

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., at the mayor’s request, met with Mayor Wagner for several days, beginning Monday, July 27th. With the recent uprisings as the pretext for Dr. King’s invitation, the mayor was trying to appear responsive to civil rights matters. Instead, he succeeded in further alienating local civil rights leaders who could not understand what Dr. King could tell the mayor about African American New Yorkers. King left the night of July 30th with little to show. During three four-hour meetings with the mayor over four days, Dr. King repeatedly pressed the review board issue with him but got nowhere. He said the following day he was “very sorry” Wagner had not agreed to this. While he described their meetings as “frank, fruitful and amicable,” Dr. King found what New York’s black civil rights leaders had known for years when their discussions ended with not one formal agreement or concession from the mayor. He described Commissioner Murphy as “utterly unresponsive to either the demands or the aspirations of the Negro people.” Continuing in his frustration with the commissioner,

⁵ Memo from Alan Reitman to executive staff; 24 July 1964; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1079, Folder 11; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Proposed Statement for Adoption by Organizations United for the Creation of an Independent Board to Review Civilian Complaints against the Police; 29 July 1964; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 490, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Dr. King said, “He is intransigent and has little understanding of the urgency of the situation. If he had, he would have suspended Lieutenant Gilligan at once, and would not have obstructed establishment of a public review board to investigate charges of police brutality.”⁶

Following the uprisings, a special subcommittee of five city council members, including Councilman Weiss, went to Philadelphia to study the country’s oldest review board, which the then-mayor established in 1958 when the city council refused to do so. Over two days, they met with a variety of civil rights and police representatives, as well as the Police Advisory Board. Weiss returned from Philadelphia confident New York would have an analogous board within six weeks, despite failing to get his bill through previously. He, like others, believed the recent uprisings would sway public opinion on the board, push the city council to act and force the mayor’s hand. More than happy with what he encountered in his trip, Weiss also believed the rest of “the committee was impressed by what it saw in Philadelphia.” The committee made another trip two weeks later to Rochester, examining the board that had been created the previous year. Weiss seemed to have the same sentiments upon his return from there.⁷

While the councilmen were in Philadelphia for the second day, Wagner released a long statement detailing, among other things, that he would not create a new review

⁶ Philip Benjamin. “Dr. King Confers with Mayor on City and U.S. Rights Issues.” *New York Times* 28 July 1964: 15; R.W. Apple Jr. “Negro Leaders Split over Call to Curtail Drive.” *New York Times* 31 July 1964: 1, 11; R.W. Apple Jr. “Wagner Rejects Demands for Civilian Police Board.” *New York Times* 1 Aug 1964: 1, 11.

⁷ Cowan, 160-162; Gertrude Samuels. “Who Shall Judge a Policeman?” *New York Times Sunday Magazine* 2 Aug 1964: 8, 34, 46; Murray Illson. “Opinions on Philadelphia Civil Police Board Vary.” *New York Times* 30 July 1964: 12; R.W. Apple, Jr. “Weiss Confident City Will Get a Civilian Police Review Board.” *New York Times* 5 Aug 1964: 37; “Two Review Boards Praised by Weiss.” *New York Times* 20 Aug 1964: 12.

board. Sidestepping the issue, he explained it would be improper for him to create a new board while the city council was still considering it. Some reports claimed Wagner would sign the bill if it passed city council, but this was unlikely, as Commissioner Murphy had sworn to resign if any changes came to the Civilian Complaint Review Board. Murphy was one of the most popular and competent heads the department had had in decades, and Wagner would not risk losing him or the ensuing fallout, especially on something that did not matter to him. The mayor also announced he would be appointing a committee to study Deputy Mayor Cavanagh's review of the review board, which civil rights mastermind Bayard Rustin derided as "a review board made up of city officials."⁸

Over the winter, a number of organizations and individuals worked on developing new strategies to change the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board. On March 9th, 1965, Democratic State Assemblyman Mark T. Southall from Harlem introduced state legislation virtually identical to Weiss' city council bill. On April 6th, one day less than a year following the Weiss bill's introduction, Councilman Raymond Jones, also a Democrat from Harlem and head of the New York County Democratic Committee, submitted a resolution to the city council in support of Southall's bill, which was a proxy for supporting Weiss' bill. Southall's bill ran up against apathy in the assembly and went nowhere. Jones was trying to keep pressure on the city council, which was still technically considering the Weiss bill, one year after the fact. The majority of council members were against killing Weiss' measure, as it would draw renewed attention to the issue. Instead, they hoped keeping the bill out of discussion would make the issue fade

⁸ R.W. Apple, Jr. "Wagner Rejects Demands for Civilian Police Board," 1, 11; Kenneth Gross. "Rustin Blasts Wagner over Review Board." *New York Post*, 31 July 1964: 3.

through a lack of media coverage. For his work, Councilman Jones received at least one death threat, a postcard stamped from the Bronx reading “Remember the oldie, ‘Put a Nigger on a horse and he rides to hell.’ If this civic board develops, you’re a dead Nigger. Al Smith, Jimmy Walker [legendary machine politicians – the former was governor of New York and the latter mayor of the city] and the other great Tammany Hall Americans must be turning over in their graves. Re: A Nigger leader in the Hall.” The author claimed to be “23 Auxillary [*sic*] members of the American Legion who were Democrats.” Jones maintained his support.⁹

In between Southall and Jones’ bills, the New York County Lawyers’ Association, one of the country’s largest and most influential bar associations, produced a report intending to broker a compromise between the police department and advocates of reform. It argued that change to the current system was necessary, as the process through which complaints were addressed was not at all clear or open and did not make “available public information on the disposition of complaints.” The group recommended adding one or more qualified civilians not on the police payroll to the current board. It proposed the department select from former judges or others with substantial experience weighing evidence and assessing the veracity of witness testimony. The NYCLA noted civil rights activists should not be considered for appointment. Offering a second possibility, the report outlined creating a new office not attached to the police department with the function of reviewing the Civilian Complaint Review Board’s files. This agency would have no legal powers and could only request files, record complaints and conduct cursory

⁹ “Council Weighing Agency on Police.” *New York Times* 27 April 1965: 74; “Demands Action on Review Board Bill.” *New York Amsterdam News* 3 April 1965: 12; “Threat to Ray Jones.” *New York Amsterdam News* 8 May 1965: 1, 2.

investigations. The lawyers' group explained it was not criticizing the NYPD administration "in any way," nor did it believe in "any pattern of police brutality in New York City."¹⁰

Commissioner Murphy was no more receptive to the NYCLA's plans than he was to any other proposed changes to the review system. In his response to the NYCLA official overseeing the report, Murphy wrote, "there is no valid, logical or practical reason for making the substantial revisions which the report proposes." He disagreed "most vigorously" with inferences he took to portray a "widespread lack of confidence in this department and its present procedures." Furthermore, either of the proposed changes included in the report would create "a measure of outside administration of the Police Department," which he found "dangerous." These were sentiments FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had expressed at the beginning of the year in the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, where he regarded every urge for an independent board as "an ill-advised maneuver. It amounts to the usurpation of authority rightfully belonging to the police commander. It is a practice which could damage effective law enforcement and reduce the orderly processes of community life to petty bickering, suspicion, and hatred." Any new review board, "a backward step for law enforcement toward ineptness and mediocrity," would make its police department head "a mere pawn of bureaucratic committees." As for the individual officer, she or he would be "subjected to public ridicule and penalized in salary, promotion, and personal career based on decisions reached by outside overseers to whom professional law enforcement and public protection may be of secondary interest." When the Weiss bill first came up for discussion, a number of reports claimed the

¹⁰ Homer Bigart. "Murphy Rejects New Review Unit." *New York Times* 21 April 1965: 31.

commissioner would add a few civilians to the board once the pressure was off of him, so that it did not appear he was caving to public sentiment. One year later, it was clear that Murphy would not make any changes to the board, and now he had garnered the director of the FBI's support.¹¹

During the spring, supporters of independent review began trying to renew pressure on city leaders and resuscitate public awareness of the issue. The *New York Amsterdam News* was an enthusiastic supporter of independent review, using one editorial to argue, "A member of a minority group can expect no fair play in a 'trial' where police brutality is the charge, so long as the police themselves serve as the judge and jury unto themselves." A contingent of African American and Puerto Rican civil rights groups demonstrated outside police headquarters in April while nine members attempted to present petitions demanding the board to Commissioner Murphy. Outside, Harlem rent strike leader Jesse Gray and militant black communist William Epton both addressed a rally for independent review. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. gave his support to the review board cause, issuing statements and giving speeches demanding both an independent board and the appointment of at least one black deputy police commissioner. Bayard Rustin, Basil Paterson, president of the New York City NAACP and father of future New York Governor David Paterson, and representatives from the Urban League, the National Council of Negro Women and the Negro American Labor Council met with the mayor for over an hour seeking a number of goals, including funds to employ seventeen thousand disadvantaged black youth during the summer and an

¹¹ Bigart. "Murphy Rejects New Review Unit," 31; Message from J. Edgar Hoover in *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*; 1 January 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1873, Folder 9; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

independent civilian review board. While Rustin had positive impressions as to the mayor's reception of the jobs plan, he described Wagner as "noncommittal" when the review board came up for discussion.¹²

In April and May, James Farmer used his "The CORE of It" column in the *New York Amsterdam News* to call for independent review in acerbic terms. He referred to Commissioner Murphy as one of "Jim Clark's cousins." The Jim Clark to whom Farmer referred was the sheriff who reigned over Selma, Alabama with a cattle prod and a button reading "Never," in reference to integration. Overseeing Dallas County and its seat, Selma, from 1955 to 1966, Clark is best remembered for his role in "Bloody Sunday," a police riot against nonviolent marchers attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge en route to Montgomery. Farmer argued instead of "Never," Commissioner Murphy said "Later," which had the same outcome. Farmer used another column to vituperate Mayor Wagner, accusing him of a host of iniquities, including sitting by while on- and off-duty police officers beat demonstrators. In numerous conferences and meetings stretching over years, Farmer wrote, he and CORE asked the mayor to implement a review board, but he was only ever "non-committal" and in the end, "did nothing," even in the face of the July uprisings.¹³

In May, Farmer went after the city's police force, stating "The New York City Police Force is a paramilitary organization of 28,000 heavily armed men who killed 95

¹² "Testimony." *New York Amsterdam News* 27 March 1965: 18; "Rally Friday Will Demand Review Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 24 April 1965: 52; Raymond H. Anderson. "17,000 Jobs Sought Here to Avert Summer Violence." *New York Times* 5 June 1965: 1, 20; "Powell Hedges on Support." *New York Amsterdam News* 8 May 1965: 6.

¹³ James Farmer. "The CORE of It." *New York Amsterdam News* 3 April 1965: 19; James Farmer. "The CORE of It." *New York Amsterdam News* 17 April 1965: 15.

people last year.” He lambasted the mayor as standing “haplessly by while Commissioner Murphy applauds and decorates men like Thomas Gilligan who shoot and kill Negro children.” After deploring the departmental regulation requiring off-duty officers to carry their weapons at all times, claiming that it created more problems than it solved, Farmer asked, “What kind of man becomes a cop when he could be making a good living selling ball bearings or driving a truck? I don’t know...but the Police Commissioner doesn’t know either and that’s important. He ought to.” Asserting current mental health tests for police recruits were insufficient in rooting out “sadist” and emotionally unstable applicants, Farmer cited a figure of fourteen NYPD officers who committed suicide in 1962 versus four who were murdered as evidence of this. Using the 95 civilian deaths as his basis, Farmer posited “the police are responsible for roughly one sixth of the violent deaths in this city every year.” Farmer offered several potential solutions, with the first being “Fire Commissioner Murphy,” followed by “Immediately install an objective civilian review board with disciplinary teeth” and ending with “GET A NEW MAYOR!”¹⁴

Commissioner Murphy’s position became a nonissue when he abruptly quit May 18th. He held a rushed press conference at 6:00 that night to announce his resignation. Sitting alongside the mayor, Murphy explained he was leaving to head the National Automobile Theft Bureau, an insurance industry organization dedicated to tracking stolen cars and disrupting theft rings. He insisted his exit had no relation to the increased pressure to implement review board reform, though friends privately said it had sapped his morale and he felt city officials inadequately defended him. Murphy would stay on

¹⁴ James Farmer. “The CORE of It.” *New York Amsterdam News* 1 May 1965: 15.

until a new commissioner was found. Wagner praised him as “the best Police Commissioner the city has ever had” and expressed his “deep regret that the Police Commissioner felt that this was necessary.” Murphy would be making \$5,000 less per year in his new position, but that was in addition to an annual pension of around \$20,000 from the city, leaving him rather well off for that time. PBA President John Cassese rued the loss, describing the outgoing commissioner as “firm but fair,” declaring, “the city will miss him.”¹⁵

Civil rights groups, on the other hand, saw the potential for a new day with Murphy’s exit. James Farmer expressed that “CORE’s largest concern at this hour is that his successor have a more tractable point of view of the major issues of New York police brutality and the creation of a civilian review board that is not simply a political balloon.” Basil A. Paterson agreed and called on Mayor Wagner to choose a successor who placed a “high value on community relations.” Another CORE spokesperson related feelings of “relief and hope that the new commissioner will deal with problems of brutality on minority member groups instead of ignoring them, as Mr. Murphy did.” These men were sorely disappointed when Wagner appointed Vincent Broderick, “a close friend” of Murphy, the following day. Broderick, a former deputy commissioner and current chief assistant U.S. district attorney, was Murphy’s personal choice for his successor and had already publicly expressed his opposition to an independent review board in the city, saying, “It would lessen the effectiveness of the police officer on the street, because he could be second-guessed by someone who is not informed.” He also advanced the same

¹⁵ Richard L. Madden. “Murphy Quits as Police Commissioner.” *New York Times* 19 May 1965: 1, 36; Joseph C. Ingraham. “Police Stunned by Murphy Action.” *New York Times* 19 May 1965: 36.

logic that said those who sat on the review board were already civilians and took it one step further by saying they were under a civilian commissioner's authority. The new commissioner confirmed his likeness to his friend when he stated, "My views on civil rights are the same as my predecessors, Mike Murphy, Stephen P. Kennedy and Francis W.H. Adams."¹⁶

Earlier that day, the city council released its long anticipated and delayed report regarding its findings on civilian review boards in Philadelphia and Rochester. The council endorsed the New York City Lawyers' Association's compromise where a body to oversee the review board would be created – a review board to review the review board. It praised the Civilian Complaint Review Board, describing it as having "performed ably" and "equal" to independent review boards existing elsewhere. Keeping in line with what Hoover and Murphy had said, an independent board "would dilute the authority of police leadership and, consequently, result in inefficiency." The city council committee would be limited to only councilmembers and would have the power to check on the review board's handling of cases when requested to do so or when it chose to. It could access departmental records at will and use them to perform its own investigations and hold hearings.¹⁷

The report also recommended several changes to the current review system, such as accepting complaints only in writing, allowing lawyers to cross-examine those

¹⁶ Samuel Kaplan. "Vincent Broderick Named as Police Commissioner." *New York Times* 20 May 1965: 1, 46; Cowan, 210.

¹⁷ John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Randolph Boehm. "Majority Report of a Special Subcommittee to Study the Feasibility of Creating an Independent Civilian Complaint Review Board." Papers of the NAACP: Part 22. Branch Department General Administrative File Civilian Review Board - New York Reports 1965. Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1996.

testifying during hearings and passing a law creating the right for both the complainant and the department to subpoena witnesses. This plan pleased no one, with CORE calling it inadequate and the PBA characterizing it as “detrimental to the Police Department, the morale of the men and the efficient protection of the people of the city.” Councilman Weiss disparaged the council’s recommendations as “worse than nothing” because he was not of the belief “that the Council has the political independence to do the job,” referring to its Democratic majority’s loyalty to the mayor. Commissioner Murphy denied the report had any bearing on his decision to resign, asserting the timing was strictly coincidental, though a number of those close to him stated otherwise.¹⁸

Electing the Review Board

Coterminous with Murphy’s resignation and the city council’s report, the race for mayor was beginning to enter its initial stages of campaigning, with the election coming in November. On May 20th, the city’s forty-three-year-old U.S. Representative from the Upper East Side, John V. Lindsay, committed himself to the principle of civilian review in his first speech as a mayoral candidate. A liberal Republican, Lindsay had amassed a progressive voting record during his previous six years in the House. At times, he was one of a few members or the only member of his party to vote for or against a particular bill and was a strong proponent of civil rights measures. It was not particularly surprising then that he would support a board that had been so unpopular with most of the city’s politicians. Speaking before the New York County Lawyers’ Association, Lindsay laid out the “principles and the need” for a new review board, but he did not believe in an

¹⁸ Samuel Kaplan. “Study Bids Council Set up Own Unit to Curb Abuses.” *New York Times* 19 May 1965: 1, 36; Peter Kihss. “Backers’ Silence Grieved Murphy.” *New York Times* 20 May 1965: 1, 46.

independent board. Instead, he favored a compromise in which three deputy commissioners would remain and four distinguished citizens would join them. “A committee made up of men and women of unquestionable stature,” who the mayor would appoint, would select “persons who will have the confidence of the community and of the police, preferably with judicial backgrounds and who in any case are trained and experienced in evaluating evidence” to staff the modified board’s civilian component.¹⁹

To Lindsay, this was the ideal permutation, for it merged the benefits of independent review with “professional police knowledge.” In an appeal to those who opposed any change, he argued this board would better protect police officers, as he foresaw the possibility of the extant board reacting to pressure from civil rights and civil liberties organizations by coming down hard on accused officers in a quest to demonstrate its impartiality. And for the city as a whole, the participation of civilians in the CCRB would mitigate the problematic situation in which “too many New Yorkers who have no wish to thwart the law have come to view the policeman as an enemy rather than a friend. The result is that the policeman is met with sullen silence or worse. Being human, he may reciprocate the antagonism. And so there is a running war which goes on day after day with no sign of improvement.” While viewed less negatively than the city council’s plans, few people initially took to the congressman’s concept wholeheartedly.²⁰

¹⁹ Cowan, 215; NYCLU News Release; 25 May 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; John V. Lindsay for Mayor Campaign Press Center News Release; 21 May 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²⁰ NYCLU News Release; 25 May 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; John V. Lindsay for Mayor Campaign Press Center News Release; 21 May

On June 10th, Mayor Wagner shocked the city when he announced he would not run for reelection. Leaving no room for interpretation, he told the packed room of reporters, staff and camera operators:

Simply put, my decision is to end my service as Mayor on Jan. 1, 1966. I shall not seek or agree to re-election. I am not willing under any circumstances to be a candidate for this office. I emphasize this in order to close all doors that might otherwise invite requests for consideration. My decision, based on long and painstaking personal contemplation, and on consultation with my sons, with other members of my family and with intimate friends, is final and irrevocable. I say this without reservation or qualification of any kind.

In his twenty minute, 2,700 word statement, the mayor related he could not serve again with clear conscience, though he had publicly committed to doing so in February.

Wagner said his decision to not run came from a devotion to his two sons, one finishing high school and the other a senior at Harvard. After their mother died of lung cancer in March 1964, he said the demands of being mayor did not allow for him to give his sons the attention and parenting they needed. Some cited recent polls indicating his November victory unlikely as motivation for his decision, but Wagner flatly denied those numbers having any effect.²¹

Now that Wagner was out of the race, the presumed election between him and Lindsay was no more. A glut of politicians now vied for the Democratic nomination, as well as the Liberal nomination, which Wagner had previously enjoyed. Four were serious contenders to win the Democratic primary in September: Comptroller Abraham Beame, City Council President Paul Screvane, Councilman at Large Paul O'Dwyer and U.S. Representative William F. Ryan, from the Upper West Side. In an effort to poll

1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²¹ Richard Witkin. "Wagner Says He Won't Run for 4th Term." *New York Times* 11 June 1965: 1, 12.

competitively, every Democratic candidate for mayor now had a proposal to overhaul the civilian review board in some way, even City Council President Paul Screvane, who had recently been a vocal opponent. By early August, there were at least six different review board bills before the city council. Screvane wanted an independent board that a panel of five judges would nominate. Beame felt adding civilians to the Civilian Complaint Review Board was the best idea, while O'Dwyer picked up the idea of an ombudsman when a Swedish man holding that office recently visited the city. O'Dwyer's Director of Civilian Redress would have the authority to investigate any government agency facing a complaint, not just the police department. Ryan believed in the independent, all-civilian board Councilman Weiss had proposed last April. Now that the race for mayor was wide open, it seemed that no matter who won, there would be some measure of civilian review coming to the city after January 1st, 1966, when the mayor would take office.²²

One significant development supporting civilian review came from an unlikely source – within the police department. The Guardians Association, the fraternal society for black officers founded in the 1940s, came out in support of an independent civilian review board in mid-June after one of its members had his locker thrown from the window, his tires slashed and windows smashed for reporting third-degree tactics in the

²² “3 in Race Backing Review Bd.” *New York Amsterdam News* 31 July 1965: 49; Richard L. Madden. “And Now, the Issues.” *New York Times* 21 Aug 1965: 22; “The William Ryan Team.” *New York Amsterdam News* 11 Sep 1965: 8; “Here’s Where Candidates Stand in Primary Stand on Important Issues.” *New York Amsterdam News* 11 Sep 1965: 8; Social Action Committee, The Community Church of New York, Re: Civilian Complaint Review Board; 10 August 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1080, Folder 7; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Bedford-Stuyvesant precinct where he worked. For the approximately thirteen hundred officers who comprised the group, this was their breaking point.²³

In 1965, white commanding officers kept the city's black officers out of patrol cars, frequently gave them assignments in desolate areas of the city and moved them to the back of the formation when assigned to parade detail. The city's black finest commonly dealt with racist graffiti throughout their respective precincts. Their white superiors frequently used them to fill complaint quotas when the black officers had done nothing wrong, which made it difficult for them to move up, as the complaints stayed on their permanent records. Very few were permitted to work as detectives. When a legal issue would arise between a black officer and a white officer, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association that was supposed to protect all of its members refused to represent the black officer. It would give him "a few dollars and direct him to find himself a lawyer" while PBA lawyers took care of the white officer. Many of the city's black police were deeply offended by the significant number of their white coworkers who counter-demonstrated against CORE when they picketed Lieutenant Gilligan's home. They were profoundly disappointed by Commissioner Murphy's failure to release the report Mayor Wagner ordered on the influence of members of the ultraconservative John Birch Society within the NYPD's ranks.²⁴

²³ Cowan, 215; NYCLU News Release; 25 May 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; John V. Lindsay for Mayor Campaign Press Center News Release; 21 May 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²⁴ Johnson, *Street Justice*, 239; Peter Kihss. "Negro Policemen Here Ask for a Civilian Review Board." *New York Times* 15 June 1965: 32; "Negro Cops Ask for a Civilian Review Boards." *New York Amsterdam News* 12 June 1965: 1; Roger L. Abel. *The Black Shields*. (Bloomington, In: AuthorHouse, 2006), 307-374.

The Guardians Association's announcement to support independent review was controversial and resulted in the majority white PBA further casting out Guardians members. After a verbal attack from PBA President Cassese, Guardians President Patrolman William H. Johnson Jr. released the following statement detailing the ways in which he perceived policing, social justice and accountability to the community to be interconnected:

The decision of the Guardians Association favoring the establishment of an independent civilian complaint review board was made after a hard look at a long history of double standards and inequalities, both within and without the Police Department. It was made by policemen and policewomen who live in the slums and ghettos beset by fundamental societal disorder.

Every effort has been made to afford courtesy to all concerned in this matter. Despite our restraint, the president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association has unjustly charged the Guardians with "putting color before job and oath as policemen." We respect our Department and the new administration, but we are aware of the need for a strong position transcending color. Our stand is not against our profession. It is against attitudes that reinforce social injustices. The creation of an independent review board will provide a means of coping with deeply rooted social problems. There are many – even within the Police Department who agree with us.

We feel that honorable men can disagree without insulting one another. The report of planned Guardian withdrawal from membership in the P.B.A. is absolutely without foundation. We are certain that the president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association would, upon reflection, wish to retract his "color" remarks, which constitutes an affront to intelligent people throughout the Police Department and the city. The morale of the entire community we serve is at issue here. Once excessive emotionalism is set aside, it can be clearly seen that there is nothing about the proposed independent civilian review board that is contrary to the highest needs of a democratic society.

To most of the 27,000 other police officers in the city, the only clear thing to see about the board was that it could not be.²⁵

²⁵ Abel. *The Black Shields*, 367-364; "Gap Widening in Ranks of Police." *New York Amsterdam News* 3 July 1965: 1, 2.

Following the Guardians' lead, several other black civic organizations publicly came out in favor of independent review. The Federation of Negro Civil Service Organizations, with fifty thousand members coming from seventeen groups throughout municipal agencies, made known its rank and file were "in complete agreement" with the Guardians and would provide their "full support." A group known as One Hundred Men, founded in 1963 to uplift black communities in the city, also voiced its support. Lead by Robert J. Mangum, a former NYPD deputy police commissioner with sixteen years on the force, it also included Livingston Wingate, executive director of Kenneth Clark's Harlem Youth Opportunities, Unlimited and Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s Associated Community Teams, a welfare commissioner, a deputy fire commissioner, the chairman of the Housing and Redevelopment Board and nearly two hundred others. Mangum described a new review board "as a vital necessity to restore confidence in a major arm of city government which plays so prominent a role in the lives of so many members of the Negro community."²⁶

Councilman Weiss had taken the recent flood of support for review reform and used it to submit a motion to the City Affairs Committee that on June 29th, his bill finally be discharged from consideration and voted on. Weiss announced his intent to do so more than a week in advance and the PBA, with help from others, began preparing to defeat the bill once again. Cassese announced officers would begin collecting signatures opposing the board en route to and from work, on their lunch hours and other free time, with assistance from their spouses and children. Cassese claimed they already had 250,000

²⁶ "50,000 Civil Service Workers Supporting Civilian Review Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 19 June 1965: 1, 2; "Civil Service Workers Back Guardians on Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 24 July 1965: 4; "Ex Commissioner Leads Fight for a Review Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 26 June 1965: 3.

signatures the New York Citizens Committee to Support Your Local Police had obtained. Members of the John Birch Society led that group, founded in late 1964 to oppose any change to the CCRB. Cassese delivered a claimed four hundred thousand signatures contained in nine bundles to the city council meeting, where five thousand off-duty police stood outside protesting the bill and screaming such things as “Go home finks,” “Send ‘em to Vietnam, that’s where they belong” and “Wave a bar of soap at them and they’ll all run” at fifty CORE picketers supporting the bill’s enactment. Some assaulted the CORE members with racial slurs that were not printed in any newspaper but Commissioner Broderick later acknowledged as having occurred. Members of Parents and Taxpayers, the white citizens’ group dedicated to keeping the city’s schools segregated, came out to support the police, as did Young Republicans and Conservative Party activists. The council members debated Weiss’ motion for two hours, ultimately voting twenty-seven to eight against it and decided to hold further hearings July 13th and 14th.²⁷

Before voting, the council heard testimony from Commissioner Broderick, who had only been on the job a few weeks at that point. He strongly denounced all iterations of review that would alter the CCRB, repeating the now standard lines that it would weaken the department’s authority and make police officers hesitant to act.

Commissioner Broderick used his testimony to announce several changes to the CCRB. First, the NYPD would soon be establishing an office solely for taking complaints. With

²⁷ “24 Teams Circulate Petitions Opposing Civilian Police Board.” *New York Times* 23 May 1965: 82; Martin Arnold. “Police Will Fight Civil Review Unit.” *New York Times* 21 June 1965: 1, 14; Homer Bigart. “Police Pickets to Keep Pistols.” *New York Times* 29 June 1965: 21; Homer Bigart. “5,000 Policemen Picket City Hall.” *New York Times* 30 June 1965: 1, 24; “Text of Broderick’s Speech on Bigotry.” *New York Times* 3 July 1965: 16; “Read and Remember How Council Voted.” *New York Amsterdam News* 3 July 1965: 1.

a staff in civilian clothes, it would be neither in nor adjacent to any other police buildings, therefore removing a major barrier to complainants – facing uniformed police. The other noteworthy change he suggested was the publication of reports detailing the CCRB’s activity every three months, whereas the CCRB had not previously made any operational statistics public. Minor modifications included a numbered receipt for each complaint and letters sent to complainants explaining the board’s findings.²⁸

Broderick’s changes did not address any of the major issues proponents of independent review propounded were wrong with the extant board. The NYCLU indicated as much when it referred to his plans as a “sham” intended to keep the CCRB intact with a few modernizing touches. During the July hearings, the organization’s new executive director, Aryeh Neier, contended:

The Commissioner recognizes that a Police Department installation manned by police in uniform serves to deter the lodging of complaints. We think he is right. But the solution the Commissioner offers seems to us a sham. Any office opened by a police agency is a “Police Department installation.” And who is going to be fooled by the fact that the policemen manning the installation are in civilian attire? I suspect the answer is no one would be fooled.

The editorial board of the *New York Amsterdam News* concurred, stating, “Continuing the present board, moving it to another location, and placing the policemen in civilian clothes does not solve this matter at all.” In his prepared remarks to the city council, Neier also asserted any new board should have members selected for “the ability to render intelligent and fair decisions.” He spoke of this in contrast to what he saw with the current board members, all deputy commissioners “not selected for their capacity to serve

²⁸ Cowan, 210; Bigart. “5,000 Policemen Picket City Hall,” 24; Roy Wilkins. “Naked Threat by Police.” *New York Amsterdam News* 10 July 1965: 14.

as fair reviewers of complaints” but for “their capacity to carry out their important administrative duties. The two are not necessarily identical.”²⁹

Following the July hearings, the City Affairs Committee still would not vote on Weiss’ bill, despite implorations from Councilman Weiss as well as City Council President Paul Screvane. A white rookie NYPD officer shot and killed a black man in Bedford-Stuyvesant just one day before the one-year anniversary of Powell’s death at Lieutenant Gilligan’s hands. It too was an event involving a contested knife and conflicting reports, producing even stronger demand for a new board from civil rights groups, especially after the officer was cleared of wrongdoing two weeks later. Another white patrolman killed a twenty-year-old black man at Coney Island less than two weeks later when he fractured his skull with his nightstick. The other two bar associations in the city officially announced their support for independent review, as did the gay rights group the Mattachine Society. A rash of Puerto Rican arrestee and prisoner “suicides” while in police custody convinced the National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights to join these other groups in the New York City Review Board Conference, an NYCLU-led group of eleven civil rights and political organizations favoring independent review. Support was stronger and more widespread than ever for significant alterations to the city’s civilian review board, but there was still no action. By the end of August, only a

²⁹ NYCLU News Release; 12 July 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1873, Folder 9; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Statement of Aryeh Neier, Executive Director, New York Civil Liberties Union, before the City Council; 13 July 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1883, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; “It’s Still the Same.” *New York Amsterdam News* 31 July 1965: 16.

few weeks before the mayoral primary, the city council had still not voted on the Weiss bill, despite nearly a year and a half of discussion, debate and testimony.³⁰

The city council's inaction on civilian review reform meant the mayoral race would be the only hope for change. On September 14th, Comptroller Beame decisively crushed Screvane's aspirations when he won the Democratic primary by nearly 59,000 votes, 327,934 to 268, 991, a considerable margin in a four-way race with fewer than 750,000 votes cast. Congressman William Ryan came in a distant third with a little more than 113,000 votes and Councilman O'Dwyer made a poor showing with only 28,613 people casting their ballots for him. Ryan, the only candidate favoring fully independent review, was out of the race. Beame's victory was seen as a sweeping repudiation of Wagner's brand of politics, for Beame and Screvane came from separate factions of Democratic Party, both vying desperately for control of the overall body. Screvane was Wagner's handpicked candidate and the loss was stunning. At Screvane's campaign headquarters, Wagner appeared "grave and uncommunicative" once it became clear Beame was the victor and left shortly thereafter, telling reporters "I have nothing to say." Screvane's supporters were despondent, milling about the floor, heads down. Former

³⁰ Thomas Buckley. "Review Board Backers Clash with Foes at Hearing." *New York Times* 14 July 1965: 25; "Council to Consider Review Board Issue." *New York Times* 15 July 1965: 26; Homer Bigart. "Protest Is Renewed." *New York Times* 17 July 1965: 1, 15; Roy Wilkins. "A Time for Keeping Cool." *New York Amsterdam News* 24 July 1965: 16; "Hypocrisy Charged over Police Review." *New York Times* 25 Aug 1965: 19; "Bklyn Tense, Quiet as Cop Is Cleared." *New York Amsterdam News* 31 July 1965: 27; Clayton Knowles. "City's Bar Urges Civilian Control of Police Review." *New York Times* 6 Aug 1965: 1, 28; "Top Lawyers Back Civilian Review." *New York Amsterdam News* 14 Aug 1965: 3; "No More Fiddling." *New York Amsterdam News* 14 Aug 1965: 14; Cowan, 232; NYCLU News Release; 8 Dec 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; NYCLU News Release; 18 Aug 1965; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Assistant Secretary of Labor with the Johnson administration Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now part of Screvane's ticket as city council president, was reduced to tears.³¹

The November contest was between Beame, who spoke of an amorphous support for "civilian participation in a review board" and Lindsay, whose four civilian and three police board had been clearly laid out for months. Conservative Party candidate William F. Buckley was running as a third-party challenger who had made his antipathy toward any reform of the review board clear. With Ryan out of the question, Lindsay was the obvious choice for anyone favoring changes to the CCRB. Lindsay, running on a Republican-Liberal fusion ticket, defeated Beame, the Democrat, by 135,000 votes, 1,165,506 to 1,030,119. Buckley pulled in nearly 340,000 votes in this liberal city, nearly 13 percent of the total. All hopes for reforming the CCRB rode on Mayor-elect Lindsay.³²

Civilian Review Rises and Falls

Before Lindsay took office, it was already clear that establishing his board would involve a major battle against the PBA, police officials and various conservative elements. PBA President John Cassese made it known his organization would fight against any changes to the CCRB "as long as this city is around." Understanding the two pathways for the new board were a city council bill or an executive order that would require budget approval from both the city council and board of estimate, the PBA vowed to "round up every possible vote to block legislative or budgetary approval." Should those options fail, then the police would "get out on the streets and round up enough

³¹ Richard Witkin. "Blow to Wagner." *New York Times* 15 Sep 1965: 1, 37; Homer Bigart. "For Beame, an Unexpected Joy; for Screvane, Stunning Dismay." *New York Times* 15 Sep 1965: 37.

³² "Here's Where Candidates Stand in Primary Stand on Important Issues," 8; Richard Witkin. "Seesaw Contest." *New York Times* 3 Nov 1965: 1, 28.

signatures on petitions to bring about a referendum,” which would require fifty thousand New Yorkers to sign their petitions. Commissioner Broderick had made his opposition to any alteration to the CCRB clear since before he accepted his current position. As he was an interim appointment, taking over for a man who left his post early, Broderick’s term expired when Murphy’s would have, February 21st. Lindsay said in late November he did not know who his commissioner would be, but the person would have to be a “Renaissance man” who was “very sensitive” to issues New Yorkers of color faced. When asked if Broderick could stay on, Lindsay said that it was possible and described him as “a very good man.”³³

At the same time, Lindsay was also facing pressure from those advocating independent review. Two days before his inauguration, December 30th, Lindsay met at his home with fifteen representatives of the United Council of Harlem Organizations. Speaking with Basil Paterson, Percy Sutton, Hulan Jack, James Lawson and other important Harlem activists and business figures, each made demands of the soon-to-be mayor. Collectively, they wanted it to be easier for black New Yorkers to become police officers, they wanted more black officers overall and more black captains appointed heads of precincts. Despite knowing Lindsay’s plan, they nevertheless pressed him for a fully independent board. They also wanted the City Commission on Human Rights to have stronger powers to take action in situations of discrimination, especially with housing and employment. Overall, they wanted Lindsay to extend the city’s hand to its black citizens, bringing them into decision-making positions within the government,

³³ “Lindsay Facing Problems.” *New York Amsterdam News* 20 Nov 1965: 14; Richard L. Madden. “Lindsay Delaying on Head of Police.” *New York Times* 28 Nov 1965: 1, 78.

giving them real opportunities to receive a quality education and fostering black businesses throughout the city. He told them theirs were “reasonable” goals, but could not be accomplished quickly. Now asking the men for their assistance, Lindsay apprised them of the need for new taxes to cover the costs of these improvements and said, “You help me get that tax program passed and we’ll have the money to improve the ghettos and hire more cops.”³⁴

Once Lindsay took office on January 1st, it quickly became apparent he and the commissioner would not agree to disagree. In early February, Broderick publicly accused the mayor of trying to have Deputy Mayor Robert Price “run the police.” The same day, he told Lindsay in a seven-page letter the proposed board was a “cruel hoax” and a “bromide.” The commissioner asked, “Is it not time, Mr. Mayor, for you to say that you renounce political expediency?” The mayor did not reappoint Broderick. He brought in Howard Leary, the head of the Philadelphia Police Department for the past three years, as the new commissioner. Leary had been with that department since 1940, rising through the ranks to become deputy commissioner several years before the city’s Police Advisory Board went into effect. Since he had comfortably coexisted with the Philadelphia board since 1958, Lindsay asked Leary to study his concept for a review board the previous November. Once he decided to not reappoint Broderick after the letter incident, he knew Leary was his choice. With Leary, the mayor could now move forward with creating his hybrid board.³⁵

³⁴ “Step up Review Bd. Pressure.” *New York Amsterdam News* 18 Dec 1965: 7; Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 31.

³⁵ Woody Klein. *Lindsay's Promise: the Dream That Failed: A Personal Account*. (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 110-116; Eric Pace. “Broderick Defies Lindsay on Issue of Police Review.” *New York Times* 9 Feb

Leary embarked on a “top to bottom” reorganization of the NYPD. Within a week of beginning his term, he promoted Lloyd Sealy, a black officer, to assistant chief inspector, skipping two ranks, as well as moving Sanford Garelik, a Jew, to chief inspector, the highest rank a uniformed officer can achieve. This was seen as finally destroying the “Irish mafia,” as the NYPD had long been known, due to the disproportionate representation of Irish Americans within its ranks. What Leary did not include in his reorganization, however, was handling the five hundred officers who were allegedly members of John Birch Society. Leary said they would be allowed to openly maintain membership within the organization and serve as police as long as it did not “impair their efficiency.” This had been a controversy brewing for some time, since before Commissioner Murphy left office, due to the conflict between the group’s radically conservative antigovernment agenda and the fundamental tenets of policing, not to mention the individual members’ often bigoted perspectives on humanity. Lindsay, responding to the recent interest in NYPD “Birchites,” had recently referred to the organization as “terrible, infamous, and hostile to everything I think is decent.” Many agreed with him and thought participation in both organizations should be mutually exclusive, but Leary allowed it so long as the individuals did not blatantly violate departmental regulations.³⁶

On May 2nd, despite at least two separate publicly threatened lawsuits should he take action, Mayor Lindsay announced the creation of the new Civilian Complaint

1966: 1, 30; “Text of Broderick’s Letter to Lindsay Commenting on Police Task Force Report.” *New York Times* 9 Feb 1966: 30.

³⁶ Michael T. Kaufman. “Police Shake-up Begun by Leary; Top Aide Chosen.” *New York Times* 26 Feb 1966: 1, 26; Klein. *Lindsay’s Promise*, 140.

Review Board, as he had described nearly one year ago. The mayor was careful to speak of the board in a positive light for all involved, wishing to have it seen as a means to generate respect between officers and the communities they policed. The board would “protect police officers from malicious or baseless accusations” and “most importantly, will lead to better communication and understanding between the police, and the people, particularly those people in deprived areas where crime is most prevalent and police protection is most valued.” Lindsay spoke highly of the city’s police, praising and thanking them for their service and dedication. Following his initial remarks and those from Commissioner Leary, the mayor revealed the eleven-member selection committee responsible for nominating the four civilians to the review board. Lindsay named as chairman Herbert Brownell, president Eisenhower’s Attorney General and well-known for his relatively strong progressive stances on civil rights, having a large role in drafting the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and guiding the president’s action in the Little Rock school integration situation. The board also featured the Reverend Donald S. Harrington, a white Unitarian minister who presided over the interracial Community Church of New York, William H. Booth, an African American lawyer and chairman of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, Morris B. Abram, Jewish civil rights attorney and president of the American Jewish Committee, Sandy F. Ray, minister of the Cornerstone Baptist Church in Brooklyn and lifelong friend of Martin Luther King Sr. and family, and Dr. C.B. Powell, the African American editor and publisher of the *New York Amsterdam News*, as well as a several other lawyers, the dean of Fordham University School of Law and a white teacher and former United Federation of Teachers vice president.³⁷

³⁷ Eric Pace. “Suit Threatened on Police Board.” *New York Times* 15 Feb 1966: 1, 26; “Suit Threatened on

Though it had been long expected, Lindsay's announcement caused waves throughout the city. It came against a backdrop of surging complaints against police, numbering 186 in the first three months of the year, potentially putting the department on track to receive seven hundred by the end of the year, versus the 324 from 1965. It seemed the review board issue was now timelier than ever. Groups on either side of the mayor immediately criticized Lindsay's board. The NYCLU issued a press release the same day, accusing Lindsay of staying "on the safe side." The statement contended "only a completely independent board will be a fully effective deterrent to police abuse of authority" and announced the NYCLU's intent to "continue to press for a completely independent review board with an independent investigative staff." The organization articulated this as necessary because as its lawyers had seen in the "great many cases" it had handled before the CCRB, "all too often, witnesses to incidents of police abuse disappear or become forgetful when they discover they must describe the events they have seen to police investigators." The NAACP was also critical, with national general counsel Robert Carter citing "serious inadequacies" which would do little to remediate the "suspicion and hostility" the city's black and Puerto Rican communities felt toward the police. A local NAACP head referred to the mayor's plan as "dressing up the same old system," with the organization's state president voicing a similar opinion.³⁸

Police Board." *New York Times* 28 April 1966: 36; "Text of Statements and Preamble of Order on Police Board." *New York Times* 3 May 1966: 38; "Review Board is In." *New York Amsterdam News* 7 May 1966: 1, 2.

³⁸ Martin Gansberg. "Complaints Rise on Police Action." *New York Times* 7 April 1966: 34; NYCLU News Release; 2 May 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; "Review Board is In," 1.

The PBA and its allies also went on the attack, with Cassese pronouncing “you won’t satisfy these people [referring to non-white New Yorkers] until you get all Negroes and Puerto Ricans on the board and every policeman who goes in front of it is found guilty.” The *Daily News* went further, professing the board would be “infested sooner or later with cop-haters, professional liberals, representatives of pressure groups and the like, to the great detriment of the police force.” Cassese told of how he was “sick and tired of giving in to minority groups with their whims and their gripes and shouting,” threatening mass resignations from the NYPD in response to the modified board. Cassese said he and the PBA “consider the Mayor’s proposal improper, illegal and undesirable.” The PBA seized upon the legality aspect of its criticisms and pursued this course for the next six months. The PBA had already petitioned the state supreme court to prevent the mayor from implementing the board, contending the plan violated a line the city charter stating the policing commissioner is to have “cognizance and control” of all matters regarding the NYPD. Though the PBA lost this suit, Lindsay had good reason to worry, for police lawsuits had recently hamstrung both the Rochester and Philadelphia review boards, forcing them to halt all activities.³⁹

On July 7th, the PBA delivered 51,852 signatures to the city clerk’s desk as part of the process to make banning Lindsay’s board a ballot initiative in November.

Conservative Party leader William F. Buckley brought a separate bundle of 40,383 signatures. The Conservative Party proposed to alter subdivision A of section 434 of the

³⁹ Eric Pace. “Booth Condemns Cassese Remark.” *New York Times* 19 May 1966: 40; “NAACP Assails PBA Review Board Stand.” *New York Amsterdam News* 21 May 1966: 24; Roy Wilkins. “Advice to Mr. Cassese.” *New York Amsterdam News* 28 May 1966: 16; “Mayor Gets Police Board Nominations.” *New York Times* 29 May 1966: 42; “A Promise Kept.” *New York Amsterdam News* 16 July 1966: 14; Jackie Robinson. “Civilian Review Board Fight.” *New York Amsterdam News* 16 July 1966: 15.

city charter, concerning the police commissioner's power and duties. The original read, "The commissioner shall have cognizance and control of the government, administration, disposition (and discipline) of the department and of the police force of the department."

The proposed version would add significantly to that, changing it to:

The commissioner shall have cognizance and control of the government, administration, disposition (and discipline), discipline and disciplinary procedures of the department and of the police force of the department provided, however, that no board for the review of civilian complaints against policemen who allegedly have abused their authority or used unnecessary force may be established or maintained by the commissioner or by any other officer of the City of New York, unless each member thereof is a deputy commissioner appointed pursuant to section four hundred thirty-two of this charter.

The new language, underlined above, would prohibit anyone from serving on a review board unless that person was a deputy commissioner in the police department. Lindsay and the network of organizations and individuals opposing the PBA knew this was coming, but underestimated how much support the anti-review board forces had in the city.⁴⁰

Four days later, on the 11th, Lindsay named the civilian board members. Algernon Black, the white senior leader of the non-theist New York Society for Ethical Culture, was appointed chairman of the panel. The sixty-five-year-old Black, born to Russian immigrant parents, had graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 1923 and worked with the NYSEC ever since, rising to become the head of the organization. Deeply concerned with social justice, he was vice president and director of the NAACP and served on the boards of the ACLU and the Citizens Committee for Children. Lindsay also

⁴⁰ Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 199-201; "Group Drops Anti Review Board Drive." *New York Amsterdam News* 16 July 1966: 28; Conservative Party Petition; undated; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

named Thomas R. Farrell, a thirty-seven-year-old white lawyer who had helped integrate middle-class areas of the Bronx and served as president of the Bronx Catholic Interracial Council, Dr. Walter Isaiah Murray, a fifty-five-year-old African American professor of education at Brooklyn College, raised in the Midwest, and Manuel Diaz Jr., the forty-three-year-old Puerto Rican former chief of community affairs at Mobilization for Youth and current executive director of the Puerto Rican Community Development Project with a master's degree in social work. Leary, responsible for choosing the three NYPD members, selected African American former U.S. assistant district attorney Franklin Thomas, the thirty-two year old Brooklyn-born deputy commissioner in charge of the department's legal matters, Edward McCabe, fifty seven, a white twenty-five year veteran of the FBI currently overseeing the department's division of licenses and Deputy Inspector Pearse Meagher, a forty-seven-year-old white officer who joined the force in June 1941. McCabe was reappointed to the board after serving on the all-police board under Commissioner Murphy. At this gathering, Chief Inspector Garelik spoke of the "enormous benefits" the board would offer both the department and community, but few NYPD officers shared his sentiments.⁴¹

As with Lindsay's nomination of the selection committee two months prior, his critics attacked immediately. PBA President Cassese hurriedly announced a press conference in which, banging his fist on the podium before him, he assessed the members as "so pro-civil rights and so Lindsay-thinking" that "Lindsay went out of his way to get

⁴¹ Emanuel Perlmutter. "Lindsay to Name 4 Civilians Today for Police Board." *New York Times* 11 July 1966: 1, 22; "And the Six Other Members." *New York Times* 12 July 1966: 33; "Civilian Bd. Named; Mayor Keeps Word." *New York Amsterdam News* 16 July 1966: 1, 3; Bernard Weinraub. "New Police Board Has Two Negroes and Puerto Rican." *New York Times* 12 July 1966: 1, 33; Bracey, Meier, Boehm. "Majority Report of a Special Subcommittee to Study the Feasibility of Creating an Independent Civilian Complaint Review Board," 10.

these four.” As A. Philip Randolph rebutted, the U.S. Constitution is pro civil rights. Roy Innis, chairman of Harlem CORE, was dissatisfied with Lindsay’s selections, propounding none of the men was in “close enough touch with the minority groups in the ghetto areas. I don’t think they have suffered to the same degree the indignities of individuals in the ghetto.” Innis found them to be lacking in life experience, regardless of skin color, saying he “would have preferred to see some representation from the ghetto, to see people on the board who work there, live there, are in active contact with the realities of the ghetto. After all, police brutality affects ghetto residents more than anyone else.” Criticism, no matter from whom, would soon prove to be low on Lindsay’s list of problems.⁴²

While Cassese spoke at the Warwick Hotel, a much more dangerous storm was brewing in the adjoining room where Rodney Ettman was convening the initial gathering of the Independent Citizens’ Committee against Civilian Review Boards. With former NYPD commissioner Michael Murphy as its honorary chairman and several state senators as members, the committee was neither independent nor comprised of average citizens. Ettman was a wallpaper manufacturer from Woodmere, NY, a town on Long Island about twenty miles southeast of Manhattan. He had gathered thirty or so businessmen “to actively oppose civilian review of individual police action in New York City and where else it may be proposed” to “free the policeman from all these encumbrances.” The maker of vertical adornments saw those gathered in the Sussex room, including himself, as “captains of industry.” Or at least, Ettman said, “That’s what

⁴² Weinraub. “New Police Board Has Two Negroes and Puerto Rican,” 33; A. Philip Randolph. “A Fight We Cannot Lose.” *New York Amsterdam News* 6 Aug 1966: 28.

I'd like to think they are." The men vowed to raise half a million dollars to wage an "educational campaign" to destroy Lindsay's board and prevent anything like it in the future. This was in addition to the \$1.5 million the PBA had pledged to spend, essentially the contents of its treasury. Lindsay met with Cassese and Norman Frank, a Madison Avenue advertising executive working as the PBA's public relations consultant, two days later. He told the Cassese and Frank "if anything happened in New York – if there was a blow-up – they would be responsible." The mayor felt preemptively blaming them for something similar to what had happened in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant two years prior left them "a little floored" but was not sure if it had much effect.⁴³

It took supporters of independent review, the people and organizations who now found themselves compelled to defend a board toward which they were ambivalent or worse, nearly a month to marshal an organization. On August 4th, the Federated Associations for Impartial Review, or FAIR, announced its formation. Initially comprised of the NYCLU, the Citizens Union, the Liberal Party, CORE, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Guardians Association, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, the Catholic Interracial Council and forty other groups, NYCLU Executive Director Aryeh Neier predicted it would have seventy-five member organizations within a month. The NYCLU had previously been opposed to working with most civil rights groups due to tactical and ideological differences, but necessity now forced the organization to change course. Speaking for the group, Neier said, "We are taking the position that legal action is unpredictable and we feel we must organize our efforts at this

⁴³ Weinraub. "New Police Board Has Two Negroes and Puerto Rican," 33; "New Group Fights Police Review Unit." *New York Times* 2 Aug 1966: 21; Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 202.

time.” FAIR estimated it could expend \$500,000 to preserve the board while its opposition had been planning a coordinated media assault for weeks and committed to spend up to \$2 million on it.⁴⁴

Herman Katz, the city clerk in charge of certifying the PBA and Conservative petitions, ruled them invalid August 5th. Calling the Conservative petition “vague, indefinite, ambiguous and incomplete,” Katz said it was “not in fact a real charter amendment,” but instead an alteration of the city’s administrative code, a much longer document. The administrative code had different standards applied to it and could only be amended via referendum if the city council approved of such a vote. Katz also struck nearly half of the Conservative Party’s forty thousand signatures and nearly fifteen thousand of the PBA’s, still leaving the PBA with over thirty-seven thousand valid signatures, still exceeding the threshold necessary to hold a referendum. The PBA and Conservative Party took the issue to the New York Supreme Court, which eventually overruled Katz, upholding the legality of the petitions and validating the proposed amendment to the city charter as just that. The referendum was set for November 8th, Election Day. The *New York Times* predicted the city would feel “the noxious consequences of a hate-filled campaign in which both law enforcement and municipal tranquility would be hurt.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bernard Weinraub. “Ruling Due Today on Review Board.” *New York Times* 5 Aug 1966: 1, 11; Paul Hofmann. “Negro Policeman Criticizes P.B.A.” *New York Times* 29 Aug 1966: 15.

⁴⁵ Bernard Weinraub. “Petitions Barred on Review Board.” *New York Times* 6 Aug 1966: 15; “Review Board Victory.” *New York Times* 6 Aug 1966: 16; “Police Board Bid to Be Reviewed.” *New York Times* 10 Aug 1966: 27; Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 217; Richard L. Madden. “Court of Appeals Backs Nov. 8 Vote on Police Board.” *New York Times* 3 Sep 1966: 1, 24.

In the meantime, the new Civilian Complaint Review Board had gone to work with little fanfare. Still operating at the Park Avenue office Commissioner Broderick had opened, the board members had spent time observing departmental trials, consulting with police officials and getting to know how the department worked. It now had a staff of secretaries, as well as a full-time executive director. Bernard Jackson, an African American former police officer, assistant U.S. district attorney, president of the Bronx NAACP and area director of the regional office of the Office of Economic Opportunity, was appointed assistant director. The office was accepting complaints at the rate of about three per day, as well as receiving a number of another kind of complaint. Board members had been enduring threats and abuse since their names were made public. White members had received phone calls, letters and first-person verbal assaults from late-night visitors calling them “nigger lovers,” Dr. Murray, the lone African American civilian member, changed his phone number after someone called his home and yelled “nigger!” into his wife’s ear.⁴⁶

By mid-September, Mayor Lindsay was openly declaring, “We are on the upswing, we have a fighting chance,” regarding maintaining the review board. The Guardians Association, the black officers’ organization within the NYPD, came out against the PBA when its president appeared on a televised talk show and swore to fight for the hybrid CCRB. Lindsay felt energized by the heavyweights who had recently signed on as co-chairs of FAIR – Herbert Brownell, the former attorney general, Bronx Borough President Herman Badillo, civil rights giant A. Philip Randolph, Morris Abram

⁴⁶ Bernard Weinraub. “Now Civilians Share the Beat.” *New York Times* 21 Aug 1966: 178; “Review Bd. Member Reports Threats.” *New York Amsterdam News* 20 Aug 1966: 2; “Ex-Cop Asst. Head of Review Board.” *New York Amsterdam News* 3 Sep 1966: 1.

from his review board selection committee and Theodore W. Kheel, a labor moderator who was one of Mayor Wagner's closest advisers. All major candidates for the state's governorship were now on board, though Republican Governor Rockefeller refused to campaign for the issue, citing it as strictly one of local importance. Donald D. Shack, vice chairman of the NYCLU went before the Republican State Committee contending "this referendum, while it will only confront the citizens of New York City on the ballot, has not only state-wide significance but national significance," likening it to the "problems in the Deep South." The state's two U.S. senators, Jacob Javits and Robert F. Kennedy, both accepted positions as honorary co-chairs and vowed to support the board however they could.⁴⁷

Norman Frank, the PBA public relations man, biblically portrayed the senators' support as "the story of David and Goliath... The Goliaths are gathering, but David will reign supreme because he represents the people and a just cause." The PBA announced it intended to secure three hundred and seventy billboards, open twenty storefronts and employ thousands of door-to-door campaigners to defeat the review board. It now

⁴⁷ "Statement of Donald D. Shack, Vice Chairman New York Civil Liberties Union before the Platform Advisory Committee of the New York State Republican State Committee," 22 Aug 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1083, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; "FAIR Wins Backing, Works to Win Ballot," *Civil Liberties in New York* Oct 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 491, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; "Review Bd. Drive Kicked off Uptown." *New York Amsterdam News* 8 Oct 1966: 1; Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 222; Bernard Weinraub. "2 Senators Back Mayor on Police." *New York Times* 25 Aug 1966: 1, 26; "Guardians Still Back Review Bd." *New York Amsterdam News* 3 Sep 1966: 1; Bernard Weinraub. "Brownell to Fight for Police Board." *New York Times* 13 Sep 1966: 1; Bernard Weinraub. "P.B.A. Plans Door-to-Door Fight against Review." *New York Times* 26 Sep 1966: 20; Thomas A. Johnson. "Negro Policemen Split with P.B.A." *New York Times* 4 Oct 1966: 39.

counted Parents and Taxpayers, the American Legion, the Brooklyn Bar Association and American Nazi groups as allies.⁴⁸

As the referendum moved closer, the PBA and its allies resorted to emotional appeals and groundless accusations. Cassese made the claim that “Communism and Communists are somewhat mixed in this fight. If they are not in the forefront, they are making hay while the sun shines.” Exploiting sharply rising crime rates in the city, the Independent Citizens’ Committee against Civilian Review Boards ran a full-page ad in the *Daily News* September 26th, showing a young white woman emerging from subway entrance, alone on a dark street. The caption read, “The Civilian Review Board must be stopped! Her life...your life...may depend on it. Send your contribution today.” The ICCACRB told the public:

This is your fight against the spread of crime in the streets....Only the policeman stands between your family and the continuous threat of the hooligan, the addict and the criminal....A police officer constantly puts his life on the line for you. He must not hesitate....In this time of explosive violence and increasing disregard for law and order, our Police Department must be given the authority to act effectively to safeguard the entire community....With a Civilian Review Board, it may be the police officer who hesitates, not the criminal.

Lindsay characterized the ad as “an attempt to incite racial tensions.”⁴⁹

Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, vilified ICCACRB’s message as “the slimiest kind of racism.” Speaking at length, he asserted this type of media assault was “calculated to arouse fear and counteraction among white people. It calls upon them

⁴⁸ Thomas R. Brooks. “25,000 Police against the Review Board.” *New York Times Magazine* 16 Oct 1966: 36-37, 124-133.

⁴⁹ Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 228; Brooks. “25,000 Police against the Review Board,” 37. Most American cities experienced jumps in crime rates in the 1960s, partially due to police departments abiding by new regulations that demanded better reporting. In 1960, there were 435 murders in New York City; in 1966, there were 734. Johnson, *Street Justice*, 245.

to rescue the poor, lonely, frightened, about-to-be-attacked white girl.” For Wilkins, this was evidence that “the people who have organized the fight against the review board have organized a sly and dirty campaign against New York’s Negro citizens.” The ICCACRB was relying on the discourse around “law and order,” which had become prevalent following the 1964 presidential election, that politicians used to speak about race in ways that people would understand while avoiding overt discussions of race. Wilkins saw this in the campaign image, stating, “All along, the opponents of the review board have talked about ‘minority groups’ and how about the review board is to be a protection for these minorities. They have talked, publicly and privately, about ‘minorities and crime.’” The moderate NAACP leader accused the PBA of campaigning “on a sewer level,” saying their campaign “spreads fear. It spreads racial suspicion and hate. It arouses passions. It splits the city.” Wilkins brought his statement to a finish by harkening back to the days when justice was a rope from a tree, frustrated the PBA had deliberately aroused “the dogs of racial hatred, mixing with that already deadly concoction the blood-pumping ingredient of ‘protecting white womanhood.’”⁵⁰

Review board proponents responded by stepping up their efforts. The mayor gave an address in which he described the battle to keep his board intact as “Perhaps the most important fight I have ever seen.” Lindsay said he was “appalled to discover, after passage of many civil rights bills, that many of the wonderful liberals are slightly doctrinaire, it appears....History has seen before established liberals not smart enough to see the importance of crucial fights. The result is that we are set back for many years.” Commissioner Leary went on the offensive against the PBA, putting himself in an

⁵⁰ Roy Wilkins. “Sly Campaign against Negroes.” *New York Amsterdam News* 15 Oct 1966: 6.

awkward position. Taking aim at the anti-review board campaign's major claim, Leary said, "The suggestion has been made...that the existence of a civilian review board reduces the effectiveness of the police and thereby threatens the safety of the people of New York," and then flatly stated, "This suggestion is totally without foundation." As commissioner, Leary could point out, "The review board has been in operation now for some three months. During that time there has been absolutely no discernible rise in crime, nor has there been any discernible reduction in arrests." FAIR coined a slogan to go along with the election: "Don't be a yes man for bigotry, vote no!" meaning a yes vote, in favor of destroying the board, was hand in hand with prejudice, while voting no would keep the board and promote understanding. All sixteen local branches of the NAACP in the city united to coordinate a campaign in favor of the board, committing to "hold meetings, distribute literature, make door to door contacts, utilize sound trucks and conduct a consistent educational campaign until Election Day, November 8."⁵¹

With only a month to go, Lindsay increased his campaigning to the point where it took over his other priorities and duties. The mayor was now spending nine hours a day, from 3PM until midnight, on the streets doing walking tours for the board, often met with such hostile shouts in white ethnic neighborhoods as "Go back to city hall," "Why do you always kowtow to the colored?", and "Talk in Bedford-Stuyvesant." Lindsay gave a Sunday morning address October 16th at St. George's Episcopal Church on 16th Street at Stuyvesant Square. Rector Edward O. Miller, the church's spiritual leader, began by arguing there is no conflict between religion and politics, saying "Everything is

⁵¹ Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 232; Sidney E. Zion. "Civilian Review Board." *New York Times* 11 Sep 1966: 241; Bernard Weinraub. "Leary Assails P.B.A. Accusations." *New York Times* 28 Sep 1966: 50; "NAACP Branches Map Review Board Fight." *New York Amsterdam News* 24 Sep 1966: 36.

political....You can't really be alive today as a religious person without constantly confronting the political." He then listed the church's heritage of outspoken righteousness on such issues as slavery, labor disputes, a woman's right to birth control and pacifism during World War II, asking his congregation, "Was that politics or religion?" Miller implored his congregation to support the board, for "The policeman, with screeching sirens, flashing red lights, handcuffs hanging from his belt, visible bullets and a gun, and the right to force one in humiliation apart from family and friends into a stationhouse about which horrible stories have been told, often seems the most frightening, visible omnipresent threat to the liberty of those who have no one to speak for them."⁵²

The mayor followed and thanked the rector and congregation for allowing him to speak, expressing his belief of the review board as a moral issue on which he had no doubt. Lindsay then explained how the board functioned, pointing out it had been accepting complaints, the "vast majority" from white New Yorkers, making investigations and holding hearings since July. The new CCRB, finding 85 percent of all complaints frivolous, had been deciding a higher proportion of the remainder in favor of the police than its predecessor had, giving Lindsay the opportunity to describe it as "the best protection and shield that a police officer could possibly have." In conclusion, Mayor Lindsay averred that the proposed charter amendment's wording would "virtually cut off your elected political leadership from any voice at all in the administration and performance control of our 28,000-man police force." If the anti-review board forces

⁵² Klein. *Lindsay's Promise*, 250; Bernard Weinraub. "Mayor Starts Sidewalk Tours for Review Board." *New York Times* 5 Oct 1966: 39; Bernard Weinraub. "Poll Favors Foes of Review Board." *New York Times* 14 Oct 1966: 37; "The Police Department's Civilian Complaint Review Board: Addresses presented at a Special Civic Service on Sunday morning, October 16, 1966;" 16 Oct 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

were successful, Lindsay warned people would look back years later and query, “How in heaven’s name did we permit this to happen?” The answer, said the mayor, would be “fear set in.”⁵³

The various groups trying to save Lindsay’s board were holding rallies and speaking engagements at a furious rate, trying to drum up support for the board however they could. Chief Inspector Garelik and Assistant Chief Inspector Sealy spoke at these rallies along with chairman of the city Commission on Human Rights, William H. Booth, Senator Kennedy, Mayor Lindsay and many others. Booth led several voter registration-themed marches through places like Bedford-Stuyvesant and Corona, Queens, as part of a concerted effort to get Puerto Rican and African American New Yorkers to register to vote. On Saturday, October 22nd, Lindsay appeared at five separate rallies between 4:15PM and 5:35PM, from 72nd Street up to 110th Street, with such figures as Congressman William Ryan, Councilman Weiss and several state senators and assemblymen. Senator Kennedy declared the board a national issue, as “The eyes of the country are focused on New York.” Should the board go down, “it will have a major effect throughout the country and will set back the cause of civil rights and progressive government.”⁵⁴

During this intensive campaigning, review board advocates were picking up additional supporters such as the National Maritime Union and small civic and

⁵³ “The Police Department’s Civilian Complaint Review Board: Addresses presented at a Special Civic Service on Sunday morning, October 16, 1966;” 16 Oct 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 1082, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁵⁴ “Your Crucial Vote.” *New York Amsterdam News* 1 Oct 1966: 1; “Booth Will Lead Voter March Sat.” *New York Amsterdam News* 8 Oct 1966: 27; Klein. *Lindsay’s Promise*, 254; Bernard Weinraub. “City Police Board Called U.S. Issue.” *New York Times* 13 Oct 1966: 1, 24.

neighborhood organizations. Eighty-six Catholic priests from Brooklyn and Queens signed a statement declaring their support for the board, proffering “The idea that the Civilian Complaint Review Board would make a policeman choose to disregard his professional oath as an officer of the law is an insult to his integrity.” Larger allies were still signing on as well, including the United Federation of Teachers and nine groups representing a total of 1.5 million Jews. The same week, lawyers for one of Roy Wilkins’ nephews, a fifteen-year-old boy from the Washington Heights section of upper Manhattan, filed a \$250,000 lawsuit against the NYPD for allegedly beating and kicking him while handcuffed in a police station, throwing him down stairs and having him forcibly committed to Bellevue Hospital’s psychiatric ward where he was bound to a wheelchair.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the PBA was conducting a truck tour with “go-go girls” dancing on the back to convince people to vote for their amendment. Spending several hours traveling through various sections of Brooklyn on October 23rd, the vehicle featured a combination of dancing women, Jewish folk songs, and speakers denouncing Mayor Lindsay. PBA President Cassese told a group of people “It’s a shame that with a stroke of the pen the mayor of the city of New York would nullify your police protection.” One campaign worker tried in vain to explain to an elderly man in a mixture of English and Yiddish that a vote of “yes” meant “no” on the review board. When the man was understandably confused, the worker inexplicably declared, “It’s that Lindsay,” blaming the mayor for the confusing vote the PBA had intentionally set up, where voting

⁵⁵ “Coney Island Group Backs Review Bd.” *New York Amsterdam News* 8 Oct 1966: 29; Malcolm Nash. “NMU Winding up; Backs Review Bd.” *New York Amsterdam News* 8 Oct 1966: 1; “S. Ozone Pk. Assn. Campaigns for Bd.” *New York Amsterdam News* 15 Oct 1966: 27; George Barner. “Youth Files \$250,000 Suit in Police Brutality.” *New York Amsterdam News* 22 Oct 1966: 1, 3.

affirmatively actually meant you were against the board. When a young woman favoring the board asked Cassese for “facts and figures” to support his claims, she was verbally assaulted as a communist and asked “Comrade, where’s your hammer and sickle?” One day prior, police had arrested a National Maritime Union official driving a pro-review board sound truck in the Bronx, claiming he had no permit, a charge the driver disputed.⁵⁶

The ICCACRB, with the PBA’s support, continued with its media blitz, curated by advertising executives at Cole Fischer Rogow, Inc., a prominent public relations company in the city. One one-minute commercial featured former police commissioner Murphy and Cassese speaking to the audience. Another was the film version of its earlier advertisement featuring the lone white woman emerging from the subway onto a darkened street. There was a third focusing on a post-urban uprising situation in the streets. There was also a series of ten-second spots with comments from New Yorkers “concerned with safety in the streets.” The campaign’s final television spot showed “hoodlum types (12 or 15) from the waist down, flashes of chains, tipping over ashcans, a gun for a second and a switchblade for a second. Not threatening any person, just a threat to the community.” This was from the company’s president, Arthur A. Fischer. Thirty advertising agencies and people involved with the industry took out a large advertisement in the *New York Times* excoriating Cole Fischer Rogow for producing the ad, with one executive declaring “this type of advertising has no business in the profession, if we are to be a profession.” FAIR, on the other hand, ran dry print ads using statistics such as the

⁵⁶ “Brooklyn Areas Toured by P.B.A.” *New York Times* 24 Oct 1966: 27; Maurice Carroll. “Police Halt Sound Truck Backing Review Board.” *New York Times* 23 Oct 1966: 85.

number of complaints dismissed and the fact that three policemen sat on the panel to explain why the review board was not destroying the city's police.⁵⁷

Less than two weeks before voters were to decide the issue, legal analysts pronounced the discovery of a "sleeper clause" within the PBA's amendment that posed a potential threat to basic democratic rights. While there had been two separate questions scheduled to be on ballot, one from the PBA and another from the Conservative Party, the Conservative Party successfully had its initiative removed so that voters would not have to vote on two similar amendments. The part of the PBA's measure in question read, "Neither the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, nor any other officer of the City of New York shall have the power to authorize any person, agency, board or group to receive, to investigate, to hear or to require or to recommend action upon, civilian complaints against members of the Department." The Association of the Bar of the City of New York, taking the unusual step of giving public position on an issue, claimed the language could "virtually insulate the Police Department" from city investigations into matters that were wholly unrelated to civilian review, such as bribery, corruption and other assorted illegal activities in which police had historically taken part. "The proposal," according to the lawyers' group, "could reduce the present powers of the Mayor, the City Council, the Commissioner of Investigation and the Commission on Human Rights to investigate civilian complaints against members of the Police Department in areas ranging from lax enforcement of traffic regulations to bribery, graft and corruption." The potential limits on power would be "wholly contrary to our

⁵⁷ Philip H. Dougherty. "Advertising: Civilian Review Board Fight." *New York Times* 18 Oct 1966: 58; Philip H. Dougherty. "Advertising: Review Board Foes Criticized." *New York Times* 8 Nov 1966: 53.

fundamental governmental principle of checks and balances.” Samuel I. Rosenman, the organization’s former president and special counsel to presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, offered, “Some aspects of the secret police methods of past and present totalitarian governments” were possible outcomes.⁵⁸

City Investigations Commissioner Arnold Fraiman, the man in charge of examining all allegations of bribery and corruption against the police and other city agencies, agreed, declaring the PBA was “asking the voter to build a wall of immunity around the police of New York – to grant them what is accorded no law enforcement body in the country, not even the F.B.I. or the C.I.A.” Senator Kennedy expounded upon the last part of Fraiman’s point, speaking of his experiences as U.S. Attorney General working extensively with the civilian leadership of the Department of Defense. As Lindsay put it, “We are no longer talking about complaints of brutality and discourtesy. We are speaking of the entire breadth of citizen grievances, including graft and corruption.” The normally composed mayor, already stirred, became even more emotional as he attested, “It is time for those who oppose the Civilian Review Board to decide whether they are nonetheless willing to go all the way – whether they are willing to let the Police Department of this city become a law unto itself.” The PBA, for its part, emphatically denied it had any such intentions, that it was only interested in wiping out the review board.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Bernard Weinraub. “Review Board Backers Accused of ‘Smear’ Tactics.” *New York Times* 25 Oct 1966: 37; Sidney E. Zion. “‘Sleeper Issue’ on Police Referendum Wakes Up.” *New York Times* 30 Oct 1966: E4.

⁵⁹ “Court Limits Vote on Police Board to P.B.A. Proposal.” *New York Times* 27 Oct 1966: 1, 52; Bernard Weinraub. “Bar Sees Scrutiny of Police Barred if the P.B.A. Wins.” *New York Times* 29 Oct 1966: 1, 30; “NYCLU Spearheads FAIR Campaign in Fight for Life of Civilian Review Board,” *Civil Liberties in New*

For all the effort those struggling to keep Lindsay's board intact exerted, they lost by a landslide. The hybrid Civilian Complaint Review Board was destroyed 1,307,738 votes to 768,492, a difference of nearly 540,000. Only in Manhattan did voters choose keeping the board, 234,485 to 168,391. It was a bloodbath in every other borough, with individuals going against the board by two to one or more. In Staten Island, it was nearly five to one. While some of the many voting districts within each section of the city voted for the board's continuation, the rest of the districts in each borough overwhelmed them. Manhattan had Central Harlem as well as East Harlem, the city's Puerto Rican center, and a high concentration of white liberals and progressives. Working-class and middle-class white ethnic Catholic residents comprised the majority of white New Yorkers in the city's outer boroughs, many of whom felt religious and class solidarity with the police. These residents also shared police officers' hostility toward men like Lindsay, seeing them as political elites who ruled the city from their privileged perspectives and favored racial and ethnic minorities, out of touch with the common white New Yorker. White ethnics perceived themselves to be under assault from progressives and closed ranks during the 1960s to repulse liberalism. These people would soon identify as part of Richard Nixon's "silent majority." It is also worth noting that many white citizens, particularly in Queens and Brooklyn, had been organizing against liberalism and civil rights for years. Parents and Taxpayers, the anti-integration group which had managed to claim half a million members within a year and a half of its March 1963 founding.⁶⁰

York; Sep 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 491, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁶⁰ Bernard Weinraub. "Police Review Panel Killed by Large Majority in City." *New York Times* 9 Nov 1966: 1, 23; "Tally of Votes for Governor, Statewide Offices, Police Review Board and Judges." *New York*

Lindsay, with the defeat weighing heavily upon him, gave a midnight press conference at Gracie Mansion, where he cited “emotion, misunderstanding and fear” as responsible for the board’s death. When questioned as to whether or not the decision was a rebuke of his leadership, the mayor was only able to get out, “I don’t know. I have no idea at all. It’s irrelevant.” Norman Frank, the man in charge of coordinating the PBA’s campaign, characterized its victory as “a mandate to create and pursue a meaningful program for the furtherance of understanding between the community and the police.” Frank said those who believed in either an independent review board or one of the hybrid versions should move on and “join hands in a citywide effort to promote cooperation and understanding at all levels.” Cassese saw “eight million winners,” referring to the number of New Yorkers, declaring “Thank God we saved this city.” As a *New York Times* headline professed the next day, “Board’s Defeat Elates Police, Saddens Negroes.” Though overly simplistic, it was also fairly accurate. New York’s African American voters had supported the board overwhelmingly, as did Puerto Rican voters. The article described “Bitter laughter, deep hurt, cynical shrugs, forebodings of violence” and “a feeling that once again the white man had turned his back on the black man” as sentiments widely held in places like Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant.⁶¹

The board was dead and the city had no recourse. Two weeks later, Commissioner Howard Leary appointed a new all-police board, including two holdovers from Lindsay’s

Times 10 Nov 1966: 32; “Harlem Went for Board, City Didn’t.” *New York Amsterdam News* 12 Nov 66: 1, 50. The white ethnic abandonment of liberalism in New York City is well documented. See Rieder, Siegel and Sleeper. Joseph Lelyveld. “Parents to Stage a Protest Today.” *New York Times* 12 March 1964: 26.

⁶¹ Michael Stern. “Board’s Defeat Elates Police, Saddens Negroes.” *New York Times* 9 Nov 1966: 23; Marilyn Johnson rightly argues that pure racism does not explain the review board’s crushing defeat. Issues of class, politics and religion, with the NYPD being more than 70 percent Catholic in the mid-1960s, played a significant part as well.

board, Franklin Thomas and Edward McCabe. The other three were all white men. The previous executive director, Harold Baer Jr., stayed on as well. Leary also appointed forty-five police officers, ranging in rank from those walking a beat to Assistant Chief Inspector Sealy, to fifteen advisory panels charged with reviewing reports and making recommendations to the renewed all-police board.⁶²

Conclusion

Lindsay and FAIR had little chance of victory. Though they had the editorial support of the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *New York Times* and every television station in the city that commented on the board, it did little for them. The PBA and Independent Citizens' Committee against Civilian Review Boards outspent them by a huge margin, started their campaign earlier, had a more focused message and were willing to engage in emotional appeals to fear and racism. They were much more coordinated and never wasted time with infighting. FAIR, however, was a motley coalition of groups that had often only uneasily gotten along in the past. Most of its money came from the NYCLU. Most of the groups in FAIR were fighting for something in which they did not even really believe. They wanted an independent board, but political realities forced them to struggle for Lindsay's board or have nothing. FAIR's campaign was based in logic, facts and rationale. Such efforts do not stand up well to raw emotion. The people trying to save the review board were on the defensive the entire time and even if they had been willing to employ unscrupulous tactics, what could they have really done, attacked the police and told people they should fear arbitrary violence? If

⁶² "Sketches of Members of New Police Review Board." *New York Times* 23 Nov 1966: 43; "Thomas, Jackson Stay with Board." *New York Amsterdam News* 26 Nov 1966: 1, 43.

some group desired to do so, the PBA could not have wished for more, providing justification for the constant slander of “cop-haters” as comprising the bulk of the board’s supporters.

What were those who voted against the board, many of who were working-class outer borough white people, voting for mentally? The police and law and order, as well as perceived class solidarity with the police. What were they voting against? Crime, communism, “cop-haters,” “minority groups with their whims and their gripes and shouting,” liberalism, Mayor Lindsay, Senators Kennedy and Javits, all of whom were men of rather substantial means, CORE, the NAACP, Jews, and so on. As for those casting their ballots to preserve Lindsay’s panel? They were voting for civil rights, progress, civil liberties, good government and fairness. They were voting against police excess, racism and conservatism. Those voting to destroy the board had far more motivation to do so and there were many more of them.

As Aryeh Neier, executive director of the NYCLU pointed out in the aftermath, “When the concept of race or civil rights attaches to a referendum, it cannot win.” While civilian review was a matter relevant to civil rights, it was much more centrally related to civil liberties. However, both sides made the referendum about civil rights. Those opposed to the review board tirelessly connected its existence to the advancement of the civil rights movement, which they portrayed negatively. FAIR and Lindsay also said the board was a civil rights issue. Though they meant it in a positive way and saw the continued progress of the African American civil rights movement as good, they failed to understand that they were confirming the PBA’s accusations. FAIR could point out that white New Yorkers filed most complaints, the bulk was dismissed and then less than 3

percent of those left were found against the officer in question, but this truth did not make much impact on opposed voters. By 1966, the civil rights movement had become a negative association for many white voters.⁶³

Most, if not all, civil rights legislation has come into effect without voter approval. If the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voting Rights Act were left up to the electorate, they would not have become law. Even in liberal New York City, voters would not come out and support an issue that both sides made a matter of black and Puerto Rican rights. African American New Yorkers voted 5:1 in favor of the board and Puerto Rican New Yorkers voted nearly 3:1. White people of Italian and Irish backgrounds voted against it in larger numbers and greater proportions. Jews voted 55 percent to 45 percent in favor of abolishing the board. The civil rights coalition among liberal whites, Jews and African Americans, while always tenuous, fell apart here. Mayor Lindsay saw this toward the end of the campaign when he began chiding liberals and questioning their beliefs, saying perhaps they were not so liberal after all. Now, Jewish New Yorkers could no longer be counted on as solid supporters of African American civil rights as they once had. The religious and civic organizations to which Jewish New Yorkers belonged spoke favorably of the review board, but the referendum was about much more than the review board. Jews too feared “crime,” with its implicit and overt connotations of blackness, and having made the transition from outside immigrant group to generally accepted as part of the “white” designation, were part of the intended target

⁶³ NYCLU Staff Meeting report; 14 Nov 1966; American Civil Liberties Union Records, The Roger Baldwin Years, Box 491, Folder 1; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

audience of the PBA's scare tactic advertisements. Why should they have been expected to act any differently than other white New Yorkers in the face of such hysteria?

This referendum revealed and fostered multidirectional racial resentment and hostility in the city that would only grow with time, explosively revealing itself two years later in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization saga. The review board's destruction represented white New Yorkers repulsing what they felt to be an attack on the basic function of the police force by African Americans and their white allies. More broadly, the outer borough white voters who defeated the review board were also repudiating liberalism, the upper class Manhattan politicians they perceived to be pushing it on them and the civil rights movement they saw as coercing undeserved largesse from liberals. Once African Americans won full legal equality following the Voting Rights Act in 1965, many white people, even those who had previously considered themselves supporters of the civil rights movement, saw no need for continued civil rights agitation, much less Black Power. Many northern urban white residents viewed continued struggles for housing, education and economic opportunities as attempts to take from them, and this perspective was certainly prominent in New York City, as Jonathan Rieder shows in his study of the Canarsie section of Brooklyn.⁶⁴ These residents were not sympathetic to the fact that African Americans had historically been denied access to the same economic and social structures that had allowed so many immigrant groups to achieve class mobility. Seeing liberals as lacking the ability and commitment to sufficiently address inequality, many black New Yorkers took an increasingly militant position to secure

⁶⁴ Rieder.

economic justice and security. Following the November 1966 referendum, racial hostility and resentment in the city intensified for decades.

Conclusion

Following the referendum, various organizations in favor of reformed civilian review regrouped, vowing to continue their fight. None found the strength to get a campaign going again, especially after such an exhaustive fight and a decisive loss. Some explored legal options, but to no avail. New York City would not have civilians sitting on a police review board until 1987, when the city council passed legislation that added civilians to the same three-person police commissioner board. In 1993, Mayor David Dinkins and the city council worked together to remove all police from the board and create a thirteen-person all-civilian panel, as it remains today. There has been nothing like the PBA's public campaign of fear in the 1960s against the now nearly twenty-year-old board.



Mrs. Elinor Wolfert watched as looters broke into her President Pharmacy and did three thousand dollars' worth of damage. Wolfert, one of two black women who owned a drug store in Brooklyn in 1964, said the looters had told her through neighborhood word-of-mouth they were sorry for damaging a black-owned business. She felt her ownership of the store had gone unnoticed since she opened it in 1952, with most residents assuming the whole time it was white-owned. Even though her store was trashed, with all windows and glass display cases broken, Wolfert was not bitter. She said what happened to her store was the result of "the kind of anger that has been building up for a long time. A

generation of youngsters not afraid of the white man has come along. And perhaps it feels it has nothing to lose.”¹

During the postwar period, civil rights activists from New York City and throughout the country, along with the international spotlight they shone onto racial inequality in America, forced the federal government to invalidate segregation at the legal level. Those actions, while substantial, did not address the issues African Americans faced in the urban North. Dislodging the racism and prejudice that had shaped daily life would necessitate much more than the absence of discriminatory laws. Black people in America needed concrete opportunities, and they were rarely forthcoming. Both the public and private sectors tended to oppose affirmative action once the concept emerged in the early 1960s, denouncing it as reverse racism. Unwilling to take or support further actions that would allow substantial numbers of African American New Yorkers to move beyond the social, economic and political confines they faced, both the city and white people of New York kept black New Yorkers where they were, all the while inner city conditions worsened. With government action and inaction having rendered the bulk of the people in New York’s black neighborhoods immobile, stuck in colonies of high unemployment, high rents and little reason to hope for a better tomorrow, James Powell’s death pushed thousands of people in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant over the edge. This was the ugliest manifestation of the urban crisis at this time, but there would be literally hundreds over the course of the decade. No simple “race riot,” these events demonstrated profound desperation that had been growing for decades.

¹ “Story of a Store Owner.” *New York Amsterdam News* 1 Aug 1964: 25.

New York's rebellions realized many people's fears, black and white. The deep sense of despair northern black urbanites felt was widely recognized throughout the media, politics and civil rights movement. Civil rights leaders and advocates had been predicting and warning of urban uprisings in the city for some time, especially in the previous year. Stanley Lowell, the white chairman of the City Commission on Human Rights told a television interviewer in May 1963 that all black New Yorkers, not just "extremists," desired the government to take immediate action to put life into the "legal papier-mâché" that was currently only serving as a façade of northern equality. If the government did not act, Lowell warned of certain urban unrest.² Two weeks later, the black executive director of the Urban League of Great New York declared its long favored strategy of gradualism to be dead, citing the need for civil rights groups to engage in a "crash effort to avert violence" in the city's streets. The Urban League asserted New York City "could never recover from [the] racial catastrophe" that was sure to result should the city fail to respond to civil rights organizations' increased pressure.³ In late June of 1963, a delegation of black leaders from Harlem met with Deputy Mayor Edward Cavanagh for two hours, aiming to impress upon him the seriousness of the social tensions that had been mounting in their community. Paying particular attention to high rates of unemployment and underemployment, the men told Cavanagh "if nothing is done to alleviate the Negro employment situation here, the dikes will break."⁴ African Americans in the urban North had no better place to go, leaving them with the options of fighting or giving up. They had reached the Promised Land and found this.

² Natalie Jaffe. "Negro Violence in North Feared." *New York Times* 27 May 1963: 19.

³ "Urban League Head Urges Swift Drive for Rights in City." *New York Times* 14 June 1963: 16.

⁴ Charles G. Bennet. "Negroes Here Ask a Job-Quota Plan." *New York Times* 25 June 1963: 1, 18.

Despite the city's long history of strong civil rights activism, black New Yorkers were worse off in 1964 than they were in 1945 and they knew it. Many hundreds of thousands of African Americans had recently settled in New York City after having departed the South to escape its physical, economic and emotional violence. They succeeded in that only to discover the slow misery and quiet violence of New York. We can see the effects of that clearly in the youthful character of the revolts. African American migrants' sons and daughters watched as their parents struggled in a new city with no place left to go. They saw the civil rights movement largely pass over New York. Most of their problems just got worse with time, and it seemed that there was nothing productive any of them could do about it. They grew up disillusioned, angry, bored and hopeless, living in the margins of American society.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, New York's African American population demonstrated an increasing exhaustion of patience with city leaders' action on civil rights issues. For years, activists, citizens and leaders had tried everything at their disposal to secure justice. Through mostly homegrown activism, they had gone to jail, fought in court, picketed, boycotted, attended countless meetings with elected and appointed officials, formed organizations, held rallies and more. By 1964, two decades of struggle had not even managed to maintain their social and economic positions. Black New Yorkers lived more segregated lives, went to worse schools and had bleaker economic prospects than they did at the end of the Second World War. Mayors had promised improvements time and again, but they did not come. The city's black residents needed action, not sympathy, but often only received the latter.

Though some of the most powerful black men in the country resided in New York, the organizations they headed had relatively little influence on the local movement. In 1964, the leaders of three of the “Big Four” national civil rights organizations resided in or near the city. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality’s James Farmer and the Urban League’s Whitney Young were all New Yorkers. They were preaching to the disaffected and jaded, those who understood that southern-style nonviolence in the urban North as a remedy against segregation, joblessness, unsafe neighborhoods and inequality was virtually irrelevant due to the deeply systemic and diffuse nature of northern segregation coupled with a lack of Jim Crow laws and a dearth of corybantic white politicians and police officials willing to play the role of arch racist. In short, there were few prominent sympathy-inducing issues civil rights activists could use to publicize their causes. The major civil rights organizations, operating under the belief that the country’s political system was generally good and just needed to right its wrongs, had little to offer to black northerners. The lack of issues to publicize also made it difficult for national organizations to force city leaders into action.

The rebellions revealed an ideological gulf between many local African American leaders and the citizenry of the city’s black neighborhoods. One stark moment indicating that times had changed came during a rally the morning after the upheaval began. While Marshall England, the head of Harlem CORE spoke, he referred to his audience as “Negro people.” Though using Negro to describe African American people was nearly universal in 1964, several in the crowd shouted out a correction – “We are black men, not Negroes!”, showing the city’s position on the cutting edge of black political

consciousness.⁵ Most black leaders issued repeated implorations for a cessation to the revolt, seeking to assure those who never paid them much mind in the first place that looting and fighting the police would only hurt civil rights. During the uprisings, civil rights workers and leaders went to the people and urged them to get off of the streets. Clergy read statements in their churches from politicians that pleaded for order and made promises of change. Representatives from national organizations that attempted to work within the liberal state were ignored, booed, shouted down, verbally abused and at the worse times, police had to rescue them. Not only were these spokespeople telling the participants what they were doing was wrong, but they also did not provide alternatives or ways to channel their frustrations.

People clamored for Malcolm X and turned to local militant leaders for guidance during the rebellions, those who contested the liberal state and advocated self-help and community-based action. Militants and nationalists offered a different path from the integrationist approaches of mainstream groups. They rejected gradualism and legalism. They demanded and did not ask. Like more moderate leaders, militants also discouraged chaotic rebellion, but not for its immorality or the potential damage to their organizations. Men like Jesse Gray and Edward Mills Davis were not necessarily opposed to fighting the police, but articulated a concern for the wellbeing of black people and the certain defeat that would come with doing so in an unorganized way. The appeal these men and their ideologies had to black New Yorkers would continue to grow throughout the decade.

⁵ Junius Griffin. "'Guerilla War' Urged in Harlem." *New York Times* 20 July 1964: 16.

The inability of integrationist civil rights organizations to build a support base in the North also has to do with the ways in which Cold War anticommunism eviscerated the progressive Left, especially true of the civil rights movement. In the decades following World War II, organizations could not cut their ties to communists, socialists and other radicals fast enough. Wholesale purges of ranks were common. Austere antiradicalism in this country severely limited the kinds of goals activists could seek while still being perceived as loyal or patriotic. As such, major organizations had to attenuate their goals, such as economic equality, or risk serious legal and financial problems jeopardizing their existences. Most were forced into seeking legal reform.⁶ It is important to note that integration-oriented civil rights groups were generally not fervent believers in the power of liberalism to fix racial injustice. Especially in New York in the 1960s, even the leaders of the major national organizations were not optimistic about working within the political system. They felt they had no other choice, as black nationalism was the alternative, which these leaders and their organizations rejected as destined to fail.

Analyzing the city's civil rights movement allows us to trace the local growth of Black Power. In doing so, we can see the concept did not come to New York from the South, but instead was an outcome of the local movement. Over and over, the city failed to adequately address civil rights activists' demands. By the early 1960s, black New Yorkers were facing declining fortunes in a time of national progress. Their expectations were rising, but their quality of life was not. It seemed integration-oriented activism

⁶ Branches of the NAACP were able to exercise some autonomy from the national administration, and Brooklyn CORE was essentially a renegade branch broadly viewed as too militant and demanding, but they were exceptions.

could not offer solutions to their problems. Frustrations with the lack of progress throughout the city's black communities produced both the rebellions and support for more militant voices.

New York City has a rich tradition of all-black community and civic groups. And while black nationalism always had a hold in Harlem, it was not the dominant ideology throughout the city's postwar civil rights movement. Black and white New Yorkers worked together on many of the local movement's campaigns. However, as the 1960s progressed, many black activists became disillusioned with interracial cooperation for a number of reasons. They felt white activists had a tendency to try to dominate organizations. White citizens, whose support black New Yorkers would need to succeed in integration, were becoming more hostile toward civil rights and more vocal in their opposition to the movement. The city's elected officials and political appointees, almost entirely white, had not been the supportive partners in the struggle for equality black New Yorkers needed them to be. Black New Yorkers began to reject interracial activism in greater numbers during the 1960s, with the civilian review board referendum campaign as the breaking point. To many black activists and citizens, the combination of the decisive defeat and the success of the PBA's racially coded campaign showed there was no future in working with white people.

White politicians and citizens during the mid- to late 1960s seized upon the nation's seemingly endless revolts and used them against the civil rights movement, claiming black leaders and citizens were orchestrating rebellions as means to extort undeserved services from government at all levels. These appeals succeeded in eliciting a burgeoning white public antipathy toward the civil rights movement that would greatly

contribute to its demise. This was no backlash though, as there was never majority white support for the civil rights movement.⁷ Some white people actively supported it, while many others simply tolerated it until they felt it had gone too far, which usually entailed forced integration, whether at the job site or their children's schools. At such points, the latent hostility many white people had toward their black fellow New Yorkers surfaced.

Politicians with presidential ambitions like Barry Goldwater and George Wallace, the Democratic governor of Alabama, extracted substantial political capital from the unrest that began in the summer of 1964. They accused liberal Democrats of having long been soft on crime, thus creating a breakdown of "law and order," a concept that Richard Nixon would ride into the White House four years later. These politicians successfully put Lyndon Johnson and other self-identified liberals on the run for many years after, dictating the terms of engagement, forcing them to fight defensive battles and prove that they were for law and order. Politicians and commentators spoke of crime waves, drug abuse, spikes in juvenile delinquency and an unraveling of the American moral fiber.

To combat these issues, law and order politicians from both major political parties promoted new laws, longer prison sentences, larger police forces and wider police powers. For example, New York State's 1964 "stop and frisk" and "no-knock warrant" laws, in the former case, empowered police officers to stop people on the street and search them on the basis of visual suspicion, rather than a criminal offense, while the latter enabled police to enter suspected premises of criminal activity without first announcing their presence. A decade later, once law and order had become a political

⁷ Arnold Hirsch shows this vividly in his account of Chicago, *Making the Second Ghetto*. Thomas Sugrue demonstrates the same fact in Detroit in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

axiom, the 1973 Rockefeller drug laws, named for New York's governor who championed them and signed them into law, established long mandatory minimum sentences for people convicted of drug offenses. Policies like these would come to define crime, punishment and the carceral state. The NYPD's stop and frisk program is a major topic of discussion today, still revolving around its disproportionate targeting of black and brown people, especially young men. To understand not just the 1960s but beyond, we need to understand New York in 1964.

In studying New York in the postwar period, we are able to see new aspects of police power. Looking at the review board struggle and the ensuing referendum, the political power the police were able to muster becomes clear. The PBA and its allies were able to deftly manipulate the issue into one of life and death, showing keen political acumen. They understood the extent to which many of the city's white residents resented the civil rights movement and its increasingly assertive tactics, as well as feared the growing threat of crime, typically from faceless black and Puerto Rican men. Playing upon this and running a barely cloaked racialized campaign, opponents of review board reform most importantly made the issue about black and white. Proponents also made the vote a civil rights matter, walking into the PBA's trap. In 1966, the PBA and its allies were able to easily defeat the will of the mayor, the police commissioner, several top police officials, two U.S. senators and a host of less powerful people.

Looking at the city's civil rights movement in the postwar period provides a fuller understanding of the limits of liberalism. In the city that elected celebrated progressive mayors like Fiorello La Guardia, Wagner and Lindsay, black people had many of the same social and economic problems as others did throughout the urban North. Liberalism

had fundamentally failed to adequately address substandard housing, housing discrimination, police brutality, educational segregation, employment discrimination, inadequate policing, price gouging, inflated housing prices, health issues and a host of other ills. Black New Yorkers had some of the strongest white political allies calling their city and state home, but their problems were as deep as anyone else's.

A large part of liberalism's failure to help black New Yorkers is its disinterest in addressing economic issues, such as financial inequality or loan policies. Without challenging banking practices, pay discrepancies, hiring and promotion policies or the abilities of unions to exclude whomever they wish, it was difficult to take effective steps to help the city's black residents. Volumes of open occupancy and fair hiring laws could never really begin to mitigate the host of problems African American New Yorkers faced. Shifts away from patronage to civil service exams permitted employers and the city to assert they engaged in race-blind hiring, with their whiteness of their workforces barely changed now a result of impartial tests instead of bigoted hiring. As long as black people were kept out of the lucrative construction jobs and the ability to pass them down to relatives and children, there was little hope for them to find remunerative work, as the schools they attended typically offered low-quality educations and most decent manufacturing jobs were either gone or on the verge of being so. As long as black people could not get the same mortgages white people got, they stood a poor chance of moving to a better neighborhood that stayed that way for long. As long as lending institutions refused to make loans that would place a black person in a white neighborhood, black New Yorkers would be stuck where they were, or be at the mercy of blockbusters.

The city's refusal to address economic inequality in the postwar period was a failure in one sense, but a victory in another. By successfully ignoring the economic underpinnings of black New Yorkers' troubles, city leaders helped to maintain the idea of America as a just and fair place for all, so important in this time of global ideological war against the USSR. With all legal barriers now removed, Americans of all colors could now compete fairly on the playing field of life. Those who were not successful had only themselves to blame.

Looking at liberalism's decline in the city reveals the rise of conservatism. White New Yorkers, especially white ethnics, had been evincing a growing hostility toward civil rights, African Americans and liberals throughout the 1950s and 1960s. White parents successfully protested against school integration, threatening violence should their children be forced to learn with black children. Police membership in the John Birch Society caused concern among many people, including two mayors. White plumbers assailed black and Puerto Rican plumbers with racial epithets for coming to work. Residents of Little Italy came out for several nights running to heckle and physically attack peaceful CORE demonstrators on public property. On the steps of city hall, police officers derided picketers supporting civilian review as communists and peppered them with racial slurs. Though these were actions of individuals, they represented a cross section of the city's white population throughout the five boroughs. The outcome of the civilian review board referendum, however, was an undeniable representation of the city's white population as a whole.

In casting their ballots to ban civilians from serving on the Civilian Complaint Review Board, white voters sent a number of messages. Politically, they repudiated

Mayor Lindsay, his liberal values, and his allies who shared them, including Senators Javits and Kennedy. They viewed these men as overly sympathetic toward black people and insufficiently concerned with white constituents' problems. These voters saw the antipoverty money Lindsay spent at the local level as wasted on those who did not deserve it and had not earned it, but instead coerced it through threats of continued upheaval. White residents of Queens and Brooklyn frequently heckled Lindsay along such lines while he was on walking tours to build support for his review board. White voters were also rejecting the civil rights movement, just as they used the referendum as a way to vote on Lindsay's ideals. Many white people in the city rejected any civil rights measures that went beyond establishing legal equality, such as forced desegregation or attempts to establish economic parity. They agreed with PBA president John Cassese when he said he was "sick and tired of giving in to minority groups with their whims and their gripes and shouting." With their votes to destroy the board nearly every black group in the city supported, white New Yorkers could show their solidarity with Cassese. By siding with the police, white voters also decisively put their support behind law and order, the PBA campaign's central thrust. Anxieties over rising crime rates in the city were growing intensely during the 1960s and the referendum provided New York's silent majority with a way to show their support for the law and order policies and the police who would be on the front lines of the battle for society. In 1968, many of these voters would comprise the sellout audience at presidential candidate George Wallace's Madison Square Garden campaign rally and give him their votes that November.⁸

⁸ Wallace won 5 percent of the vote in the Bronx, 4.3 percent in Brooklyn, 2.4 percent in Manhattan, 5.8 percent in Queens and 9.2 percent in Staten Island.

New York City is a prominent example of how serious the urban crisis had become by 1964. No movement could have hoped to combat something as massive and amorphous as deindustrialization. The New York civil rights movement already had its hands full with a multitude of issues, each requiring long-term effort and dedication. Trying to reform the police department and pressure companies to hire and promote black people in meaningful ways was difficult enough; trying to convince or force manufacturers to stay in New York while they stared at the allure of tax incentives and lower wages in other places was impossible. By the mid-1960s, deindustrialization, residential segregation, employment discrimination, educational segregation and a lack of effective progressive voices of protest had hammered New York's black population. Black New Yorkers fought with every means available to them, but the opposition was much stronger and well organized. Finding allies in power was exceedingly difficult. The problems black New Yorkers have faced between the 1960s and today are not a result of the failure of their activism, but a failure of those in power to listen to them.

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