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BLACK POWER, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH POLITICS IN DETROIT, 1966-1973

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation investigates the role of black high school youth in the development of the Black Power movement in Detroit. Specifically, it examines their efforts to institutionalize their vision of education as a means to achieving liberation. As white flight took shape in Detroit during the postwar period, the Detroit Public Schools' majority black student population encountered a majority white teaching force that resisted their very presence. Through walkouts, building takeovers, and the development of student organizations, black high school youth demanded Black Studies and political education seminars to carve out physical and intellectual space in the Detroit school system. And yet, historians know very little about these youths and their contributions to the long history of African American educational movements from slavery to freedom. This dissertation shows that in the courses they demanded, in the freedom and liberation schools they developed, and in their evaluation of the reformed curriculum, these young activists were architects of the Black Power movement's educational politics, which emphasized community control of schools.

Using archival research and oral interviews, this dissertation places Black Power studies in conversation with the History of Black Education to make two important arguments about the role of high school youth in social justice movements. First, it argues that black high school youth marshalled their experiences with racial segregation in the North and their engagement with the black radical intellectual tradition to produce the intellectual labor that made possible the institutionalization of culturally relevant and political education. Second, it shows that the pedagogical approaches of movement organizations contributed to young people's view of education as instrumental to multiple sites of struggle, including local movements around labor, welfare, and policing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I first began this study ten years ago as an undergraduate student, I could not have imagined the places it would take me and the people it would bring into my life. These individuals read early drafts of this work, served as mentors as I tried to find my voice as a scholar, opened their homes to me during my trips to the archives, and never let me forget the importance of telling this beautifully complex story. To my loving community of friends, mentors, and family, I say thank you.

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The life stories of several individuals have greatly enriched this dissertation. It is no small request to ask activists to recall their lived experiences, especially for a study that seeks to understand a history that is fifty years old. I am honored to have had the opportunity to interview the following people for this study: Shirikiana Aina, General Gordon Baker, Jeffrey Edison, Cassandra Ford, Gordon Fox, Debra Goodman, Michael

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I count myself blessed to have found several colleagues in History and in other graduate programs who helped me to endure the daily grind of graduate school. I will forever cherish Miya Carey, Jasmin A. Young, Kendra Boyd, Jesse Bayker, Enmanuel Martinez, Kaisha Esty, Ashleigh Lawrence-Sanders, Julia Katz, and Raffaella Fusco for their friendship and support. Our writing retreats and virtual and in-person late-night sessions served as a great source of external accountability. In this group, I was allowed to fail without judgement and pushed to persist when the process became overwhelming. In these spaces, new ideas found life.

I was fortunate to have found at Rutgers a community of graduate students who, socially and intellectually, brought joy to my graduate school experience. I am especially grateful for Julia Bowes, David Reid, AJ Blanford, Julia Bowes, Hilary Buxton, Beatrice Adams, Marlene Gaynair, Pamela Walker, Tracey Johnson, Shaun Armstead, Megan Wierda, Rachel Bunker, Daniel Manuel, Amy Zanoni, Luis Leyva. From the happy hours to practice job talks, their presence made a world of a difference.

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I am forever grateful to Gary Buschhorn, Dawn Ruskai, and Simona Turcu for helping me navigate the Rutgers bureaucracy. Seven years would have felt much longer without you.

Before I discovered such a great community of scholars and mentors, I learned the importance of community and service from my family. They sacrificed a great deal for me to pursue a doctoral degree and did so with unconditional love and support. Because of them, I learned to listen to the voices of those who have often been ignored in the historical profession. I learned that the work has to matter to my community, beyond accolades and recognition. I am so very happy to honor my father Robert Porter, Jr. who passed away nearly two months before my dissertation defense, and my mother Shirley Walker. And to my sister, Lucricia Porter, thank you for standing with me. In addition to my family and friends, I found solace at that time in *Telling Histories: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower*. It is a text I turned to many times throughout my graduate school career. And in those pages, I found the voices and experiences of black women who wrestled with personal and professional tragedies, but who remained steadfast in their endeavors to change the historical profession. In their words, I found the inspiration to persevere.

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## Introduction

On April 7, 1966, over 2,000 students walked out of the predominantly black Northern High School to protest the school administration's censure of a student editorial. When Charles Colding, an African American senior at Northern penned his article "Educational Camouflage," he sought to expose racial inequality in Detroit Public Schools. Colding charged that, "If the Negro in America is to ever gain what is often termed as true equality he must first gain true education." The practice of social promotion that left black students unprepared for college and the world of work troubled Colding because it normalized a substandard quality of education for black youth. Colding had cause for concern. According to the *Report of an Investigation: Detroit Michigan, A Study of Barriers to Educational Opportunity in a Large City*, more than 75% of Northern students in grades 10-B and 12-B scored below average in math, science, and reading. Even though Colding was building on a local, decade-long movement for racial equality in education, the white principal and chairman of the English Department, Arthur J. Carty refused to publish Colding's editorial. In protest of Carty's decision to reject Colding's editorial, students at Northern High School self-organized a school walkout. This action would spark several weeks of student dissidence and marked the beginning of six years of an organized high school movement in Detroit.<sup>1</sup>

Under the leadership of Charles Colding, Judy Walker, and Michael Batchelor, Northern High School's student protestors used the walkout to present several demands

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<sup>1</sup>National Commission on Professional Rights and Responsibilities of the National Education Association of the United States, "Report of an Investigation: Detroit Michigan, A Study of Barriers to Educational Opportunity in a Large City" (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, March 1967), 74-75. [https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\\_ED011705#page/n1/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/ERIC_ED011705#page/n1/mode/2up); Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 53 .

to the Board of Education. They sought the removal of both Principal Carty and a police officer who was known to harass black students and demanded that the school board provide information about the difference between the quality of education in Detroit and in the surrounding suburbs. Additionally, they demanded the creation of a joint student-faculty council. Finally, student protestors sought protection from the disciplinary measures for staging protests were sure to follow.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the student protestors, an equal education was only possible when the greatest stakeholders in the system, students, could have a voice in educational matters that shaped their daily lives.

To advance their vision of equal education, student protestors turned to a critical resource that had served the southern Civil Rights movement well, freedom schools.<sup>3</sup> Within two weeks of the initial walkout, boycott leaders had organized the Northern High Freedom School. Modeled after the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) freedom school, Northern's Freedom School gave student activists time to negotiate with the Board of Education over their demands. Dr. Karl Gregory, a black economics professor at Wayne State University and a graduate of Northern, agreed to serve as the principal of the school while St. Joseph's Episcopal church offered space for classes and student organizing meetings. Using contacts he made attending community meetings, Gregory organized the teaching force, seeking out individuals who could hold the attention of youth. On the first day of the school's opening, most of the teachers were

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<sup>2</sup> David Gracie, "The Walkout at Northern High," *New University Thought* 5 (1967): 13-28

<sup>3</sup> Several historians have examined the history and importance of SNCC's freedom schools. See Jon Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); William Sturkey and John Hale, *To Write in the Light Of Freedom: The Newspapers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Daniel Perlstein, "Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the Creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools," *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1990): 297-324; and Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

from SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), with very few from the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Teachers from Detroit's schools also taught classes at the freedom school once their formal school day concluded. The adults worked on the curriculum while the students met in class.<sup>4</sup> In organizing the freedom schools, Northern's high school activists had taken a strategic approach in their negotiations with the school board. Furthermore, they brought to bear the full weight of the local community on their struggles at Northern.

Although the board finally removed Carty from Northern High School, the most consequential outcome of the walkout was the Board of Education's decision to form the High School Study Commission (HSSC). The commission, which included 22 members from across Detroit, was charged with the task of examining the cause of unrest in the schools and finding ways to resolve racial inequality in education. More importantly, however, the walkout sparked six years of high school student organizing and protests, leading to structural changes in Detroit's schools. Looked at from hindsight, it marked the entrance of youth activists in the national debate over school desegregation and community control of schools.<sup>5</sup> It was debate that, in 1968, would explode most forcefully in New York City when the United Federation of Teachers struck in opposition to the newly formed community-controlled school board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gracie, 13-28.

<sup>5</sup> Detroit High School Study Commission, "Detroit High School Study Commission Report" (Detroit, Mich., June 24, 1968), Ernest Dillard Collection, Box 1, Folder 40, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; David Gracie, 13-28; Dr. Karl Gregory, "The walkout: symptom of dying inner city schools," *New University Thought* 5 (1967): 29-54; "1,000 in Detroit Go to Freedom School," *New York Times*, April 22, 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, see Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

While the success of the Northern High School walkout of 1966 was critical to the local movement for black education, the racial violence that characterized Detroit's racial geography significantly shaped high school youth's turn towards militancy. When the Detroit Board of Education changed school boundaries in 1967, Cooley High School, which was in Northwest Detroit, saw a dramatic shift in its student population. Overnight, the school's racial demographics shifted from predominantly white to 50% black and 50% white.<sup>7</sup> The policy exposed black students to racist attitudes of teachers and administrators, white vigilante violence by local communities, and a curriculum that reflected pervasive racist assumptions about black life and culture. Former high school activists Cassandra Ford and Gregory Hicks recalled some of the routine experiences that students faced. Ford explained,

When we got out of school we had to run to catch the bus, because you had Donald Lobsinger and his group, a band of people that came together in a van that would grab the kids and beat them up. They'd get out of the thing with slings and belts and things scaring you half to death. As a result of that, we started trying to stick together. It became, 'Okay we're going to go together to the bathroom. We're going to go together after school. We're going to meet, and then we're all going to run catch the bus.'<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Gregory Hicks recalled,

The big issue at Cooley was to get from Hubbell Avenue and Fenkell Avenue all the way down to cross over Wyoming. Because if we crossed over Wyoming at that time, we were considered to be in kind of like safe neighborhood. But between Wyoming all the way up to Hubbell, which was where Cooley was located, it was largely a white community. So, we oftentimes had to run home to escape being attacked in those situations.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Maidenber, "Cooley Swept by Racial Change," *Detroit Free Press*, October 5, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>8</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

These kinds of experiences helped to fuel student demands for a say in school governance and integration policies. While the student protests that occurred in 1966 focused on granting students a more prominent voice in educational matters, the next six years would see black high school activists expand their self-organization and self-mobilization to reshape the form, function, and method of delivery of education. The turn in the character of the student movement was not simply a consequence of the rise of the Black Power movement. It was also the result of poorly planned desegregation policies.

By the end of the tumultuous 1960s, students had led numerous school building takeovers and city-wide walkouts and rallies to demand that school officials make the curriculum culturally and politically relevant to their lives. In a city with a majority black student population, student activists argued, the curriculum, personnel, and funding patterns had to speak to their specific needs. In addition to organizing these heady moments, high school activists raised their concerns at local school board meetings and formed freedom and liberation schools as alternative educational spaces. And they were not alone. Students in other cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, and York, Pennsylvania also led the charge for curricular change and quality education.<sup>10</sup>

While the student movement largely addressed issues in education and viewed schools as a core site of struggle, its organizers saw their demands for quality education as intricately tied to broader freedom struggles. They were keenly aware of the local

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<sup>10</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!’: High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A.,” in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107-129; Dionne Danna, “Chicago High School Students’ Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966-1971,” *Journal of African American History* 88 (2003): 138-149; and Dwayne Wright, “Black Pride Day, 1968: High School Student Activism in York, Pennsylvania,” *Journal of African American History* 88 (2003): 151-162.

labor movement, the antiwar struggles, and the fight against poverty. They watched their parents attend community meetings about police repression in church basements and, in many instances, joined them. Over the course of seven years, the character of the black high school student movement in Detroit became more militant and more organized as it extended itself beyond the boundaries of the schoolyard to include community struggles over labor rights, recreation, and welfare.

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My dissertation, “Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit, 1966-1973,” examines this short history of black high school activism in Detroit. It is a study of black student activists who fought to institutionalize their own visions of quality education in an era where education professionals, reformers, and state leaders claimed to have the answers to racial inequality in public schools. Specifically, it examines the activists’ personal experiences, political ideas, and strategic political organizing to understand how they arrived at their vision of education as the path to liberation from inequality and white supremacy.<sup>11</sup> It asks the following questions: How did black high school activists arrive at their ideas about power and politics in the age of Black Power? What was the role of political education in the production of culturally relevant education? How did the state respond to student efforts to institutionalize their vision of culturally and politically relevant education? What was the role of liberatory education

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the conception of education as a path to liberation, see Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000).

beyond school walls? And finally, what does this history reveal about the production of black youth politics during the Black Power movement?<sup>12</sup>

I make three critical arguments. First, I assert that high school youth's development of and participation in alternative educational spaces where they developed historical knowledge constituted the intellectual labor that made the struggle for liberatory education possible. Second, I show that they used the intellectual rigor of the Black Radical tradition to fight for a form of education that was not simply celebratory, but instead, one that could teach them what they called "the art of living,"<sup>13</sup> or the art of combating systems of political, economic, and social oppression. And finally, I demonstrate how intergenerational relationships between black labor activists and high school youth in Detroit blurred the generational lines between the Old and New Left. Together, these analytic points reveal the production of black youth politics in Detroit and the role of high school youth in Detroit's culture of resistance. I suggest that black youth politics constitutes how young people understood the possibilities and limitations of formal levers of political power and informal political organizing. It includes the ways in which high school youth navigated systems of exploitation, exclusion, and repression and multiple sites of struggle. Moreover, black youth politics reflects the importance of local conditions and regional movement histories. In sum, this dissertation suggests that the fight for liberatory education produced black youth politics of the Black Power era.

## Historical and Historiographical Significance

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<sup>12</sup> For more on culturally relevant pedagogy, see Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 465-61.

<sup>13</sup> UHURU Freedom Association, n.d. "The Real Reasons Behind Northern's Black Student Demands," General Gordon Baker's Personal Collection, in the author's possession.

## **Black Radicalism in the Motor City**

In African American and urban historiography, Detroit is frozen in the summer rebellion of 1967. On the evening of July 23, 1967, officers from the Detroit Police Department raided the Blind Pig, an illegal after-hours bar, and ignited one of the most violent urban rebellions in American history. According to eyewitness accounts, police arrived at the bar on 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Clairmount with the assumption that they would find a dozen or so customers. However, they entered to find a party of more than eighty who had come to celebrate the return of two Vietnam war veterans.<sup>14</sup> In their accounts, partygoers charged that police officers used extreme force during arrests. Police harassment and brutality in this particular district was common, as was the ire of the African American community. By 8 a.m., nearly 3,000 people had gathered on Clairmount Avenue following hours of looting. In one instance, someone had thrown a trash can into the window of a local shop while another threw an empty glass bottle at the back window of a police car. That night, the long history of racial bias in the policing of poor and working-class blacks created a volatile situation that ended with more than 40 deaths and millions of dollars in property damage.<sup>15</sup> While the Detroit uprising was one of many to occur between 1964 and 1968, Detroit has come to represent the “urban crisis” in popular and academic discourse. If Detroit’s rebellious spirit has captured great scholarly attention, the city’s well-organized conservative base was equally arresting. As an offshoot of the conservative John Birch Society, Breakthrough formed in 1963 to advocate for an American victory in the Vietnam War, but shifted its focus to resisting

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<sup>14</sup> Otto Kerner et al., *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

the Black Power movement after the rebellion of 1967.<sup>16</sup>

Breakthrough's founder, Donald Lobsinger, pointed to two experiences that shaped this change in course. The first issue, he explained, was that the city had capitulated to Black Power activists when it decided to call in the National Guards only after 24 hours of rioting had taken place. The second experience, he revealed, was an encounter with Black Power activists at a Detroit city council meeting that was held after the summer rebellion. During this encounter, Lobsinger recalled, one of the local radical activists approached him and stated, "Lobsinger, don't even open your mouth because we're running things now." Lobsinger explains,

The rebellion changed course for us. [...] So I got the Breakthrough leaders together after that, and I said, 'We're changing direction right now from the Vietnam War to opposing the black power movement in the city of Detroit' and holding public meetings around the city, at halls, telling the people what happened at the city county building, who was behind these riots, what was likely to happen again, what they should be prepared to do if they did happen again.<sup>17</sup>

Within months, these meetings turned into action. In the spring of 1968, Breakthrough began organizing whites to purchase guns and to stockpile supplies for urban uprisings they were sure to come. In their minds, the city had failed to protect white families from rioters. Therefore, they estimated, whites had to defend themselves. Breakthrough was not simply an anomaly. According to the local press, "Many gun dealers reported unprecedented sales. There is some food hoarding. Police forces are piling up riot equipment, and laws and ordinances clearly aimed at riot suppression are being passed."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Donald Lobsinger, June 23rd, 2016," *Detroit 1967 Online Archive*, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/287>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> George A. Nikolaieff, "'White Racism': Ghetto Violence Brings Hardening of Attitudes Toward Negro Gains-Detroit Area Typifies Trend; Fearful Suburbanites Buy Guns, Support Tough Laws; Some Groups Work for Calm," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

By 1969, Lobsinger would use every opportunity he could to resist Black Power activists who, he charged, were communists seeking to take over the city. This ire extended to high school students and school desegregation. In the spring of 1969, Lobsinger attended a parents' meeting to protest school integration at Finney High School and spent more than an hour urging white parents to join the organization and to resist "liberal-communists."<sup>19</sup> For whites of Lobsinger's ilk, the rebellion represented a shift in the balance of power that favored the emerging black radical movement. It was a shift they had to resist.

Historians seeking to revise the "urban crisis" thesis have produced significant local histories of Black Radicalism in Detroit. For decades, social scientists, journalists, and the first wave of urban historians claimed that the rebellion of 1967 spurred the downfall of a once prosperous city. In this narrative, the rebellion caused the demise of public education in Detroit, the hyper-segregation of its residential communities, and the mass exit of whites and jobs to the suburbs that has shaped the city since the 1970s. Recent scholarship has challenged this narrative as revisionist historians locate the origins of the urban crisis in the postwar period and have identified the significant role of structural racism and class inequality in the making of the crisis. Building on Black Power studies and social history, other historians have examined the dynamic radical organizing that emerged out of the rebellion. For scholars and the broader public, Detroit has come to symbolize the limits of liberal reform and the possibilities for grassroots organizing.

This burgeoning historiography stresses the significant role of black radical labor

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<sup>19</sup> "C. Rassi to Field Division," June 9, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 48, Folder 13, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

activists in the development of the Black Power movement. These narratives largely examine the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. As an independent black labor union, the League emerged out a long movement of Black Radicalism in Detroit which included Black Marxist-Leninists and Black Nationalists. Formed in 1969 by auto workers, former campus activists, and other community members, the League also had a significant presence in local educational politics. While the League's genealogy offers a window into the diversity of black radical thought in Detroit, very little is known about its student component, the Black Student United Front (BSUF). In *Detroit I do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*, scholars Marvin Surkin and Dan Georgakas, offer a brief description of the BSUF while focusing heavily on the adult executive board of the League.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, it provides a narrow understanding of the intergenerational dynamics that shaped Detroit's Black Power movement. "Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit, 1966-1973" examines this relationship to reveal the ways in which Detroit's local movement blurred the lines between the Old Left and the New Left. It illuminates a history of youth activism where differences in ideological commitments created friction among black youth activists while similarities bridged generational divides.

Surkin and Georgakas not only miss the importance of adolescent activists in the League's movement, but they also fail to explain the Black Nationalist tendencies that drew the students into the organization's orbit. In his review of *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, former League member and Black Studies scholar Ernest Mkalimoto Allen revealed this insight when he charged the authors of whitewashing the League's history.

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<sup>20</sup> Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge: South End, 1998).

By focusing on the Marxist-Leninist faction, Allen asserted, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* painted an unfavorable picture of the organization's Black Nationalist advocates. As Allen explains, the League's predecessor, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) emerged with a Black Nationalist energy even though the League's executive board identified itself as Marxist. Allen writes, "Ironically, though the LRBW (through its top leadership) widely projected itself as a Marxist organization, such categorizing had little to do with the concrete political sentiments of the rank and file." Those who studied Marx did not always do approach theory out of a deep philosophical commitment, but in the spirit of "political correctness of the Executive Board."<sup>21</sup> However, my dissertation argues that the League's work with the BSUF reveals its Black Nationalist roots. By examining the students' underground newspaper, the *Black Student Voice*, reading lists for the League's political education classes, and the curriculum for the BSUF's freedom school, the importance of Black Nationalism in the League's community struggles becomes evident.

Focusing on the Black Student United Front also disrupts the view that the League's out-of-plant activities were "helter-skelter" community programs. As a case in point, Ernest Allen explains

[...] the proliferation of offices and activities of the LRBW [League of Revolutionary Black Workers] throughout the Detroit Metropolitan area [...] was, at the same time, a series of helter-skelter operations which often drained the organization of precious human and financial resources.

He continues,

In the worst cases, such activities assumed the form of purely personal projects, where individual Executive Board members appeared to be carving out semi-independent organizational fiefdoms. [...] To outsiders the operation appeared

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<sup>21</sup> Ernest Mkalimoto Allen, "Detroit, I Do Mind Dying: A Review" in *Radical America* vol. 11, no. 1 (1977), 72.

quite impressive; rank-and-file insiders often saw it as an organizational and bureaucratic nightmare.<sup>22</sup>

Placing the students at the center of the League's story shows that the student organization was indeed one of the League's more successful out-of-plant operations. The students published dozens of issues of its student paper, institutionalized political education seminars at one of the high schools, and organized a citywide high school movement. And they acknowledged the great deal of help they received from League members including General Gordon Baker, Jr. and Marian Kramer.

Urban historians Heather Ann Thompson and David Goldberg have offered more nuanced histories of Black Radicalism in Detroit. While Thomas Sugrue focused on the structures of inequality that produced the urban crisis in Detroit, his study omitted the local resistance movement that posed a challenge to these structures. Thompson's urban history successfully answers the question Grace Lee Boggs' posed in her review of Sugrue's study, "Where are the people?" in *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern Urban City*.<sup>23</sup> In an effort to push to the fore the voices of black militants who were conspicuously silent in Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Thompson examines the rich tradition of black labor radicalism in spheres of city politics and union organizing. According to the author, black radicals expanded their sphere of influence beyond auto factories to include schools and churches by addressing the needs of the black community at large. In highlighting the diversity of issues that mattered to activists

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. and Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge: South End, 1998) have also made this argument.

<sup>23</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Beth Bates, Timothy Bates, and Grace Lee Boggs, "Where are the People? Review Essay on Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*," *The Review of Black Political Economy* 27, no. 4 (2000): 13-26.

across the city, Thompson opens up space for a discussion of how young people, as the inheritors of “Detroit’s civic future,” viewed police brutality, educational reform, and economic independence as political struggles that were inextricably linked.<sup>24</sup> “Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit, 1966-1973” utilizes Thompson’s focus on city politics, a major feature of urban history, to illuminate the impact of student activism on local politics.

If Thompson offers a rich story of the complex nature of black labor radicalism and civic activism, David Goldberg provides a conceptual framework – “community-based labor activism” – that elucidates the complexity of Black Radicalism in Detroit and the place of high school activists in the League’s movement. In “Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the ‘Short Black Power Movement’ in Detroit,” Goldberg illustrates how the League’s break from a

shop-floor only politics [...] redefine[d] Black Power into a revolutionary black working-class movement that connected black workers’ struggles to ‘community struggles around housing, welfare rights, and community control of schools [...].’<sup>25</sup>

Goldberg argues that the League’s entrance into community organizing signaled a new kind of labor politics that pivoted on community organizing. The group’s Black Student United Front, Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC), and in-plant organizing all reveal the nature of black labor radicalism and as well as conceptions of Black Nationalism in post-rebellion Detroit.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. and Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> David Goldberg, “Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the ‘Short Black Power Movement’ in Detroit,” in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 90-111.

Although studies published by scholars like Thompson and Goldberg offer refreshing narratives that focus on “the people,” first-hand accounts from former activists unveil the inner lives of movement participants. The works of former student activist Gregory Hicks, for example, demonstrate the rich narratives that emerge from unpublished first-hand accounts and oral histories. In his masters’ thesis, Hicks’s explicates the intergenerational nature of the League’s organizing efforts in “The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and Detroit’s Black Student United Front: Social Exchange and Leadership Development, Select Interviews with Members of the Black Student United Front.”<sup>26</sup> He confirms that the League’s development of Detroit’s black youth leaders was vital to the persistence of the organization, and ultimately, the movement. High school students attending the League’s political education classes and freedom schools studied political leaders and theoreticians like Amílcar Cabral, Karl Marx, and James Boggs, figures that had yet to appear in school lectures or textbooks. While Hicks offers a rich narrative, he does not examine the experiences of the BSUF’s female activists. Such a gap serves as an opportunity to examine the ways in which black girl activists made sense of Black Power. “Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit, 1966-1973” expands Hicks’ story as it sheds light on the ways in which gender shaped black girls’ experiences in the movement as well as their ideas about politics, power, and education.

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Hicks, 2009, “The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and Detroit’s Black Student United Front: Social Exchange and Leadership Development, Select Interviews with Members of the Black Student United Front.” *Master’s Thesis*, Wayne State University.

## **Black Power Studies and Local Histories of Black Radicalism<sup>27</sup>**

While the historical scholarship on the Black Power Movement and Black Radicalism have grown immensely over the past decade, the role of black high school activists in the development of these phenomena remains understudied. Black high school youth across the country led massive student walkouts, building takeovers, and rallies, often appearing in headlines in national and local newspapers. According to historian Gael Graham, “the National Association of Secondary School Principals reported unrest in 59 percent of responding high schools and 56 percent of junior high schools.”<sup>28</sup> Despite the significant presence of adolescent activists in multiple social movements of the era, scholars know very little about these young people and how they arrived at their ideas about power, politics, and education. Without a nuanced understanding of black high school activism, scholars will have a limited view of the Black Power movement’s legacy and the young people who made multiple sites of struggle for Black Power possible. Using the tools of social and intellectual history, “Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit, 1966-1973” makes this critical contribution to Black Power Studies, the historiography of local Black Radicalism, the History of Education, and the history of childhood and youth.

Black Power Studies emerged out of a scholarly interest in expanding academic and popular understandings of the movement and its diverse politics. Largely hoisted upon the shoulders of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPPSD), the meta-

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<sup>27</sup> Local black power studies largely draw on the rich body of social movement historiography. I would also add Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: The University of Berkeley Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Gael Graham. *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press), 2006, p. 5.

narrative of Black Power indicted the movement of rampant sexism, nihilistic attitudes, and of sabotaging the strides made by civil rights activists. In recent years, however, revisionist scholars have published studies of Black Power that map the full complexities of the Black Panther Party and have examined the multiple meanings of Black Power at home and abroad. Scholars have integrated women and youth into these histories. Historians of Black Power and Black Radicalism turned to histories of black campus activism as the dominant means of student organizing. This scholarship has pushed historians to address the ways that youth leadership helped to form and sustain social movements. The works of Donna Murch, Ibram Kendi (Rogers), and Martha Biondi have contributed to this recent shift in focus. In *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland California*, Murch argues that black youth's experiences with secondary schooling, institutions of higher education, and carceral spaces shaped the emergence of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California. Murch's conceptual framework – the survey of black youth's experiences within these institutions – encourages scholars to address young people's lives inside and outside of the classroom to understand how college students shaped Black Radicalism.<sup>29</sup> My dissertation deploys this framework to analyze high school youth's experience with political repression and support in multiple spheres of public life. It uses Murch's framework to examine how confrontations with law enforcement, inadequate housing, and educational institutions – in tandem – shaped black high school students' commitment to Black Radicalism in Detroit. Furthermore, it expands Murch's focus on the forerunners of Black Power by including the next generation of black radical

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<sup>29</sup> Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2010;

activists as historical actors.

If Murch's local study offers a micro-level analysis of Black Radicalism, Kendi (Rogers) and Biondi provide a national exploration of student activism on college campuses. In *The Black Campus Revolution*, Biondi argues that students moved to the forefront of the national Black Freedom movement while transforming higher education in the process. Likewise, Rogers' *The Black Campus Movement* reveals how black college students shaped the racial reconstitution of American universities.<sup>30</sup> While Murch, Biondi and Rogers address black student activism off-campus, they focus on the relationship between black college students and the black community at large, leaving the discussion of one important segment of the population – high school students – quite limited. To fully understand the political work and legacy of the Black Campus Movement, scholars must consider the relationship between campus activists and the high school students who would go on to fill their ranks years later.

My dissertation also responds to the social movement historiography that addresses education as a site of struggle for Black Power. Jeanne Theoharis' "'W-A-L-K-O-U-T!': High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A." work provides an example of what a Black Power study of high school activism might reveal about the nature of Black Power. According to Theoharis, "Looking at the political activism of high school students provides a crucial – but understudied – window into the character and direction of the black freedom movement." Theoharis' major contention is that examining high school student's efforts reveals the "everyday view of Black Power

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<sup>30</sup> Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: The University of California Press), 2012; Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan), 2012.

itself.”<sup>31</sup> While this study utilizes Theoharis’ focus on the everydayness of youth activism in schools, it captures students’ ideological commitments which Theoharis and others have not analyzed. It expands Theoharis’ research by studying students’ political philosophies. Furthermore, it investigates what their political ideas might reveal about their visions of Black Liberation.

As the only book-length national study of student activism in high schools that addresses young people’s engagement with multiple social movements, Gael Graham’s *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* sheds light on the goals, tactics, and impact of students’ political organizing. However, Graham’s attention to multiple national movements offers a piecemeal understanding of the local character of these movements. In Graham’s brief mention of dozens of cities, the author simplifies the nature of black student activism by addressing one or two forms of student protest while she obscures the complex web of ideas that circulated on the ground. As a case in point, in focusing on one strand of Black Nationalism, specifically Black Cultural Nationalism, Graham provides a limited conception of Black Revolutionary Nationalism.<sup>32</sup> “Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics in Detroit” will account for the multiple strands of Black Nationalism.

Local and national histories of Black Radicalism have also made space for discussions of black women’s leadership in social movements. They have revealed the contributions black women made to struggles for welfare rights, economic justice, and

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<sup>31</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!’: High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A.,” in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107-110.

<sup>32</sup> Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest*, 1 edition (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

labor.<sup>33</sup> During the electrifying years of the Black Power movement, black women's activism often functioned as the principal contribution to the life and work of national and local black social justice organizations. Indeed, female members of national black power groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party contributed to the production of organizational literature, worked to find resources for children's breakfast programs, and often did the footwork it took to grow their organizations' base.<sup>34</sup> But women in local, lesser well-known black power organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers have also contributed to this long tradition of black women's activism. As Marian Kramer, one of the League's best-known female organizers explained in a 1991 interview,

A lot of us got pulled into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and were its backbone but male supremacy was rampant and we never got proper credit. We were always in the streets, fighting urban renewal, organizing against slum landlords, forming tenants' unions, protecting people from police brutality, and so forth.<sup>35</sup>

While scholars have certainly taken historical studies of the Black Power Movement, black labor, and women's activism in fresh and exciting directions, the voices of League women who were fighting "in the streets" remain conspicuously silent. My dissertation, however, reveals the role of black women in educational movements and as mentors of black high school activists.

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<sup>33</sup> Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed An Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robyn Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); and Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Peniel Joseph, *Waiting til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Marian Kramer, *Detroit Lives*, ed. Robert Mast (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 103.

## History of Education

Despite the growing interest in black educational activism, Barry Franklin's *Community, Race, and Curriculum in Detroit* is the only book-length study that takes seriously black student activism in Detroit. Franklin argues that the Northern High School student walkout of 1966 was a historic moment for community building in postwar Detroit. Since Franklin's study focuses on the year 1966, his work does not sufficiently explore the influence that the Rebellion of 1967 might have had on black students.<sup>36</sup> And although educational historian Jeffrey Mirel does offer a treatment of black student activism in *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-1981*, he characterizes the Black Student United Front and several other black radical groups as a sore for the education movement in post-rebellion Detroit. Mirel argues,

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, so many groups sought to impose their particular orthodoxy upon the schools that the true function of public education – the mastery of sufficient knowledge and skills to assume the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship – was lost.

According to Mirel, black radicals and the white working class abandoned the movement for quality education to fight for “larger political and social agendas” instead. Mirel's view of educational struggles as separate from “larger political issues” limits his ability to consider that for the black community, education was inherently political.<sup>37</sup> My dissertation revises Mirel's interpretation of black educational activism. It takes the position proposed by educational historians, that education for black Americans has historically functioned as a tool for liberation. This conceptualization of black education

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<sup>36</sup> Barry Franklin, *Community, Curriculum, and Urban School Reform* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1993, p. 369.

presents a revision to Mirel's interpretation of black student activism because it sees the fight for quality education as a part of a larger struggle for Black Liberation. By focusing on the students themselves – what they wanted and how they determined to get it – this work reveals the ways in which students fought to make the form, function, and method of delivery of black education culturally and politically relevant to their lives.

Although histories of educational activism in Detroit are quite limited, more recent scholarship has placed a laser focus on other local educational movements, suggesting that the time is ripe to reconsider Detroit's struggle. For example, educational historians Dionne Danna and Dwayne Wright answer Graham's call for local studies of student activism. Danna's "Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966-1971" details the diverse ways that Chicago's Black high school students organized to demand that the Chicago Public School system improve the quality of education for Chicago's youth. Like other schoolchildren across the country, they demanded that school boards increase the hiring of black faculty and administrators, offer school curricula that included the history and culture of blacks, and give students and communities a greater input in matters of school affairs. The students came to affirm their will to act through walkouts, boycotts, and efforts to organize a citywide student organization. Dwayne Wright's "Black Pride Day, 1968: High School Student Activism in York, Pennsylvania" examines the efforts of black students at William Penn High School to memorialize Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after his assassination. Wright's focus on the "spadework" required by students to plan King's memorial illuminates schoolchildren's ability to organize, and to work methodically. Furthermore, it shatters

the myth that students, by virtue of their youth, were incapable of such a feat.<sup>38</sup> Like Theoharis, Danns and Wright largely address high school students' actions, and not their ideas. To fully understand the strategic approach high school youth took to organizing in schools, scholars must address the ideas they brought to bear on their activism and visions for a more relevant education.

Historians of education and social movements have expanded the scholarly focus on activism to include social movement pedagogy. Broadly defined, social movement pedagogy constitutes a movement's teaching practice and philosophy. In the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, activists and educators provided alternative educational spaces that taught organizing strategies as well as reading, writing, and arithmetic. During the Civil Rights movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) established freedom schools in the South. In subsequent years, black power activists organized liberation schools in the North and in the West while activists in the women's liberation movement created consciousness-raising groups. In "'Live the Truth': Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Movement for Freedom and Liberation," Daniel Perlstein argues that SNCC's freedom schools and the Black Panther Party's liberation schools best represented "the pedagogical ideals of the African American struggle for social justice."<sup>39</sup> The trends in each movement's pedagogical approaches, he explains, followed the trajectory of African American politics. African Americans' beliefs in liberalism shaped SNCC's freedom schools while the BPP's

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<sup>38</sup> Dionne Danns, "Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966-1971," *Journal of African American History* 88 (2003): 138-149 and Dwayne Wright, "Black Pride Day, 1968: High School Student Activism in York, Pennsylvania," *Journal of African American History* 88 (2003): 151-162.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Perlstein, "'Live the Truth': Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Movement for Freedom and Liberation" in *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism*, eds. Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009). 137.

liberation schools reflected pessimistic views about the project of American democracy. He suggests that SNCC was concerned about teaching self-discovery and believed that people's experiences could reveal to them the "nature and the promise of American society."<sup>40</sup> While the freedom schools did not critique society, he argues, it demonstrated to black people their power to make social change. By the late 1960s, Perlstein states, movement leaders did not trust that blacks could arrive at an understanding of American society on their own. Conditions had become too repressive: police brutality, murders of activists, and white vigilante violence. This oppression discouraged black activists from seeking to achieve the liberal vision of America. He writes, "A focus on self-discovery and self-expression among the voiceless was replaced by a desire to articulate a critique to the oppressed."<sup>41</sup> For these activists, white supremacy was so embedded in American life and culture that they did not feel "that Black students could draw from their American experience an understanding of their real needs, desires, or identity."<sup>42</sup> But once Black Panther women took over operations of the liberation schools and created the Oakland Community School (OCS), they discarded this pedagogical approach. The Panthers' new approach was a return to integration and liberal vision of education. Perlstein argues that the Panthers' made their greatest contribution to African American educational thought during the later years of OCS.

My dissertation revises this declensionist narrative. These studies, in large part, have directed scholarly attention to SNCC's freedom schools and the Black Panther Party's liberation schools. My dissertation, however, expands the scholarly focus to

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

include the pedagogical approach of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and local student groups. Additionally, it examines the inner lives of the students who attended local liberation schools as well as the after-school curricula produced by lesser-known groups like the Black Teachers Caucus. The inclusion of such organizations offers a view of the Black Power movement's pedagogy and illuminates the ways in which young people viewed the movement as critical to their own self-discovery. Whereas previous studies have surveyed movement pedagogy through the perspective of adults, and the curriculum, the dissertation turns to the young people who attended these alternative educational communities. In taking this approach, this history unearths a narrative that moves beyond students' rote memorization of Black Panther sayings and songs to address their critical engagement with readings from figures like Amilcar Cabral and Malcolm X.<sup>43</sup> This approach turns the freedom and liberation schools into sites where students developed the intellectual labor and historical knowledge that made the institutionalization of culturally and politically relevant education possible.

More recent scholarship has expanded the focus on social movement pedagogy to include the voices of educators and students. For example, Jon Hale's *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* reveals the ideological debates that were at the core of the Civil Rights movement, especially in regard to whether or not desegregation was the means through which black Americans could achieve quality education. While Perlstein suggests that SNCC's freedom schools

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<sup>43</sup> For more on movement pedagogy, see Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel Perlstein, "Freedom, Liberation, Accommodation: Politics and Pedagogy in SNCC and the Black Panther Party," in *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition*, eds. Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Strickland (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 75-94.

did not critique society, Hale argues otherwise. By focusing on the students who attended the freedom schools, he illuminates the ways in which social movement pedagogy politicized black high school youth in Mississippi.<sup>44</sup> However, no such study exists for the Black Power movement's pedagogical approach. While Russell Rickford's *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* examines black radical social movement pedagogy, he does so from the perspective of adult educators. In his work, he argues that demands for culturally relevant education generally followed two trends: one relied on "contributionism," or the demand for courses that acknowledged the contributions of black Americans to narrative of American progress. The second strand, he explains, constituted the Black Nationalists who "saw the study of black life and history as a way to forge an African-American personality fully committed to political and cultural autonomy."<sup>45</sup> Yet, when historians bring the voices and written sources of high school youth into the narrative, a third conception of culturally relevant education is rendered legible. It is a conception of education that teaches "the art of living,"<sup>46</sup> or in other words, how to navigate and resist systems of oppression and exclusion that previous generations of black Americans had to endure. As sources produced by students reveal, some high school activists possessed a vision of education as a means through which they learned *how* to struggle. And more importantly, these sources reveal that high school youth engaged with the works of Karl Marx, Mao Tse Tung, and other radicals to make sense of their coming of age stories.

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<sup>44</sup> Jon Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Rickford, 49.

<sup>46</sup> UHURU Freedom Association, n.d. "The Real Reasons Behind Northern's Black Student Demands," General Gordon Baker's Personal Collection, in the author's possession.

“Black Power, Education, and Politics” expands scholarly conceptions of social movement pedagogy. Whereas Black Power studies and histories of educational activism have treated freedom schools and liberation schools as core sites of movement education, my dissertation reveals the role of familial networks, movement and religious institutions, the street corner, radical educators, and popular culture in the construction of the Black Power movement’s pedagogy. By looking at the other half of this history, and not just the curriculum, a different narrative becomes possible, a narrative that does not solely rely on a vision of social movement pedagogy as a form of indoctrination. But instead, as a movement that provided students with analytical tools to do the work of liberation, including aiding the development of Black Power and culturally relevant education.

While the history of education and Black Power studies had yielded rigorous scholarship that places the curriculum and pedagogy at the center of educational activism, the fierce repression students encountered in schools remains understudied. Clashes between local police departments, junior high and high school students, parents, and teachers were all too common at student protests. And in many instances, law enforcement’s extreme show of force – the use of bats and other weapons – escalated tensions. My dissertation contributes to the history of black educational activism by addressing the ways in which high school youth carried the burden of law enforcement’s criminalization of high school activism. It also offers an analysis of high school activists’ alternative visions for public safety. It brings to bear the emerging scholarship on the carceral state to understand the politics of race and public safety in students’ confrontations with law enforcement. While the recent scholarship on the carceral state has largely addressed how state institutions contributed to the rise of the mass

incarceration, this study reimagines the roots of this phenomenon from the perspective of black students and their communities. Interpreting this history from the perspective of black adolescents reveals the alternatives for public safety they envisioned and struggled for during the ascendancy of the War on Crime. My dissertation draws on Heather Ann Thompson and Elizabeth Kai Hinton's work on black youth and the carceral state to understand student resistance to schools as sites of the carceral state.

### **History of Childhood and Youth**

"Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics" also builds on and utilizes the analytical tools of the emerging field of the history of childhood and youth. It expands the field's focus on youth dependency and youth's questioning of adult authority to demonstrate how intergenerational organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers blurred generational lines. It shows that high school youth were much more concerned about the shared ideas than differences in age. Furthermore, the recent focus on the history of black girlhood creates space for an important analysis of how gender, age, and race shaped black youth's experiences in the Black Power movement. Building on the works of LaKisha Simmons, Marcia Chatelain, and Rebecca De Schweinitz, my dissertation engages with age as a category of historical analysis.

In *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*, Simmons uses cultural geography to explore the lives of black girls who came of age in the segregated South.<sup>47</sup> My dissertation uses Simmons' focus on geography to interpret Detroit's racial geography and the racial violence that was associated with

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<sup>47</sup> LaKisha Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

segregation as a source of experiential knowledge that shaped young people's understanding of and engagement with educational policies. Specifically, it conceptualizes high school youth's experiences with racial violence in schools as a source of knowledge that shaped their demands for community control and their views on the limitations and costs of school desegregation. While scholars might think of racial violence as a source of political socialization, which suggests a passive experience, mainly that "violence simply happens to young people," this project calls upon scholars to treat experiences with racial violence as a source of experiential knowledge. This reframing shows high school youths' *active* engagement with these experiences and what these experiences taught them about education, power, and politics. Socialization still matters because it explains how youth were socialized into societal norms, but as this project shows, socialization also had the potential to produce or evolve into experiential knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

Rebecca De Schweinitz's *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* explicates the construction of "youth-centered racial liberalism." De Schweinitz explains that "youth-centered racial liberalism" produced postwar policies that sought to alleviate ails such as poverty and racial discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was one example. According to De Schweinitz, this brand of liberalism was born out of liberal anxieties that marginalized youth would align themselves with communism if inequality persisted.<sup>49</sup> "Black Power, Education, and Youth Politics" argues that while

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<sup>48</sup> For more on childhood, race, and socialization, see Jennifer Rittenhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Joyce Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (New York: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>49</sup> Rebecca De Schwenitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for*

youth-centered racial liberalism sought to improve race relations by addressing the personality development of, and education access for black children and youth, it unintentionally demonstrated to young people the power they possessed to alter the relationship between black youth and the state.

Finally, my dissertation turns to Marcia Chatelain's work to make sense of how local movement institutions understood black childhood and adolescence. According to Chatelain, African American parents and communities defined notions of black girlhood in relation to their anxieties about urbanization. She argues that "adults constructed notions of black girlhood in times of crises – from institutional challenges to scandals to national crises." Furthermore, she contends, "girls shared in collective dramas and personal regrets about migration."<sup>50</sup> By focusing on the local movement and civic institutions that formed in Detroit during the 1960s, my dissertation suggests that adults turned to the construction of black youth's social and democratic citizenship as an antidote the black radical organizations that also vied for high school youth's attention. And in placing the curriculum of freedom schools and liberation schools in conversation with the students' voices, it highlights the ways in which adults and black youth viewed black adolescents as a site of possibility. This becomes most clear in the classes students proposed in their freedom schools, which ranged from black film and arts to law and medicine.

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Racial Equality (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

## Chapter Overview

This story unfolds over the course of five chapters, beginning in 1950 and ending in 1973. The first two chapters examine the activists' experiences with segregation in Detroit, and their familial connections to local movement struggles. Chapter One, "The Hopes, Dreams, and Unmet Expectations of Postwar Detroit, 1940-1969," expands scholarship on the long history of Black Radicalism to include the political lives of black adolescents as well as their vision of liberation struggles as a multi-generational process. It reimagines the history of Detroit's Great Migration and Black Power movement through the experiences of seven black adolescent activists and their familial and movement networks. Through a collective biography of adolescent activists from the Black Student United Front and other black high school associations, it explores the breadth of black adolescents' political analysis, what they were willing to fight for, and the extent to which they saw their destinies "all bound up together" with the social and political struggles of past generations. This chapter examines the state's conceptions of black youth citizenship to understand the world black adolescent activists occupied and the political choices that were available to them. It begins with the often-told story of Detroit's Second Great Migration and concludes with a collective narrative of black adolescent activists who were the descendants of these migrants. It wrestles with black American's experiences with discrimination in housing, employment, and education in postwar Detroit to understand the conditions that informed black intellectual radicalism in general, and black adolescent activism and political thought in particular.

These chapters situate the struggle for community control of schools within the history of the development of Detroit's New Left, which included Black Marxists and

Nationalists. Chapter Two, “‘The Revolution is a Praxis’: The Black Radical Tradition, Movement Culture, and Youth Leadership in Postwar Detroit,” suggests that the ideological contours of black student activism during the Black Power movement emerged out of the black intellectual radical traditions that coalesced in Detroit between 1960 and 1965, and lays bare the multigenerational nature of liberation struggles. The Great Migration not only shaped the geographical contours of black American life, but the radical intellectual traditions that would inform black social movements in postwar America as well. The diversity of black radical thought in Detroit provided a space for theorists and activists to constantly rework their conceptions of power and citizenship. While the range of ideas that percolated on the ground sometimes produced clashes around the philosophical and tactical means that the movement utilized, Detroit’s eclectic mixture of radical thought informed the rich diversity of tools black student activists employed in their schools and communities. As a case in point, Old and New Leftists advocated various strands of Black Nationalism, Marxist-Leninism, Revolutionary Nationalism, Maoism, and Black Christian Nationalism. But as scholars of the movement have demonstrated, the means and theoretical underpinnings blacks used to fight for liberation often varied – even within the same organization. The possibilities the movement imagined for youth offered a radical alternative to the states’ view of youth citizenship. The activism that appears in the subsequent chapters recover young peoples’ alternative vision for black youth citizenship and as well as the ways in which they navigated the state’s view of black youth to fashion their own ideas about the possibilities for Black Liberation. This chapter concludes with the multi-generational organizations

that produced student formations like the Black Student United Front and local black student associations.

The third chapter, “‘We demand relevant education’: The Intellectual Labors of High School Youth and the Fight for Liberatory Education,” examines the intellectual praxis high school youth used to institutionalize political and culturally relevant education. It captures the role of groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the leadership development of black student activists. It also shows how student protests were part of a deeply personal, and gendered, struggle for black youth who had to navigate the confluence of Eurocentric conceptions of beauty. The intellectual work black youth invested in the production of liberatory education was most visible in the types of courses they demanded, in their negotiations with school leaders, and in how students evaluated Black History and Black Studies courses that school leaders developed in response to unrest. It also complicates our understanding of generational differences. The political education classes high school youth attended with black labor activists highlight an intergenerational organizing tradition while ideological tensions among various high school student groups reveal ideological fault lines among young activists.

The next chapter addresses police repression of student activists. “The Pigs Must Go!!!,” investigates state-sanctioned police violence in schools and black communities. Instead, black communities possessed a community-centered politics of education. In the view of students, parents, teachers, and community members, the state’s excessive use of force posed a threat to efforts to realize a vision of liberatory education. In this chapter, I map the genealogy of the punitive turn through the eyes and experiences of black high school students. First, I analyze the relationship between Detroit’s black communities and

the Detroit Police Department. Next, I explore black youth's experiences with anti-delinquency programs, which local officials viewed as solutions to poor police-community relations. This chapter then survey how contentious police-community relations and anti-delinquency programs spurred the influx of police and police brutality into Detroit Public Schools. It illuminates the tools students brought to bear on their resistance to and management of disciplinary action, as well as students' alternative visions for student safety. To be sure, this youth resistance was grounded in Detroit's long history of black radicals' in-plant resistance to repressive shop floor management and black resistance to police repression. Finally, it investigates how the War on Drugs overturned many of the advances student and community activists made in challenging police repression.

The final chapter, Chapter Five: “‘To work within the community and for the community’: Black Students, Liberatory Education, and Black Economic Development,” shows how struggles over education created paths to community activism for black adolescents. It examines how black youth used the black radical tradition and black educational activism to create multiple paths to community activism. While black students confronted the police state and white vigilante violence in their schools, they sought out alternative visions for black economic independence in their communities. Student activists who had staged protests against punitive measures and organized against Euro-centric models of education marshalled their organizing and leadership skills to combat economic deprivation and repression in their communities. Black youth conceptualized and struggled for a more self-determining role for black Detroiters in the urban political economy, including in matters of income distribution, labor rights, and

consumer education and often found support in these movement spaces. While black students mostly engaged in educational struggles, they believed that black education was intricately tied to a larger struggle for Black Liberation. They viewed citizen's issues such as quality housing and employment as important factors that shaped their experiences as students, and as the inheritors of "Detroit's civic future."<sup>51</sup> Students not only organized within the confines of school walls, but they also joined organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' Black Student United Front, the NAACP Youth Council, the Citywide Student Council, the West Central Organization, Harambee House and the Inner-City Student Organization. As this chapter suggests, the multi-generational model of Detroit's Black Power movement illuminates one of the many legacies of the Black Power movement.

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<sup>51</sup> The phrase comes from the chapter title of Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), "Citizens, Politicians, and the Escalating War for Detroit's Civic Future," 71-102.

## Chapter One: The Hopes, Dreams, and Unmet Expectations of Postwar Detroit, 1940-1969

*All our parents basically told us, is they wanted for us – wherever the children were – to live a better life than they did. When you think of that from the perspective of former slaves, slaves wanted their offspring to simply live better than in slavery. And you marched that up through the generations. That's still the task today.<sup>1</sup>*

Gregory Hicks, founding member of the  
Black Student United Front

Anytime Harvey Mark, an African American tenth grader at the majority-white Finney High School, raised his hand in the classroom, his white math teacher greeted this common learning gesture with silence. According to Mark, this teacher often forced him to sit in the rear of the classroom and responded to his questions with complete indifference. This aggression, the 15-year old explained, represented just one example of the aggression black students experienced at Finney. In another instance, when white students freely patronized local white restaurants while the school cafeteria closed temporarily in 1968, black students reported experiencing “outright hostility” from these same businesses.<sup>2</sup> During the late 1960s, Finney, which was located on the East Side, had a 20% black student population while the school district’s black voting base constituted 37% of the district’s constituency. These racial demographics created an environment where white voters and educators controlled the direction of education for a school population that was changing at a rapid pace.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> C.C. Douglas, “At Finney High: Negro Transfers Meet Hostility” *Michigan Chronicle*, February 24, 1968, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 17, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>3</sup> Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute and the West Central Organization, “A Report to the Parents of Detroit on School Decentralization,” December 22, 1969, from the Personal Collection of General Gordon Baker, in the author’s possession; and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 322.

The hostility toward black youth at Finney reached such an explosive peak in May 1969 that it nearly tore the school apart and left many black parents wondering if it was safe to allow their children to travel to and from school. On May 22, the community organization, East Side Voice of Independent Detroit (ESVID), received a phone call from a black student at Finney alerting their office to white attacks on black students. When ESVID's Mary Frances Musgrove and the Black Nationalist Republic of New Afrika (RNA)'s Clem Peoples arrived at the school, they found black and white students readying themselves for a confrontation as police officers tried to keep both sides from attacking one another. Musgrove tried to restore calm among black students until she and Peoples could escort them out of the school and on to city buses. However, getting students home proved to be equally challenging. According to one bus driver, the city had ordered bus drivers to block students from boarding. In a manner reminiscent of the Little Rock Nine, Musgrove decided to transport the students out of the school by loading them into private vehicles. On one of the trips, the police arrested Musgrove, Peoples, and several others. Peoples' account of what he witnessed at the police station suggested to black parents that they had great cause for concern. He later testified that officers arrived at the station with white students in tow, many of whom were carrying weapons. Peoples warned,

You better believe that they weren't comin' out to Finney to talk; they were comin' out there to kill Black People. All you parents can send your children out there if you want to. But, believe you me, somebody's gonna get killed, and it will be your Black children. They are not only your children, but mine also.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Jacoway, "Not Anger but Sorrow: Minnijean Brown Trickey Remembers the Little Rock Crisis." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 1, (2005): 1-26. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed January 15, 2018) and "Robert Holland to Richard Marks and Lonnie Saunders," May 27, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 48, Folder 13, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Finney's black parents had to consider a critical question: How could they navigate the violence of racial segregation while ensuring that their offspring would receive the same educational opportunities as their white peers? Should they accompany their children to school, allow them to face possible violence on their own, or pull them out of school for the rest of the school year?

The day after the confrontation between black and white students, Finney's African American parents explored their options, collectively. The meeting examined the tactics parents, students, and community members could marshal to survive the rest of the school year. Although members of the RNA opposed sending black students back to Finney, they agreed to provide protection for them as they traveled to school. During the meeting, John L. Davis, the Deputy Minister of the Interior for the RNA argued,

'If you decide to send the kids back to Finney, I would say go with them. Can you afford to wait until one of them is killed? [...] But if you decide that you want the children to go back to Finney on Monday, we will provide you with trained legionnaires who will instill the children in strategy necessary to guarantee their safety to and from school.'

The hostility between black and white students communicated to Musgrove that parents had to take the safety of their children into their own hands, and escort them to school.<sup>5</sup>

During the meeting, unidentified black students shared testimonies of the indifference and hostility they experienced at Finney. One student observed that, "The Black teachers at Finney don't give us any support. They only stand by, and smile." Another African student explained "There is no meaningful relationship between students or faculty. The problem is not new to Finney; everyday, it has been building up

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<sup>5</sup> "Robert Holland to Richard Marks and Lonnie Saunders," May 27, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 48, Folder 13, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

to this.'" One of their peers laid bare the dilemma, "I want my diploma, but if the decision is that we stay away from Finney, I will go along.'" While student opinions varied on the course of action, there was a consensus among parents that they should return to school. Black students in attendance explained that if they had to return to school, running away from white attacks was not an option. For years, they had encountered violent resistance from teachers and students to their very presence. The Detroit Commission on Community Relations' Robert Holland summed up the tension that characterized the meeting when he explained,

Of special interest to this observer was the apparent psychological hang-up of the parents, that is, they were forced to adopt a more militant attitude due to the circumstances surrounding Finney High.<sup>6</sup>

Black students and parents found themselves in a troubling position where violence in the educational sphere was a daily reality and an impediment to accessing quality education.

The year of racial unrest and aggression that rocked Finney High School constituted the costs of school desegregation. It revealed the very real violence that desegregation policies produced, and it exposed what was at stake for black high school students who, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, led walkouts, building takeovers, and rallies to demand quality education. For black parents and grandparents who migrated from the South between the 1920s and 1950s, this racial violence was all too familiar. To be sure, it was not the life they had imagined for their children when they arrived in Detroit with the promise of prosperity and freedom. When African Americans migrated to Detroit during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they arrived with dreams of a better life for themselves and for their children.<sup>7</sup> Life in the North, they thought, had to be much

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of Americans Great Migration* (New York:

better than a life tied to sharecropping and continually constrained by economic repression and social inequality. Blacks migrated out of the South for several reasons. Some wanted to flee a life of economic displacement wrought by the mechanization of the cotton industry and the devastating effect of the boll weevils. Black women, in particular, left in search of better employment and to escape the domestic violence they often experienced in the homes of white employers. These women migrated to the North in the pursuit of autonomous lives.<sup>8</sup> By the 1940s, racial discrimination in housing, employment, and education revealed the limits of migration within a nation mired in structural inequality.

The struggle of the student and their parents raises a number of important questions: What were the possibilities black migrants and their offspring imagined for self-determination and freedom? What were the constraints in which they fashioned ideas about the lives their youth would lead? How did the state respond to black Detroiters' efforts to lay claim to citizenship? And what kind of world did the Great Migration and responses to the urban crisis create for young people who came of age during the tumultuous 1960s? Racial segregation and the Great Migration produced the experiential knowledge black high school students would use to advance their visions of liberation. This chapter examines Detroit's racial geography and the structures of racial and class discrimination that shaped the world black high school activists inhabited during the 1960s. It begins with black Detroiters' experiences with segregation in housing,

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Vintage Books, 2010) and Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in Joe William Trotter, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). 130 and Annalise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

employment, education, and policing to reveal the multiple sites of struggle that black high school students engaged in as activists. Furthermore, it explicates the efforts of the federal government and local civic groups to provide alternatives to the emergent Black Power movement. Finally, it examines the lives and familial networks of several high school activists whose stories provide a window into the generation of youth who would enter these sites of political struggle and carry forth the movement for Black Liberation.

## **From Paradise Valley to the War on Poverty**

### **Racial Discrimination in Employment**

Between 1910 and 1920, Detroit's black population increased by more than 600%, with many of its new arrivals traveling from Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Virginia.<sup>9</sup> Blacks who migrated to Detroit during the Second Great Migration arrived with hopes of finding work in the burgeoning auto factories. Those who were successful in their pursuit often found employment in the Ford Motor Company's plants. With the aid of the black ministerial class, the number of blacks Ford employed rose to 12 percent by 1940. In exchange for the support of religious leaders, industry professionals hired black workers who arrived in their offices with letters of recommendation from Detroit-based clergymen.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the Civil Rights movement and interracial unionism forced the auto industry to increase black employment in Detroit's auto factories. By 1950, black

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Richard Deskins, Jr. *Residential Mobility of Negroes in Detroit 1837-1965* (Ann Arbor: Department of Geography, University of Michigan, 1972), 26; and Joe T. Darden, Richard Hill, June Thomas, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19.

men experienced a 16% increase in factory employment, a figure that surged from just 29% in 1940. But access to jobs did not guarantee safe working conditions nor the possibility of upward mobility. For example, management placed most black workers in unskilled, service jobs and in dangerous, dirty environments. In most instances, African Americans worked in the foundries, furnace rooms, and on the janitorial staff.<sup>11</sup> While black migrants believed that factory work would be less oppressive than the sharecropping system of the South, they found the factories to be exploitive as well.

Similarly, black women saw limited improvements in their access to secure employment. For example, black female migrants noted that domestic jobs in the Midwest were much better than the domestic industry in the South. Jobs in the North paid more, they argued. And to be sure, many of these women left the South to escape the sexual exploitation that was common for black domestics in southern households.<sup>12</sup> Despite these improvements, however, black women came to despise domestic labor by the 1940s for many reasons. At its core, household employment did not offer the same financial security that other fields offered, such as social security and unemployment compensation. Moreover, black women acutely felt the impact of Detroit's economic downturn as workers in the domestic service industry. As historian Megan Shockley reveals, white Detroiters held negative perceptions of African American migrants, and marshalled these ideas to exclude black women from several industries and sectors of work.<sup>13</sup> But World War II opened doors that seemed to be eternally shut to African

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<sup>11</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 25-28; and Kevin Boyle, "The Rages of Whiteness: Racism, Segregation, and the Making of Modern Detroit," in *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies* ed. Joel Stone (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 130.

<sup>13</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 25.

American women. Between 1940 and 1944, the employment rate for black women increased by 30%. Yet, employers in wartime industries often assigned black women to unskilled positions in clerical and janitorial work and denied them access to seniority benefits.<sup>14</sup> African American women had achieved some measure of freedom when they moved North, but they met the limitations that de facto segregation had placed on black life north of the Mason Dixon Line.

Detroit's prosperous wartime season, however, was short-lived. When the war ended, contractors terminated defense contracts that had provided a great boost to Detroit's manufacturing industries as it decentralized production. The auto industries' move towards automation also placed many workers who had recently won access to factory jobs out of work and spurred an exodus of jobs to the Detroit suburbs.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Detroit's auto workers soon confronted sustained unemployment due to the outsourcing of jobs and regional recessions of the 1950s. For example, when the Hudson, Kaiser-Frazer, Packard, and Midland Steel plants could no longer compete with the production rates of Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors, more than 70,000 workers received lay-off notices.<sup>16</sup> Faced with discriminatory practices and the consequences of deindustrialization, Detroit's black-working class came face-to-face with the limits of postwar prosperity.

As black autoworkers met racial discrimination in hiring practices and union representation, they also battled white workers who resisted their presence. Despite

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<sup>14</sup> Meagan Shockley, "We, Too, Are Americans:" African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954 (Champaign: University of Illinois Press), 91-93.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 126-136.

<sup>16</sup> R.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1979), 137-138.

President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which created the Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in 1941, racial discrimination in employment persisted. Before the Michigan State legislature passed the Fair Employment Practices Act of 1955, employers could declare their racial preferences in job postings and opt to hire out-of-state workers instead of employing black Detroiters. Some managers claimed that hiring black workers threatened "camaraderie" in the workplace while whites refused to work with blacks in skilled jobs. Historian Joe Darden explains, "As one white worker said during a walkout at Packard Plant, 'I'd rather see Hitler and Hirohito win than work next to a nigger.'"<sup>17</sup> Black workers who labored in Dodge Main plants confronted racial discrimination in training programs that could have upgraded their employment status and granted them access to class mobility. While white workers gained entree to training programs without much resistance, black skilled and unskilled laborers had to fight them for space in federally-funded training programs at every turn.<sup>18</sup>

Black auto workers and domestics did not simply accept these conditions. Instead, they turned to the Detroit chapter of the NAACP in their fight against workplace discrimination. The civil rights organization sought to combat structural inequality and racial discrimination in labor through meticulous investigations and court cases. Detroit NAACP received many requests from black women whose husbands were away at war, and who found themselves excluded from several industries. In 1942, for example, five African American women brought discrimination lawsuits against employers with the aid

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<sup>17</sup> Joe T. Darden, Richard Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 68. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 25, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Beth Bates, "'Double V for Victory' Mobilizes Black Detroit, 1941-1946," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside of the South, 1940-1980*, eds. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22.

of the NAACP. One woman filed a suit against the Michigan Bell Telephone Company for refusing to hire her as an operator. Even women who had earned more than 300 defense hours faced discrimination in hiring for defense jobs in manufacturing. In this instance, Gloster Current, president of the NAACP, charged that employment discrimination in the defense industry put the “war effort in jeopardy” and constituted “a form of treason which is as detrimental to democracy as Nazi spies.” According to Megan Shockley, “The NAACP began to use the discourse of responsible patriotism at it became engaged in the battle for working-class rights.”<sup>19</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Detroit NAACP continued to fight to make a place for blacks in skilled, clerical, and managerial positions. They fought to expand the black middle class. Following the logic of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations’ Manpower programs, the civil rights organization focused on improving the individual through training instead of making a paradigm shift in the industry itself.<sup>20</sup> However, during the late 1950s, a new class of black labor leaders expanded their fight for labor rights to include more militant means, including wildcat strikes and other confrontational means of direct action. As black migrants traveled across several states, uprooting or leaving their families, in search of jobs that could improve the lot of their families, they often found that the traditional civil rights activism offered limited solutions to structural inequality. Ultimately, their disappointment led them to embrace more radical means to gain access to jobs.

### **Detroit’s Postwar Racial Geography and Housing**

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<sup>19</sup> Megan Shockley, “*We, Too, Are Americans*,” 74-76.

<sup>20</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 176.

After black migrants found employment, they had to also contend with the realities of residential discrimination in the public and private housing sector. Between the mid-nineteenth century and World War II, black Detroiters were confined to the lower East Side where old, dilapidated buildings awaited them. During the 1940s, 70% of Detroit's African American population resided on the Eastside. Blacks also lived in enclaves on the Near Eastside district, in the Westside neighborhood in the northern boundary of the city nestled along Wyoming Avenue, and further south on the Westside in the Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard area. By World War II, the black migrant population had also expanded to a small section of Black Bottom called Paradise Valley, which was surrounded by Hastings Street and St. Antoine Street. While it was home to great jazz music, racial uplift institutions, black businesses, and churches, this predominantly black neighborhood encountered overcrowding and slumlords who charged exorbitant rates for dilapidated housing. It was, for example, a widespread practice for landlords to divide large rooms into smaller units they could rent out to poor and working-class families with limited options. And some dwellers on the Lower Eastside referred to the neighborhood as the "rat belt" because of the significant number of rat bites reported to housing authorities. "Paradise Valley," in name, was supposed to represent the land of prosperity black migrants had hoped to find once they arrived in the Motor City.<sup>21</sup> And yet, the reality was far more troubling.

A housing market that was segregated by class and race also proved daunting for black newcomers. While most black migrants found housing in Paradise Valley, those who had the means and the skills to join the black professional class moved out of the

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<sup>21</sup> Sugrue, 22-24; Joe T. Darden, Richard Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas, 86-87.

overcrowded territory and into the Westside area near Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard during the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> By the 1950s, Detroit's Black elite, or "E-lights" as poor and working-class blacks called them, created their own communities to escape overcrowding and substandard housing in Paradise Valley. Many in the black professional class moved into Conant Gardens on the Eastside where more than 60% of its residents were homeowners who had earned a degree in higher education. And they vigorously protected these neighborhoods. For example, when the city announced plans to develop the Sojourner Truth homes, a housing development that would have provided affordable homes for the black working-class near Conant Gardens, black middle-class homeowners protested its construction. Having achieved some distance from the substandard housing that was most associated with the black working-class, the black elite resisted the presence of anyone who could diminish property values in their community. Using the tools of resistance to residential segregation that whites had marshaled for years, blacks in Conant Gardens created racial covenants that excluded whites as well.<sup>23</sup> This protection of race and class interests would eventually give way to a radical movement of black activists of the 1960s who worked to shift the focus from fighting for black homeownership rights to struggling for fair public housing for the black working class.<sup>24</sup> Following the significant growth in the city's population, black migrants continued to bear the brunt of the housing crisis despite their contributions to the war as laborers and soldiers.

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<sup>22</sup> Sugrue, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Todd Shaw, *Now Is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) 43; Sugrue, 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> Shaw, 50.

Despite achieving some measure of upward mobility, however, black homeowners and those who aspired to own a home met fierce opposition from real estate agents and banks. Furthermore, by the 1940s, the Great Migration had placed a substantial burden on these communities as its black homeowners had to also contend with city officials who marked their neighborhoods unfavorably for the Federal Home Loan Bank System. The system was the mechanism that banks used to determine if a neighborhood was “unsuitable for federal loans and subsidies.” In spite of claims that a “‘better class’ of ‘Negro’” lived in these communities, appraisers still marked these neighborhoods “D” and red on the Home Owners Loan Corporation appraisal maps. This practice became known as “redlining,” which became a common means through which banks and real estate agents discriminated against blacks in private homeownership.<sup>25</sup> Banks that gave home financing to whites used redlining policies to limit black homeownership in neighborhoods that had historically been white. Furthermore, until 1948 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, these contracts produced higher ratings for these communities. When blacks finally gained access to homeownership, they encountered costly repairs for outdated homes, high down payments, and high interest rates.<sup>26</sup> Even for upwardly mobile blacks, segregation posed limitations on their American Dream.

As “black pioneers” increasingly traversed the racial boundaries of white communities, whites responded by organizing civic and homeowners’ associations that served as the frontline of grassroots resistance to residential integration. Between the 1940s and 1960s, white Detroiters founded close to 200 such organizations. Some groups

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<sup>25</sup> Sugrue, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 43-45.

focused on resisting residential integration at the policy level while others organized themselves into groups to physically protect their homes from “Negro invasion.”<sup>27</sup> White adults passed down this resistance to their youth. As a case in point, young white children in elementary and junior high schools expressed fears about blacks at an early age. One child stated of African Americans, ““They are dirty fighters and they do not keep their yards clean.””<sup>28</sup> The child’s sentiment characterized the racist attitudes that would ultimately turn Detroit’s racial geography into a landmine for school desegregation battles.

Challenging integration in housing became a family affair where men, women, and children contributed to white vigilante violence that shaped the daily lives of blacks who sought access to better homes. Reports to the Detroit Urban League, Detroit NAACP, and the Detroit Commission on Community Relations showed that the number of incidences reached its peak between 1954 and 1957 when Detroit experienced major plant closings and a housing shortage that greatly impacted whites. In one telling incident that occurred at the start of January 1956, whites in Northeast Detroit burned down the garage of a black man who had recently purchased a home. When the man decided to stay, whites continued to harass him, and set fire to his house several months later.<sup>29</sup> White resistance to residential integration in the Wyoming section in Northwest Detroit was often the most virulent. In a community that consisted of native-born white, Italians, Irish, Slavs and other ethnic groups, blacks encountered fierce violence from the white grassroots movement. These neighborhoods were largely home to working-class whites

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>29</sup> Joe T. Darden, Richard Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas, 127.

who could not afford to leave the inner-city for the suburbs. The violence Henry Love, a black autoworker, and his family experienced in 1955 illustrates the enormity of white resistance. When Love tried to move into his home on Chalfonte Avenue, more than 1,000 protestors threw rocks at his house and injured two police officers in the process. As Thomas Sugrue argues, white resistance to residential integration was an organized movement that used violence as a strategic tool.<sup>30</sup>

While the black middle class fought to gain entrée into white neighborhoods, the black poor and working-class fought the city to hold on to what little housing they had. To fight blight and to spur the development of the suburbs, local leaders turned to urban redevelopment, or urban renewal projects. Local politicians and city planners praised the benefits of urban renewal which, they argued, would enlarge the city's tax revenue and improve the lives of Detroiters living in poverty. Although city developers and municipal leaders claimed that "clearing the slums" was good for the city, the construction of highways it included wreaked havoc on black communities and black businesses. Slum clearance rarely included relocating the black communities that they displaced. Urban renewal projects, or what blacks called "Negro Removal," destroyed black communities that old black settlers and newcomers had created. After World War II, the city constructed the Chrysler Freeway (I-75) built on the Lower East Side, the John C. Lodge (M-10) on the Lower West Side, and the Edsel Ford Freeway (I-94), which dissected Paradise Valley.<sup>31</sup> The construction of the Chrysler Freeway in 1960 destroyed many of these businesses in Paradise Valley, including Joe Von Battle's record shop where the

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<sup>30</sup> Sugrue, 233-240.

<sup>31</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 17-18; and Sugrue, 47-48.

renowned Reverend C.L. Franklin – father of famed R&B singer Aretha Franklin – recorded his sermons and music.<sup>32</sup> Urban renewal reconfigured Detroit's racial geography as it disrupted whole communities.

When black migrants arrived in Detroit with hopes of finding neighborhoods where they could raise their families and build a life for their children, they found displacement, abandonment, and violent resistance. Blacks in Detroit had to navigate the city's racial geography, the class divisions, and a white grassroots resistance movement that produced it, with little protection from the federal government. This racial geography would ultimately fashion a segregated school system that white vigilante violence, organized resistance, and municipal policies would help to maintain for decades.

### **Detroit Public Schools and the Costs of Segregated Schooling**

Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, urban school districts turned to the Detroit Public School system as a model for urban schooling as Mirel explains, in part, because its curriculum provided an example of how to assimilate thousands of southern and eastern European immigrants who arrived in the 1920s and 1930s. Due to the Great Depression and the labor movement's battles to narrow competition in the workforce, public schools became custodial institutions for youth who had been locked out of the city's formal economy during this tumultuous period. While compulsory schooling emerged as a solution to a labor problem, it offered very little to poor and working-class students who filled its seats during the 1940s.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 46; and Marsha Battle Philpot, interview with the author, October 27, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 44, 191-203.

As the children of black migrants began to flow into the schools, African American youth found themselves similarly herded into basic courses. As the labor movement pushed youth out of the world of work during the Great Depression, limiting their competition in a tight economy, students entered the nation's public schools at a rapid pace. At the same time, federal and state leaders worried that radical, disillusioned and unemployed youth would embrace communism. Even the NAACP's national office formed its youth councils out of this perceived urgency. In Detroit, several unlikely bedfellows worked together to advocate for compulsory schooling, a move that only made the passage of child labor laws in the 1930s a welcomed change to the formal economy. This coalition included the Detroit Federation of Labor, school leaders, and elite white women who, in previous years, had opposed the patronage system of school board elections.<sup>34</sup> While policymakers turned to Detroit as the model for urban schooling, the children and grandchildren of the Great Migration found segregated schools that offered them limited access to the upward mobility for which their parents had sacrificed so much.

The Great Migration, deindustrialization, and white flight produced a segregated educational system and a racial geography that placed African American students in old buildings, with limited resources, and in many cases, with white teachers who saw them as inferior to white students. Detroit schools began the practice of tracking black youth into remedial courses while placing their white counterparts in honors courses and in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 44, 191-203; Thomas L Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013); Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81, Second Edition*, 2 Sub edition (Ann Arbor: UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN REGIONAL, 1993).

classes that prepared them for college.<sup>35</sup> Since property taxes constituted a major source of funding for Detroit Public Schools, job discrimination and residential segregation had the compounding effect of producing racial inequality in the school system. In its 1951 study of Detroit's schools, the Detroit Urban League revealed that black youth "attended the oldest schools in the oldest sections of the city."<sup>36</sup> Additionally, black students had very few black counselors and teachers they could turn to for guidance since the school system did not make it a priority to do so.<sup>37</sup> The "academic achievement gap" was also a source of concern for black parents. During the mid-1940s, historian Jeffrey Mirel argues, "black students were twice as likely to be in the general track than white students and half as likely to be in the college preparatory track."<sup>38</sup> In 1965, 75% of black students at the majority black Northern High School tested poorly on national standardized tests that year.<sup>39</sup> Despite more than a decade of civil rights struggles for educational equality, the gap between black and white students continued to expand.

When the U.S. Supreme Court decided that school districts across the country could desegregate schools "with all deliberate speed," it forced local educational movements to find local solutions to segregated schools.<sup>40</sup> For example, as early as the 1940s, the Detroit NAACP issued demands for the increased hiring of black teachers and black counselors and for black teachers to be placed into schools with low black student

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<sup>35</sup> Mirel, 44, 191-203.

<sup>36</sup> Mirel, 253.

<sup>37</sup> Mirel, 44, 191-203.

<sup>38</sup> Mirel, 191.

<sup>39</sup> Mirel, 301.

<sup>40</sup> Gary Orfield, Susan E. Eaton, and the Harvey Project on School Desegregation, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 7 and Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

enrollment.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the chapter worked to remove racist leaders from school administrations, sought to place more blacks on the Board of Education, and pushed textbook publishers to include African Americans' contributions into its textbooks.<sup>42</sup> In 1960, the Detroit NAACP took its case to the US Civil Rights Commission and charged the local school board with drawing district boundaries that produced racially segregated schools. While the NAACP encountered some success in its efforts to desegregate public education, by the end of the 1950s, it met the radical contingent of the black educational movement led by the African American clergyman, Reverend Albert Cleage.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Detroit NAACP used its might to push forward the agenda for school integration in a sea of voices that shouted for community control. And yet, it would lodge one of the most important lawsuits in the history of black education, *Miliken v. Bradley*.

During the 1960s, education reformers published numerous reports that sought to explain the gap between black and white "student achievement." Before the High School Study Commission (HSSC) released its report in 1968, three federally-commissioned studies ventured to find the answer: *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman Report), *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools*, and the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Kerner Commission Report).<sup>44</sup> While black radicals

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<sup>41</sup> Mirel, 190-191.

<sup>42</sup> Mirel, 251 and "Find Textbook Publishers Willing to Point Up Negro's Role in U. S." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), Dec 08, 1962. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>43</sup> Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 260-265.

<sup>44</sup> Detroit High School Study Commission. "Detroit High School Study Commission Report." Detroit, Mich., June 24, 1968. Ernest Dillard Collection, Box 1, Folder 40, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; James Coleman, "Equality of Educational Opportunity" (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1966), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED012275.pdf>; United States Commission on Civil Rights, "Racial Isolation in the Public Schools," 1967, Thurgood Marshal Law Library, The University of Maryland School of Law,

viewed community-minded educators as the answer to increasing black students' academic success, these reports argued that the root cause was inadequate school financing and the culture of poverty in black communities.

Black migrants had hoped to find a school system that would become the “great equalizer” so many had claimed it to be.<sup>45</sup> Instead, they found schools that lacked adequate resources and education professionals who placed the blame for racial inequality squarely at their feet. For example, the architects of the Coleman Report argued that the absence of parental involvement and limited financial resources caused the black-white achievement gap.<sup>46</sup> However, black students charged that the problem rested with education professionals who could not meet the needs of black students. For example, some student activists recalled how discipline of black students changed with school desegregation. In one instance, Jeri Love recalled the experience of one young black boy named Paul. Paul, according to Love, had behavioral issues, but had never faced suspension while the pair attended the predominantly African American Atkinson Elementary School. But when Paul started at Farwell Middle School, she argued, he faced suspension and expulsion on a consistent basis.<sup>47</sup> The core distinction Love makes is that with desegregation, teachers felt less invested in students. For Love, the black community made a world of difference in the lives of black youth. Furthermore, desegregation meant separation from supportive community networks.<sup>48</sup> Since the race

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<http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/sudoclist.html>, pp. 203; U.S. Riot Commission Report: Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1967.

<sup>45</sup> Horace Mann, *Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts for the Years 1845-1848: An Oration Delivered before the Authorities of the City of Boston, July, 4, 1842* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1891), 251, Google Books.

<sup>46</sup> James Coleman, “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1966), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED012275.pdf>;

<sup>47</sup> Geraldine (Jeri) Love, interview with the author, October 30, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> On the role of in loco parentis within black communities, see Thomas J. Socha and Rhunette C. Diggs,

and class of the teacher is unknown, it is difficult to discern if this shift constituted evidence of increased authoritarianism on the part of teachers and administrators.

As the Great Migration continued to expand the black population in Detroit, it also created an enlarged black educational movement that fought diligently to improve education for black youth. As a case in point, long before Detroit Public Schools institutionalized black history and black literature courses, progressive educators took the initiative to fill this important gap by constructing their own curriculum around the black experience, despite the void that existed in state-supported textbooks. One student, Sandra Stewart, recalls one such experience with her fifth-grade English teacher, Ms. Hogg. According to Stewart, Ms. Hogg

[...] had us do an African-American history assignment where we had to look up one hundred important black people. And I remember how difficult it was trying to find any history about Benjamin Banneker and about Washington Carver, and to get one hundred. I remember going home and crying.

Despite soliciting assistance from her mother, the pair could not find much information at the local public library. However, they found one book at the local, black bookstore that Edward Vaughn owned. Stewart explained,

And I can remember going to the black bookstore and there was only one book that had a lot of different black people, what they did, but they didn't have everybody. And I really struggled and struggled. And I can remember when I found the last person and turning in that book report. That was one of the most important book reports I've ever done.<sup>49</sup>

The sense of pride and joy that Stewart recalled represented the feeling that she and many of her peers yearned to experience in their daily experiences at school. In the burgeoning

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eds., *Communication, Race, and Family: Exploring Communication in Black, White, and Biracial Families*, 1 edition (Mahwah, N.J: Routledge, 1999). 211.

<sup>49</sup> Sandra Stewart, interviewed by the author, September 18, 2010.

local civil rights movement, they found African American educators who were up for the task.

The struggle to build black communities during the migration greatly impacted the black educational movement in Detroit as it placed education at the center of this process. Prior to World War II, reformers viewed schools as the means through which they could deliver social services, host community meetings, and meet the needs of new European immigrants. By 1965, education reformers at federal, state, and local levels called for new modes of school governance known as the community school. Throughout the 1960s, community activists and progressive educational reformers published position papers and articles that examined how the concept of “community” might reshape the function of public schooling and increase student achievement. In 1965, for example, the Michigan State Curriculum Planning Committee published its own pamphlet outlining the community school concept. According to the committee, the role of the community school was to study and to seek out solutions for community problems, assist with community projects, "help to develop a sense of community in both children and adults," and was "genuinely life-centered as a social institution." In 1969, the Michigan Community School Education Association published its “Position Paper on the Community School within the Philosophical Concept of Community Education,” which argued that the community school

democratizes the use of school facilities, looking to communities to define their own problems and locate their own solutions, working with local agencies and institutions to meet local needs and developing local programming to meet these needs.

A year later, the Ford Foundation funded research that resulted in a subsequent the publication, “The Community School in the Nation,” which painted a national picture of

the move towards community schools. The article surveyed community schools in DC, NY, Chicago and Roxbury, among other places. The author argued that the impulse for community schools was a consequence of the federal government's democratization of schooling policies like Head Start and Elementary, Model Cities Programs, and the Secondary Education act of 1965.<sup>50</sup> These impulses emerged out the black freedom movement's visions for quality education and conceptions of community.

The shift in racial demographics engendered a shift in focus in educational politics as well. Community education was important, but community control spoke to questions of funding and governance in ways that community education had not. The national debate over school governance came to a head in Detroit in 1969. For decades, the Detroit Board of Education served as the central citywide organ for educational policy decisions. However, black Detroiters argued that the board had failed to provide black students with equal educational opportunity. They proposed, instead, to create community-controlled schools that placed the power to make decisions in the hands of the people. On March 24, 1969 Reverend Albert Cleage, the Black Christian Nationalist organizer, attended a hearing sponsored by the Education Committee of the Michigan state legislature to sound the alarm over racial inequality in Detroit's schools. Pressing

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<sup>50</sup> John Rogers, "Community Schools: Lessons from the Past and Present," Los Angeles: UCLA IDEA, 1998, [http://sedn.senate.ca.gov/sites/sedn.senate.ca.gov/files/rogers\\_community\\_schools\\_lessons\\_1998.pdf](http://sedn.senate.ca.gov/sites/sedn.senate.ca.gov/files/rogers_community_schools_lessons_1998.pdf); Barry Franklin, *Community, Race, and Curriculum* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 13: explains, "There is the issue of whose knowledge comprises the curriculum and whose knowledge is excluded. There is the related matter of who does and who does not get access to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the curriculum conveys. And finally there are an array of struggles surrounding the role that the curriculum plays in the cultural reproduction and the perpetuation of patterns of power and privilege."; "The Community School Program" (1965), Community School Education, 1965, State of Michigan Archives, Lansing Michigan; Michigan Community School Education Association, "Position Paper on the Community School within the Philosophical Concept of Community Education" (1969), The Detroit Public Schools Community Relations Division Box 7 Folder 8 School Problems: re: community school letter-action, 1969, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Marilyn Gittell, "The Community School in the Nation," *Community Issues* 2, no. 1 (n.d.): 3-19.

the committee to propose a community control bill, Cleage found support in Detroit House Representative James Del Rio, who had long been angered by institutional disparity in the city's school system. Indeed, he charged the Detroit Board of Education as "responsible for more riots than all the white racism in America." When results for the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills became available in June, proponents of community control received greater ammunition for their demands. Three weeks after the hearing occurred, Coleman A. Young, the State Senator from Detroit, introduced his own decentralization proposal (Public Act 244) as a compromise between community control and the citywide board that already existed. Coleman's plan sought to divide the school district into regions and to create a central school board.<sup>51</sup>

Despite Young's claims that school decentralization was a good compromise, community control advocates believed otherwise. Their main concern was that Young's bill gave the power to make decisions about hiring and firing, and curriculum to local school boards, but that the central board would maintain the authority to veto these decisions. Furthermore, community control proponents wanted to ensure that black students received an education from black teachers. By contrast, liberal groups like the NAACP and the Detroit Urban League, however, viewed decentralization as a barrier to true integration. Amid these debates, the Detroit Board of Education passed its own resolution at a secret meeting in April 1970. This resolution would have increased the black student population in Cody, Denby, and Redford – all of which were housed in predominantly white regions – and would have placed the futures of black students in the hands of a predominantly white teaching force and voting base. Black high school

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<sup>51</sup> Mirel, 335-336.

students worked with parents to form Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC) to create their own plan – the Black Plan – which sought to place six out of the eight regions under the control of black communities.<sup>52</sup> In a city with a growing black population, this made sense to community control activists. While the Civil Rights movement launched an assault on racial segregation in schools, by the end of the 1960s, the Black Power movement revealed the ways in which the growing African American community had expanded its visions for public schooling.

Yet, Detroit's racial geography and local white resistance made school desegregation unlikely. On August 11, 1970, Governor William Miliken passed Public Act 244 and declared that it would take effect on January 1, 1971. The passage of the decentralization bill marked the beginning of the infamous busing case, *Miliken v. Bradley* (1974) and its journey to the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>53</sup> It also made clear the physical and emotional costs of school desegregation. The costs of integrated education forced the young people who carried the burden of executing desegregation policies to maneuver unsafe situations in local white communities that did not want black children to integrate historically white schools. By the 1960s, the children of white parents who harassed and burned down black people's homes to resist residential desegregation had taken up the banner of white vigilante violence to prevent the entree of black youth into their public schools.

### **Policing “The single most important problem in the city”: Police-Community Relations in the Motor City**

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<sup>52</sup> Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, “A Report to the Parents of Detroit on School Decentralization,” December 1969, General Gordon Baker's Personal Papers, in the author's possession.

<sup>53</sup> Mirel, 345.

If racial segregation in employment, education, and housing revealed the limits of the American dream to black Detroiters, the relationship between local law enforcement and blacks constituted a complete shattering of this vision. In 1964 Arthur Johnson, president of the Detroit chapter of the NAACP proclaimed that “the single most important problem in the city” was the tumultuous relationship between Detroit law enforcement and the black community.<sup>54</sup> Police brutality lay at the heart of this relationship. According to sociologist Albert Reiss, the accusation of police brutality was “the judgment [of individuals] that they have not been treated with the full rights and dignity owing citizens in a democratic society.”<sup>55</sup> And it took on many forms, including physical and verbal abuse that affected men, women, and children. Police often referred to black men as “boys” and “nigger” and black women as “honey,” or “baby.” If individuals arrived at the precinct with bruises, police officers claimed self-defense or argued that the person had resisted arrest. Black Detroiters also expressed concern about the Big Four police cruisers, which included three plainclothes officers and one uniformed driver who were often armed with shotguns, tear gas, and machine guns.<sup>56</sup> The extreme show of police force in the black community created a profound distrust of the Detroit Police Department and shaped black youth’s disdain of law enforcement more broadly.

The question of poor police-community relations was not simply an issue of misunderstandings; it was a matter of structural inequality in hiring and racist views police held towards African Americans, especially recent migrants. While some claimed

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<sup>54</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 95.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

that human relations training was the answer to poor police-community relations, black liberals soon realized that the problem was in fact structural. This realization came only after years of examining police-community relations in other urban communities. Black civic leaders had three concerns about the relationship between law enforcement and blacks. First, the consequence for brutality did not match the nature of the excessive force that was rendered. Second, the Citizens' Complaint Bureau processed complaints without haste. Usually, the complainant received a charge for resisting arrest. Finally, concerns about civil rights often gained little attention compared to other types of complaints.<sup>57</sup> For Detroit's liberal base, the relationship between blacks and law enforcement constituted a crack in the story of American democracy and progress.

While the 1960s created greater access to upward mobility for segments of the African American community, this expansion of the black middle class was earned the ire of the Detroit Police Department (DPD). The DPD was overwhelmingly white and working-class. Until the 1950s, many of the white officers came from the rural towns in the Midwest. However, with the Second Great Migration, white Southerners began to expand their ranks in their department. Approximately two-thirds of the police at the time of the 1967 rebellion came from blue-collar families, and about 80% held blue-collar jobs or served in the armed forces before joining the force.<sup>58</sup> White beat officers saw Detroit's black residents as "a privileged minority ... without real grievances, deficient in respect for law and order and ready to use violence to attain a still greater advantage vis-à-vis the white community." Many of these officers felt that they were underpaid.<sup>59</sup> Despite the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 116.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 21-22.

<sup>59</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 96-98.

racial discrimination that blacks encountered in every sphere of American life, white police treated their status as an opportunity to limit black Detroiters' access to the rights of safety and free movement.

Translating the resentments of the white working-class into informal policing policy, Detroit's police regarded African Americans' ideas about quality policing as trivial. Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh's administration heard the complaints of its black citizenry and made efforts to implement police sensitivity programs. However, as historian Sidney Fine demonstrates, seasoned police officers often trained new officers to maintain their authority, rather than protect and serve communities. In Detroit, police brutality and disdain for black life had become institutionalized as older officers passed down these practices to each new cohort. While human relations training was organized to make officers more culturally sensitive, a 1966 survey suggested that police officers' prejudicial attitudes swelled after this training.<sup>60</sup> The racial violence that marked the high school hallways, local neighborhoods, and the workplace found a home in the local departments of law enforcement.

The Great Migration may have enlarged the possibilities for employment in the auto industries and in several other sectors, but it could not achieve similar reforms in the Detroit Police Department within the context of structural racism and white resistance. Between the 1910s and 1930s, the Detroit Police Department sixty-three African American police officers even though it the force included nearly 3,000 members.<sup>61</sup> By 1953, approximately 100 African American police officers served on the force even

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<sup>60</sup> Fine, 111.

<sup>61</sup> Joe T. Darden and Richard W. Thomas, *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 29.

though DPD had more than 4,000 police officers on its payroll. And even when administrators allowed African Americans access to the force, they limited their ability to patrol white neighborhoods while white police officers received assignments in both black and white communities.<sup>62</sup> While civil rights leaders had hoped that the election of the liberal white mayor Jerome Cavanaugh in 1961, and his appointment of the liberal George Edwards as police commissioner, racial discrimination on the force persisted. During the early 1960s, African Americans constituted less than 3% of the police force. When they spoke out against police brutality, white officers harassed them in retaliation.<sup>63</sup> Despite demands from DPD leadership to integrate scout cars near the close of the 1950s, police officers continued to resist any effort to integrate the police force.<sup>64</sup> In response to discriminatory hiring practices and harassment, African American patrolmen organized the Guardians of Michigan in 1963. In doing so, they joined a long history of black police associations, including the organization of the Texas Police Officers Association which formed in 1935, the Guardians Civic League that formed in Philadelphia in 1956, and the Afro-Patrolmen's League of Chicago that emerged in 1967. In the face of institutional discrimination and white harassment, black police officers organized among themselves to demand sound police in African American communities as well as better working conditions.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, 37-38.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>65</sup> Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Katrina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 117; and Beryl Satter, "Cops, Gangs, and Revolutionaries in 1960s Chicago: What Black Police Can Tell Us about Black Power," *Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 6 (2016): 1110-1134.

Blacks not only had to contend with the direct attacks from the local police department, but they also had to navigate the impact of racist statistical discourse.<sup>66</sup>

According to Fine,

The total number of offenses reported rose from 75,000 in 1964 to 76,397 in 1965, 101,773 in 1966, and 71,637 for the first six months of 1967. Homicides increased from 125 in 1964 to 214 in 1966, forcible rapes from 475 to 744, and robberies from 4,739 to 9,102, but the number of aggravated assaults fell from 7,804 to 7,493.

The Kerner Commission found that

just after the riot that 96 percent of all cities with a population over 100,000 had lower crime rates in 1966 than Detroit and that crime had increased more rapidly in Detroit since 1961 than in all but 14 percent of the nation's largest cities.

Cavanaugh acknowledged that this increase occurred due to the city's decision to use the FBI's crime reporting system in the spring of 1966. Before this change, only 50-75% of precincts reported its crime statistics to the city. Thereafter, 90-95% began to issue crime reports.<sup>67</sup> Reformers tried to make city officials aware of the racial discourse that permeated crime reporting, often challenging the local press to refine how they relayed crime reports to the broader public. Wayne State University Professor of Educational Psychology, William Wattenberg for example, posited in his position paper that the largest group committing crimes was young adults between the ages of 17 and 19-years old. While it's unclear if these statistics are national or local in scope, Wattenberg's concern was that they represented a population increase that impacted the rise in crime among these groups. Larger populations produced more crimes, he stated. Obscuring this fact lead to shoddy crime reporting and would, in his estimation, tarnish the judicial

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<sup>66</sup> For more on racial statistical discourse, see Khalil G. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Fine, 119.

process and place much of the burden on black youth.<sup>68</sup> Over the course of twenty years, the policing of black migrants and their offspring grew with greater sophistication and increased its impact on those who had little political clout: black youth.

Although local reformers and federal officials praised Detroit for its efforts to improve police community relations, and heralded it as a model for the nation, blacks residents found the police to be exceptionally repressive.<sup>69</sup> Four months before the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, Mayor Cavanaugh proclaimed, “that the Detroit police were ‘among the best paid, best trained, best equipped and best led in the entire nation.’” Likewise, the Department of Justice called the DPD “the model for police community relations.” However, the rebellion of 1967 demonstrated, there was much cause for concern. The rebellion marked a turning point in police-community relations. When officers from the Detroit Police Department raided the Blind Pig, an after-hours bar in the 12th Street district, it set off days of rioting and fierce opposition to law enforcement. And like the unrest that occurred in New York, Newark, and other sites of urban rebellion, the city launched a federal investment in the militarization of local police departments and funding for surveillance technologies that the state had hoped would prevent future rebellions.<sup>70</sup>

In 1971, the Detroit Police Department organized its decoy and surveillance program, Stop Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) under the mayoral administration of Roman Gribbs. To be sure, there were similar types of organizations in Buffalo, NY,

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<sup>68</sup> William Wattenberg, “Position Paper on Crime Statistics and Reporting” (n.d.), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 10, Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>69</sup> Fine, 125.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Cleveland and New Orleans.<sup>71</sup> The taskforce consisted overwhelmingly of white police officers who volunteered for duty. Over the course of its two-year tenure, the unit was responsible for the deaths of approximately twenty suspects, many of whom were black. As historian Sidney Fine explains, “STRESS came to be viewed in the black community as ‘a killer squad.’”<sup>72</sup> While Detroiters expressed outrage at the vigilante nature of STRESS, it was the killing of two black teenagers by a STRESS officer that ignited mass action against the unit. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1971, STRESS member Richard Worobec, 30, shot and killed Ricardo Buck, 15 and Craig Mitchell, 16. According to police investigation, Worobec lured the teenagers by staggering like a drunk person who needed assistance with his car. Worobec claimed that the two youths tried to mug him. In turn, he shot both young men in the back while Buck also received a gunshot to the chest. Immediately following the shooting, the State of Emergency Committee (SEC) organized a protest to demand the termination of STRESS, and to bring attention to the Attica Prison deaths, George Jackson's death, and the arrest of Angela Davis. The organization consisted of local black and white radicals who came together with the sole aim of dismantling STRESS. This issue garnered strong support among African Americans, nearly 5,000 residents attended the anti-STRESS protest, most of them black youth.<sup>73</sup>

Over the course of a decade, the struggle between the Detroit Police Department and black residents produced some level of accountability within the Department. While black communities searched for police accountability, the city explored ways to mend the

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<sup>71</sup> Nadine Brown, “‘State of Emergency, Emergency Committee’s Aim: To Combat All Forms of Repression,” *Michigan Chronicle*, (September 1971), Kenneth V. and Sheila Cockrel Collection Box 5, Folder 22, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>72</sup> Fine, 457.

<sup>73</sup> Thompson, 93-94; and Nadine Brown, “State of Emergency,” September 1971, Kenneth V. and Sheila M. Cockrel Collection, Box 5, Folder 22, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

relationship between police and blacks, ultimately placing much of its hope in anti-delinquency programs for summer employment and recreational activities. Such programs were also meant to serve as an alternative to Black Radicalism and as a way to manage migrant children.

### **A War on Poverty Programs and Alternative Visions for Youth Citizenship**

Throughout the course of the Second Great Migration, local civic groups formed to meet the needs of the burgeoning black community. While they created commissions to improve access to jobs, housing, employment, and public safety, they also wanted to provide social services as well. By the late 1950s, several civic groups formed to provide resources for the city's newcomers. Churches, public and private social agencies, professional organizations, community groups, and businesses all tried to craft solutions to racial inequality and by the 1960s, many of these groups would benefit from federal dollars granted to the War on Poverty and Great Society programs.<sup>74</sup> These programs usually had two goals: first, to combat youth idleness and second, to encourage civic engagement among the next generation of Detroiters. For example, high youth unemployment rates among blacks was one of the core issues that concerned civic organizations like the Detroit Commission on Children and Youth. By July 1960, black youth saw unemployment rates as low as 21% and as high as 76%, with young people between the ages of 16 and 19 experiencing the highest degree of joblessness.<sup>75</sup> By 1967, black youth between the ages of 18 and 24 experienced 25 to 30 percent unemployment

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<sup>74</sup> Katherine Laird, "7th Precinct Community Profile" (March 1967), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 375, Folder 9, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>75</sup> Fine, 3.

rates.<sup>76</sup> When state institutions failed to address the needs of black Detroiters, the importance of local power became much more pronounced.

While local civic groups had the desire to improve urban conditions, financial constraints and limited visions for federal programs created a barrier. Detroit's own Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh, for example, worried that War on Poverty funding could not sufficiently solve the problems of urban America. In September 1965, Cavanaugh penned a letter to President Johnson, urging him to develop more coordinated programs and less decentralized efforts. Cavanaugh wanted Detroit to be a testing ground, or what he called "Model City U.S.A." for War on Poverty funds. At that time, the Office of Economic Opportunity's approach was largely decentralized and "seldom reached 'the angry young man standing on a ghetto street.'" The Johnson administration solicited ideas from Detroit officials three months later. By November 1966, legislators had passed the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act. The law prompted cities to apply for funds in two stages: for planning and implementation. The execution of the program, however, did not allow room for local communities to determine how the funds could be used. While the War on Poverty did not prevent the Detroit rebellion of 1967 from occurring, some officials claimed that "it would have been even worse had not Detroit combated poverty so aggressively." Their argument was grounded in the fact that looters had left antipoverty facilities untouched, "and that only three of the five thousand youths enrolled in the various antipoverty programs at the time had engaged in riotous acts more serious than curfew violation."<sup>77</sup> Though limited, these programs provided the

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<sup>76</sup> Fine, 92.

<sup>77</sup> Fine, 87-93.

infrastructure and jobs that black youth utilize at the end of the decade to fund their own student movement.

Programs that created parallel civic institutions for youth – student councils and student governments – which modeled the functions and responsibilities of municipal government emerged out the government’s efforts to define young people’s democratic citizenship. Mayor Cavanaugh’s Commission on Children and Youth (DDCY) began this work in the early 1960s, before the national War on Poverty commenced, but later accepted its funds. In 1965, the Commission’s Youth Citizenship Committee embarked upon such an endeavor. To encourage adolescents to become more engaged and interested in learning about the functions of city government, one commissioner proposed the initiation of a Detroit Student Government. Rev. David Eberhard explained,

I am concerned with the caliber of tomorrow's leaders, and this program is designed to improve it. This will give them experience in actually trying to get a bill through a legislative body. They will find out about compromise and other aspects of lawmaking.

Eberhard also wanted young people to feel that they had a stake in the city’s future. As the pastor of Riverside Lutheran Church, Rev. Eberhard spent a lot of time in Detroit’s Lower East Side getting to know young people in the community where he maintained an active presence in the civil rights movement.<sup>78</sup> His relationship with the east side’s black youth likely shaped his view that young people needed to feel as if they had a stake in their own communities. The committee determined that the citywide student government

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<sup>78</sup> Detroit Youth Commission, “Detroit Youth Commission” (December 1965), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 307, Folder 47, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Bill Taitner, “Rev. David Eberhard, longtime Detroit councilman, dies at age 82,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 10, 2016. (<https://www.freep.com/story/news/obituary/2016/05/10/rev-david-eberhard-longtime-detroit-councilman-dies-age-82/84211876/>); Mark Hicks and Candace Williams, “Ex-Detroit leader Eberhard’s dedication ‘unshakable,’” *The Detroit News*, May 11, 2016 (<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/obituaries/2016/05/11/ex-detroit-leader-eberhards-dedication-unshakable/84217440/>).

would not be accountable to local pressure groups. Instead, it would be formed by students elected by the student body from each of the area high schools. Delegates would propose legislation and debate the merits, then recommend it to other governing bodies in the city. The student government would also organize regional conferences for students from high schools, settlement houses, and other local agencies to attend.<sup>79</sup> In the minds of DCCY members, it was important for black youth to understand the responsibilities of citizenship, however limited their access to rights might have been by virtue of their race. The civic leaders had witnessed the changes that the Civil Rights movement had made possible and aimed to use that same spirit to help students make sense of their role in urban politics.

The debate over the merits of creating parallel civic institutions for black youth provide a window in the world black adults envisioned for the children and grandchildren of migrants, as well as the limits of these visions. Once DCCY's Executive Secretary, Mrs. Roberta Hughes, received a proposal from Rev. David Eberhard, the group debated the merits of the program. Chairman Rev. Jerome S. Shanahan expressed concern that such a project would give the students unrealistic expectations about having a voice in creating legislation, which they did not. And once they realized this, the students would consider the whole project "a sham." Shanahan called the proposal "meaningless" and assumed that students would not be interested in it. Another commissioner, however, thought that it was a great learning opportunity for the city's youth. Other members stated that if the student government submitted proposals that were worth considering, the Commission would take it to the Common Council. Others believed that the youth group

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<sup>79</sup> Detroit Youth Commission, "Detroit Youth Commission" (December 1965).

had to focus on violence in schools. Commissioner Mergentine wondered if the proposed program would become "too much of the 'Do It Yourself' type of projects." However, Rev. Butler explained that he had witnessed troubled youth improve their behavior once they had been given responsibilities. How much control were adult leaders prepared to hand over to adolescents?<sup>80</sup> Although black youth came of age in an urban landscape that discriminatory policies had produced, adults pondered the extent to which black youth could truly bear the weight of civic responsibilities.

The debate also exposed the possibilities that black youth had more in common with adult leaders than the larger society had assumed. Although Mergentine believed that the project would lead to students organizing a "citywide movement, which is just not desirable," Commissioner Bushnell stated that, at the very least, students would be organized "and have the opportunity to participate in their own destinies." Under this proposal, students could come together, determine which social problems they found to be most important and craft solutions for them. Throughout the 1960s, Bushnell was a board member of Detroit NAACP and a member of New Detroit, Inc., a coalition of economic and political leaders who sought to remake the city after the rebellion.<sup>81</sup> His role in the movement suggests that he may have viewed black youth as important actors in the movement. Rev. Charles W. Butler noted that since it was likely that the federal government would lower the voting age to 18 years old, the student government could provide a great rehearsal for the youth who would soon practice their responsibilities of citizenship. As the pastor of New Calvary Baptist Church and a Detroit representative for

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*; and Adam Bernstein, "George Bushnell Dies," *The Washington Post* (August 10, 2002), ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/08/10/george-bushnell-dies/fba8010a-432d-4708-ac30-79cf440f6b4b/?utm\\_term=.3bbca4269e6c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/08/10/george-bushnell-dies/fba8010a-432d-4708-ac30-79cf440f6b4b/?utm_term=.3bbca4269e6c))

the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Butler had a history of fighting for open housing. Before the rebellion of 1967, he warned that racial segregation would likely lead to urban unrest.<sup>82</sup> It is likely that Butler's experience with the civil rights movement informed his desire to see young people actively participate in reforming American democracy and engaging in struggle on their own behalf.<sup>83</sup> While some adults opposed granting youth access to parallel civic organizations, others, many of whom were part of the Civil Rights establishment, saw in young people the next generation of leaders.

While local civic organizations sought to teach students how to marshal their rights as citizens, they also sought to influence their ideas about social mores. For example, the DCCY's efforts to encourage civic engagement among youth included improving race relations between black and white students through a student exchange program. This program sent black students to visit white schools and students from "culturally deprived" schools to visit culturally enriched schools. What would it mean for students from majority white schools to attend majority black schools? Or for students from under-resourced schools to have their more well-funded counterparts visit their side of town? It is not apparent if the commission considered these questions in their meetings, but their interest in such a project follows the logic of school desegregation plans: place the responsibility on youth of color to combat structural inequality. This logic was the cornerstone of local civic groups' conceptions of black youth citizenship in particular.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 270; and Sugrue, 258.

<sup>83</sup> Detroit Commission on Children and Youth, "Minutes" (March 16, 1965), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 247, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>84</sup> Detroit Commission on Children and Youth, "Minutes" (February 2, 1965), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 247, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. "Mrs. Roberta Hughes to Mr. Philip J. Rutledge," February 10, 1966, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 307, Folder 7, Archives of

As was the case with most postwar youth programs, there was always a special focus on black girls. These plans tended to address black girls' social citizenship. Published in 1965, the Moynihan report informed many of the policies and programs that emerged out of the War on Poverty. The assumption that black girls were largely a problem to be solved permeated white sociologist Daniel Moynihan's assertions that black-female headed households were the cause of black Americans' social ills. While historical studies of black life address Moynihan's emphasis on black women and their role as the heads of households, his notion that black girls' academic success was what placed black women ahead of black men is also worthy of study. According to Moynihan,

The disparity in educational attainment of male and female youth 16 to 21 who were out of school in February 1963, is striking. Among the nonwhite males, 66.3 percent were not high school graduates, compared with 55.0 percent of the females. A similar difference existed at the college level, with 4.5 percent of the males having completed 1 to 3 years of college compared with 7.3 percent of the females.

The gender disparity between black girls and black boys was just the beginning of the cycle of matriarchy, which the Moynihan study identified as the root of the tangle of pathology. The disparities in educational attainment translated into disparities in employment opportunities.<sup>85</sup> This view of black girls and black girlhood would later inform the masculine ethos of the Black Power movement as well as black girls' resistance to middle class conceptions or respectability.

Moynihan was also concerned about black girls' sexuality, and the problem of unwed teenage mothers who became dependent on the welfare state. While Moynihan was indeed concerned about black women and black matriarchy, he was equally as

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Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>85</sup> "U.S. Department of Labor -- History -- Chapter IV. The Tangle of Pathology," accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/moynchapter4.htm>.

troubled by the fact that the “tangle of pathology” began at an early age with young black girls. Moynihan represented a larger trend in social science that suggested to black girls that they should not be too sexually active or too smart. Since Moynihan took much of his interpretation from black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier’s work on black youth and family life, we should read Moynihan’s report in the tradition of 1960s “youth-centered racial liberalism” that focused on personality development. Moynihan explains,

The disorganized families have failed to provide for their emotional needs and have not provided the discipline and habits which are necessary for personality development. Because the disorganized family has failed in its function as a socializing agency, it has handicapped the children in their relations to the institutions in the community.<sup>86</sup>

While black female migrants came to Detroit in search of better jobs, their daughters and granddaughters became the ire of policymakers.

Local civic groups that had a long history in urban communities sought to improve the character of black girls. Moynihan reflected the common-sense ideas of both black and white reformers in Detroit and other cities. The Detroit Urban League worked to develop preventative and pregnancy services specifically for black unwed teenaged mothers who were likely represented in these statistics. In addition to their work with the

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<sup>86</sup> For more on “youth-centered racial liberalism,” see Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America’s Long Struggle for Racial Equality*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); “U.S. Department of Labor -- History -- Chapter V. The Case for National Action,” accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/moynchapter5.htm>. National and local civic groups were equally concerned about girls becoming “wayward” juveniles. In 1967, the Chicago Defender detailed these national concerns in the article, “Delinquency Among Girls Increases.” According to a report released by the Children's Bureau of the Welfare Administration, an office in the U.S. Department for Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), juvenile court cases involving girls increased by 8% while cases among boys increased by less than .50%. In urban areas, the upsurge was closer to 13% whereas rural areas saw a 19% increase. While court cases among girls were due to larceny, sex offenses, running away, and “ungovernable behavior,” reformers like Mrs. Katherine B. Oettinger were principally concerned about girls’ sex offenses. Gertrude Samuels, “Rescue for the Wayward Girls: An Unusual Experiment in Los Angeles, Substituting Therapy for Punishment, Contrasts with Programs Elsewhere, Notably in New York,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1961, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

12<sup>th</sup> Street Academy, a school for high school dropouts, these reformers took what Albert Cleage called the "social work approach" to teen problems. The DUL "social work approach" was guided by two assumptions: first, that girls who found themselves with child had made a choice to do so. In an internal memo written by Lovell Jones, the acting director of the organization's Health and Welfare Department, "The act is often committed without awareness of her own purposive behavior and in the majority of instances it is the result of a desire to feel needed, wanted, and loved." Second, they assumed that some girls might experience "guilt feelings and shame" that would require counseling to help solve "emotional and social problems." In collaboration with the Detroit Board of Education, they sponsored sex education forums that included film discussions and talks by representatives from local law enforcement and social service agencies. Topics included "homosexuality and perversion," "sex and prostitution," and "the future of sex education in the schools." By 1967, the Detroit Urban League (DUL) used its resources to provide data about the limited services that were available to black teenage mothers who needed assistance once they became pregnant.<sup>87</sup>

Simultaneously, the Detroit Commission on Children and Youth provided programming for girls that demonstrated the larger society's conception of girlhood as tied to consumerism and domestic work. In her report on the organization's cultural enrichment programs, Roberta Hughes described a common scene from such trips with the girls, "Armed with their frilliest aprons, thirty-five homemaking students from the Spain Jr. High School attended a lecture-demonstration in the Electric Living Department

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<sup>87</sup> Fine, 25; Detroit Urban League, "Sex Education Forum" (June 9, 1965), Sex Education Forum, 1965-66, Box 56, Detroit Urban League Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; Detroit Urban League, "Sex Education Forum" (February 23, 1966), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

of the Detroit Edison Company.” The trip also provided the girls with hands-on experience. Hughes explains,

The girls saw model kitchens, discussed kitchen planning and the use of modern appliance. Each girl participated in the beginning-to-finish preparation of a small snack, which was enjoyed by all. This gave the pupils an opportunity to utilize some of the principles and appliances they had discussed in class.

The Commission also organized a Teen Glamour Club that provided professional dance classes.<sup>88</sup>

When African Americans migrated to the Detroit, they imagined a world with schools that would prepare their children for a life independent of the sharecropping system that was the cornerstone of the southern economy. Although black women did not explicitly discuss the futures of black girls, black women's escape from violence in the Southern household suggests that they envisioned a life for their daughters that freed them from violence in the workplace and in the home. As they developed community institutions and networks, their vision of what was possible became much more expansive. Legal battles over integrated schools gave way to movements for black community control. Demands for access to the voting booth evolved into elections for union and municipal positions. For young people, the states' conceptions of their social and democratic citizenship were marked by the battle between young people's dependence and the state's efforts to teach youth that independence was the cornerstone of American democracy. The problem, however, was that black citizenship was always limited. Despite the War on Poverty and the efforts to improve the personality and character development of black youth, black adolescents had to still contend with a world

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<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Roberta Hughes to Mr. Philip J. Rutledge,” February 10, 1966, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 307, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

where structural inequality limited their life chances. Instead, they fought for a vision of liberation that did not solely rest on ideas about citizenship but instead, included conceptions of power as rightfully theirs.

### **Black Power Youth Inherit Detroit's Civic Future**

As African American adolescents came of age during the 1960s, they inherited a world where African Americans experienced simultaneously progress and immense repression and exclusion in most spheres of American life. But as the children and grandchildren of black migrants, they also seized the long history of African American struggles for liberation and freedom. They had heard stories about the prosperity that factory jobs had brought, albeit limited, to black Detroiters. In conversations at the dining room table, they heard tales of the great accomplishments that black artists, thinkers, and political leaders had made to American society. These young people inherited a world of possibilities and contradictions.

The black high school youth who fought to make Black Power a lived reality in multiple sites of struggle were incredibly diverse whether in familial and class backgrounds, political ideology, and post-graduate aspirations. Some were members of the Black Student United Front and advocated a Marxist-Leninist analysis of social conditions while others embraced the Black Cultural Nationalism of Amiri Baraka. In many instances, they experimented with ideas and beliefs that were sometimes contradictory. Although students may have held divergent political views, the connections they made when attending citywide community meetings helped to facilitate relationships across the ideological spectrum. The close-knit character of Detroit's communities and junior high schools also created a vibrant network of high school

activism across institutions and neighborhoods. As a case in point, students who attended Post Middle School often encountered each other at Cooley High and Pershing High schools as students. Despite having different political commitments, they had created bonds in middle school that they carried with them into the high schools. Their familial networks, experiences in schools, and lives in diverse local communities provide the experiences they would marshal to make sense of the world they had inherited and planned to change.

### **Gregory Hicks: “Then, let’s close this sucka’ down.”**

Before Gregory Hicks began his high school years at Cooley, he had already spent close to a year organizing his peers as a 14-year old student at Post Middle School. Both schools stood in the Northwest section of the city, which had become ground zero for Detroit’s school desegregation battles. As an African American student at Post, Hicks was all too familiar with the racial violence that blacks had to navigate in Northwest Detroit. When he and his family moved to this section from the Old North End in 1965, they had heard the stories of white racist attacks on black families that had tried to integrate his neighborhood years before. As a student at Post, Hicks and his family lived in the Fenkell Avenue and Greenlawn areas. When Hicks and his ten siblings moved into the community, they joined a growing number of black families that posed a challenge to the old order of residential segregation. Within the context of the city’s changing racial demographics, the move placed Hicks in the middle of this battle.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

Born in 1954 in Detroit, MI, Hicks came of age in a household with parents who had migrated from Birmingham, Alabama. His father worked in Detroit's steel industries while his mother found employment in several sectors, including the hospital industry, hair salons, and the Michigan-based Big Boi restaurant. Since the family had limited options for childcare, Hicks spent many nights at work with his mother, often assisting her with cleaning in many instances. According to Hicks, his parents emphasized the importance of education and a good work ethic. "My immediate role models were my parents; they worked hard," Hicks explained. "I could see how hard they worked and that left an everlasting impression. That if you work hard, you get more out of life." But life in Northwest Detroit also introduced Hicks to community activists like Larry Nevels of the community organization Unicom (a League affiliate) and Marian Kramer of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. In his home life and in the community, Hicks found support in his efforts to organize and mobilize his school peers.<sup>90</sup>

In Nevels and Kramer, Hicks gained access to movement mentors and a path to formal organizing in the community and in the schools. When Hicks entered Post Junior High School in 1967, black youth had already started to lay claim to spaces that white youth had established as their own. Black radical organizations in Detroit, largely led by adults from the Old and New African American Left, developed community institutions that nurtured this activism and black youth's visions of liberation. Hicks also encountered radical educators like Melvin Peters, Claude Chapman, and Ronald McCombs who taught African American literature and history in their English and social studies classes. At the young age of 14 years old, he had organized student walkouts and marches at Post

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<sup>90</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

and actively engaged in direct action. These experiences prepared him for the much bigger struggles that awaited black students at Cooley High School.<sup>91</sup>

Hicks arrived at Cooley in the fall of 1969, and instantly encountered racism from teachers, the local white community and his peers. However, his experiences with radical black educators and activists at Post had prepared him to become a leader of the school's student movement at Cooley. Over the course of two years, Hicks appeared in local news stories as a prominent activist. In addition to sitting on the Cooley-School Community Council as a student representative and leading walkouts, he was also falsely arrested on charges of committing armed robbery. As a student activist Cooley, Hicks served as the youth director of Unicom and the founding member of the Black Student United Front. He attended the League's political education classes where he read books like *Labor's Untold Story: The Adventure Story of the Battles, Betrayals and Victories of American Working Men and Women* and *Black Reconstruction* alongside black auto factory workers.<sup>92</sup> But this activism came at a cost. When the school board learned that Hicks was a leader in the citywide student movement, they transferred him to Northwestern High School during his last year. This common disciplinary action, however, made it possible for students to carry the movement into other schools. According to Hicks,

I'm sure it was not intentional on their part, but what that meant is that they ended up sending some of our best organizers and most radicalized students to spark additional activities at other schools. And so, as we met more students around the city, this idea of a citywide organization emerged.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story: The Adventure Story of the Battles, Betrayals and Victories of American Working Men and Women*, 3rd edition (United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of Amer, 1979); W. E. B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1935).

Despite these challenges, Hicks played a pivotal role in struggles for community control of schools, black labor power, and community resources.<sup>93</sup>

**Cassandra Ford (Bell): “So I began to try to fight back. I began to say, ‘you know what? I gotta’ survive.’”**

Since Cassandra Ford had spent most of her life attending schools in the Detroit suburb of Highland Park, the racial violence and segregation that characterized Northwest Detroit’s high schools was not a part of her vocabulary or consciousness. Although Highland Park bordered Detroit, for Ford it constituted a different world with a whole set of possibilities that seemed inaccessible to students who attended Detroit Public Schools. As a case in point, Ford recalled learning German in grammar school while it was also common for her peers to study Spanish. A 1968 report of conditions at Post Junior High School, which was also in Northwest Detroit, suggests that intermediate schools did not have language courses. In fact, students included requests for language courses in the demands they issued following a schoolwide walkout.<sup>94</sup> Cassandra decided to attend Cooley when teachers at Highland Park High School went on strike during her sophomore year in September 1970.<sup>95</sup> Upon transferring to Cooley, she immediately noticed a difference between the level of student readiness she encountered at Highland Park High as a freshman and the readiness of tenth graders at Cooley. The education she received at Highland Park High School placed her ahead of her 10<sup>th</sup> grade peers and led

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<sup>93</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Post Junior High School Investigation Committee, “Report” (May 1, 1968), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>95</sup> “Teachers Strike in Highland Park,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 1, 1970, <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/98915362/>.

Cooley administrators to place her in classes with 11<sup>th</sup> graders. She would later use this insight in her writings as an editor for the underground student paper, *The Black Student Voice*.<sup>96</sup>

Ford was raised by her mother who was a domestic worker and she spent much of her childhood in the home her grandmother purchased in a predominantly white neighborhood. As a child, Ford viewed fashion models as role models, but quickly learned that little black girls like her had limited examples to look up to for inspiration. Ford explains,

As a child, I looked at models, but I always knew that I couldn't be one. I used to always think that was just so wonderful to be able to do that, for a whole lot of reasons. I figured that I couldn't be that because I was black, number one. And at that time, most of them were all white.

While dark-skinned girls like Ford came of age with African American female celebrities like Nina Simone and Cicely Tyson, Ford suggested that she had very few examples she could relate to. The desire to see herself, as a little black girl, in the popular images of black women shaped much of her childhood and would later inform her fight for culturally relevant curriculum.<sup>97</sup>

When Cassandra Ford entered the movement, she had little knowledge of the contentious times that awaited her at Cooley High School. Once the Board of Education instituted its desegregation policy, local whites in the Cooley School district harassed black students who had traveled through that section of town to attend school. Encounters with white vigilante violence became a daily feature of black students' educational experiences. Ford tried to explain to her mother the terror she experienced, hoping that

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<sup>96</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

she would defend her daughter and demand that the school take action. However, Ford's mother was born and raised in Crowville, LA, and had experienced similar violence as a student. Years later, in 1962, for example, Crowville was one of 16 towns where the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses to protest integration after the Catholic Archdiocese desegregated its classes at the start of the school year.<sup>98</sup> Ford was aware of the violence her mother experienced while attending segregated schools because her mother shared these experiences as a cautionary tale for her young daughter who refused to run away from the violence. When Ford tried to explain the gravity of the situation at Cooley, her mother offered little support for resistance. Ford explains, "It took me a while to understand that she got scared. She didn't want me to get hurt. She was just like, 'Go the other way.' So, I was like 'What other way?' I'm like, 'No! We gotta' stand up and do something. Bring some attention to this.'" Her mother's fear sparked in her a resolve to defend herself.

When I came home and told my mother, I expected her to get up and go with me into the school and get this straightened out. But I didn't get that, and it just left me feeling like 'what?! Then it's up to me.' That's when I decided that I had to get involved in this struggle because it's about our future.

In the era of Black Power, in the North, and in an urban landscape that had a long history of black militancy, Ford found alternatives that her mother did not have.<sup>99</sup>

Detroit's Black Power movement provided an answer to Ford's desire to ensure her own survival and to realize a vision of safe schooling. Although students had organized a chapter of the Black Student United Front at Highland Park High School, Ford did not join the student group until she arrived at Cooley High School. She explains,

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<sup>98</sup> "Klan Active as Church Schools Enroll Negroes in Louisiana," *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), Sep 3, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Washington Post*, pg. A6.

<sup>99</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

I understood the movement was going on and there were some things that needed to be addressed, but I didn't see it as a necessity as it was when I went to Cooley. It became, 'Oh yeah. I gotta get involved in this and actually fight for some things to change, even the curriculum.'

Attending schools in both cities gave Ford crucial insight into race, power, and place in educational politics.<sup>100</sup>

**Geraldine (Jeri) Love: “And then Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. So, the dialogue really escalated.”**

Before Jeri love joined the movement as a high school student, she had witnessed her mother and father serve their communities as educators and civil rights organizers. In 1953, Geraldine (Jeri) Love was born to a father who was a migrant from Alabama and the son of a sharecropper, and a mother who was one of Detroit's black educational theorists. Love was raised in a middle-class family that lived in the prosperous black and affluent neighborhood of Conant Gardens. As a child, her father lived on the outskirts of this community where he worked his first job as a paperboy. Throughout the 1950s, this community, which was located on the Northeast side of Woodward Avenue, was home to Detroit's black middle class. Many of the African Americans who lived there had college degrees. Although her father spent much of his time looking from the outside in as a child, he vowed to one day own a home there. And later in life, he did. Throughout much of Jeri's childhood and teen years, this home served as a community hub for local black youth. Since Love's father was a community organizer with the NAACP's integration and voter registration campaigns. He worked several jobs, sometimes at the same time. Although he worked awhile in the auto factories, he maintained a small farm in his

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<sup>100</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

backyard, affectionately known as Sam Love's Plantation.<sup>101</sup> At other times, he worked for the local post office, which offered greater job security and freedom from dangerous factory work. Love's mother worked as an elementary school and middle school teacher and developed workbooks and textbooks that focused on the metric system. Since Love's mother spent much of her time in the local schools, many of the young people in the community recognized her even when they encountered her away from school.<sup>102</sup> As active members of the civil rights community, Love's parents fostered a community-centered ethic in their home and in the daily lives of their children.<sup>103</sup>

While local officials watched efforts to desegregate schools in Northwest Detroit with great anxiety, the young people like Jeri Love who attended schools in the Northeast section of the city experienced a quiet, though still difficult, school integration scheme. Love attended the Atkinson Elementary School, which had a significant presence of black men in the teaching force. For Love, Atkinson represented a space where there was a strong sense of community and a commitment to relating to the needs of black children, including young people who lived in low-income homes. However, Love noticed a stark distinction in how teachers at Farwell Junior High School treated black children from poor and working-class communities. According to Love, who was one of the first black students to integrate Farwell, teachers treated children who did not come from middle-class homes not with care, but with indifference. Although Love's experience with school desegregation differed greatly from Gregory Hicks' experience, it was nevertheless a teachable moment in the politics of class, race, and education. The sense of community

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<sup>101</sup> Jeri Love, Interview with the author, October 30, 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

that her parents instilled in her made Love aware of the issues that her peers had to grapple with and enabled her to look beyond her experiences and middle-class upbringing.<sup>104</sup>

While these early lessons in the home and in the schools revealed to Love the classed dimensions of racial inequality, her social time with her high school peers made space for her to engage with the ideas of national leaders who articulated solutions to these conditions in student-centered spaces. For much of her life, Love advocated the politics of Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. However, after King's assassination, she found Malcolm X's arguments useful to understanding the contemporary moment. Conversations with local members of the Nation of Islam and other Black Nationalists, many whom lived in her neighborhood, introduced Love to a different world of political possibilities. Although she attended Pershing High School for one year, it was a year that marked a critical shift in her political consciousness. Love explains, "And then Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. So, the dialogue really escalated." For Love, King's assassination marked the beginning of her embrace of black radical politics. If life in her neighborhood schools introduced her to the politics of race, her time at Cass Technical High School, and as a member of the Black Student United front, would expand her politics to include an analysis of gender as well.<sup>105</sup>

When Jeri Love transferred to Cass Technical High School, she had fulfilled her father's hopes that she would get an education that would lead to upward mobility, but she had also entered a student movement that challenged conceptions class mobility. It was an open-enrollment school located downtown near Wayne State University and had a

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

rigorous catalogue of academic and performance curricula. But access to Wayne State University and Cass Technical that brought together students from across the city offered Love entry into the movement in 1969. Through Chuck Wilson, a childhood friend and student at Wayne State, who had worked with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Love learned of the National Black Economic Development Conference, which was well attended by members of the Black Student United Front. The conference introduced Love to Gregory Hicks, who would not only encourage her to join the BSUF but who would later become a romantic partner.<sup>106</sup>

Love became a prominent leader in the BSUF and in the movement at Cass Tech, and used her voice to fight for gendered equality as well as black studies and black literature courses. In 1970, Love resisted the fact that girls were not allowed to wear jeans at school. One day, she organized her female peers to wear jeans to school as a form of protest of the dress code. Although the school expelled her, she returned, and continued to pursue her demands. According to Love, she was deeply influence by the women's rights which seemed to offer a more expansive vision of black girlhood when compared to the Black Power movement. However, as a member of the Black Student United Front, Love was exposed to the leadership of women in the League like Marian Kramer and Edna Ewell Watson. While she describes Kramer as "the most powerful woman in the League," she explains that anything that was considered feminist was characterized as "counterrevolutionary." In school, however, she found a path to joining the politics of race, gender, and age in the struggles to reform the high school dress code.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

**Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell: “When I was young, I knew something was wrong. I understood it almost instinctively and intuitively.”**

For Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell the “world of work” shaped much of his life. His father worked as an electrician for the Ford Motor Company for more than thirty years, while his brothers and daughter spent much of their lives employed with the Chrysler Auto Company. His father’s experience as a soldier in the Korean War and as an autoworker deeply influenced the Mitchell’s home life. According to Darryl Mitchell,

Our home was set up on an industrial model. When we got up in the morning, we had to make up our beds. We had to lay out our clothes at night so that when we got up in the morning, we would go to school. Each person in our house – it was five boys and one girl – had a distinct task to do.

Raised in what he calls, “the last phase of the industrial revolution,” Mitchell came of age in a middle-class home where his parents valued hard work and an appreciation for how labor expanded the possibilities for black families. Furthermore, he watched his father reap the limited benefits of U.S. citizenship that African Americans had access to: the G.I. Bill. Like many African American veterans, Mitchell’s father used the benefits afforded by the G.I. Bill to purchase a home for his family in the middle-class suburb of Highland Park. As the son of a laborer and veteran, Mitchell came of age aware of the might of organized labor and social movements and how such struggles could improve the daily lives of black Americans.<sup>108</sup>

Mitchell's family life was filled with the sounds, images, and stories of African American dreams of freedom. During the second Great Migration, his mother arrived from Compton, Tennessee while his father came to the Motor City by way of Augusta, Georgia. As his father labored in the factories, his mother took courses in nursing in

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<sup>108</sup> Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

Highland Park and went on to become an Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) at Highland Park Hospital.<sup>109</sup> His mother was a part of a generation of African American women who joined a long history of "class and race conscious" black medical professionals that had its origins at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>110</sup> In the homes of aunts and uncles who were artists, Mitchell found paintings of and by African American artists. He explains, "That impacted me just profoundly because it gave me a sense of a different aesthetic." As a child of migrants, Mitchell inherited the economic and artistic fruits of the Great Migration.

Although Mitchell attended several area high schools, he found stability in community figures like Mama Naomi Oden. After attending the predominantly black Northern High School and Central High School, Mitchell falsified documents to enroll at Cass Technical High School, but, after a week, dropped out of school before finishing the eleventh grade. However, he encountered a woman of the Bahai Faith who lived across the street from Ferris Middle School. Many in the Highland Park community knew of Mama Oden and her husband James as fierce community activists who warned local youth of the horrors of drug addiction.<sup>111</sup>

She would watch all the kids from her front porch and for some reason she picked out Walter Thompson, Marshall Walston and myself because we used to hang

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<sup>109</sup> Although Mitchell doesn't recall the name of the school, it is likely that his mother attended the Highland Park General Hospital School of Nursing. See Patricia Ibbotson, *Images of America: Detroit's Hospitals, Healers, and Helpers* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004) and "Cheryl Pierce-Reid, July 25th, 2015," *Detroit 1967 Online Archive*, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/89>.

<sup>110</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890-1950," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (2003): 1279-294. doi:10.2307/3092543.

<sup>111</sup> Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, "Race, Gender and Difference: African American Women and the Struggle for Equality," in eds. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Richard Thomas, *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America: 1898-2000* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), 69-94 ; June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1997); and Marsha Philpot, interview with the author, 2015.

together. And she would always talk with us every day, always talked. [...] She deeply influenced me.

Mama Oden introduced Mitchell to General Gordon Baker, who would later become his mentor in the Black Power and labor movement.<sup>112</sup>

As a 16-year-old founding member of the Black Student United Front, Mitchell spent much of his time contributing to the “propaganda apparatus.” In this role, he wrote for and published the Front’s mimeographed paper, *Black Student Voice*, and helped to distribute the League’s paper *DRUM* at the plant gates of Dodge Main’s auto factory. While many of his BSUF peers organized within the school system, Mitchell spent much of his time with the League, and would ultimately join the ranks of autoworkers once he dropped out of school. As an older member of the BSUF, he often took on the responsibility of helping younger students negotiate their roles as organizers as well as the personal issues they encountered in their homes. Mitchell’s age afforded him access to the adult-centered spaces of the labor movement while serving as a bridge to school struggles that were a constant presence in the lives of younger activists. Mama Oden and General Baker had tapped into a feeling that Mitchell had, but could not articulate: that something was fundamentally wrong with the social order. It was a feeling, he says, that evolved out of his upbringing and a feeling that would shape his decision to join the Black Student United Front.

**Shirikiana Aina (Laura Ross): “I was plopped into an era where self-discovery was mandatory.”**

As the daughter of an African American father who was an entrepreneur, and a white mother who was trained social worker, Laura Ross was accustomed to asking

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<sup>112</sup> Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

complicated questions about racial identity. She spent much of her childhood and adolescence in Northwest Detroit, first living on Delaware Avenue, and then moving to Seven Mile Road. But once her parents deemed the Seven Mile area as too dangerous, the family moved to Birwood Street. This area, like many in Northwest Detroit, had experienced white flight. Years later, the family would move again, but this time to Six Mile Road, where Aina would start her time as a student at Cass Technical High School. In the home, Aina learned early on that she was a representative of her race; that her actions served as a reflection of the broader African American community.<sup>113</sup>

This ethic, of respectability to one's race, spilled over into her school life, and served as a complement to her home life. As a student at the predominantly black Beaubien Junior High School, the majority-black teaching staff emphasized that it was important for black youth to act "proper." In the face of the indignities that racial segregation mapped onto the lives of black Americans, the black professional class viewed "proper" behavior as the means through which the next generation could have the sense of dignity that previous generations had fought so diligently for. This ethic, however, clashed with the ethos set by black youth who organized in the South. By the late 1960s, activists of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) embraced the "working person's" uniform: jeans. While black elders saw dresses as a proper form of attire and a means of representing the race, black youth viewed this kind of attire as the hallmark of materialism and resisted it as such. Aina explains that she often heard "Walk down the street with your head held high like you've got somewhere to go" from elders in school and in her family. As a junior high school student, Aina, along

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<sup>113</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

with her peers, resisted this notion that respectable attire was the path to freedom and full humanity.<sup>114</sup>

This spirit of rebellion characterized much of Aina's adolescent years. But as time passed, came a greater yearning to understand herself as an African American girl. As a biracial teenager, Aina saw in the Black Power movement a black consciousness that helped her make sense of herself, and even of, her curly hair. This consciousness was not only significant to her personal development, but it was also important to her political awakening as well. As a case in point, following Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968, she and her peers boycotted their school to acknowledge his death. But this dissidence was met with additional arguments that respectability was the path black youth should look towards. Aina explains,

And I remember my black math teacher saying to us in the doorway the next day, 'You have to come to school tomorrow because King would have wanted you to be in school. That would have made him happiest. You shouldn't skip school.' Of course, we didn't agree with that. We didn't come to school.

In the Black Power movement, Aina found herself and her voice.<sup>115</sup>

Aina carried this rebellious spirit with her into Cass Technical High School when she began her freshman year in 1970. While she did not explicitly identify with the ideals of black nationalism as a junior high school student, her outlook and activism at Cass Technical had a much clearer intellectual foundation. As a member of the Black Student Caucus at Cass, Aina fought for black history and black literature courses. Her activism in the caucus then pushed her into Baraka's Congress of All African People (CAP). As a teenager, she was an avid reader who valued the opportunity to read and study in youth

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

collectives. For Aina, coming of age in an era of self-discovery as the daughter of a white mother and an African American father, the Black Power movement was essential to her ability to find her connection to Africa and to giving her a better sense of her role in this society as a change agent. She explains,

[S]o when you start to construct your identity that way and put these pieces into place, you realize that whoa! There some things that I have to do on the planet now that I realize I have a base, that I have a root. There's some things around here that really need to change.

As a student activist at Cass Technical, Aina marshalled this process of self-discovery in service of the fight for culturally relevant education.<sup>116</sup>

**Malik Yakini (David Burton): “It wasn't so much that I chose the movement. But really, the movement chose me.”**

While Malik Yakini considered himself a “son of Malcolm,” he locates his roots in the lands of Georgia and Arkansas as the grandson of African American migrants. Born David Burton, Yakini came of age watching his self-employed grandparents work to make a life for themselves in the North. Both of his parents were born and raised in Detroit, but had descended from skilled southern migrants. Yakini’s paternal grandfather arrived in Detroit during the 1920s to work at the Ford Motor Company’s River Rouge plant as a tool and die maker.<sup>117</sup> His grandfather had likely joined the first cohort of African American tool and die makers who received training from the Henry Ford Trade School in Highland Park. The school trained students in skilled trades such as foundry, carpeting, and tool and die making. Ford expanded his training programs to include the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

Apprentice School he formed in 1923 at the River Rouge plant.<sup>118</sup> Yakini's maternal grandfather also migrated to Detroit from Brinkley, Arkansas during the 1920s, where he used his training as a printer to establish his own business. For Yakini, the entrepreneurial spirit his grandparents championed was a source of great pride for him as a young person. He explains,

So, for all of my childhood, my grandfather and grandmother were self-employed in a business that they owned. And that had a profound influence on me. Seeing them working hard – up late at night and up early in the morning – to kind of create this self-sufficiency.<sup>119</sup>

Yakini did not view this work ethic in the context of Protestantism, but rather, as evidence that contradicted negative depictions of black Americans. Yakini's familial background had expanded his understanding of the possibilities of black life long before Malcolm X ignited black youth's militancy.<sup>120</sup>

Yakini greatly benefited from a new black leadership class that was radical and had gained access to institutional resources and influence. As a case in point, his experiences with the local Boy Scout troop taught him leadership skills and how to work with others while creating a male-centered environment that had the support of local fathers. He explains,

We'd go camping a lot, which also instilled a lot of really good values in me and gave me the confidence to survive any situation, to be observant of things around me, to know how to respond to emergencies, and to know how not to lose my head when there are emergency situations.

Yakini returned to these lessons when participating in walkouts and protests during his years as a high school student at Cass Technical High School.

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<sup>118</sup> Quentin R. Skrabec Jr, *The Green Vision of Henry Ford and George Washington Carver: Two Collaborators in the Cause of Clean Industry* (McFarland, 2013), 182.

<sup>119</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

In addition to these tactical lessons, Yakini developed his black consciousness in the classrooms of radical black educators like Melvin Peters and Ronald McCombs. As teachers at Post Junior High School, Peters and McCombs introduced students to black authors, ideas, and experiences. Peters, who taught both Yakini and Gregory Hicks in his English courses, used *Black Voices: An Anthology of African American Literature* as his core text. The anthology included works from Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Margaret Walker.<sup>121</sup> When recalling the experience of encountering these works, Yakini explains,

Grappling with that text, and the ideas in it and the discussions in class really had a profound influence on us as young people. It started us to really think about conditions as African people in this country and looking at things on a global basis.

In McCombs' Social Studies class, Yakini read the Black Panther Party's newspaper as a source of information about world affairs. McCombs integrated Malcolm X's *Message to the Grassroots* into his lesson plans, revealing the pedagogical power of culturally and politically relevant primary sources. Yakini recalled,

I never really heard Malcolm in depth before. And to really hear his analysis at that time was really mind-blowing for me. It had a tremendous impact not only on the way I perceived the world, but also all of my classmates.

He continues,

And we used to listen to it over and over and over again to the point where we could almost quote the whole record verbatim. Because he talked about things on an international level. He talked about the Bandung Conference that had occurred and talked about power on a global level. It caused us to start looking at things in a very broad way.

These black middle-class educators and community leaders Yakini encountered used their resources and access to the levers of municipal power to develop the leadership

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<sup>121</sup> Abraham Chapman, *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

potential, black consciousness, and commitment to global change in Yakini's generation.<sup>122</sup>

When Yakini left Post Junior High School and started classes at Cass Technical in January 1971, he entered a high school movement that was already in motion. During his first year, he joined the Black Student Caucus, which had already organized student walkouts and sit-ins. In the organization, Yakini found high school members of the Republic of New Afrika who introduced him to groups ideas and demands. While this high school network, which included non-caucus students, expanded Yakini's political activities, it also engaged in the kind of revolutionary violence he assumed would bring about radical change. Yakini explains,

We definitely saw revolutionary violence as being a factor in this revolution that we were trying to bring about. And so, as young people, we were reading and studying and learning various techniques that we thought would be employed in making this revolution to overthrow the existing power, and to establish a kind of people's government or a government that represented the aspirations of the people more so and enable black people to have a greater degree of self-reliance and self-determination.

Yakini's evolution in consciousness began with his grandparents' entrepreneurial spirit and ethic of self-determination. It was then nurtured by radical educators and leaders of the progressive black middle class. And within the context of the black high student movement, the seeds of this consciousness produced a revolutionary.<sup>123</sup>

**Jametta (Boyce) Lily: “There were no images in the school that reflected black people. And this was in a city that was at least 50% black.”**

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<sup>122</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

By the time Jametta Lily began her freshman year at Cass Technical, she had already spent hundreds of hours attending community meetings in church basements and listening to her parents discuss the movement at the dining room table. Years later, Lily and her friends would also meet at this same table to debate tactics over how to force the school to create black history and black literature courses. Lily was born into a middle-class family that nurtured her self-awareness at an early age. Jametta Lily was born in Misouti, India in 1955 where she lived with her parents until the trio returned to the states in 1960. Although the family moved to the state of Washington for a short time, a call from Jametta's aunt and grandmother sent them back to Detroit. Once they arrived, Lily's father accepted a position at Wayne State University as a sociology professor. As early as seven years-old, Lily found the college classroom to be a liberating space, where she could create her own world while listening to her father expand the young minds of his college students. According to Lily, her father would often stop his lectures to ask about illustrations she was crafting at the back of the classroom. At the age of six or seven years old, she became accustomed to answering questions about herself and about her ideas, all of which suggested to her that her experiences mattered. Lily's middle-class childhood provided her with a foundation that would draw upon as a student activist at Cass Technical High School.<sup>124</sup>

This middle-class childhood had its challenges, but the black community provided a safety net for young Jametta Lily. Lily's family lived in a predominantly white middle-class community on the West side that was largely Catholic and that had experienced a wave of white flight and a major shift in Detroit's racial geography. With her father's

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<sup>124</sup> Jametta Lily, Interview with the author, November 3, 2015.

economic and social capital, the Boyces became one of three black families to integrate the community. Lily attended Thirkell Elementary School on the West Side where she was given the role of library captain before moving on to Hutchins Junior High School. When the family moved to Euclid Street, her elementary school was predominantly white. But by 1966, most of its schoolchildren were African American. The racial demographics of homeownership also changed. When the Boyces first moved into the community, most of the families owned their homes. However, the community soon included families who could only rent. While the ground below her shifted, she found stability in the black women she encountered in her home and in the beauty shop where she worked doing small tasks.<sup>125</sup> Lily gained a great sense of self-awareness from her family and community, and marshalled this confidence in her writings about community life. As a preteen, Lily worked as a youth editor for a local independent community paper that operated out of an office near Linwood Avenue and Clairmount Avenue. She used this platform to interview other young people about their experiences in the community. Despite white flight, Lily had found a community that supported and nurtured her ideas and adolescent development.<sup>126</sup>

Immediately after the summer rebellion of 1967, Lily found community in other students who also wrestled with ways to understand the event, the changes in the city's racial geography, and the possibility of gaining power in post-rebellion Detroit. As a case in point, she often had conversations with older students about Marxism and dialectical materialism at the age of 13. While she did not fully understand these ideas, she recalls these conversations as integral to her intellectual development. Lily also found a

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

community of student activists when she entered Cass Technical High School in 1970, including Shirikiana Aina and Malik Yakini. While Cooley was Lily's neighborhood high school, she was all too familiar with the stories of school violence that shaped the narrative around Cooley. But she had also witnessed and experienced racial violence at her junior high school. However, after a white school counselor explained that her grades were good enough for her to attend Cass Tech, Lily decided to undertake her high school studies there. As a student of the Performing Arts curriculum at Cass Tech, she joined the Black Student Caucus where she would fight for culturally relevant courses.<sup>127</sup>

**Michael (Humphrey) Simanga: “We have to resist this. And we have to organize ourselves.”**

Michael (Humphrey) Simanga was born in 1954, nearly two months before the U.S. Supreme Court determined that separate equal education was unconstitutional. While the vision of integrated schooling shaped much of the classical civil rights period, Simanga found himself developing collective struggle as a high school activist at Mumford around the form and function of black education in a way that pivoted on the long history of black nationalist thought. During his early childhood, Simanga attended Custer Elementary School and Beaubien Junior High, both of which were segregated at the time. According to Simanga, while these school leaders would have considered his schools “under resourced,” these community institutions provided a “sacred space” from the humiliation of segregation. The experience of learning in black communities gave him a window into the possibilities of black community control of schools.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Michael (Humphrey) Simanga, interview with the author, March 1, 2017.

Humphrey traces his lineage through the Great Migration. While his paternal grandmother came to Detroit from South Carolina, his (maternal?) grandfather arrived in Inkster, Michigan from Montgomery, Alabama. Once there, Simanga's grandfather joined the Inkster Police Department as a detective where he later rose to the ranks of deputy police chief. But due to structural racism, his grandfather remained there with no hope for promotion to police chief. Humphrey's maternal grandmother worked as a domestic worker, was well-read and spoke conversational French while his paternal grandfather worked as a janitor in the auto factories, as a Pullman porter, and for a short time in the local informal economy, as a gambler. The possibilities for their children, however, expanded. Simanga's mother was an educator while his father worked as a youth counselor. While his grandparents experienced limited economic mobility as southern migrants, his parents inherited a change in the economic and social order that gave blacks from working-class families access to the black professional class.<sup>129</sup>

Both of Simanga's parents came of age in working class families in Inkster, MI, a small city next to the Detroit suburb of Dearborn. His father joined the air force to take care of the family. Upon returning to civilian life, he worked in the auto factories, and later as a counselor in juvenile detention homes. According to Simanga, joining his father during his work with youth summer programs and other community civic work created an infrastructure for his own activist work as a young person. Simanga considered his father a "servant of the people," and often asked himself as a teenager, "How do you build a life of service?" From his father, he learned that "Revolution is a series of reforms."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

While Michael's parents grew up in working class families, they managed to achieve a measure of upward mobility. His mother attended Eastern Michigan University and the University of Detroit. In addition to seeking advanced degrees, she worked as a phone operator and a receptionist at a local hair salon. The Humphrey's lived in the Brewster projects on the West Side for a time, and then moved into a two-story frame house on Baylis Street. He had moved from a majority black community into a white community that was in transition, but which had a large Jewish community.<sup>131</sup>

The seeds of Michael's activism were planted and nurtured in the home Humphrey had spent his early years in organizing, meetings with his father who was social worker, and watching his mother, an educator, develop culturally relevant materials for her own classroom. These experiences informed Humphrey's acute sense of what constituted an effective strategic response to structural inequality. The young student would bring these organizing skills and ideas into the fold of the student movement at Mumford High School and into Ujiima, an Afro-centric after-school program he created at the age of 16 years old.<sup>132</sup>

However, his mother was also an educator with a deep commitment to a vision of culturally relevant education. As an educator and the head of the English Department at King High School, she exposed her children to black culture by attending jazz concerts and reading the black literary canon, as well as classical music. Visits to the local library were common. These experiences with culture shaped Simanga's love for reading and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

appreciation for black culture. Humphrey was born to a family of socially conscious educators, including an aunt who opened Timbuktuu Academy.<sup>133</sup>

Over the course of his junior and high school years, Humphrey developed his intellectual commitment to, and hunger for, black culture and history through reading, which then forged a path to his political organizing as a high school student. As a student at the predominantly black Beaubien Junior High School, he interjected key black figures into classroom discussions by and asked how thinking about the black experience would change one's understanding of American history. When Humphrey began attending Mumford High School as a 10<sup>th</sup> grader in 1968, he continued to interject black literary figures into the curriculum. In his English class, for example, when the teacher asked students to come to class prepared to read a poem by an American poet he decided to read Margaret Walker's poem, "For My People." And although he couldn't fully understand Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, he read it at the age of 15. Although white teachers resisted his advocacy to include Richard Wright's *Black Boy* into the curriculum, he persisted. When Humphrey arrived at Mumford, it was a majority white school. White teachers placed black students in the back of the classroom, didn't call on them in class, and often excluded them from classes for minor infractions. He thought to himself, "We have to resist this, we have to organize ourselves."<sup>134</sup>

The reach of Simanga's mother extended far beyond the home and impacted his views on what power looked like. She was not only the president of the parents group at Mumford, but she also mentored Malik Yakini, who would go on to create one of the earliest Afro-centric schools in Detroit. His aunts also became Afro-centric educators in

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Detroit. She was also his advocate in instances where white teachers responded to his activism with unequal treatment in grading. As a case in point, Humphrey's mother challenged a white teacher who had given her son a poor grade. When his mother asked to see the teacher's gradebook, he saw the balance of power shift away from his teacher on to his mother. In the end, the school removed Simanga from the teacher's class for the rest of the semester, only to return him to her class the following semester. Humphrey refused to talk in class or to respond to the teacher's questions as a form of resistance. He had seen other activists marshal silence as a political tool, and he envisioned it as a way to marshal his own power. While he did not intend to disrupt the class, it is likely that the teacher interpreted this action as a disruption. And yet, Humphrey's argued, she was the one who ended up disrupting the learning environment. Seeing his mother advocate for him demonstrated two key lessons. First, it showed him that just because someone is an authority figure, that doesn't mean that they are always right. And second, it inculcated the feeling that teachers should be on the side of the student. At the end of it all, what stood out most was his mother's statement that "You have to be empowered to do for yourself" and for other people. In another sense, these lessons that were core elements of his mother's educational theory were ideas he would bring into his role as a political organizer at Mumford High School.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

**Brenda Hicks: “The idea of the Black Panther Party kind of scared me. Because all we were hearing from the news and from what we were reading is here’s this militant group. They’re violent. But they’re making it known that black people are being discriminated against, that all we’re enduring cannot continue.”**

The granddaughter of southern migrants, Brenda Hicks was raised in a black working and middle-class community in Northwest Detroit. Her grandmother migrated to the Motor City from Wetumpka, Alabama with her children when her husband passed away. Hicks’ father, who served in World War II, was born in Anderson, South Carolina and the pair met when Hicks’ father was on duty in the army. The pair moved into a black working and middle-class community where with Brenda’s grandmother, they raised Brenda and her sister. Her mother was at times, a stay-at-home parent, but had also trained as beautician. While Brenda’s grandmother had worked in the Chrysler plant as a janitress, she and the couple lived just blocks away from doctors, judges, and attorneys. As Brenda watched her grandmother go to work as a janitress in the plants, she vowed to study law, which she had hoped would save her from a life of similar work. However, Hicks’ encounter with the Black Panther Party and her role as a community worker had the potential of jeopardizing this dream and all that her parents had worked for.<sup>136</sup>

When Hicks’ father moved the family to Adrian, MI to take as job as a road crew member with the Michigan State Highway Department, he gave his daughters access to a world that was quite different from Detroit. At the age of nine-years-old, Brenda Hicks transferred to Adrian Elementary School and would later attend Adrian Junior High School. For five years, the family lived in a community where there were very few black families. While Hicks does not recall instances of overt racism as a student at the

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<sup>136</sup> Brenda Hicks, interview with the author, April 9, 2017.

elementary school or the junior high school, she remembered that there were many years where she and her sister were the only African American children in their classes. When the pair moved back to Detroit and transitioned into Cass Technical High School, they noticed a stark difference in the quality of education received in both school districts. It was an experience that Cassandra Ford shared when she transferred from Highland Park High School to Cooley High School. When the Hicks sisters returned to Cass Technical, they began school two grades ahead of their Detroit peers. Although Brenda was placed in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade performing arts curriculum, she took many classes with 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Hicks' father exposed his daughters to a world where they did not have to worry about violent resistance to their very presence. And yet, it offered them a window into the consequences of racial inequality in education. It revealed that Detroit's Public Schools were operating on a separate unequal basis – even the premiere Cass Technical High School.<sup>137</sup>

When Brenda Hicks first encountered the Black Panther Party on television, she had very little interest in joining them. According to the news, they were violent and militant, profoundly unappealing. However, through her social network, she learned about the Black Panther Party's community programs. After several long conversations with a friend from school and invitation to an organizing meeting for Panther supporters, she gained access to an image of the Panthers that challenged media portrayals of the Party. Born in 1954, Hicks had just entered high school when she learned that the Panther's media image had obscured the organization's work in the community. But through conversations with her friend, she learned about the free breakfast program and

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

the tutoring program. According to Hicks, the organizing meeting was well-attended, and included the friend's parents as well as students from other area high schools. While many youths joined the Panthers because of its spectacular image, Hicks was drawn to the organization's work with the community. She explains, "The idea of the Black Panther Party kind of scared me. Because all we were hearing from the news and from what we were reading is 'here's this militant group. They're violent.'" But she also believed that they were making an important contribution to the community. Hicks stated, "They're making it known that all we're enduring cannot continue." The community work allowed Hicks the opportunity to contribute to the Detroit chapter without encountering the violent repression they experienced at the hands of the Detroit Police Department.<sup>138</sup>

Even though Hicks did not encounter much violence, only a few hecklers, her parents disapproved of her involvement. She states, "If they could have disowned me, they would have. [...] They thought they were diabolical people trying to make things horrible for black people." Her parents disagreed with her decision to work with the breakfast program and explained that any association with the Party would compromise her chances of getting into law school. While images of her grandmother cleaning auto plants nurtured her interest in law, she was captivated by the immediate change and impact the party had made in local communities.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

**Dorita Smith: “It [the Black Panther Party] was an organization based on empowerment; Being able to control where you lived; Being involved in your community; Working for the betterment of your community; But the press gave them a whole other image.”**

Dorita Smith was 14 years old when she marched her fellow Post Junior High School classmates down to the Black Panther Party’s Indiandale Avenue office. Smith had heard of the party’s Free Breakfast Program and wanted to support its’ efforts with what little means she had. After she and her peers finished their graduation celebration with their social studies teacher, Melvin Peters, Smith encouraged the other teens to take leftovers from the party down to the Panther’s office for the Breakfast Program. Over the course of six years, Smith would continue to support the party, first as a community worker, and then eventually as the communications director. From an adolescent Panther advocate to full-time member, Smith’s trajectory characterized a common path black girls took to the Party.<sup>140</sup>

Dorita Smith’s sense of commitment to community began at an early age. She was born to a working-class family, and in a multigenerational household that her grandmother owned in Northwest Detroit. When Smith’s mother was not working at the YMCA, cooking for a convalescent home, or working at an after-school program, she worked as a nanny for a local Jewish family. For years, Smith watched her mother care for others, including her cousins who also lived in the home. This sense of community was a common feature in Smith’s life; they lived in predominantly black working-class neighborhood where many of the neighbors labored as factory workers. Although Smith’s

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<sup>140</sup> Dorita Smith, interview with the author, July 10, 2017.

family eventually moved into section of the Northwest Detroit that was once predominantly white, the neighbors from the old community maintained ties and sustained the sense of community that some assumed desegregation would rupture.<sup>141</sup>

If Smith's multigenerational household and working-class neighborhood revealed the significance of community, the radical educators and familial relationships she encountered introduced her to the complexities embedded in racial politics. In Peters' classroom, she discussed the material contradictions that shaped much of postwar politics. Their classes addressed the social and economic inequality that shaped their communities against the backdrop of the narratives of postwar prosperity they heard around the dinner table. Smith found conversations about Africa, famous African Americans, and history to be especially captivating. The lessons she learned in the classroom expanded her world view as it left her with more questions about the African continent. This search for self and a connection to something bigger than herself was further enriched when she learned that her cousin had romantic ties to an African student she met at Grand Rapids College. In one instance, Smith used a family dinner to ask the student questions about the continent, because she was concerned about the myths that had been dispelled in the classroom and wanted to know more. She explains, "When he came over, he probably wanted to get out of there because we had a million questions about Africa and the culture and some of the myths being dispelled." In the classroom and in the home, Smith found a different world where the voices and lives of those so often left on the margins of history found full recognition.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

Smith carried these experiences, and the new knowledge they offered, into her activism as a high school student. When Smith graduated from Post, she moved onto the tumultuous Cooley High School with many of the young people who would go onto lead walkouts and boycotts for black studies and black literature courses. However, this transition also expanded her relationship with the Panthers. While many of Smith's peers waged struggles within their schools, she treated school issues as secondary to her community work with the Panthers. The young woman who marched her peers down to the Panthers' office as a ninth grader had committed to the organization as a full-time organizer, selling its newspaper and eventually, working as their communications secretary. Knowledge of her membership was often widespread; in a few instances, she recalled, students informed her that the Panthers had arrived at the schools to pick her up so that she could help sell the newspaper. Community work took precedent over school organizing because Smith felt that there was a "real need" in the community and because she felt that she could make a "real difference" there. Although Smith left Cooley High School, her time with the Black Panther Party provided her with a different kind of education on how to contribute to social change.<sup>143</sup>

During high school, the Black Panther Party became a dominant force in Smith's life. She left her grandmother's home when she was 16 years old and moved into one of the many apartments that housed Panther members and that was often referred to as "a collective." Despite her youth, she lived with married couples, members who had children, and other teenage Panthers. In these collectives, women and men entered fluid relationships that allowed them access to other temporary romantic partners. When

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<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

describing the experience, she explains, “It was different. [...] Like a family type of situation.” In addition to selling the Party’s newspaper, Smith assisted with transportation for the children who attended the free breakfast program. Since she worked with the program that was housed in the St. Neal’s Church in a low-income neighborhood, she encountered living conditions that revealed to her the significance of her community work. But she also gained the opportunity to talk to young girls, as she combed their hair before school, about their lives and her work with the Party. Although Smith had dropped out of Cooley, her time with the Panthers filled this void as it offered her an education that spoke to the needs of local communities.<sup>144</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The physical movement of black people during the half-century long era of the First and Second Great Migrations was also a political movement towards new visions of social change and liberation. Black men, women, and children left their homes in the rural South and the urban West for urban cities like Detroit because they envisioned a better world beyond the boundaries of Black Belt states like Mississippi and Alabama. They imagined schools that would afford their children the opportunity to realize their full potential; they wanted the next generation to live a better life than previous generations of black Americans had. These migrants also believed that a society where they were no longer bound to their employers – as was true for southern sharecroppers – existed in the “Arsenal of Democracy.” But as history teaches us, many of the black migrants’ dreams of social, political, and economic equality would not become a reality

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

without the social movements they often participated in and led. Black Detroiters continued to dream of a better society from the early days of their arrival through the tumultuous years of the 1960s and 1970s. These dreams, however, forged a path towards an intergenerational culture of resistance.

## **Chapter Two: “The Revolution is a Praxis”: The Black Radical Tradition, Movement Culture, and Youth Leadership in Postwar Detroit**

Before the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed his “I Have a Dream” speech to more than 250,000 Americans on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963, he gave Detroiters a window into his vision at the Walk to Freedom March on June 23, 1963.<sup>1</sup> While this was indeed a momentous occasion for the Motor City, the conditions under which the city’s dignitaries brought King to Detroit revealed significant division within the liberal-labor-black coalition. For more than a decade, civil rights organizations, union leaders, and liberal officials formed Detroit’s movement leadership class. But as the movement for civil rights continued to grow, and black Americans began to call for self-determination and power, in addition to rights, the coalition wrestled with demands for a radical movement and leadership base.

The city’s liberal leaders Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh, Walter Reuther, and the Reverend C.L. Franklin organized the Walk for Freedom as a fundraiser aimed at supporting activists organizing against segregation in the South and local organizers who pushed back against discrimination in the urban North. The 35-year-old mayor had a long history in politics, and found support in Reuther, who headed the United Auto Workers Union, and the African American pastor and gospel singer, C.L. Franklin. The Detroit Council of Human Rights (DCHR) issued its call for the march after the local NAACP chapter failed to organize its own rally to support the southern civil rights movement. DCHR, which viewed the NAACP as beholden to the white establishment, aimed to use

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Park Services, at least 250,000 people attended the 1963 March on Washington. See National Park Services, “March on Washington for Dreams and Freedom,” Accessed February 24, 2018. (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/march-on-washington.htm>)

funds raised from the march to support the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Led by the Rev. C.L. Franklin with Reverend Albert Cleage as a member on the board of directors, DCHR invited Dr. King to lead the march. Although both Cleage and Franklin wanted the march to maintain a “‘Negro character,’” the NAACP sought the support of local white liberals and insisted on inviting the recently elected Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh and Walter Reuther. For DCHR, local conditions required a local leadership and movement that represented the interests of black Detroiters.<sup>2</sup>

The Walk for Freedom March represented a moment of rupture in the liberal-labor-black coalition as it laid the groundwork for a local black grassroots movement with its roots in the Great Migration. To develop a homegrown base that was further to the left of the Detroit NAACP, DCHR formed the Northern Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC) months after the Walk to Freedom. However, when Cleage insisted on inviting black radicals like the attorney Conrad Lynn, the Nation of Islam, the Black Nationalist, youth-led organization UHURU, and William Worthy – a journalist with the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Franklin and others charged that NCLC was not the place for “‘communists, black nationalists and persons with criminal records’” who “‘would only ‘destroy our image.’”<sup>3</sup> In response to this disagreement, Cleage left DCHR and formed the Northern Grass Roots Leadership Conference. Detroit’s black radical community, including the Black Christian Nationalist Cleage and Marxist-Leninist theoreticians Grace Lee and James Boggs, organized the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference to take place in November with Malcolm X as its invited speaker.<sup>4</sup> In his

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<sup>2</sup> Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 268-273.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 272-273

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 273.

stirring speech, “Message to the Grassroots,” Malcolm X labeled the March on Washington the “Farce on Washington,” and placed the harsh realities of urban life in the North at the center of his vision for black freedom struggles. While King envisioned an integrated social movement, Malcolm offered no such hope. Instead, Malcolm stated, “We too realize here in America we all have a common enemy, whether he's in Georgia or Michigan, whether he's in California or New York. He's the same man – blue eyes and blond hair and pale skin – the same man.”<sup>5</sup> To be sure, black Detroit had wrestled with the trajectory of the black freedom struggle for at least a decade before the national leaders shared their visions. However, 1963 forced Detroiters to take up questions about the direction of the movement, the character of the movement culture, and its visions of a black movement leadership. Would black Detroiters continue to support the liberal-labor-black coalition, or would they look to more radical means to achieve self-determination?

The competing visions of Black Liberation that King and Malcolm X presented, and the tensions between the local movement that led Cleage and Franklin to part ways, reveal a proxy conflict between Black Radicalism and black liberalism that would shape the next ten years of Detroit movement politics. To understand the movement culture Detroit’s black high school activists inherited, I ask the following questions: What conceptions of power, rights, and education did Detroit’s civil rights and black power organizations marshal in the making of this world and the local movement? And what kind of movement culture did this produce for adolescent activists? I explore these questions by focusing on the multiple voices shouting for revolution and reform at the grassroots.

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<sup>5</sup> *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, edited by George Breitman (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1990), 3-17.

In this chapter, I examine the strategies and ideas that shaped the multiple sites of struggle that constituted the local Black Power movement, including the movement for black labor power, against police violence, and for welfare rights. Following the political commitments, ideas, and concerns of local black power and civil rights organizations, I reveal the tactical and philosophical tools that high school activists would later draw upon after the rebellion of 1967. While this chapter addresses the black freedom struggle from the perspective of adult activists, it provides a window into how, why, and when certain ideals, tactics, and conceptions of leadership appealed to black youth activists in local struggles for power and rights.

This chapter begins with the leadership of the oldest and largest civil rights organizations, the NAACP and the Urban League, with a focus on local chapters in Detroit. While the NAACP took a legalistic approach to this civil rights agenda, which focused on integration, reforming structures, and the fight for racial equality in housing, education, and jobs, the Detroit Urban League took a social work approach to the urban problems of black migrants. This chapter explains how the politics of Cold War liberalism created a rupture in Detroit's civil rights community that gave way to a new class of black leaders who possessed a vision of the movement that relied on the physical and intellectual labor of grassroots activists.<sup>6</sup> The chapter then advances to the postwar period, paying special attention to the development of the black radical activist community that working-class intellectuals, students, and laborers created. In Detroit, the Old Left shaped this community. With James and Grace Lee Boggs as two of the core

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Sundiata Cha Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Black Freedom Studies," in *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 265-88.

radical theoreticians of this movement, Detroit's Old Left blurred the lines between generations of radical activists through their intergenerational relationship with college student activists. This new wave of organizers included General Gordon Baker, Luke Tripp, and several others who would later form black Revolutionary Nationalist organizations and Marxists-Leninist groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). Simultaneously, in Detroit, a Black Cultural Nationalist tradition emerged with Reverend Cleage at the helm. This tradition produced groups like the Republic of New Afrika (RNA) and the Black Christian Nationalist movement. King and Malcolm's presence in Detroit did not simply constitute a brief encounter between local communities and national leaders. Their presence, in fact, created a dynamic moment for local activists to develop its grassroots leadership.

The local black freedom struggle in Detroit created a movement culture that relied on the ethic of collaboration and study. While organizations like the NAACP offered the local movement historical evidence that the language of rights possessed great value, black organizations that developed in the postwar period revealed the effectiveness of collective organizing in the fight for structural change. But through struggle, this movement culture found that labor was a force to be reckoned with. The black radical tradition produced a multigenerational activist and intellectual tradition that viewed education as a tool for developing a strategic approach to mass struggle. The movement culture that Old and New Leftists created in Detroit suggested that power could be best marshalled collectively, with the help of past and present generations, and that there was power in political education. The movement conceded that education was also key to

understanding how violence and power worked. The diversity of black radical thought in Detroit created movement culture where theorists and activists constantly reworked their conceptions of power and politics. While the range of ideas that percolated on the ground sometimes produced clashes around the philosophical and tactical means that the movement would yield, Detroit's eclectic mixture of radical thought would offer black high school student activists a vision of themselves as the emerging black leadership class.<sup>7</sup>

Detroit's black radical community developed a culture of resistance that was deeply committed to praxis. Drawing on Jean Paul Sartre's discussion revolutionary praxis, the black intellectual Harold Cruse argued that the long black freedom struggle was "a movement that forged its ideas in (direct) action. As a praxis, direct action could only propel this movement a certain distance before it would encounter well-entrenched social barriers that would force it to alter and qualify its philosophy."<sup>8</sup> The everydayness of bottom-up movements created sustained contact with political struggles that required flexibility and experimentation with political ideas. Rapid changes in the social order, such as school desegregation, police violence, and racial discrimination in employment, produced the need for activists to quickly reassess ideas, tactics, and strategic approaches. Black high school activists of the 1960s would greatly benefit from the failures and successes of this experimentation. But they would also develop a more expansive

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, With a New preface by the author edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); David Goldberg, "Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the 'Short Black Power Movement' in Detroit," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 90-111; and James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 185-186.

conception of black leadership because of it as well. This struggle over diverse meanings of leadership, power, rights, and liberation shaped the movement culture and the local politics that black high school student activists like Cass Ford, Shirikiana Aina, and Gregory Hicks inherited by the end of the 1960s.

### **The Early History of Detroit's Top-down Leadership**

Building on the long history of African American struggles for the full rights of U.S. citizenship, the interracial Detroit NAACP used the courts to fight for structural changes in employment, housing, and education. Between 1912 when the local chapter opened its doors, and the 1920s, the civil rights organization marshalled its legal expertise to challenge police brutality against interracial couples.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1920s, the organization expanded its base when it fought to free Dr. Ossian Sweet, an African American physician who had been charged with killing a white man. When Sweet purchased his home in an all-white neighborhood, much to the ire of local whites, he was met with white mob violence. After hours of waiting for someone to leave Sweet's home, the mob heard a gunshot from inside of the house ring out into the crowd. Sweet and those who sat with him inside were charged with the murder of a member of the white mob. The NAACP investigated the murder while providing financial support to Sweet and the others during the yearlong trial. While to this point Detroit NAACP had had a presence in the city for more than a decade, historian Kevin Boyle suggests that it was the

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 121.

uptake in violence against blacks who tried to desegregate Detroit's predominantly white neighborhoods that swelled attendance at its meetings to the hundreds.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the rest of the 1940s, the organization continued to address racial inequality in housing and education, but in the Motor City, it had to also contend with racial exploitation in the city's auto plants.<sup>11</sup> Black auto workers turned to the Detroit NAACP in their battle against workplace discrimination.<sup>12</sup> Black workers who labored in Dodge plants confronted racial discrimination in training programs that could have upgraded their employment status and granted them access to class mobility. While white workers gained entree to training programs without much resistance, black skilled and unskilled laborers encountered confrontations with white workers over these federally-funded programs at every turn.<sup>13</sup> While Detroit NAACP had the might of a national organization behind it, and maintained a stronghold on local politics until the 1950s, it did not constitute a significant challenge to the labor bureaucracy, which had also failed the black worker.

By the 1940s, local groups posed a challenge to the NAACP's gradualist approach to improving the conditions of labor for black workers. In the process, they produced a new class of black leadership. The National Negro Congress, for example, used the full force of collective organizing to push labor management and unions to expand labor protections and training to African American laborers.<sup>14</sup> Marshalling the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 163-94

<sup>11</sup> Megan Shockley, "We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-54 (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 172-173.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 170-171; and Thompson, 62-63, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Beth Bates, "'Double V for Victory': Mobilizes Black Detroit" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside of the South, 1940-1980*, eds. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 19.

rebellious spirit of the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), black workers turned to direct action, including wildcat strikes and work stoppages, to fight for more just labor policies.<sup>15</sup> These local activists also turned to collaborative organizing. In the early 1950s, for example, labor activists in Detroit and Harlem formed the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC) as a civil rights organization that fought on behalf of black workers. The young organization struggled to combat the anti-communist rhetoric that many liberals lodged against it.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, some blacks who were “expelled” from the UAW found their voice in other ways: George Crockett was elected to the Records Court in 1966 while James Boggs, a former laborer and southern migrant, became one of the foremost black radical intellectuals. John Conyers and Coleman A. Young both gained state and local elected positions.<sup>17</sup>

While Detroit’s liberal leadership maintained prominence for fifty years, the Cold War threatened to disrupt the progress they had made. The struggle for labor rights revealed the cracks in the liberal-labor-black coalition. As Thomas Sugrue shows, the local struggle to enact a Fair Employment Practices (FEP) law exposed internal divisions. When Detroit’s Left argued that putting the FEP ordinance on the 1951 ballot was the most effective way to ensure that the law would pass, liberal groups disagreed, fearing that white conservatives would beat the ballot initiative with anti-black and anti-communist campaigns. To gain ground in the battle over the FEP ordinance, liberal reformers organized themselves into the Detroit Citizens Committee for Equal Employment Opportunities (DCEEEO), which included the NAACP, the UAW, and the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>16</sup> Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 192.

<sup>17</sup> Bates, 33.

other liberal groups.<sup>18</sup> The ballot initiative failed for two reasons. First, many of the signatures were deemed invalid. And second, the Detroit Common Council voted to postpone the vote due to concerns about their prospects for re-election.<sup>19</sup> For the city's leftists and liberals, political divisions protracted the battle to improve the lives and rights of black laborers. Furthermore, this struggle was not simply a fight over strategy, but was also a struggle over the form of black leadership for the ensuing struggles for rights and power.

Despite internal divisions within the movement, the FEP law gained traction in 1954. With a win that gave additional seats to state Democrats, liberals had the support needed to pass the law, which Governor G. Mennen Williams signed in June 1955. This success was in part due to their collaboration with liberal Republicans.<sup>20</sup> While the FEP commission formed to give power to the law, local activists claimed that it moved too slowly. The Trade Union Leadership Conference (TULC), for example, used its base to make apprenticeship programs available to black youth and to place blacks in UAW leadership positions.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Detroit NAACP continued its fight to place blacks in skilled, clerical, and managerial positions.<sup>22</sup> Following the logic of the manpower programs John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson established, the civil rights organization focused on improving the individual through job training programs.<sup>23</sup> This struggle around labor suggested to black auto factory workers that they

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171-172.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

had to organize their own labor groups, and develop a leadership that was independent and would represent its interests.

Detroit NAACP also faced pressure to take a more militant approach towards the black educational activism. As early as the 1940s, the chapter demanded that the school district hire more black teachers and black counselors.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the chapter worked to remove racist leaders from school administrations while simultaneously seeking to enlarge the presence of blacks on the Board of Education.<sup>25</sup> In 1960, Detroit NAACP took its case to the US Civil Rights Commission and accused the local school board of establishing school district boundaries that produced racially segregated schools.<sup>26</sup> While the NAACP met some success in its efforts to desegregate public education, it had to also contend with the radical contingent within the black educational movement led by the Reverend Albert Cleage.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Detroit NAACP continued to use its might to push forward the agenda of integration in a sea of voices that shouted for community control. In the end, it argued one of the most important lawsuits in the history of black education, *Miliken v. Bradley* (1971).

While Detroit NAACP was indeed the largest civil rights organization in the city, the Detroit Urban League (DUL) also played a key role in shaping the local black freedom movement. Founded in 1916, the racial uplift organization began its tenure in Detroit as a resource for black Detroiters in search of employment.<sup>28</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, DUL expanded its mission to include supporting working mothers by offering

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 190-191.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>28</sup> Sugrue, 165.

daycare services, summer camps, and neighborhood clean-up programs. As the Great Migration brought thousands of black Americans to the city, DUL used its resources to help newcomers navigate city life.<sup>29</sup> Although it had placed many black workers in jobs with Ford and Dodge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it shifted this responsibility to the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC) during the 1950s. The middle-class leadership of the DUL mostly addressed its efforts to meet the needs of blacks Detroiters who had degrees, and often tried to place these individuals in management positions that were not historically open to blacks. As historian Thomas Sugrue has argued, public sector jobs were not simply important for the sake of employment; the Detroit Urban League considered jobs in retail, for example, as “a major step toward civil rights by encouraging ‘public acceptance of the Negro both as a citizen and as a worker.’” The DUL did not engage in direct action, but instead, focused on closed door negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

Francis A. Kornegay’s approach was representative of this nontraditional approach. As the vocational secretary for the DUL, Kornegay sought to expand its job placement program. He was especially disturbed by the reality that the organization could only offer black Detroiters who had degrees placement into unskilled work in the factories or as secretaries. In one telling instance of Kornegay’s nontraditional approach, he threatened to have DUL members withdraw their bank accounts from the Bank of the Commonwealth when its white manager rejected Kornegay’s request to hire more African Americans. After some wrangling, guilt trips, and a few tears, the bank manager

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<sup>29</sup> Shockley, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

caved into the secretary's request.<sup>31</sup> In another instance, the manager of a local women's clothing store, Lane Bryant, asked Kornegay to send him a light-skinned woman to fill a clerical position. Refusing to support the manager's colorist assumptions, Kornegay sent a woman who he described as "almost as black as coal, but she had a charming personality."<sup>32</sup> As Sugrue has suggested, "The DUL employment policy was a limited solution to a growing structural problem."<sup>33</sup>

Although DUL focused on job placement for black Detroiters with degrees, it also addressed the needs of poor and working-class women. This work was partially the consequence of these constituencies pushing the organization to work with them. But it was also the result of DUL's uplift mission. For example, black women turned to the DUL to fight discriminatory hiring practices and to improve access to childcare. In 1952, Detroit Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) member Bonita Blair turned to CORE, DUL, and the Detroit Commission on Community Relations (DCCR) to pressure Sam's Cut Rate Store to hire its first African American saleswomen.<sup>34</sup> The DUL also wanted to maintain childcare options for working-class mothers. Although it managed its own childcare center, it was forced to close when it failed to receive funding under the Lanham Act.<sup>35</sup> However, once working-class mothers turned to the middle-class women of the Carpon Women's Activity Club to push the DUL to locate funds elsewhere, the DUL found funding and successfully pushed the Board of Education to lower childcare rates to make it more affordable for working-class mothers.<sup>36</sup> DUL's work with working-

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<sup>31</sup> Elaine L. Moon and the Detroit Urban League Inc. *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918 -1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 214.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Sugrue, 170.

<sup>34</sup> Shockley, 142.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

class women opened up space for black women to assert their full rights on their own behalf.

The Detroit Urban League was also an ardent fighter in the struggle against urban renewal that greatly impacted poor and working-class black women. As a case in point, when officials from the Housing Commission tried to remove low-income women from dilapidated homes in the Gratiot area in 1946, they turned to the DUL to demand that adequate housing facilities be made available. While local officials considered these homes the “worst slum in Detroit,” these women refused to leave until the city provided alternative housing for them. DUL lawyers pursued this case and “won a three-year continuance to stop the clearance until alternative housing was found.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout the postwar period, the Old Guard used the court’s improvement programs to better the lives of black Detroiters. With the Second Great Migration and the success of the Civil Rights Movement, however, the local movement found radical voices that were willing to challenge the Old Guard, and in the process, link the language of rights to the language of power and revolution.

### **The Black Radical Tradition and New Visions for Black Leadership**

Although the NAACP and the Detroit Urban League used the courts and the social work approach to improve local conditions, the rise of the Detroit chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) marked a radical shift in the tactics and conceptions of black leadership that shaped the culture of the long black freedom movement for decades. The organization used direct action tactics such as picketing urban-renewal

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<sup>37</sup> Sugrue, 167.

projects that used government funds to draw government officials into this fight.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Detroit-CORE organized tenants' rights groups in the Twelfth Street district and nurtured the leadership development of many activists in the Detroit Left, including Marian Kramer. Kramer, who was a founding member of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and a SNCC activist, worked with CORE's Westside Mothers, bringing her skills from organizing in the southern civil rights movement to bear on struggles in the North.<sup>39</sup> Although CORE activists debated the ideological underpinnings of the organization during the early 1960s, much like many other civil rights groups, it remained committed to achieving racial integration. As historian Angela Dillard explains, "the idea was 'to show people that by organizing, they can still participate in our integrated society.'"<sup>40</sup> The debates that raged in CORE signaled a coming sea change in protest tactics, ideas, and visions for a black leadership class.

If CORE represented a small, but significant shift in the strategies and tactics of the local movement, then Grace Lee and James Boggs embodied a radical transformation in the local freedom struggle through their embrace of Marxism and Leninism. Committed to building a revolution that could upset the social order, the black radical tradition in Detroit created a bottom-up approach to movement politics. The ideological evolutions of Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. and James and Grace Lee Boggs provide a window into the making of black radical politics in Detroit. All began their political journeys with the Old Left but embraced the vibrant ideological transformations that

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<sup>38</sup> Todd Shaw, *Now Is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>39</sup> Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 225.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

black youth of the New Left introduced a decade later. These older activists mentored black youth from groups like UHURU and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) through their own ideological development. Although Cleage was best known for his Black Liberation Theology and the Boggs had been celebrated for their brand of Marxism, both informed the mixture of black intellectual radicalism that would later shape the diversity of black radical thought within the Black Power movement of the 1960s.

Marxist theoreticians Grace Lee and James Boggs' political affiliations demonstrate the rich tapestry of black radical intellectualism during the postwar period, which seemed to offer an alternative to the integrationist moorings of the NAACP and the classist impulses of the Detroit Urban League. As a migrant from Alabama, James Boggs traveled to Detroit in 1937 in search of factory work and found employment in the Chrysler auto factory. Once there, Boggs became a union organizer and joined a network of Trotskyites who associated with the local Social Workers' Party (SWP). Through this network, Boggs gained access to the organization's New York-based study group where he met his future wife, Grace Lee. Born to Chinese immigrant parents in Rhode Island, Lee attended Bryn Mawr where she earned a doctoral degree in Philosophy. After working in Philadelphia, Lee traveled to Chicago to join the tenants' rights movement, a trip that would introduce her to the Trinidadian Marxist theorist C.L.R. James. In the mid-1950s, C.L.R. James moved to Detroit to form his own wing of the SWP. This faction of the Socialist Party, or the Johnson-Forest Tendency was head by James and the

Russian Raya Dunayevskaya along with the Boggs. However, the Boggs would eventually split with the SWP because of the organization's support of Stalinism.<sup>41</sup>

The Johnson-Forest Tendency altered traditional understandings of Trotskyism to make sense of the conditions of oppressed groups within the U.S. and in the Third World, and in the process, created the possibility for black youth leadership. Instead of viewing revolutions as the product of a vanguard leading the masses, these theoreticians called for a conceptualization of revolution as a dialectical process. The value in this reconceptualization of revolution, according to the party, "was that no revolutionary party could hope to lead the masses without taking part in a dialectical interaction recognizing the creative power and dynamic spontaneity of the proletariat." Furthermore, they stated, "Without a flexible and democratic interaction, vanguard parties, regardless of their good intentions, risked the danger of limiting the working-class' revolutionary potential and distorting their own goals."<sup>42</sup> The Boggs parted ways with C.L.R. James during the early 1960s due to ideological differences. Although James argued that the proletariat would lead the next revolution as the vanguard, James and Grace Lee held steadfast to their view that the black working class and people of color from across the globe were best suited to provide leadership for the ensuing revolution. During this split, the Boggs met young radicals who would ultimately form several black radical groups and the vein of the Black Power movement in Detroit.<sup>43</sup>

In Detroit, the black radical tradition included militant clergymen who called upon the social gospel and liberation theology to achieve Black Liberation. When

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<sup>41</sup> Dillard, 227.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 230-231.

Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr.'s career as a minister and an activist began in the 1950s, he had hopes that integration would lead to real social change for black Americans. As the young pastor of St. Marks Presbyterian Mission, Cleage organized membership drives for Detroit NAACP. However, when some members of the church began to actively oppose Cleage's political activities, he formed his own church in the 12th Street district. The church, Central Congregational, embraced social activism, and in doing so, attracted a diverse constituency that included black youth and young professionals, including the Boggs, and Milton Henry who later formed the Republic of New Afrika.<sup>44</sup> In the black radical tradition, black leadership could very well rise from the grassroots.

As the movement culture shifted towards a greater emphasis on the grassroots, black radicals used community institutions to nurture this potential organizing and leadership base. By 1961, Cleage had established his own community newspaper *Illustrated News*, which featured articles from Milton Henry and his brother Richard. The community paper discussed a wide range of issues that mattered to black Detroiters, including housing, jobs, and education. Articles such as "Segregated Schools and Urban Renewal: A Program of Negro Containment" and "Little Rock Comes to Our Schools," revealed the disillusionment black Americans felt in the early years after the U.S.

Supreme Court's Brown decision.<sup>45</sup> According to historian Angela Dillard,

The *News* was an outlet for emerging Black Nationalism and a platform for often virulent criticism of the racial status quo, as well as a community-organizing tool. Cleage's articles in particular were critical of the Black middle class and the liberal coalition, from which he took great pains to distance himself.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 267-268.

<sup>45</sup> "Segregated Schools and Urban Renewal: A Program of Negro Containment," *Illustrated News*, March 26, 1962, Vertical File Box 2 Folder 1960s African Americans-Journalism, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr., "What's Wrong with Our Schools?: Little Rock Comes to Detroit" (January 15, 1962), Vertical File Box 2 Folder 1960s African Americans-Journalism, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Although the paper only ran for four years, it offered an alternative to the black liberalism of Reverend C.L. Franklin.<sup>46</sup>

Cleage marshalled his influence into organizing the Group on Advanced Leadership (GOAL) with Milton and Richard Henry in November 1961, a black organization that sought to serve as an alternative to Detroit NAACP. While the organization used the language of civil rights, this militant group aimed to push city politicians beyond the gradualist approach in their struggle against racial and class inequality.<sup>47</sup> Although Cleage and GOAL helped Jerome Cavanaugh win the mayoral election of 1961, Cleage was deeply committed to ensuring that black Detroiters had greater access to elected positions in city government. As a challenge to the Democratic political machine in Detroit, GOAL ran its candidates on an independent slate with a grassroots base. Despite its unsuccessful efforts to run Frederick Yates as the first African American mayoral candidate in Detroit, GOAL had introduced the possibility that a black grassroots movement could elect an African American to a position of municipal power.<sup>48</sup>

GOAL's multi-pronged approach to the movement included the use of the courts as well as direct action. Under the guidance of Cleage, GOAL lodged two lawsuits against the city for its investment in urban renewal projects. GOAL questioned whether the city had a constitutional right to implement the Urban Renewal Redevelopment Program, which would have sacrificed the homes of local citizens for further

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<sup>46</sup> Dillard, 252.

<sup>47</sup> Peniel E Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 57.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-63.

development of a private housing market. The first lawsuit challenged an urban renewal project that would have uprooted black businesses along Eight Mile where developers made plans to build a mall that was unlikely to offer space to black businesses that had served the local community for years. The second lawsuit challenged the development of the Medical Center, which would have taken property away from black churches and businesses, without forcing whites to do the same.<sup>49</sup> While GOAL used the courts to push back against the displacement of African Americans, it did so by organizing local Detroiters and marked a shift in the relationship between black leadership, the grassroots, and the judicial system. Whereas the NAACP turned to the courts to defend African American rights using legal teams, Cleage and members of GOAL included the local community in these efforts.

GOAL's leadership welcomed the radical voices of the Detroit's black youth. As black college students became a force for social change on university campuses across the country, they also posed a challenge to civil rights establishment leaders in urban communities. In Detroit, they found support for this dynamic energy in the Old Black Left. As a case in point, Rev. Albert Cleage and James and Grace Lee Boggs nurtured the leadership of UHURU ("freedom" in Swahili) activists, one of the first black radical youth groups to form in Detroit during the early 1960s. Organized by General Gordon Baker, Jr., Luke Tripp, and John Watson, this youth movement worked with whites from organizations like the Young Socialist Alliance on a coalition basis. However, they found Cleage's work with the Freedom Now Party and GOAL to be more supportive of their self-defense ethic and calls for Black Liberation.<sup>50</sup> When GOAL formed the Medgar

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<sup>49</sup> Dillard, 261.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 264-265.

Evers Rifle Club in 1964, for example, it joined the long tradition of calls for armed self-defense that many had thought only resonated with blacks in the South. GOAL activists also supported Richard Henry's Fox and Wolf Hunt Club. Henry claimed that every black family in Detroit should own a gun, a line of thought that traced its origins to Ida B. Wells' 19<sup>th</sup> century claim that the Winchester rifle should have a prominent place in every black home.<sup>51</sup>

In its efforts to redefine the relationship between black Detroit and the Detroit Police Department, which greatly affected black youth, GOAL collaborated with black college activists. Despite the limited progress city leaders made in the fight to improve police community relations at the start of Cavanaugh's administration, the fatal police shooting of Cynthia Scott, an African American sex worker, on July 5, 1963 jeopardized these advancements. Immediately following the shooting, GOAL and the Black Nationalist youth-led group UHURU called attention to the unjust killing by law enforcement. With the assistance of Milton Henry, GOAL launched a 5-million-dollar lawsuit on behalf of Scott's mother. UHURU called for the "appointment of a black police commissioner, the disarming of the police, and the arrest of Olsen, [the offending officer]." Police commissioner George Edwards investigated the killing and found that the officer had acted in self-defense. The NAACP and other civil rights groups responded with a demand for a civilian review board.<sup>52</sup> This collaboration highlighted the significance of intergenerational organizing in Detroit's movement culture.

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<sup>51</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 26.

<sup>52</sup> Dillard., 267.

In Detroit's Old Left, young activists of UHURU found intellectual institutions that would inform the ideological development of the New Left, as well as a new leadership base and movement culture. As a case in point, Tripp, Baker, and John Watson's wife, Edna, attended the Friday Night Forums that were integral to the radical networks the Boggs had created after their split from the Socialist Workers Party. The forum provided a space for young activists to engage in the rigorous study of social issues at home and abroad, including the Cuban Revolution, the role of Black Nationalism in liberation movements, and the utility of nonviolence in the movement for civil rights.<sup>53</sup> Although Cleage and the Boggs nurtured the intellectual development of UHURU activists, not all black organizations supported them or agreed with their tactics. As a case in point, in 1963, when city officials petitioned to bring the 1968 Olympics, UHURU used its platform to hiss at city leaders during the lobbying ceremony. Members of CORE viewed this dissent with great disdain and distanced itself from the young activists. CORE had also taken issue with UHURU for threatening customers who dared to cross the picket line during a protest at a Kroger grocery store.<sup>54</sup> For these young activists, respectable notions of leadership and movement politics did not constitute a strategy for achieving Black Liberation.

The Cold War may have created ruptures in the Civil Rights movement, but it helped to facilitate the development and trajectory of the black radical community in Detroit, and the place of youth in it.<sup>55</sup> Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) offers one

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<sup>53</sup> Dillard, 231; Joseph, 57-58.

<sup>54</sup> Dillard, 265.

<sup>55</sup> Sundiata Cha Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Black Freedom Studies," in *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 265 argues that the Cold War and the anti-communist rhetoric it produced, was a moment of rupture in the Civil Rights movement.

key example. The roots of RAM took shape at the 1961 National Student Association conference at Madison Wisconsin. Donald Freeman of Case Western Reserve University was in attendance, along with Muhammad Ahmad and other SNCC members when news of radical activist Robert F. Williams exile reached them. Building on conversations about the importance of Williams' work, students from Central State returned to their school after the conference and formed Challenge to resist the paternalist approach the school took towards black students.<sup>56</sup> Challenge considered Donald Freeman's vision of

a nationwide revolutionary nationalist organization that combined the focus on identity and culture of the NOI, the militancy of Robert Williams, the direct action tactics of SNCC (but oriented toward the urban North), and a working-class orientation and cadre structure (and political analysis) that owed much to Marxism and Leninism.

In 1962, Challenge answered Freeman's call and changed its name to the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM).<sup>57</sup>

RAM was revolutionary nationalist in orientation, but also embraced Marxism-Leninism, and was thoroughly anticolonial. It embraced the works of Aimé Césaire, James Boggs, Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, and Robert F. Williams and published its own paper, *Black America*. And RAM members found mentors in black women like Queen Mother Audley Moore who sought to blend Marxism and Garvey-like nationalism. They also received support from Ella Baker. From Ethel Azalea Johnson, Muhammad Ahmad, in particular, learned the art of organizing and the importance of Lenin's view that movements need "regularly issued organ[s]."<sup>58</sup> When the Detroit

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<sup>56</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 167.

<sup>57</sup> James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 176.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-68.

college students of UHURU traveled to Cuba with several other revolutionaries, they met Max Stanford, RAM's national field chairman. The students returned to their home schools and organized local chapters of RAM where several young activists joined in 1963 or 1964, including Glanton Dowdell.<sup>59</sup> In 1966, rumors that RAM was behind the paramilitary group, the Black Guard, spread throughout the city of Detroit. The group stated that it was time for blacks to arm themselves in preparation of the long hot summer again.<sup>60</sup> The youthful organization's relationship with civil rights activists, and its embrace of Black Radicalism, demonstrated the limitations of cold war civil rights politics and gave way to African American youth leadership.

While anticommunist rhetoric limited the possibilities for building coalitions between radicals and liberals, it opened space for black radicals across the ideological spectrum to collaborate. And yet, even among radicals, ideological tensions created irreconcilable fault lines. As a case in point, although James Boggs was the ideological chairman for RAM in the early stages, he and Grace rejected the old Communist Black Belt thesis because they believed that cities were the hub of the revolution. This disagreement with RAM led James Boggs to leave his position as the ideological chairman.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, while Cleage and the Henry Brothers agreed on questions around black self-defense, they did not always agree on the meaning of Black Nationalism. While Cleage envisioned the black nation as a political, cultural, and spiritual entity, the Henry Brothers wanted to fight for a physical Black Nation that had its own land. These differences lead to the break between Cleage and the Henry Brothers and produced the

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<sup>59</sup> Kelley, 75-76; Dillard, 288; and Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 26-27.

<sup>60</sup> Fine, 143.

<sup>61</sup> Kelley, 78 and 84.

Republic of New Afrika (RNA).<sup>62</sup> The internal divisions that occurred in the black radical movement was not a consequence of anticommunism, but of ideological differences about the shape that Black Liberation could and should take.

## Post-Rebellion Movement and the Culture of Resistance

This complex web of radical networks shaped the form of Black Radicalism that developed in Detroit after the rebellion of 1967. The ideological evolution of Rev. Albert Cleage reveals the ways in which those days of violence impacted the trajectory of the movement's culture and politics. After the rebellion, Cleage published two books, *The Black Messiah* and *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church*, changed his name to Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, and renamed the Central Congregational Church the Shrine of the Black Madonna, signaling a shift to Black Christian Nationalism. As proponents of Black Christian Nationalism, Agyeman and his followers aimed to “build a Black Liberation movement which derives its basic religious insights from African spirituality, its character from African communalism, and its revolutionary direction from Jesus, the Black Messiah.”<sup>63</sup> They wanted to

make Black Christian Nationalism the cornerstone of the Black man's struggle for power and survival. We will build a Black communal society which can protect the minds and bodies of Black men, women and children everywhere.

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<sup>62</sup> Dillard, 274.

<sup>63</sup> Albert B. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), 174.

The evolution in Rev. Cleage's political and ideological development between the late 1950s and early 1970s represented the broader impact of the failed promises brought by desegregation and deindustrialization.<sup>64</sup>

This, radical new black leadership class turned to democratic means of organizing, including the community press. During the fall of 1967, just months after the rebellion, the former activists of UHURU began to publish their own organ, the *Inner-City Voice* (1967-1971) under John Watson's direction. Editors of the ICV described it as the "organ that will lead black people to freedom," "a participant in this struggle not just a reporter," and "the only publication of its kind in the city of Detroit which is dedicated to the revolutionary struggle of black people to throw off the yoke of oppression and exploitation."<sup>65</sup> This community paper sought to galvanize the energies of black Detroiters who believed that the rebellion was just the beginning of a political revolution that was sure to come. Its editors published articles on the black labor struggle, the fight for quality education in Detroit Public schools, and a number of other issues. *The Voice* printed articles about black revolutionaries like Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams and helped activists organize the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) that formed in 1968. Albert Cleage, Jr. and the Boggs fully supported these young black radicals in their calls for community control of schools, improved conditions in the plants, and humane treatment of welfare clients.<sup>66</sup> Like many black radical organizations

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<sup>64</sup> James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 184; and Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968);

<sup>65</sup> "The Inner-city has a voice," *Inner-City Voice*, vol. 1, no. 6 (March 1968), p. 23, General Gordon Baker's Personal Papers, in the author's possession.

<sup>66</sup> Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998), 14; and Dillard, 299.

that developed in the 1960s, Detroit's community of activists turned to the community newspaper as an organizing force.

In DRUM, the local movement found black workers and radical professionals leading the charge for a radical workers movement. DRUM sought to radically improve black auto workers' conditions in the factories. During its early years, the organization battled the United Auto Workers (UAW), one of the largest labor unions at that time, and auto factory management. But as DRUM's political program reached workers beyond the Dodge Main plant gates to include laborers at the Eldon Ave plants, the Chrysler plants, and even local hospitals, its founders established one umbrella organization that could support this dynamic growth of support. At the same time, many of its Marxist-Leninists founders wanted to include the larger black community in DRUM's membership. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers emerged from these efforts.<sup>67</sup>

In 1969, General Gordon Baker, Jr., Chuck Wooten, John Williams, Luke Tripp, Kenneth Cockrel, Sr., John Watson and Mike Hamlin formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers as an umbrella organization for the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). The League embraced a diverse mixture of revolutionary Black Nationalism and Marxist-Leninism that set the stage for the group's introduction to community organizing. But this blending of philosophies also fueled the organization's split. As historians Georgakas and Surkin explain, Cockrel, Hamlin, and Watson formed the Marxist-Leninist tendency, which sought to extend the League's efforts to lead a workers' revolution to include students, non-factory workers, and the unemployed. The other faction, which included Baker and Wooten, comprised the organization's Black

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<sup>67</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 70-75.

Nationalist tendency and emphasized in-plant organizing. Tripp and Williams straddled the middle because they believed that organizing workers and mobilizing the black community were both important to the League's revolutionary goals. Some of the activists developed their activist roots in SNCC. John Watson's political activism had deep roots in SNCC and CORE. Years before he helped to organize DRUM and the League, he was deemed "too radical for CORE" and was a member of the Detroit SNCC chapter that was ejected because of its calls for direct action.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the development of the League signaled a change in the local movement's conceptions of leadership. In sharp contrast to the Trade Union Leadership Conference and other establishment union groups, which emphasized top-down leadership, black workers themselves formed the revolutionary vanguard and emerging black leadership class.

The League embraced a view of leadership that saw ordinary, everyday people as leaders of the movement. As David Goldberg argues, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers possessed a new kind of labor politics, or what he calls "community-based labor activism." The organization's break from a "shop-floor only politics" was best expressed in the activism of black workers who

redefine[d] Black Power into a revolutionary black working-class movement that connected black workers' struggles to 'community struggles around housing, welfare rights, and community control of schools [...].'<sup>69</sup>

The League began a number of community projects. It formed the Black Student United Front (BSUF), one of the organization's most active, but least studied, components. With the support of Mike Hamlin, General Baker, and Marian Kramer, the BSUF's

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<sup>68</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 16.

<sup>69</sup> David Goldberg, "Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the 'Short Black Power Movement' in Detroit," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, eds. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 5.

membership consisted of junior high and high school students from Detroit Public Schools and the neighboring Highland Park Public Schools (HPPS). The BSUF published its own student paper, *Black Student Voice* beginning in June 1968, which was also a tool for political education and organizing. The purpose of the paper was to report on important news, to publicize movement events, and to organize student activists.<sup>70</sup> By expanding its vision for black leadership to include everyday people, the League, and ultimately the black radical tradition, made space for black adolescent leadership development.

The new black youth leadership base fought in the spirit of the Black Power movement and anti-colonial struggles that were happening abroad. BSUF activists called for an Afrocentric curriculum and demanded more hiring of black faculty and administrators at their schools. Their conceptions of black power even extended to the kind of food served in the cafeteria: they wanted soul food on the school menu. The multi-generational nature of the League's program is best expressed in the BSUF's collaboration with the League's community component, Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC) mobilized to realize demands for community control of public schools as a viable plan for school decentralization.<sup>71</sup>

The League's philosophical commitments developed within the larger historical context of the black worker's earlier struggles with the UAW, the influence of the Second World War on industry, and the growth of Detroit's black community. According to League historian, James Geschwender,

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<sup>70</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 76-77

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*; and James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 178.

Part of the League's ideology was derived from the capitalist exploitation model. The model begins with the exploitation of all workers under capitalism. Race prejudice develops to justify the exploitation of entire racial groups and is used to divide the work force into mutually distrustful and hostile camps.

At the other end of the League's philosophical foundation was the colonial model.

According to this paradigm,

- (1) black entrance into America was involuntary; (2) whites control black institutions; (3) black culture was destroyed; (4) white racism persists; and (5) cultural nationalism and ghetto revolts parallel the early stages of colonial revolutions.<sup>72</sup>

In adapting a theoretical framework that blended these two seemingly contradictory models, Geschwender argues, the League's split was inevitable. He asserts,

[i]t is difficult to engage in principled cooperation with white radicals if all whites are defined as exploiters and enemies. It is also difficult to build a community support movement if all members of the black bourgeoisie are also defined as exploiters and enemies.<sup>73</sup>

The League also made space for the development of black women's leadership.

For example, its political activities in the local hospitals gained traction because of League women's organizing skills. Members believed that revolutionary workers could be found anywhere, from parcel service employees to hospital staff. As Georgakas and Surkin explain, "Early in the League's history, Edna Watson, Paula Haskins, and Rachel Bishop had initiated an organizing drive among hospital workers, partly to give female leadership to one area of work."<sup>74</sup> Women like Edna Ewell (Watson) worked diligently to organize these hospital cadres. The archives and published histories of the League offer very little information about Ewell's earlier life experiences. But what is known is how

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<sup>72</sup> James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 136.

<sup>73</sup> Ernest Mkalimoto Allen, "Detroit, I Do Mind Dying: A Review," in *Radical America* vol. 11, no. 1 (1977):69-73.

<sup>74</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 141.

she came to join the League. Although she identified more with the women's movement than the labor movement, her marriage to John Watson mediated her interactions with League members. According to Ewell, she and John Watson opened their home to and fed traveling movement activists. Although the authors do not note which hospitals women members organized, "DRUM" papers suggest that this particular RUM might have been called the Health Workers Revolutionary Movement, or HRUM.<sup>75</sup>

Women often used their influence behind the mimeograph machine to demand better treatment of its female members. As a case in point, Marian Kramer – who was often called the grouchiest woman in the League – threatened to halt production of the *ICV* if their male counterparts did not address women's concerns. Kramer had been a political organizer prior to her marriage to League co-founder General Baker. A native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, born at the height of the second Great Migration, Kramer experienced racism firsthand. During a demonstration in Jonesboro, LA, she, along with several protestors, were not only arrested, but also tossed into a garbage truck and carried off to county jail. Indeed, these experiences remained with Kramer when she decided to attend Southern University. Ultimately, she left school for southern Illinois to organize with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Kramer arrived in Detroit in 1966, just a year before the 1967 rebellion, and joined John Watson at the West Central Organization.<sup>76</sup> The following year, she helped to form DRUM with Watson, Baker, and others. Whether or not she knew it, Kramer would become one of the more well-known

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<sup>75</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 69; 221-227

<sup>76</sup> "Marian Kramer," *Motor City Voices*, University of Michigan  
<https://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/motor-city-voices/work-showcase/kramer>

members of DRUM and the League, not just as General Baker's wife, but also as one of the organization's most vocal opponents of sexism.

The League may have had a prominent place in the local movement, but it had to also contend with the reality that black youth also wanted to form a Detroit base for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Although the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) formed in 1966, the Detroit chapter became a full-fledged group five years later. The organization that came to be known as the Detroit Panthers in 1971 began as a probationary chapter of the National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF) in 1968.<sup>77</sup> The League knew that it was only a matter of time before a local BPP chapter formed and wanted to use the dynamic energy that high school youth and young adults would bring to the organization in productive ways. Ultimately, they wanted to create a path to liberation that led youth away from the adventurism that they detested about the Panthers. By 1969, members of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and the Ford Revolutionary Movement (FRUM) had become members of the chapter. NCCF (Detroit Panthers) consisted of more than two dozen members, and while the League and its community base constituted a multigenerational organization, members were usually between the ages of 18 and 22 years old.<sup>78</sup> Historian Judson Jeffries has argued that black youth members were more likely to engage in violent revolt because of the violence they had witnessed during the Detroit rebellion. He explains, "they possessed a stronger belief in their own ability to control events in their lives and shape their own future."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Judson Jeffries, "Motor City Panthers," in *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America*, ed. Judson Jeffries (Jackson: The University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 139. Scholars still debate the origins of the Detroit chapter. Some say that it started under the League's supervision, while others argue that Ron Scott and others started it 1968, only to have it shut down until 1971 when they were finally chartered. Jeffries' account seems most plausible.

<sup>78</sup> Thompson, 90.

<sup>79</sup> Jeffries, 159.

One of the key philosophical differences between the NCCF and the League was in their ideas about movement leadership, or who constituted the revolutionary vanguard. While the Black Panther Party looked to the lumpen proletariat, the League turned to black workers who had the power to disrupt the capitalist system at the point of production.<sup>80</sup> John Watson characterized the issue as a consequence of how the Panthers utilized Fanon's lumpen proletariat in the third world context to frame their understanding of the lumpen proletariat in the U.S. In Watson's estimation, it would take a massive political education campaign to bring the lumpen proletariat in the U.S. into the fold of the revolution without attracting members who could be easily swayed by infiltration or bribes. The League believed that the image of the Panthers provided local blacks with a hero, but it did not show them that everyday people like themselves could organize in the struggle for liberation as well.<sup>81</sup>

Black youth joined the Detroit Panthers for many reasons. Those who did not identify as students, professionals, or laborers found the Panthers to be more welcoming and willing to defy the police. Others joined for the adventure they imagined as they followed the media's treatment of the Panthers. Judson Jeffries explains,

For the Panthers, this worker orientation and strategy did not align with the mandates from Oakland, nor did it appeal to those who were just along for the ride, imitating the Panther style rather than being in it to help blacks actualize their potential.

Many of the young people who joined the Detroit Panthers (NCCF) did not see the school as a site of struggle, but rather, focused on the community program, or simply, the

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<sup>80</sup>Ahmad Rahman "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*, eds. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 21.

<sup>81</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 61.

groups' masculinist style. Jeffries continues, "'It was about being cool on the street,' instructed former Panther Charles White. 'We didn't' give a shit about good grades, that stuff didn't mean a thing.'"<sup>82</sup> This attitude toward schooling would lead some youth community members to leave the organization.

Despite these differences, the Detroit Panthers (NCCF) remained an integral part of the movement and provided support to League members in other sites of struggle. This was likely a consequence of Ron Scott's early relationship with DRUM activists. Scott, following his political education with the founders of the League, found that it was important to end capitalism if racism was ever to meet its fatal end. Scott's relationship with the League was not just facilitated through shared interests in labor, but through shared concerns about tenants' rights as well. For example, Marian Kramer explains,

In 1969 some people in the Jeffries projects came to my house and asked me to help organize the tenants against rent increases. On a Sunday we had a *big* meeting and we decided to do a rent strike. We forged a unity between the seniors and the youth.

She continues, "'Ron Scott, who was in the Panthers, lived in the projects. We set up a picket line and used the young people from the Panthers and the League to help man it.'"<sup>83</sup>

In addition to its collaboration with other groups, the Detroit Panthers established several survival programs that were largely informed by its embrace of revolutionary intercommunalism.<sup>84</sup> These programs included a Free Breakfast for Children Program, a free health clinic, free rat removal service, and a free barbershop. Recruiting leftist

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<sup>82</sup> Jeffries, 159-160.

<sup>83</sup> Shaw, 58.

<sup>84</sup> Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

doctors to staff the health clinic in the Jeffries Projects, the Detroit Panthers treated these programs as an opportunity to build a rapport with the community. And while they had hoped that these programs would end state surveillance of the organization, this was not the case. In fact, it raised concerns among the FBI that these programs sought to “create an image of civility, assume community control of Negroes, and to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison.”<sup>85</sup> Although students had an attachment to school systems and could easily disrupt business as usual, Panther youth as the lumpen had no such attachment. While one’s status as a student opened the possibilities for organizing in schools, lacking an attachment to a system made it possible for youth to intervene in local community struggles.

If the Black Panther Party represented a turned towards the community in the black freedom struggle’s movement culture, the Republic of New Afrika (RNA) expanded the notion of community to include a physical black nation. Like the League, the RNA traced its roots to Detroit’s Old Left. Formed in Detroit on March 31, 1968, the black revolutionary nationalist organization sought to build a black nation, physically.<sup>86</sup> Building on the old CPUSA’s Black Belt thesis, founding brothers, Gaidi Obadele (Milton Henry) and Imari Obadele (Richard Henry) aimed to create a black nation out of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Before joining Cleage’s GOAL and the Freedom Now Party, the Henry brothers founded the United Negro Assemblage (UNA) in Philadelphia. During the 1950s, the organization focused on racial discrimination in employment, policing, and education. While the brothers embraced a

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<sup>85</sup> Rahman, 192.

<sup>86</sup> Donald Cunnigen, “The Republic of New Afrika in Mississippi” in *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, ed. Judson Jeffries (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 2006) 97.

nationalist rhetoric when they arrived in Detroit's radical community, James Smethurst explains, their work in Philadelphia "[was] couched largely in Popular Front terms of social and economic democracy rather than separatism and self-determination." In joining Freedom Now and GOAL, the Henry Brothers joined a long tradition of black Leftists, which included UHURU and the Socialist Workers Party. While these groups found common ground, there were also deep ideological tensions.<sup>87</sup>

Arguing for African Socialism, RNA founders sought to unite with black separatists across the ideological spectrum. RNA officials presented these ideas to the U.S. Congress in 1972. The organization aimed to achieve blacks' independence from the U.S. and to establish a black homeland in the Black Belt South, with a "New African lifestyle." Essentially, they wanted power and land sovereignty. With \$400 billion in reparations, the brothers suggested, black Americans could form the socialist Republic of New Afrika.<sup>88</sup> They sought control over economic structures, with the goal of placing the means of production in the hands of the state. It was unlike the League, which wanted to put the means of production into the hands of black workers. Furthermore, the former saw power in land while the latter saw power in labor. Although both organizations sought to shift the means of production from white control to black control, they had a different class focus in mind.

However, boundaries between black radicals were never static, in large part because they had a shared experience with state repression. For example, the RNA collaborated with the Detroit Panthers in clandestine formations. And when it came to

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<sup>87</sup> Smethurst, 403, footnote 8.

<sup>88</sup> Geschwender, 81.

police violence, the RNA also experienced the full force of local police repression.<sup>89</sup> This repression came to the fore in March 1969 during the New Bethel incident when the RNA celebrated its one-year anniversary. Trouble started that night when local police officers received a call that armed black men had been spotted near Reverend C.L. Franklin's New Bethel Church. That night, the Black Legion, the RNA's armed security force, escorted Milton Henry, president of RNA, to his car. When the police arrived, they began shooting at the men. The gun fight ended with Patrolman Richard Worobec shot and Patrolman Michael Czapski dead. When reinforcements arrived, they shot four RNA members and charged into the church, arresting 142 men, women, and children, charging them all with murder.<sup>90</sup>

The New Bethel incident was a watershed moment in the fight against state surveillance and efforts to reform the legal system, for it revealed the potential of a radical black professional class. Black liberals and radicals came together to fight on behalf of those who had been charged during the incident. From the ACLU and CRC to the Rev. C.L. Franklin, Judge George Crockett, and Michigan State representative James Del Rio. Legal experts from the ACLU and the CRC determined that the police "had no constitutional right to arrest all those in the church since there was no probable cause to believe that they had participated in the commission of a common crime. [...]" Following a 5 am call from Del Rio, Judge George Crockett, used his court to immediately hear the cases brought against the prisoners. He released many of these people on personal bonds.<sup>91</sup> Crockett's quick response angered the DPD and touched off plans to remove

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<sup>89</sup> Smethurst, 222 footnote 38; and Rahman, 190.

<sup>90</sup> Rahman, 190.

<sup>91</sup> Fine, 419-420.

him from the Recorders Court. Liberals supported Crockett, including DCCR which formed the Committee to Honor Judge Crockett.<sup>92</sup> After prosecutors charged four with assault or intent to kill the Detroit black radical community went into high gear. The court set two separate trial dates, one for Hibbitt and Kirkwood (New Bethel One) and a separate date for Vera and Fuller's trials (New Bethel Two).<sup>93</sup>

Ken Cockrel, Sr. of the League joined the legal team for this case, and with Justin Ravitz created a radical shift in the courts jury selection process. Cockrel and Justin Ravitz used Bethel Two to challenge the racial exclusionary policies that produced majority white juries in this predominantly black city. The difference between the first case and the second case was that the defendants in the second case had professed commitments to black nationalism in public spheres. This made the jury selection process difficult. Cockrel and Ravitz turned to the jury commissioner to gain access to the questionnaires used to select jurors. Heather Thompson writes,

As soon as Cockrel and Ravitz began looking carefully at the jury pool questionnaires, they discovered that often the forms were headed with handwritten buzz phrases such as 'on ADC,' 'long hair,' or 'community activist.'

They charged the court with dismissing jurors who fit this bill and called it unconstitutional. After some legal maneuvering, Cockrel and Ravitz had those removed for unjust cause restored to the jury and combined that group with members of the original jury pool. The radical left used its legal dexterity to shift the culture of the courts further away from its exclusionary moorings. The consequence was the first majority black jury in the history of the city's courts.<sup>94</sup> While Cockrel and Ravitz had succeeded in

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<sup>92</sup> Thompson, 76.

<sup>93</sup> Thompson, 129.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 134-35.

getting their clients acquitted, RNA knew that it had to leave if it wanted to survive the wrath of the DPD. Following the case, the organization moved its headquarters to Mississippi.<sup>95</sup>

## **Conclusion**

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, civil rights organizations marshalled their resources and legal expertise to fight for the rights of black Americans. Grounded in a commitment to integration and a strategic approach that relied heavily on the courts, this early movement in Detroit demonstrated the limits and possibilities of the language of rights. And yet, by the end of the tumultuous 1960s, Detroit's black radical tradition had revealed the revolutionary possibilities of courts. Between Judge Crockett's swift response to the New Bethel incident and Ken Cockrel's commitment to reforming the jury selection process, the use of the courts had radically changed. While this change in the role of the courts in the black freedom struggle is demonstrative of an important legal history, it also provides a window into the evolution of the movement culture, conceptions of black leadership, and the development of the black radical tradition. With the gradual changes that the NAACP and the DUL achieved came even greater demands for a youth movement that found its support in the Old Left. This support was significant to the multi-generational character of Detroit's Black Power movement. Furthermore, it informed the intellectual tools and strategic approaches black high school youth would marshal in their struggles for education, and in their community activism around labor and welfare rights.

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<sup>95</sup> Jeffries, 135.

Decades of struggle revealed the importance of developing grassroots leadership. Everyday people from the poor and working-classes, including women and youth, encountered police harassment, white vigilante violence, and racial discrimination in housing and in the workplace. While previous generations of migrants reaped some of the benefits of postwar prosperity, many others were left on the margins. These unmet expectations and the unfilled hopes and dreams of black Americans were born in postwar America. They created a movement culture and vision of black leadership that placed the voices of those most impacted by structural inequality at the head.

This eclectic movement yielded a movement culture that made intellectual rigor and experimentation, based on material conditions, a welcomed resource in the struggle for Black Liberation. Building on the movement's embrace of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Williams, Malcolm X, and others, black high school activists would inherit a movement culture that facilitated the process of self-discovery as adolescents. Through participation in multi-generational organizations that emerged out of the black radical tradition, black high school activists acquired a movement toolbox that had been developed and refashioned over the course of more than five decades.

### Chapter Three: “We demand relevant education”<sup>1</sup>: The Intellectual Labors of High School Youth and the Fight for Liberatory Education

*We found that self-discovery within a black context was so refreshing for all of us that we kind of grew together. It was a grounding for everybody to find out ‘yeah, well this little stuff in my hair is okay. [...] that our street talk is not because we don't know English.’ It's because it has a relationship to African languages.<sup>2</sup>*

Shirikiana Aina

The Post investigation committee was one of many civic groups to study racial inequality in Detroit's schools. In 1957, then superintendent of Detroit Public Schools, Samuel H. Brownell, formed the Citizens' Advisory Committee on School Needs. The committee published its report the following year, and issued recommendations for school community relations, school facilities, and the curriculum. Following discussions of this report, voters expressed support for an increase in funding for school construction.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, the Citizens Advisory Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity concluded in its study that school leaders had drawn district boundaries based on racial and class demographics.<sup>4</sup> And as student unrest at Post Junior High School unfolded, the Detroit High School Study Commission, which was organized in response to the Northern High School walkout of 1966, had just finalized its own report. Three federally-commissioned studies ventured to understand racial inequality in schools, including: *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966), *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools* (1967), and the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Debra Goodman, “Mumford Sleep-in,” Undergraduate Student Paper, n.d., in the author's possession

<sup>2</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview by author, Washington, D.C., September 11, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*, 263.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 9; James Coleman, “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (Washington,

Despite the dozens of committees that formed, and the thousands of pages they published as reports, the quality of education for black youth remained stagnant while their daily encounters with racism continued to grow. Efforts to desegregate Detroit Public Schools met limited success, in part, due to threats of violence and protest from local white parents and students. As Fine explains,

When the school board arranged in the fall of 1960 to transfer 311 elementary black school children from two overcrowded inner-city schools to two all-white schools and one almost entirely white school on the city's far northwest side, a parents' group in the area began to circulate petitions for the recall of the school board members, and parents kept about 60 percent of the school children from attending classes for three days.<sup>6</sup>

When the school board tried to integrate Detroit Public Schools again in 1967, it experienced a small measure of success. To achieve integration in Northwest Detroit, the board altered district boundaries, placing many black students in the predominantly white Cooley High School, including students from the adjacent suburb of Highland Park. This integration plan, coupled with white flight, created a dramatic shift in the racial demographics at Cooley. The school was no longer majority white, but 50% black and 50% white.<sup>7</sup>

The 1967 desegregation plan exposed black students to racist attitudes on the part of teachers and administrators, white vigilante violence by local communities, and a curriculum that presented racist depictions of black American life. When Cassandra Ford, a high school member of the citywide student group, the Black Student United Front, transferred to Cooley High School from Highland Park High in a neighboring suburb, she

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D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1966), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED012275.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Fine, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Holmes, "School Is Split Along Color Lines: Inside Story of Strife at Cooley," *Detroit Free Press*, October 5, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

experienced racism from white teachers at Cooley who didn't see much of a future for their black pupils. As a case in point, Ford recalled,

The first day of class I think they asked the students, 'what is it you want to be?' And some of the black kids were talking about what they wanted to be and she [the teacher] said 'black people can't do nothing but eat watermelon and shine shoes.'

Ford also remembered the racism that animated discussions of black Americans in textbooks: "I remember going to a science class and in the book, they called black people mongoloids. It was in the book!"<sup>8</sup> Even students at the open-enrollment, citywide school Cass Technical High recalled similar experiences. A high school proponent of Black Nationalism, Shirikiana Aina, explained:

It was still very much 'dark Africa' in History classes, white literature, European literature in the English classes and no variety. No sense that, well, Detroit is a black place. Why don't we look at some of the accomplishments and some of the histories and cultures of our variety of population?<sup>9</sup>

Ford and Aina's experiences were all too common for black youth navigating the terrain of school desegregation. Like Detroit's black youth, students across the country encountered this kind of backlash from white teachers who resisted the "Negro invasion." In the debate over school governance and school integration, these experiences pressed black students and black communities to work towards community control of schools.

Three concerns animated the movement for community control. First, black parents and students wanted to solve the "racial achievement gap" between black and white students. The second concern was that the high school curriculum treated black life and culture as inferior to whites, and that it had failed to provide black youth with a culturally relevant education, or an education that acknowledged black history, culture,

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<sup>8</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010

<sup>9</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

and thought as legitimate sources of knowledge. And finally, parents and students believed that traditional schools had failed to prepare black youth to become world citizens who could identify and solve social issues. For the black community, the gap between black and white student success was the consequence of white control of black education. The student unrest that occurred at Post Junior High School in 1968, and in hundreds of schools across the country, were the heady moments of the movement for community control of schools.<sup>10</sup> However, in this chapter, I argue that beyond the explosive, headline grabbing events was the intellectual labor that shaped the production of culturally relevant education, and ultimately, education for liberation. As foot soldiers in the fight, black high school youth realized the long-held view in African American history that education could be a means to freedom from political, social, and economic repression.<sup>11</sup>

I show that this intellectual labor was the product of the experiential knowledge high school youth acquired from their encounters with segregation and the historical knowledge they developed in independent movement spaces created by the Black Power movement's pedagogical approach. As foot soldiers in Detroit's "short Black Power movement," black high school youth realized the long-held view in African American history that education was a path to freedom.<sup>12</sup> But as Shirikiana Aina suggests, the fight

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<sup>10</sup> For a national history of high school student activism, see Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> For studies of the long history of education as a tool for liberation, see Strickland and Editors, *Teach Freedom*; A. A. Akom et al., *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism*, ed. Noel S. Anderson and Haroon Kharem (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> For "short movement" framework, see David Goldberg, "Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the 'Short Black Power Movement' in Detroit," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 90-111.

for culturally relevant education was also a deeply personal struggle that shaped young people's self-discovery and self-perceptions.

This chapter maps the role of black high school youth's intellectual labor in the fight for liberatory education. It reveals their conceptions of culturally relevant and political education as the cornerstone of a liberatory education. This conception was partly the consequence of Detroit's political economy which tied together the destinies of black students and black auto factory workers who labored in some of the most dangerous and dirtiest auto plants. This relationship was most clear to students who recognized that the school district's practice of tracking black students into vocational or general track courses created a school-to-factory pipeline for many of Detroit's black youth. Against this political, social, and economic landscape, students viewed education not as an esoteric practice, but as a means to creating a different world.

This chapter also shows that the "everydayness" of schooling made this intellectual work possible. Each day of the week offered student activists an opportunity to experiment with and study methods of political struggle. Their intellectual labor was most legible in the independent political study groups they formed, in the freedom schools they organized, and in their demands for Black History and Black Literature courses. This chapter suggests that several core principles animated high school youth's intellectual labors, and ultimately the Black Power movement's pedagogy. Broadly defined, social movement pedagogy constitutes a movement's teaching practice and philosophy.<sup>13</sup> First, education was supposed to lead to one's self-discovery. Second, it

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<sup>13</sup> For more on movement pedagogy, see Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel Perlstein, "Freedom, Liberation, Accommodation: Politics and Pedagogy in SNCC and the Black Panther Party," in *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition*, eds. Charles M.

should use Black visual art, literature, and music as sources of information about black life. Third, education should function a means to achieve liberation from white supremacy, and in turn, serve as a tool for black nation building. Fourth, it has to be community-centered and should solve social, economic, and political problems in the black community. And finally, it should result in an awareness of global oppression and foster self-control, self-determination, and self-defense.

In this chapter, I examine the contours of social movement pedagogy, which was most prescient in study groups, freedom schools, and political education classes. In these intellectual spaces, and in student protests, the intellectual labor of high school youth was most legible. This chapter places political education (P.E.) and study groups at the center to illuminate how these sites helped high school youth marshal their personal experiences with segregation to inform an analysis of concrete conditions and possible solutions to social issues. In some instances, P.E. classes used culturally relevant sources like

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Payne and Carol Sills Strickland (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 75-94. In his narrative of declension, Perlstein argued that Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) freedom schools and the Black Panther Party's liberation schools best represented "the pedagogical ideals of the African American struggle for social justice." See Daniel Perlstein, "'Live the Truth': Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Movement for Freedom and Liberation" in *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism*, eds. Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 137. He argued that the SNCC's belief in liberalism shaped the form of the freedom schools while the Black Panther Party's liberation schools reflected pessimism about the project of American democracy. SNCC was concerned about teaching self-discovery, he states, which connected the organization's political fights with its pedagogical approach. SNCC believed that people's experiences could reveal to them the "nature and the promise of American society." (140). Charlie Cobb claimed that the movement was "'spontaneous.'" (140) By the late 1960s, Perlstein argues, movement leaders did not trust that blacks could arrive at an understanding of American society on their own. Conditions were too repressive: police brutality, murders of activists, and white vigilante violence. This landscape, Perlstein explains, discouraged black activists from seeking to achieve the liberal vision of America. "A focus on self-discovery and self-expression among the voiceless was replaced by a desire to articulate a critique to the oppressed." (145) For these activists, white supremacy was too embedded in American life and culture, which made it difficult for these activists to believe "that Black students could draw from their American experience an understanding of their real needs, desires, or identity." (146) However, this chapter extends the focus beyond the Black Panther Party to include the voices of students to show that self-discovery was at the heart of the Black Power movement's pedagogy.

historical monographs, music, poetry, and art, to teach black youth how to confront white supremacy while the movement's teaching philosophy offered an analysis of class, race, and gender in social conditions. Furthermore, these sites of intellectual engagement examined the goals, contexts, and tactics of past revolutions and social movements with an eye towards studying the strategies of other liberation struggles that were taking place abroad. Finally, these groups also addressed an African and African American past that white school leaders treated as non-existent. As students moved into community struggles over labor, welfare rights, and recreation, study groups became essential to their ability to understand the relationship between multiple local movements.

This chapter also explores the relationship between the fight for liberatory education and high school youth's gendered experiences. Although the movement was a political struggle, it was also a deeply personal crusade for black youth. The Black Power movement challenged Eurocentric notions of beauty, and this challenge was especially important to black girls. For example, girls like Shirikiana Aina found in independent study groups a space that allowed them to re-articulate conceptions of blackness and the possibilities for self-discovery as black girls. For black girls of a darker hue who felt ignored by black boys in social spaces because of their skin color, the movement and the broader culture's efforts to teach self-love were especially important.

While proponents of Black Power asserted black racial manhood, the movement's battles to revise the Euro-centric curriculum, beauty standards, and school governance simultaneously presented black girls with a new conception of blackness and black girlhood. By the end of the 1960s, black girls saw women like high fashion model Joanna LaSane wear a natural hairstyle on the cover of *Jet Magazine* cover. This era also saw the

emergence of powerful black anthems such as James Brown's *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud* (1968), Nina Simone's *To be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969), and Aretha Franklin's *Respect* (1967).<sup>14</sup> With the tools provided by the Black Power movement's pedagogy, black girl activists constructed an image of black girlhood that uprooted and complicated popular conceptions of black girls' lives. By examining black girls' contributions to struggles for culturally relevant curriculum, this chapter shows that the Black Power movement's pedagogy aided black girls' ability to navigate and complicate images of themselves as dependents and delinquents. In placing the two battlegrounds for culturally relevant pedagogy in conversation – formal schooling and informal schooling – the political and personal stakes black youth had in the movement for liberatory education becomes legible and the walkouts are no longer simply heady moments, but tactical approaches to personal and political struggles.

Between 1968 and 1972, Detroit Public Schools saw a wave of violent protests by black and white students as both groups tried to make sense of the changes that white flight had wrought upon the city. However, during these tumultuous years, school and community leaders did not simply produce committees and reports, but substantive changes in large measure because of black youths' self-organization and intellectual labor. Black students found inspiration for their fight in the local black radical movement and in decolonization struggles that were taking place in Africa and Asia. At several schools, students formed political organizations, including high school chapters of local

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<sup>14</sup> Johnson Publishing Company, "Cover," *Jet Magazine*, November 10, 1966: [https://books.google.com/books?id=jLgDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=jLgDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 5/17/2017); James Brown, *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*, Vox Studios, 1968; Nina Simone, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, Stroud Productions, 1969; and Aretha Franklin, *Respect*, Atlantic Records, 1967.

and national adult groups. They organized school-community councils and sought to institutionalize culturally relevant and political education. And these youth activists built on the growing field of black history scholarship to argue for a revision of the high school curriculum and the culture of public schooling.<sup>15</sup> Through these structures, and with community support, students made great strides in the movement for liberatory education. This chapter treats the heady moments of student unrest – building takeovers and sleep-ins – as an entry point into the strategic approaches taken by high school youth to struggle for control of their schools and their futures.

### **Independent Sites of Political Study and Mass Political Education**

Throughout the 1960s, black students and parents sought to use the formal structures of power to radically change the shape and function of education. Yet, institutional changes were marked by fierce opposition and outright indifference. The ability to study collectively was one of the characteristics that made the school an ideal site of political study. But when school leaders challenged this vision of liberatory education, students created their own sites of rigorous intellectual engagement and political study as they simultaneously waged struggle within the schools. High school activists met in study groups – in home basements, churches, and on the street corner – to discuss works of black political and economic theory, third world independence

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<sup>15</sup> This period saw the publication of dozens of historical monographs that examined slavery, emancipation, and freedom. These works include Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956); John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). Works by literary scholars also shaped the cultural revolution known as the Black Arts Movement. For example, see James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963) and Sonia Sanchez, *Homecoming* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1969). For more on the Black Arts Movement, see James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

movements, and the contributions black Americans made to the development of the U.S. economy.<sup>16</sup> These independent study groups became a critical site of the Black Power movement's pedagogy. Furthermore, they revealed the nature of education students had hoped to make possible in formal educational institutions.

Students created sites of intellectual engagement that were independent of adults. For example, as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Pershing High School, Black Student United Front member Jeri Love received lessons on Malcolm X from two black basketball players on the school team. Before Love embarked upon her study of Malcolm, she was a fierce advocate of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and his philosophy of nonviolence. However, after King's death, the dialogue about civil rights escalated in the schools and on the streets. In exchange for tutoring lessons in French with Love, the student athletes introduced her to a key political figure who she was not likely to encounter in the traditional classroom. Likewise, although Jametta Lily found space for such discussions in the home, she also spent a lot of time "talking about revolution with brothers" who attended the alternative high school for dropout youth, the 12th Street Academy. These conversations, she explained, were central to her political development.<sup>17</sup> Intellectual sites of engagement that were independent of adults gave high school youth the power to determine the contours of their own ideological evolution.

Students also explored complicated questions about race and social change with community figures and religious leaders. For Toni Jones, a student at Mumford High

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the importance of study groups, see Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2012); Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Jeri Love, interview with the author, October 30, 2015; and Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015.

School, the Lutheran Church filled the gap in her political education when her parents refused to discuss race relations in the home. According to Jones, the African American Lutheran minister Joseph Featherstone encouraged the church's youth to think of themselves as black people, first and foremost. Featherstone addressed racial injustice and introduced his charges to gospel music in the tradition of runaway slaves. BSUF and League member Darryl Mitchell found a similar figure in Mama Odom. A black woman of the Bahai Faith, Mama Naomi Odom lived near Cortland Elementary School, near the League's main office.<sup>18</sup> BSUF activist Marsha Lynn Battle recalled her many conversations with Mama Odom, who spoke at length about the "terrors" of drug addiction.<sup>19</sup> These relationships suggest that the intellectual and leadership development of black high school activists was the domain of the whole community. As such, independent study spaces allowed students to conceptualize and actualize a multi-generational revolution for Black Liberation.

### **Building Theoretical Foundations: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Black Student United Front, and Political Education**

When traditional schools failed to provide students with the space to identify solutions to social problems, students marshalled their experiential and historical knowledge to create independent sites of political education. The purpose of political education varied by organization and across the ideological spectrum. For example, the East Side Voice of Detroit (ESVID), led by the Black Cultural Nationalist Frank Ditto, Jr., conceptualized political education as a means to introducing young people to formal

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<sup>18</sup> Toni Jones, interview with the author, October 29, 2015; Darryl "Waistline" Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Marsha Lynn Battle, interview with the author, November 11, 2015.

politics. The architects of ESVID's Political Education Program were especially interested in preparing black youth to enter political and public service careers.<sup>20</sup>

While it is likely that several other political groups developed political education classes, the League's relationship to the high school movement represented a unique phenomenon that reveals the exceptional role that black radical labor activists had in public education and in the movement for community control. Furthermore, this relationship illuminates the shape of black power in Detroit. ESVID's focus on political education was in sharp contrast to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' view that political education was vital to the ability of a movement to take a strategic approach to mass struggle. The League's political education class, which formed in 1969, was one of the key organizations to provide an intellectual space for black high school activists. As an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist community-based labor group, the League studied a unique mix of revolutionary ideas, including Black Nationalism, Marxist-Leninism, and Maoism. It described its political orientation as such:

Our short range objective is to secure state power with the control of the means of production in the hands of the workers under the leadership of the most advanced section of the working class, the black working class vanguard.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> East Side Voice of Independent Detroit, "Political Education Project" (n.d.), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 19, Folder 11, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; East Side Voice of Independent Detroit, "East Side Youths Kick Off Political Education Project," *The Ghetto Speaks*, March 1968, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 19, Folder 11, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>21</sup> "General Program," League of Revolutionary Black Workers Program, July 1970, Box 1, Madison Foster Papers, Bentley Historical Library; David Goldberg, "Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the 'Short Black Power Movement' in Detroit," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 90-111.

Viewing young people as the emergent black working class, the League supported black high school activists by organizing non-hierarchical spaces where they could explore radical ideas and the practicality of these ideas on the ground. This relationship produced the League's student component, the citywide high school group, Black Student United Front (BSUF).

Political education classes were critical to the leadership development of BSUF activists, as scholar and activist Gregory Hicks explains.<sup>22</sup> Although the League established political education (P.E.) classes in 1969 for factory workers to study history and social conditions, high school youth attended these meetings as well. Its members came from many student groups that were already established. While these young activists learned from black factory workers, they also led political education classes. In the League's multigenerational classes, students and workers shattered the hierarchy between older activists and youth. Led by Luke Tripp, John Williams, and Ken Cockrel, Sr. the classes featured a diverse range of works that examined the history of chattel slavery, the rise of capitalism, and social movements.<sup>23</sup> Assigned readings included *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (1947) and *Labor's Untold Story: The Adventure Story of the Battles, Betrayals and Victories of American Working Men and Women* (1955). Members also studied Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1917) and Mao's *On Methods of Leadership* (1955) as possible theoretical lenses for in-plant and

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<sup>22</sup> Gregory Hicks, "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and Detroit's Black Student United Front: Social Exchange and Leadership Development, Select Interviews with Members of the Black Student United Front," MA Thesis, Wayne State University, 2009, 37-38; unpublished, in author's possession.

<sup>23</sup> "Administration," League of Revolutionary Black Workers Program, July 1970, Box 1, Madison Foster Papers, Bentley Historical Library; A. Muhammad Ahmad, "History is a Weapon: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers," <http://www.historyisaweapon.org/defcon1/rbwstudy.html> (accessed May 19, 2017); and Hicks, 2009.

community struggles.<sup>24</sup> This eclectic mixture was a marker of the black radical intellectual tradition's intellectual rigor and hunger to study actionable revolutionary praxis. And in the eyes of youth, it was their arsenal for the political struggles they would soon wage for community control of schools and liberatory education. Access to such rich texts demonstrated the possibilities of community control of schools. It revealed that, in the hands of the black community, schools could function as laboratories for social change.

The League also used political education classes to develop an analysis of women's exploitation, approaching the topic through the lens of race and labor. As a case in point, one female League member, Edna Watson, addressed women's experiences as workers in the American healthcare system in her organizational writings. She highlighted the importance of remembering the ways in which medical schools had experimented on third world communities in the past.<sup>25</sup> In the League, black high school activists found access to education that acknowledged the social forces of repression, a form of schooling that they were unlikely to meet in the traditional public-school classroom.

Black women in the League not only organized in other local movements, but they also saw their role as educators and mentors to high school youth. Marian Kramer,

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<sup>24</sup> League of Revolutionary Black Workers, "Black Worker Outlook," 1971, Dan Georgakas Collection, Box 2, Folder, 11, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>25</sup> Edna Watson, "Note from Edna Watson" (1971), Dan Georgakas Box 4, Folder 9: LRBW: Correspondence; 1971, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; League of Revolutionary Black Workers, "Untitled: Black Women as Workers" (1971), Dan Georgakas Box 4, Folder 9: LRBW: Correspondence; 1971, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. For more on women's activism in multiple sites of struggle, including in education, see Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) and Rhonda Y Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

who was also a former SNCC member, used her role in the League and in the League's community component UNICOM to shape conversations about women's repression in almost every sphere of American life. For example, she facilitated discussions about gender exploitation with male and female youth, and used readings such as *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* to introduce questions around gender.<sup>26</sup> The journal addressed topics such as "Female Liberation as the Basis for Black Women's Liberation" and "What Do Women Want?"<sup>27</sup> These debates allowed male and female student activists to study when and how gender oppression rendered itself visible. These student activists would later integrate these questions into their underground paper, the *Black Student Voice*. This intergenerational dynamic was the hallmark of the League's pedagogical approach.

The eclectic mixture of ideas shaped the fertile ground upon which BSUF activists crafted their analysis of structural inequality that was a daily feature of their lives. And these lessons leapt from the confines of the organization's office. For example, on many occasions, BSUF activists attended founding League member and lawyer Kenneth Cockrel, Sr.'s court cases to study the art of argumentation and to understand how revolutionaries could use the law to fight for marginalized groups.<sup>28</sup> In another instance, BSUF member Warren McAlpine II recalled that his studies of Mozambique and South Africa as a high school student were far more rigorous in the League's classes when compared to his college courses at the elite University of Michigan.<sup>29</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *No More Fun and Games: a Journal of Female Liberation*, vol. 1, no. 1, Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture Digital Collection, Duke University Libraries.

<sup>28</sup> Cass Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Warren McAlpine, interview with the author, August 20, 2010.

Gregory Hicks took many of the lessons he learned from the League's political education classes into his history course at Cooley High School. Hicks explains one opportunity as such:

My subject at that point was a question of capitalism and imperialism and I was drawing heavily from some of the material in which I was getting out of the League's political education sessions and some of the classic Marx literature in order to teach that.<sup>30</sup>

This eclectic mixture of ideas became a daily feature of their lives.

In the League's intergenerational study groups, high school youth developed a movement praxis where the ideas they studied shaped the character of their direct action; furthermore, it gave them room to assess the practicality of such ideas. It showed them that mass cadre education was the way to organize their peers to achieve community control of schools and ultimately, education for liberation. It also revealed to them that it was possible to take large, complicated concepts like class and racial inequality and analyze these issues as manageable parts that they could understand. These lessons became critical to the struggles students would wage for culturally relevant and political education, and in other local movements.

### **Freedom Schooling: Northern High Freedom School and Unicom Freedom Academy**

In 1969, students at Northern High School introduced the ideas they were wrestling with in the League's political education classes into the Northern Freedom School's curriculum. Students formed the school in response to the Detroit Board of Education's failure to acknowledge and act on student demands to add black history

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

books to the school library, among other concerns. BSUF activist and student at Northern, Warren McAlpine II, responded to this void in communication, explaining, “They slammed the door in our face again. We’re not going back to school tomorrow.”<sup>31</sup> Students who attended the freedom school received tutoring in traditional courses like math, science, and English, and led courses on self-criticism and evaluation, political education, and comparative black history. According to the curriculum, instructors taught English as a foreign language, and Swahili and Yoruba as native languages. They used materials from black historians and taught math as a science for social change. Even basic science courses took on a different spirit in the hands of Black Power activists. For example, BSUF member Linda Wheeler explained that the physics lessons taught at Highland Park High School seemed esoteric while the freedom school took a hands-on approach to the subject. Students attended classes in film and television. And although they had health and safety courses, these were largely aimed at black women and girls. The school also developed the Black Institute which sought “to produce an indigenous intelligentsia from the hardcore unemployed element of the Black Community capable of leading Black America in the struggle of Self-Determination.”<sup>32</sup> The Northern Freedom school wanted to find local leadership and train black youth in preparation for community control of schools, and to help students develop a positive self-image.

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<sup>31</sup> William Schmidt, “Northen Students Set Boycott,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 1, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>32</sup> Freedom School schedule, n.d. General Gordon Baker, personal collection, 72; Northern High *Black Student Voice*, General Gordon Baker, personal collection; and Freedom school rules and objectives, General Baker, Personal Collection; Linda Wheeler, interview with the author, October 23, 2015.

Black students at Northern High School conceptualized education for liberation as more than the integration of celebratory histories into the high school curriculum; they viewed education as a means to understanding how they could best navigate repressive structures as past generations had. The reality of this view was most visible in the rationale they offered in their demands for Black Studies. In their proposal for Black Studies, the students compared the impact that Eurocentric curriculum had on white students to the possibilities of a Black Studies curriculum for black youth. They explained, “[...] we the Black Inner City Youths of today must have the same opportunity to identify with the problems, frustrations, successes and failures of oppressed Blacks.” Furthermore, they stated,

[...] study of these heroes, along with a study of our history and culture as a Black people, both past and present, can provide us with something that can teach us the art of living as we can best understand and appreciate it. We feel that a Black Studies Program is a step in that direction.<sup>33</sup>

In this instance, students saw history as a tool that they could marshal in their effort to maneuver structural and cultural repression. They envisioned black life, history, and culture as legitimate sources of knowledge that could teach students about race, politics, and power. For these activists, the study of black history suggested that revolution was a multi-generational process; that there were lessons that the younger generation could learn from those who resisted in the past.

The freedom school also viewed liberatory education through the lens of recreation. As a case in point, the goal of Northern Freedom School’s recreation program was two-fold. First, it sought to provide black youth with “a meaningful outlet and

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<sup>33</sup> UHURU Freedom Association, n.d. “The Real Reasons Behind Northern’s Black Student Demands,” General Gordon Baker’s Personal Collection, in the author’s possession.

channel of energy.” Second, it was an effort to “develop the necessary physical skills that Black youth need to survive and move towards liberation.” The recreational program included basketball, football, swimming, weaponry, track, and martial arts. Martial arts, one of the core priorities of recreation, was a means through which black youth learned “discipline, organization and the need for the development of the higher (spiritual) self. It motivates pride and self-respect and helps keep youth from drug addiction and alcoholics.”<sup>34</sup> Although it is not clear if the students authored the school curriculum themselves or if adults developed the program, this process was likely a community effort. When students formed the school, they sought out community members who could teach certain subjects. While the authorship is not clearly noted, what is clear is that these materials suggest that students and adults viewed adolescence as a site of possibility. The diversity of courses offered was in sharp contrast to the tracking policies of the traditional schools. Whereas school counselors placed black students on the general track, and ultimately viewed the auto factory as their destiny, the freedom school curriculum made it imaginable for black youth to conceptualize of world of possibilities for their futures. With access to classes on black film, writing, and law, black students imagined a life beyond the gates of the Dodge Main Factory Plant.

### **“Each One, Teach One”: The BSUF and the Black Student Voice**

Although producing culturally relevant textbooks required time, committee meetings, and most importantly, the district’s will to act, the Black Student United Front

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<sup>34</sup> “Northern Freedom School,” 1969, General Gordon Baker’s personal papers, in the author’s possession.

used the *Black Student Voice* to introduce their peers to black culture and black history on their own time and in their own terms. The underground student newspaper also served as a form of political education. Black Power activists across the country created and used community newspapers to disseminate their political ideas and programs to the masses. They became an instrument that activists used to take their objectives directly to the people. Underground and community newspapers, such as DRUM's *Inner-City Voice*, the BSUF's *Black Student Voice (BSV)*, and Reverend Albert Cleage's *Illustrated News* provided information about decentralization, student lawsuits, community control, housing and unemployment and other issues from the perspective of students and community members. In similar fashion, the high school student editors for the *Black Student Voice* had complete control over the content and editing of the paper.<sup>35</sup>

High school activists used the lessons they learned in struggle, in political education classes, and in their communities as inspiration for their own student paper. Like *Inner City Voice* and *DRUM*, the student paper became a political organizing tool, but for black high schoolers. To create a city-wide student organ, the BSUF offered the League's printing machinery to other student groups who wanted to print underground student newspapers for their own high school's chapter of the BSUF or similarly oriented student group. This plan created several *Black Student Voice* newspapers at schools like Osborn High, Northern High, Cooley High School, and Highland Park High. Using the League's equipment, the Front created a city-wide organizing base.<sup>36</sup> Activists of the BSUF developed their paper by drawing on the theory of political mobilization they had

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<sup>35</sup> Cass Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010; Since students did not include bylines, it is difficult to discern information about the authors of each issue or article.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

encountered in P.E. classes. John Watson explained in an interview about the League's own paper:

The *Inner City Voice* has gone far to accomplish what Lenin described in 'Where to Begin.' It has been the focus of permanent organization, it provided a bridge between peaks of activity. It has organized the division of labor among revolutionaries and created a network throughout the community.<sup>37</sup>

The students' approach to mass political education built on the tradition of radical activists who used literature as a tool for political organization and mobilization.

Although student activists created the student newspaper before they formally organized the BSUF, the evolution of the paper – including the issues it addressed and its approach to delivering content – illustrated the mutually constitutive nature of political education during the movement. Students' conceptions of culturally relevant education and experiences with political education converged to reveal their ideas about liberatory education. The editors described the function of the paper:

Through the B.S.V. we will be able to train strong political student organization, in unity with the League for the decisive battle against racism and oppression. [...] Every detail is of absolute necessity and NO KNOWLEDGE IS TOO TRIVIAL OR TOO SMALL. Such leaders and cadres will be trained through systematic, day-to-day, practical struggle.

The paper became the core means through which the BSUF maintained contact with its organizing base, and the source of its political mobilization.<sup>38</sup>

The editorial staff for the *Black Student Voice* encountered support, indifference, and resistance to the organ. The reactions varied for many reasons, in part, because its writers used colorful language, bold letters, and graphic images to capture the attention of

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<sup>37</sup> League of Revolutionary Black Workers, "Black Worker Outlook," 1971, Dan Georgakas Collection, Box 2, Folder, 11, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>38</sup> Black Student United Front, "Internal Bulletin," 3/6/1971, in the author's possession from General Gordon Baker.

their young readership. Explaining its strategic approach to literature production, editors of the Highland Park *Black Student Voice* stated,

Many of you Black Students have misinterpreted the intent of the paper, the *Black Student Voice*. It is not made for you to laugh at and throw away, but it is written to make you see the oppressor and the many forms he comes in, and the need to overcome this.

They continue, “We put comical pictures and articles about teachers and students in here to get your undivided attention. And now that you have gotten it, it’s time to do something.”<sup>39</sup> While the editorial staff, which likely included BSUF member Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, wanted to connect with their peers through lively language and political content, the staff found that producing literature for young people was no easy task. For they soon learned that imaginative language had the potential to distract from the message.

Nevertheless, the student paper offered a window into the production of political literature as a part of the intellectual labor that made liberatory education a possibility. The Black Student United Front introduced these ideas and their analyses to classmates in the *Black Student Voice*, giving high schoolers access to histories and theories that they were unlikely to encounter in formal classrooms. For example, many of the paper’s issues offered a critique of capitalism, conceptualized freedom as a multi-generational process, and challenged what its editors viewed as the Euro-centric indoctrination of Detroit’s schools. Since many of the high schools had their own BSV, which allowed the student editors to discuss conditions within their respective school, and in relation to other schools across the city. Like the freedom schools and liberation schools they attended, the

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<sup>39</sup> Coalition of Black Students, *Highland Park High School Black Student Voice*, v.1, no. 4 (February 13, 1970), General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

papers utilized all aspects of black culture and history to teach black students about world politics and local issues. The *Black Student Voice* offered student readership an example of the potential of a culturally relevant high school curriculum.

Using the *Black Student Voice*, black high school activists articulated an analysis of broader conditions within the community, and the ways in which education helped to reproduce racial and class inequality. For example, when describing its resistance to the school system, editors explained that

All over Black students are tired of the seeing the products of the Detroit Board of Education (Soul Brothers and Sisters standing on street corners ‘blowing scag,’ ‘snorting coke,’ ‘selling trim,’ or putting in 8-10 hours a day ‘humping’ at Chryslers or Fords.)<sup>40</sup>

According to *BSV* editors, Detroit Public Schools had produced a black youth population that was beholden to the drug economy, sex work, or factory work. In other words, they argued that the school system had failed to help black youth achieve liberation from labor exploitation.

To fill the gap that student activists believed traditional schooling had created, the editorial staff provided reading lists that resembled works they had encountered in the League’s P.E. classes. Lists included Robert F. Williams’ *Negroes with Guns*, Alex Haley’s *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, and Lerone Bennett’s *Before the Mayflower*.<sup>41</sup> Williams work introduced a historical analysis of white vigilante violence in the South, and black Southerner’s commitment to armed self-defense. Written during the height of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s calls for

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<sup>40</sup> BSV, “Citywide Black Student Demands,” (n.d.), vol. 3, no. 2., General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

<sup>41</sup> Highland Park High School *Black Student Voice*, v.1, no. 5, n.d. in the author’s possession from the personal collection of General Gordon Baker.

nonviolence, Williams' text became required reading for black revolutionaries.<sup>42</sup> Haley's autobiography captured Malcolm X's ideological development as well as the orator's indictment of white supremacy in all spheres of American life.<sup>43</sup> Fanon's work revealed the psychological impact of colonization on third world peoples and the effective uses of violence to achieve independence.<sup>44</sup> Bennett's work traced the history of black America back to the shores of West Africa and mapped the struggles and labors of black Americans up to the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Editors of the *BSV* used the historical and analytical works of black scholars and activists, making the paper both culturally relevant and a form of political education.

The *Black Student Voice* gave readers access to the rich, intellectual discussions that the BSUF studied in the League's political education classes and offered an analysis of white supremacy and the very conditions that shaped young people's daily lives. Its writers used black poetry as a form of experiential knowledge that could help students better understand these conditions. As a case in point, they reprinted poems like Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" (1919) and Don Lee's "America Calling" (1969).<sup>46</sup> Student editors also used black history and black cultural production to help foster the intellectual development and self-discovery of their peers. Poetry, music, and history revealed a black past that young people could feel connected to, even when white teachers argued that the black past was non-existent. In the section, "Black Revolutionary Poetry," the

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Franklin Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962).

<sup>43</sup> Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992)

<sup>44</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*: Tr. From the French by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963)

<sup>45</sup> Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964* (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1964)

<sup>46</sup> Osborn High *Black Student Voice*, v. 1, no. 2, in the author's possession from the personal collection of General Gordon Baker, Jr.

students reprinted Claude McKay's protest poem "If We Must Die" (1919), Langston Hughes' "A Dream Deferred" (1951), Don Lee's "America Calling" (1969), "Spiro" by H. Rap Brown, and an untitled poem. (figure 2) The editors chose poems that are imbued with a tone of urgency and a clear understanding of what is at stake in the Black Liberation struggle. Using one component of the black aesthetic – black poetry – the students shout that revolution only comes with courage, that narcotics is an enemy of the revolution, and that belonging to the U.S. as a black American means playing the role of the second-class citizen. Using the movement's pedagogical approach, the students sought to inspire – and educate – their peers who they viewed as the emerging leadership of the black freedom struggle.<sup>47</sup>

The production of literature also benefited the students who wrote and printed the underground paper. For example, Darryl "Waistline" Mitchell, BSUF and League member, recalled the experience as key to his political socialization:

[...] it allowed me to become educated, because you have to read. You have to learn how to edit. You have to learn how to work with different people and work in a collective. My organizational experience, which comes off of me wanting to be a printer when I was 13, 14, and 15, setting type, [...] gave me an opportunity to realize goals and inspirations I already had. So, for me, it was just like this marriage; this perfect thing that had happened.<sup>48</sup>

In this instance, liberatory education provided high school youth with the physical materials required to write their way to freedom.

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<sup>47</sup> Osborn High *Black Student Voice*, v. 1, no. 2, in the author's possession from the personal collection of General Gordon Baker, Jr.

<sup>48</sup> Darryl Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

# Black Revolutionary

POETRY

## If we must ....

If we must die let it not be like hogs  
Hemmed and pinned in an inglorious spot  
While round us bark the mad and angry dogs  
Making a mock of our accursed lot  
If we must die Oh! let us nobly die  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
in vain, and even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us tho dead!  
Oh Kinsman! We must face the common foe  
And in our struggle let us show us brave  
And for his throws and blows strike a death blow  
What though before us lies the open grave  
Like men will face the cowardly murderous pack  
Pressed to the wall dying but fighting back!!!

by Claude McKay

## 'BLOW'

'Blow' is my shepherd: I shall always want,  
He maketh me lie down in the gutters;  
He leadeth me in the path of wickedness for his sake;  
Yea, I would walk through the valley of poverty and will fear all evil;  
For thou 'Blow' are with me always;  
Thy needle and thy capsule they comfort me--  
Thou strippest my table of groceries in the presence of my family;  
Thou robbest my head of reason;  
My cup runneth over with sorrow--  
Surely 'Blow' will stop me all the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the damned forever.

## Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore  
and then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load

Or does it Explode????????????????????

poems Motto and Dream Deferred by  
Langston Hughes

## america calling

America calling.  
negroes.  
can you dance?  
play football/baseball?  
nanny?  
cook?  
needed now. negroes  
who can entertain  
ONLY.  
others not  
wanted.  
(and are considered extremely dangerous.)  
Don L. Lee

## Motto.

I play it cool  
and dig all jive  
that's the reason  
I stay alive  
My motto  
As I live and learn  
is  
Dig and be dug  
in return



THE RACIST U.S.A. - THE TORCH OF RETRIBUTION!

## SPIRO

Elephant and Baboon  
Learning to screw.  
Baby came out looking  
Like SPIRO AGNEW.  
by H. Rap Brown

"Black Revolutionary Poetry," Osborn High BSV (vol. 1, issue 2) from General Baker's Personal Collection

When schools failed to provide students with sites of critical, intellectual engagement, they created these spaces for themselves and found support from community institutions. Independent study groups, intergenerational political education classes, and freedom schools provided a space for students to not only engage and experiment with diverse political theories; it also they gave them the opportunity to shape these ideas in ways that spoke to their specific needs as black youth. For nearly two years, black student activists studied concrete conditions, in individual, group, and community contexts. So, when the time came to mobilize and organize their peers, they were already armed with the historical and experiential knowledge they would need to take as a strategic approach to struggle.

## **The Fight to Institutionalize Liberatory Education**

### **The Cooley School-Community Council Introduces Political Education (1969)**

Black high school youth marshalled the intellectual hunger of the black radical tradition in their fight for liberatory education. They introduced the ideas of radical theorists like Robert F. Williams and Amilcar Cabral to their peers and fought to institutionalize these ideas. In September 1969, more than a year after unrest at Post Junior High School exploded, black students at Cooley High School, encountered similar violent resistance to school integration. Over the course of three days, unrest at six of Detroit's schools erupted, many of them taking place in Northwest Detroit. When the Cooley Parents Club met with black and white students to discuss the cause of student unrest, the students proposed a school-sanctioned political education class as one solution

to poor race relations. The seminar was supposed to serve as an occasion for students, parents, and faculty to study social issues in a collaborative space. The parents club endorsed the students' calls for a non-credit political education seminar.<sup>49</sup> When the Northwest Community Organization convened its own meeting to address racial tensions the following week, thirty black and white students attended the session, as well as Marian Kramer and Larry Nevels who joined as representatives of the community organization UNICOM. Gregory Hicks and Frank Angelo, the managing editor of the *Detroit Free Press* and Cooley PTA president, were also in attendance. One white student explained that his peers worried that black students were "trying to 'take over Cooley.'" In response to this concern, Kramer argued that black and white students could benefit from a political education class since both groups were "being exploited by the system."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in an interview with the press, an unidentified black student "suggested a seminar of students, teachers and parent to 'politically educate each other.'"<sup>51</sup> Political education became the rallying cry of black students, many of whom were affiliated with the Cooley BSUF.

Immediately following the week of unrest that rocked Detroit's high school, Gregory Hicks proposed a school-sanctioned political education seminar to principal Wayne Nester. Political education, he stated, was key to "combating the narcotics flow on campus; removing the myth of the black-vs-white within Cooley; elevating students to the point that the school can be relevant." Hicks argued that political education would

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<sup>49</sup> Detroit Commission on Community Relations, "Student Unrest at Cooley High School, 10/1/1969"

<sup>50</sup> "Meeting of the Cooley Students at the Calvary United Methodist Church Last Thursday" (October 1, 1969), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>51</sup> "Outsiders Blamed for Trouble: Cooley Peace Session Held," September 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

“elevate the students to a point where they will welcome knowledge” and proposed topics such as a review of the curriculum and sources of student unrest. He included within this scope the functions of the Board of Education, commissioners in city planning, and board of assessors, housing commission, as well as questions around capitalism, the women’s exploitation, police violence, media, and black history.<sup>52</sup>

While his rationale for studying the functions of government were not clear, it is possible that it was in the interest of helping students understand the demands and claims that citizens could make of these organs. As local politics remained in flux, students sought to understand how these governing bodies functioned in their daily lives. The topics Hicks proposed offered an opportunity for students to discuss diverse political ideas and historical contexts with the intellectual curiosity and rigor they longed to have in the formal classroom setting. In this framework, Hicks’ intellectual labor suggested that political education was the means through which black and white high school youth could deconstruct large problems like inequality and seek solutions to collectively. In this way, Hicks had introduced one of the key pedagogical approaches of the movement, group-centered learning, as a solution to student unrest.

These meetings culminated in the Detroit Commission on Community Relations (DCCR)’s effort to form the Cooley School-Community Council (CSCC). Under the leadership of Frank Angelo, the group consisted of twenty-seven members: six parents, six students, six teachers, six community members, and three clergymen. DCCR charged the council with managing student concerns about curriculum, disciplinary policies, and

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<sup>52</sup> “Gregory Hicks and Blain Nichols to Wayne Nester,” September 22, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

student relations.<sup>53</sup> While several other high schools also organized similar councils, the CSCC became a test case for the possibilities and limitations of school integration amid demands for black community control of schools.<sup>54</sup> The council became the venue through which high school youth could finally achieve some measure of success in their demands for political education. In the age of demands for participatory democracy and greater access to the channels of power, the students had found an ally in the community.

While students demanded black history and political education, they sometimes conceptualized the two as complementary. This was indeed the case at Highland Park High School. “We have negro history, Afro-Seminar, etc, which is cool, but those courses dealing with the past will not liberate us in the future.” The students argued that these administrators had established these courses to “pacify” students. Instead, they claimed, “We should also be offered Political Science and subjects. And also guest speakers from the community of H.P. and elsewhere that realize the need for liberation.” The placement of this critique creates an interesting moment of irony. The authors placed an image of Malcolm X with “Remember Malcolm X Day!!!” next to it. The students also included a quote from Malcolm that read,

When you see that you’ve got problems, all you can do is examine the historic method used all over the world by other who have problems similar to yours. Once you see how they get theirs straight, then you know how you can get yours straight.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Education Division, “Education Division to Commission on Community Relations,” November 14, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>54</sup> Don Ball, “Cooley Council Wants Its Role Spelled Out,” *Detroit News*, April 21, 1970, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>55</sup> Coalition of Black Students, *Highland Park High School Black Student Voice*, v.1, no. 4 (February 13, 1970), in the author’s possession from the personal collection of General Gordon Baker.

Although Malcolm was an important figure in the study of history, the students' critique of black history classes suggests a different conceptualization of Malcolm X's import. For some black radical students, Malcolm X was not simply a figure who taught them to embrace the past; he was an intellectual who taught them the "art of living" in the present.

The Cooley School-Community Council formed on October 27, 1969. In addition to its focus on student safety and curriculum, the council agreed to establish a school-sanctioned political education seminar. In less than a month after the walkout, black student activists had accomplished one of its core goals. One week later, Hicks submitted Leonard Brown's name as the first speaker for the Cooley Political Education Seminar.<sup>56</sup> As a known white, Marxist and member of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Brown's invitation demonstrated the local radical community's ability to push the council further to the political left. According to Hicks, the title of Brown's presentation was an "Introduction to Political Science Education: What is Education? Student? Racism?" Brown had also planned to give another talk, "Capitalistic Society" a week later.<sup>57</sup> In his report on Brown's visit, Fred Linsell, member of the DCCR, described Brown's talk as "anti-white and anti-establishment, would be considered inflammatory by many, but was not untrue."<sup>58</sup> For Cooley's black and white students, the political education seminar had the potential to ignite debates over the form and function of education in a capitalist

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<sup>56</sup> Education Division, "Education Division to Commission on Community Relations." November 14, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>57</sup> Cooley School-Community Council, "Minutes" (November 3, 1969), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 18, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>58</sup> "Fred Linsell to Curtis Rodgers," November 5, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

society. It introduced students to the internal logics of the labor movement and the role of factory labor in Detroit's political economy.<sup>59</sup> Hicks' work to make political education a possibility provided adults with an alternative view of black youth when the broader society assumed that black adolescents were anti-intellectual.

Since the purpose of the seminar was to encourage debate and discussion, the parameters for speakers were less rigid than guidelines set for teachers. Student members of the council compiled a list of other speakers they wanted to invite, including school administrators, representatives from social service organizations, and even conservative groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the anti-communist Donald Lobsinger, as well as the commissioner of the Detroit Police Department.<sup>60</sup> It's not clear if the architects of the political education seminar intended to discuss sexism in American institutions and in the movement, but it is possible that the topic was of interest to student activists. As members of the League and the Black Student United Front, Gregory Hicks and Marian Kramer had conversations about "the woman" question in P.E. classes and in other movement spaces, as mentioned earlier. And since the BSUF's executive board included black girls who had a history of organizing their peers around dress codes, it is very likely that the political education seminar would have addressed sexism. The political education seminar introduced students to the intellectual rigor that was assumed to shape college classrooms, and more importantly, in the eyes of administrators, quelled student unrest.

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<sup>59</sup> Cooley School-Community Council, "A Summary of Meeting of the Political Education Seminar Committee" (November 24, 1969), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

The council was one of many efforts Gregory and the Cooley Chapter of the Black Student United Front made towards improving relations between students and teachers. They also turned to their own underground paper, the *Black Student Voice (BSV)*, to develop better communication and accountability between teachers and students. For *BSV* editors, accountability had to be a reciprocated process. To improve the ways in which students and teachers were accountable to each other, the Cooley's BSUF began the practice of interviewing teachers for the *BSV* in January 1970. They spoke to Ms. Slingerland as their first interviewee. While the editors did not include Slingerland's race or the subject area she taught, the interview is quite telling of the students' views on accountability and communication in improving the culture of public schooling. When asked about her views on establishing Black History classes, Slingerland acknowledged that black history was important, but that it should be integrated into American history courses or learned on one's own time. She explained that she was "sympathetic" to demands for these courses but felt that "people are making too big of an issue out of the whole thing." Slingerland concluded the interview declaring that Hicks and the BSUF advocated violence. The decision to include Slingerland's admonition of the BSUF was demonstrative of the transparency that the students aimed to achieve in their relations with the school's faculty and administration.<sup>61</sup>

Accountability also meant acknowledging when students made an error in the claims they made in the *BSV*. For example, in one of the first issues published in 1968, editors of the citywide *BSV* issued an apology to Mr. Mangus for referring to him as a "Tom." The editors stated,

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<sup>61</sup> Cooley High School *Black Student Voice*, v.1, no. 2 (January 12, 1970), General Gordon Bakers collection, in the author's possession.

We, the editorial board of the Black Student Voice wish to extend our sincere apologies to Mr. Mangus, a brave Black Brother at Northern High, [f]or the grave error of placing his name on last week's B.S.V.'s Tom chart. Mr. Mangus has struggled and sacrificed valiantly in the interest of black students at Northern as well as other Black schools.<sup>62</sup>

For Cooley's black student activists, communication and accountability created a path towards black community control of schools.

The Cooley School Community Council embarked upon an important mission but, except for the political education seminar, achieved little success. While high school students across the political spectrum turned to the council to appeal discriminatory decisions that faculty or administrators made, teachers and parents often challenged the council's authority and influence because of the large presence of leftists like Hicks, Kramer, and Nevel.<sup>63</sup> Despite its slow progress, the CSCC revealed the power that students possessed to change the culture of schooling in such a short time – albeit, for a short moment in the school's long history. Furthermore, it revealed the intellectual labor high school youth invested in the production of liberatory education through demands for political education.

### **The Mumford High School Sleep-in (1971)**

The next two years brought rapid changes to Detroit Public Schools. Between 1969 and 1971, the black student population rose from 180,630 to 187,966 while the

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<sup>62</sup> Black Student Voice, "Apology to Mr. Mangus," *Black Student Voice*, vol. 2, no. 8 (n.d.), Dodge Revolutionary Movements Collection (Newsletters: Archives Library) Folder Black Student Voice cc. 1968, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; For the original chart, see *Black Student Voice*, vol. 2, no. 7, American Federation of Teachers Local 231: Detroit Federation of Teachers Collection Box 9 Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

<sup>63</sup> Don Ball, "Racial Tensions at Issue: Cooley Council Ready to Quit?," *Detroit News*, April 19, 1970, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

white student population fell from 108,264 to 96,269.<sup>64</sup> The upsurge in the black student populace, coupled with the decline in white student enrollment posed several challenges for school leaders. However, it also provided a growing black student body with the power and numbers to demand more of the city, including the institutionalization of black history and literature courses. Although school leaders assumed that student activism was on the decline because students had made significant changes in the school system, student unrest continued throughout 1970 and 1971, and with more strategic approaches. High school activists organized anti-war rallies that were sometimes collaborative and orchestrated school-wide walkouts.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, these years were an intense period of political study for black youth. While they contributed to other sites of struggle, the core fight was over the direction of school governance and liberatory education.

The national debate over school governance came to a head in 1969, and in Detroit, it created a dynamic organizing moment for black youth that would rock the city for three years. For decades, the Detroit Board of Education was the central citywide organ for educational policy decisions. However, black Detroiters argued that the board had failed to provide black students with equal educational opportunity. They proposed, instead, to create community-controlled schools that placed the power to make decisions in the hands of the people. On March 24, 1969, Rev. Albert Cleage, the Black Christian Nationalist organizer, attended a hearing sponsored by the Education Committee of the

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<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 347-348.

<sup>65</sup> High School Students Strike Against War and Racism" (Detroit, Mich., 1969), American Federation of Teachers Local 231: Detroit Federation of Teachers Collection Box 9 Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "200 Students Walk Out at Northeastern," *Detroit Free Press*, September 16, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 55, Folder 67, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Support the Boycott" (1970), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Michigan state legislature to sound the alarm over racial inequality in Detroit's schools. Pressing the committee to propose a community control bill, Cleage found support in Detroit House Representative James Del Rio. According to Del Rio, "the Detroit board of education 'has been responsible for more riots than all the white racism in America.'" And as results for the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills became available in June, proponents of community control received greater ammunition for their demands. Three weeks after the hearing occurred, Coleman A. Young, the State Senator from Detroit, introduced his own decentralization proposal (Public Act 244) as a compromise between community control and the citywide board that already existed. Coleman's plan would have divided the school district into regions and would have created a central school board.<sup>66</sup>

Despite Young's claims that decentralization of the school board was a good compromise, community control advocates believed otherwise. According to Mirel, their main concern was that Young's bill would give the power to make decisions about hiring and firing, and curriculum to local school boards, but that the central board would have maintained the authority to veto these decisions. Furthermore, community control proponents wanted to ensure that black students would receive an education from black teachers. Liberal groups like the NAACP and the Detroit Urban League viewed decentralization as a barrier to true integration. Amid these debates, the Detroit Board of Education passed its own resolution at a secret meeting in April 1970. This resolution would have increased the black student population in Cody, Denby, and Redford – all of which were housed in predominantly white regions – and would have placed the futures of black students in the hands of a predominantly white teaching force and community.

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<sup>66</sup> Mirel, 335-337.

Proponents of community control created their own plan – the Black Plan – which sought to place six out of the eight regions under the control of black communities. Black high school students worked with parents to form Parents and Students for Community Control, which created its own desegregation proposal called the Black Plan.<sup>67</sup> In a city with a growing black population, this made sense to community control activists. On August 11, 1970, Governor William Miliken passed Public Act 244 and declared that it would take effect on January 1, 1971. The passage of the decentralization bill marked the beginning of the infamous busing case, *Miliken v. Bradley* (1974) and its journey to the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>68</sup>

Changes in racial demographics also created economic woes for Detroit Public Schools, and ultimately launched one of the more understudied, but profound acts of political organizing by high school students of the period. On February 18, 1971, the Detroit Board of Education unveiled its plans to cut the school district's budget by \$12 million. The cuts would have a troubling effect on the district: not only would 197 teachers lose their jobs, but classroom sizes would increase significantly.<sup>69</sup> This announcement set off waves of student unrest at several high schools, including Mumford, MacKenzie, Northwestern, Osborn, Central, Northern, and Pershing.<sup>70</sup> In addition to student unrest, citywide PTA leaders proposed a strike in opposition to these

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<sup>67</sup> Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*, 1 edition (Cornell University Press, 2001), 86-87

<sup>68</sup> Croft Educational Services, Inc., "Student Activism Expected to Decline," *For School Board Members*, April 1970, Remus Robinson Collection Box 1, Folder 61, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Parents and Students for Community Control, "The Guy Who Controls Your Future (Handbook on Decentralization)" (70 1969), Kenneth V. and Sheila M. Cockrel Collection Box 18 Folder 14: DPS; decentralization; 1969-1970, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>69</sup> Evelyn Kirsch and Malik Miah, "'Detroit Students Sit-in Over,'" *The Militant*, March 19, 1971, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 55, Folder 63, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>70</sup> Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*, 347-48.

layoffs.<sup>71</sup> However, when this meeting resulted in the union's decision to not strike, students at Mumford High resolved to act on their own behalf. This decision and their calculated approach birthed the Mumford High School Sleep-in of 1971.

While students were most certainly concerned about layoffs and the coming increase in classroom sizes, they were also committed to changing the content and form of the high school curriculum. For years, students used the school paper, *The Mercury*, to call for sex education and black history, for girls to have access to shop classes, and to introduce the possibility of holding classes outside.<sup>72</sup> So when the time came to consider how students should respond to the announcement of budget cuts, they were primed to place the demand for a culturally relevant curriculum at the center of their protest. Although the young people at Cooley explicitly demanded that school leaders add political education classes to the high school curriculum, student organizers of the Mumford Sleep-in focused solely on culturally relevant education.

Students from several organizations committed to organizing the sleep-in, including youth members of the Black Panther Party and the Mumford Association of Black Students. Even though students knew they had to act, they debated the nature of their response. During a student meeting to determine the best course of action, students decided to forgo the traditional sit-in. As the small group of organizers continued to grow, members of the Black Student United Front joined as well. According to Debi Goodman, a white ally of Mumford's black students,

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<sup>71</sup> William Grant, "'Against Layoffs: PTA Leaders Set Citywide Protests'," *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1971, Helen Bowers Collection Box 4 Folder 18: Social Issues-Student Unrest 1971, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory Carr, "Sex Education Needed in Schools," Beverly Adams, "Facts Omitted in History Curriculum, Class Could use Complete Revision," and Jane Seligson, "Encourage Education, Hold Classes Outside," 1967-1968, in the author's possession from Debra Goodman's Personal Collection.

Michael [Humphrey] allowed the conversations to continue, and then he said, in his quiet way, 'We don't just sit-in, and then go home at three o'clock and let them lock us out. We take control of the building, we stay here-sleep here-until our demands are met.'<sup>73</sup>

Humphrey, who was an African American student, had spent his early years in organizing meetings with his father who was a social worker, and watching his mother, an educator, develop culturally relevant materials for her own classroom. These experiences informed Humphrey's acute sense of what constituted an effective response to structural inequality. It was also the consequence of watching student actions unfold during the previous four years.

On Monday, March 1, 1971, student organizers arrived at the school with chains, thermoses, and sleeping bags prepared to take over the building. The sleep-in lasted for three days and garnered attention from the local press and support from parents. Throughout the week, students met with Marvin Green, the regional superintendent and Patrick MacDonald, president of the school board. On the first night, 200 students slept in, without much trouble. The second day, however, exposed the fault lines between the various student organizations. When student leaders met to discuss their demands, the ideological tensions that were endemic to the broader movement emerged forcefully. According to Goodman, some members of the BSUF wanted white students to forfeit their participation in the student strike. Other student leaders felt that the demands and rhetoric of the BSUF were divisive and had the potential to sabotage the success of their protest. When one BSUF member, Kevin, brought his demands to the table, the students found them to be much too broad to be effective. For example, Kevin wanted to add "we

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<sup>73</sup> Debra Goodman, "The Mumford Sleep-in of 1971," Undergraduate Research Paper, University of Michigan (1973/1974), in the author's possession.

demand relevant education” to the list of student demands. However, Humphrey revised this statement and gave it more clarity, asking for teacher review boards, more choices for courses, better recreational facilities, and an end to tracking. Although Kevin agreed to these revisions, he later changed his mind after consulting non-Mumford members of the BSUF. This tension was the ire of many black and white student leaders.<sup>74</sup> The debate over how to articulate demands constituted high school youth’s efforts to reshape the function of education, the content of the curriculum, and the culture of public schooling.

By the third night, city officials agreed to meet with the students to hear their demands.<sup>75</sup> Members of the regional board confirmed their support for relevant education “as long as they met state accreditation standards.” Board members also “called for more student participation in the school’s existing curriculum reform committee.”<sup>76</sup> By October, the school had established a Black Literature course that students could take in place of the traditional English 6. However, low enrollment in the course prompted student writers of *The Mercury* to investigate student perceptions of the course. One student explained that he had failed to register for Black Literature because his counselor did not explain that the course was an option. Had he known, the student stated, he would have enrolled in the class. One unidentified student said, “I really don’t know that much about regular English to be switching to Black Lit.” Other students claimed that they enrolled in the course because they thought that a course on Black Literature would be easier than taking the traditional English class.<sup>77</sup> It’s not clear why students wanted a black literature course.

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<sup>74</sup> Debra Goodman, “Mumford Sleep-in,” Undergraduate Student Paper, n.d., in the author’s possession.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> James Graham, “Region 5 Board Responds: 14 Mumford Demands Get Hearing,” *Detroit News*, March 16, 1971, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 55, Folder 63, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>77</sup> Della Spann, “Other Classes Offered in Place of English,” *New Alliance*, October 18, 1971, in the author’s possession from Debra Goodman.

However, the content and authorship of black literature provides some possible insights. Black literary figures like James Baldwin and Sonia Sanchez articulated the black experience from their perspective and study of black life. Depending on the books students wanted to include in the curriculum, there was also the possibility that they wanted texts that used the African American Vernacular English. These possibilities suggest that black literature was the means through which high school youth could break free from conceptions of blackness as intellectually and culturally inferior.

While these students did not call for political education classes, their experience with organizing constituted a form of hands-on political education. Reflecting on this history, and whether the sleep-in had accomplished anything, Goodman concluded that, “the point was in the struggle itself...that it developed in us an idea of political motivations, and a knowledge of interaction within a movement. It gave us the ability to create a struggle that would be as successful as possible.” She explains,

But more important than these concrete lessons was the idea that something can be done. The notion that struggle can take place and ordinary people can make it happen. We don’t have to wait for the politician, or the charismatic leader. Organization starts with one conversation.<sup>78</sup>

Students succeeded in pushing the school to make the curriculum culturally relevant, but like Cooley’s struggle, they learned that revolution was not an overnight process, but a course filled with peaks and valleys.

### **Cass Tech High School Building Takeover and Lessons on Waging Struggle (1971)**

Although school leaders considered Cass Technical High the premiere high school in the city, it was not immune to student unrest and student demands for culturally

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<sup>78</sup> Debra Goodman, “The Mumford Sleep-in of 1971,” Undergraduate Research Paper, University of Michigan (1973/1974), in the author’s possession.

relevant education. Black students at Cass Tech wanted to see more of themselves: in history, literature, dance, performing arts, and the sciences. For example, as black freshmen committed to Black Cultural Nationalism, Jametta Lily and Malik Yakini, pushed back against the curricular emphasis on Plato and Greek arts, and instead sought to shift the focus to Amiri Baraka, August Wilson, and the Katherine Dunham technique of dancing. Furthermore, they yearned to study engineering by examining ancient Kemet. Across grade cohorts, class groups, and ideological perspectives, students realized that they had to collectively organize to realize their vision for an education that was relevant to their culture and history.<sup>79</sup>

During the 1969-1970 school year, hundreds of students did just that when they took over the fourth floor of the eight-story Cass Tech High. Although black students constituted approximately 20% of the student population, they were an incredibly vocal group. Student leaders in the building takeover included freshman who had just arrived at the school as well as seniors who were more seasoned in political mobilization. The students believed that the best strategy to institutionalizing Black Studies was to build a coalition across the ideological spectrum. The coalition included white leftist groups, black nationalists, and students who did not have any ideological commitment, but wanted changes made to the curriculum. Black girl activists like Jametta Lily recalled the masculinist tone of the black boys who were also a part of the leadership for the takeover.

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<sup>79</sup> Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015; Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010. According to Russell Rickford, *We are an African People*, such demands constituted a strand of culturally relevant education that relied on “contributionism,” or the demand to acknowledge the contributions of black Americans. He argues that this approach contrasts with Black Nationalists who “saw the study of black life and history as a way to forge an African-American personality fully committed to political and cultural autonomy.” (p.49)

Despite black boys' efforts to assert their sense of militancy through popular conceptions of black manhood, black girls never wavered in their leadership.<sup>80</sup>

Over the course of the daylong takeover, students chanted, "Black studies, black studies. When do we want it? We want it now!" After hours of protesting, and a call to the local police force, a black female administrator arrived to tell the students that she would set up a meeting with school officials. After much discussion, the students asked that the administrator place this promise in writing. Later, students attended a follow-up meeting with school leaders. After reading the students' demands, school leaders agreed to develop Black Literature and Black History courses and to provide the Black Student Caucus with a budget and advisor. Their demands for organizational and financial support of student groups sought to create an established structure that would sustain the intellectual labor they had invested in liberatory education.<sup>81</sup>

Members of the Black Student Caucus responded favorably to the initial instructors, who demanded that students balance their scholarship with their political activities. Black and white students enrolled in these courses because they considered these educators to have a sound knowledge of the history and content they had committed to teach. However, Shirikiana Aina explained that over time, "that quality diminished." Eventually, administrators replaced these instructors with individuals who were incapable of providing adequate information about and guidance through the course material. As a case in point, Aina recalled "being taught that Kwame Nkrumah was a dictator and a communist and bad for his people. [...] So that the radical edge of--and potential for

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<sup>80</sup> Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

these courses to make change--diminished just within that period of time.”<sup>82</sup> And Lily described the subsequent instructor as a “caricature,” “weak, un-informed, and effeminate.” While it is difficult to discern what conceptions of black manhood Lily brought to her view of the teacher, her unfavorable opinion of the black boys who tried to assert their masculinity during the school takeover suggests that she wanted an educator whose demeanor matched the militant tenor of the times. Also, she was so disenchanted with the level of instruction that she felt compelled to offer this instructor a copy of Dr. Karl Gregory’s book since he lacked adequate preparation.<sup>83</sup> These activists walked away from the struggle for Black Studies having learned a key lesson: it is up to the students, and not the administrators, to evaluate course material and to choose instructors for course that they had fought so diligently to acquire.<sup>84</sup> While students did not always explain what they expected to get out of these courses, their critique of these classes and instructors demonstrate the alternatives they sought to the “Dark Africa” narrative. For these activists, efforts to integrate the history of black life into the curriculum were insufficient if the content did not follow the logic or tone of the times, and if faculty did not have adequate experience with the course materials.

Students at Cass Tech did not simply demand black history and black literature courses; they outlined their vision for the character of these subjects as well. And they were not alone. For example, when BSUF members at Northern High School warned its

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<sup>82</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015; Lily does not explain which book, but it was likely *The Financial Problem of the City of Detroit* or *Property Tax in Detroit*. Dates for both works are unknown, but were likely published during the 1960s since graduated high school in 1947. See Barry M. Franklin, “Community, Race, and Curriculum in Detroit: The Northern High School Walkout,” *History of Education*, 33 (March 2004), 137-156.

<sup>84</sup> Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015.

readers that the competing student group, Afro Club, wanted to create a black curriculum, it revealed its expectations for this program.

It has been rumored that the Afro Club's plan to start a Black Curriculum. Ain't that a laugh? [...] If they get it, you can be sure it won't be a liberation course. To top this all off, they have a sponsor that thinks that music can free the black people. Students, don't be bothered with silly s---- like this. AIM FOR REVOLUTION.<sup>85</sup>

While some students viewed African American music as a means to making sense of black life and culture in a personal context, they did not envision it as a path to liberation. In their estimation, education had to help students understand concrete conditions and how to develop a strategic approach to struggle. More radical students may have offered this critique as a way to undermine the Afro Club's leadership, but it was a critique that aligned with their visions for culturally and politically relevant education. Like students at Highland Park and Cass Tech, students across the city struggled to determine the character of black education.

Although high school students at Cooley, Mumford, and Cass Tech made great strides in the fight to make education relevant and culturally responsive to their daily lives, they encountered limitations. The Cooley School Community Council received opposition from almost every sector of the community, including white teachers. The resistance to their work created barriers to change that the CSCC could not overcome. Students at Mumford pushed school leaders to develop Black literature courses, but also had to contend with black youths' perceptions of black history as well as the attitude of indifference that school leaders had towards the success of these courses. And

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<sup>85</sup> Voice of the Coalition of Black Students of Highland Park High School, "The Negro Club," *Highland Park High School Black Student Voice*, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 26, 1970), General Gordon Baker's Personal Collection, in the author's possession.

although students at Cass Tech etched out some level of success, they too learned the limits of these reform efforts. Despite these disappointments, however, the intellectual labor these activists marshalled made culturally relevant and liberatory education not just a vision, but a reality. This labor took the form of conceptualizing black cultural productions as a form of knowledge; and it repelled the view that integrating culturally relevant content without an analysis was enough. The demands students issued to school leaders and their evaluation of the courses highlight the possibilities they envisioned for a liberatory education.

### **Movement Pedagogy and Self-Discovery: When the Personal becomes Political**

As black youth found their voices in political organizations and underground presses, the movement's demands for community control and self-determination permeated their personal lives. As such, parents, teachers and community activists sought to instill in black youth a positive self-image and conception of blackness. Black popular culture icons also asserted claims that black was beautiful, and that it was a great achievement to be "Young, Gifted, and Black."<sup>86</sup> In daily life, black youth demonstrated their pride in black culture through dress, hair, and language. Looking at dress, conceptions of beauty, and relationships allows us to understand youth activists' ideas about gender, race, and class. Their experiences suggest that the Black Power movement's pedagogical approach and resistance to white supremacy offered black girls something that the Civil Rights movement's focus on desegregation did not: a vision of the self as "whole."<sup>87</sup> For black girl activists like Aina, Ford, and Jones, the struggle for a culturally relevant curriculum

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<sup>86</sup> James Brown, *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*, Vox Studios, 1968; and Nina Simone, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, Stroud Productions, 1969.

<sup>87</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

was much more than another site of struggle for the Black Power movement. It was also the means through which they could articulate and realize their own conceptions of blackness, beauty, and power. For black activists like Cassandra Ford, Shirikiana Aina, and Jametta Lily, the movement provided them with the space needed to navigate the process of self-discovery as adolescents.

The process of self-discovery was especially important for Black girls who came of age just a decade after the emergence of the 1940s “All-American boy” and the “All-American girl” in popular American culture. And they raised their concerns about these normative notions of boyhood and girlhood in their papers. According to the first issue of the citywide *Black Student Voice*, “The All-American [...] is white, has crew-cut hair, is on the football, basketball, baseball and/or swim team, is on honor roll, in the student council, and in the R.O.T.C. or its equivalent.” The editors described the image of the All-American girl as “white, has bouncy blond hair, is healthy and carefree, is as ‘American as Apple Pie,’ loves America, hates communism, and ‘some of her best friends are ‘Negros,’ or more common none of her friends are ‘niggers.’” The Black Power movement and Black Arts movement pushed back against this version of white supremacy and socialization of black and white youth. In their own lives, black youth activists advanced an alternative vision of black girlhood.<sup>88</sup>

These “All-American” tropes characterized white boys and girls with blond hair and letterman’s jackets as the model American adolescent. The Black Power movement, however, challenged Eurocentric notions of beauty that had animated many of the core beliefs of white supremacy while the Black Studies movement contested long-held

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<sup>88</sup> Citywide *Black Student Voice* 1/1970, General Gordon Baker, Personal Collection, in the author’s possession.

beliefs about the educational value of black cultural productions. The redefinition of black beauty offered by both movements was especially important to black girls who came of age in an era where youth became a targeted group for the advertisement industry. During the 1950s, advertisement agencies viewed youth as the largest group of consumers of music, clothes, and beauty products.<sup>89</sup> The Black Power movement's reconceptualization of beauty standards was especially impactful for black girls because of the ideas about gender, race, and girlhood they encountered in school hallways and in popular culture. Black girl activists witnessed the ways in which social movements in the U.S. found inspiration in the struggles colonized groups in Africa and Asia waged for independence from colonial rulers. As one such movement, the Black Power movement in the U.S. represented black America's own fight for liberation from state repression and economic deprivation. The movement offered black girls a sense of power that they could then marshal against depictions of black girlhood as dependent and delinquent.

Engaging in this kind of self-discovery as a black girl in the era of the War on Poverty, the War on Crime, and the Moynihan report was empowering. As a teenager, Shirikiana Aina developed an interest in women's health. In co-ed reading groups with friends, she read Adelle Davis' *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit*. They also read works by Amilcar Cabral, Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. According to Aina, this was the environment in which "self-discovery was mandatory."<sup>90</sup> For Aina, self-discovery was especially important to her ability to navigate her biracial identity. Born to

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<sup>89</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2003).

<sup>90</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010; Adelle Davis, *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit* (New York: Signet Books, 1970); Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Ramparts Press Inc., 1968).

a white mother and a black father, Aina yearned for a connection to black Americans, and to the African Diaspora. She explains:

It was a grounding for everybody to find out ‘yeah well this little stuff in my hair is okay, that the way that I talk, that our street talk is not because we don't know English. It's because it has a relationship to African languages. There's nothing more wholesome than to realize that you are not wrong, that everything about you is not wrong; that it simply has a relationship to Africa.

For Aina, it jumpstarted a life-long process of resolving global issues.<sup>91</sup>

Black girls who were of a darker hue, like Cass Ford, revealed just how deeply personal the political struggle for culturally relevant curriculum was to black youth. In 1968, just one year after the Rebellion of 1967, soul and funk artist James Brown released *Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud*. When Brown crooned “Say it louder, I’m black and I’m proud,” girls like Ford and Toni Jones found a counter narrative to what they had been taught and heard about dark-skinned girls in school. Ford states,

[...] because I was dark skin, I was always teased about being black. And then James Brown came out with *I’m Black and I’m Proud*. Hey! Say it loud. Choo choo. And all of that affects you. I think I was doing it [organizing] because of that too. I don't think you should have to be talked about or be teased because of the color of your skin.<sup>92</sup>

Jones, who was not a member of the League, but had participated in student protests for a short period, shared a similar experience. Before Brown released the song, Jones hated her brown skin so much that she tried to brighten it with bleaching cream as a teenager. Part of Jones’ contempt for her skin color was informed by comments made by family members and experiences with black boys who preferred to dance with light-skinned girls at junior high school dances. For these black girls, the Black Power movement, and its influence on popular culture, gave them the space to re-conceptualize blackness and

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<sup>91</sup> ShirikianaAina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> For more on the significance of Brown’s song in the formation of black consciousness, see Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (JHU Press, 2005).

black girlhood. Neither were no longer the negative alternative to the “All-American Girl” or evidence of black dependence upon the state. But rather, a part of the black experience that was worthy of celebration.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, it suggests that popular culture was itself an educational force.

After James Brown released *Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud*, Toni Jones looked at herself in a different way. Not only did she feel pretty, she loved the “nappiness” of her hair, which she joked, girls with straight hair couldn’t achieve. As a pre-teen, Jones hated swim class, for many reasons. One of her principle concerns was that the water caused her hair to curl up into its natural state since her mother pressed her hair often. Conversations with friends about hair was a constant presence in Toni’s life. They considered “nappy” bad but viewed wavy or fine as good hair. Most of her friends had long hair. But Toni’s words, she had “bad” hair. She and one of her best girlfriends gave each other perms. But once she started to attend Mumford High School, she began to wear her hair in an Afro. Jones’ mother resisted this change with great persistence. But Jones continued to wear her Afro, except for the times her mother pressed her hair for prom, senior pictures, and graduation. Most of her friends wore Afros, even if not as consistently as she had. When they began to wear afros, they often discussed preferences for certain hair oils and sprays like Carson’s Ultra Sheen. Jeri Love found herself at the intersection of this hair politics and Black Power politics as a young activist. Love’s decision to grow her hair natural developed out of her interest in Masai women’s culture.

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<sup>93</sup> James Brown; Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010; and Toni Jones, interview with the author, July 10, 2010.

As a teenager, Love cut her hair in the spirit of the Masai women who wore their hair short in support of Masai men and to show that they, too, were indigenous warriors.<sup>94</sup>

Ideas about liberation also permeated black girls' views on romantic relationships they formed within the movement as well as the political ramifications for the organization. As a case in point, one of the internal divisions in the League revolved around the double standard in interracial dating. While black men could date white woman with impunity, black women who dated whites did not experience the same acceptance. This issue eventually impacted the Black Student United Front as well. Ford recalled one instance that she believed caused the League's split. One day, someone saw a black male activist from the Black Student United Front with a white girl, and they brought this information back to the student group. Following this incident, the young activists prohibited black boys from dating white girls. This issue remained far more widespread than in just Detroit high schools. Ford explained,

And at that time, the women of the League got together-- including some of the women from the Front--because myself, Lynn, all of us were there and we had a meeting with Ken Cockrel because Ken Cockrel was seeing a white girl, Sheila Cockrel whom he ended up marrying later on, by that time they was hanging out I guess.<sup>95</sup>

The issue of interracial dating permeated much of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement. But for girls like Cass Ford, observing how women handled such contradictions offered an example of black womanhood that was defiant and demonstrated women's ability to lead "the brothas." Marsha Lynn Battle, in another instance, recalled a formative experience with an unnamed woman in the League. During

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<sup>94</sup> Toni Jones, interview with the author, July 20, 2010; and Jeri Love, interview with the author, October 20, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Cass Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

an interview with a film crew that was working on a feature for the League, Marsha stated that she was in the organization to support the men and their work. When an older female activist heard Marsha's statement, she immediately chastised the girl and instructed her to never subdue herself to the whims of men.<sup>96</sup> The intergenerational relationships black girls and black women developed made space for a gendered political education on building women's leadership in social movements.

Black girls also used the school as a site of struggle over questions about how their race, class, and gender and the notions of respectability shaped the politics of dress. They began to question the politics of respectability in their protests around attire as early as junior high school. According to Aina, they started

reassessing why we wear clothes the way we wear them, why are we behaving in sort of a uniform fashion? Even when it comes down to our clothes. Can't we say that there are things that we can do differently? Then also the women's thing. Why are we wearing dresses all the time?

But they also saw dresses as a matter of inconvenience. After much protest, schools often changed the dress policy. But not all teachers supported this change, including African-American teachers. Aina stated,

So when finally the dress code was changed in junior high, my junior high school teacher had a meeting with the girls after school and she said 'Oh, I know my girls are not gonna' come with pants the next day because I know you guys are very proper.'

Aina viewed this teacher's resistance to change as evidence of her desire for black girls to represent the race well by dressing "respectably." Aina explained that this teacher simply wanted her students to present an alternative to the stereotypical images of black people they encountered in their daily lives.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Marsha (Battle) Philpot, interview with the author, October 27, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Shirikiana Aina, interview with the author, September 11, 2010.

The black girls' body was also a site of political activism for girls like Aina. As a case in point, Aini and other black girls took the fight around dress into high school as students at Cass Tech. By 1969, the push to wear blue jeans

became a way of dressing for young people who were looking at these people fighting and dropping a sense of materialism for a sense of functionality. So blue jeans became what young people started to wear to school.<sup>98</sup>

As a student activist in the Black Student United Front at Cass Tech, Love organized an integrated student protest against the schools' ban on girls wearing jeans. Love organized the protest, she stated, because she was influenced by the women's movement. But this decision was also likely informed by what Tanisha Ford has revealed to be SNCC women's use of dress as a form of rebellion against notions of gendered and racialized respectability.<sup>99</sup>

The personal politics of black boys took multiple forms. As a case in point, black male youth activists viewed their role in the movement as big brothers and protectors of young girls who encountered attempts at sexual abuse in the home.<sup>100</sup> Others embraced and worked to act up on the view that violence was revolutionary. As a case in point, Malik Yakini, a high school student at Cass Tech and an advocate for Black Cultural Nationalism, studied bomb-making as a way to prepare for the pending revolution.<sup>101</sup> And yet, the stories of other black boys did not easily fit the narrative that most black men saw the movement as a fight for racial manhood. For example, Michael Humphrey, one of the leaders of the Mumford High School sleep-in, recalled a great sense of appreciation for

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Jeri Love, interview with the author, October 20, 2015; For more on women's dress and respectability, see Tanisha Ford, "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 3 (August 2013): 625–58.

<sup>100</sup> Darryl Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

love songs that discussed working-class relationships. He was most drawn to lyrics by men who talked about love and responsibility. Soul music impacted Humphrey, he explained because the music made black humanity legible.<sup>102</sup>

The personal politics of black boys and girls mattered to their political activism. Like other marginalized groups during this period, they resisted Eurocentric notions of beauty and humanity as they amplified the Black Power movement's calls for self-determination. And as activists, they found the political to be liberating in their personal lives, even when the political became complicated by the movement's internal gender politics. They struggled to realize the claims that "Black is Beautiful" and that they too, were "Black and Proud." In its resistance to white supremacy, the Black Power movement's pedagogical approach offered black girls, in particular, a vision of a fully realized self. Black high school activists marshalled the pedagogical tools of the movement to reshape conceptions of blackness in their personal lives and in the fight for liberatory education. In doing so, they illuminated the personal stakes in the movement community control of schools and for liberatory education.

## **Conclusion**

Between 1966 and 1973, the call for racial equality evolved into a battle over control of Detroit institutions. Despite the educational studies and reports commissioned during the 1950s and 1960s, students, with the support of communities, concluded that they had to take up the fight for liberatory education on their own behalf. As students

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Humphrey (Simanga), interview with the author, March 1, 2017; it is difficult to discern if boys' politics were evidence of a desire to assert their masculinity or youthful whimsy.

continued to wage protracted struggles, they found support from older black radicals, young educators, and in some cases, they won over the support of their parents. In the community, the students found opponents to their cause, but they marched on. For these students, the debate over community control and decentralization was not just rhetoric; it was a matter of the shape that Black Liberation would take.

When the larger society viewed black youth as intellectually and morally inferior, the League invested in black high school activists who were already fighting for self-determination. With support and resources from the League, Black high school youth demonstrated that they were undoubtedly intentional about the methods they used when leading direct action. While educational theorists and reformers fought to realize their visions of education for black youth, the young people at the center of this history formulated their own plans to change the culture of schooling. The Black Power movement's engagement with revolutionary praxis, in tandem with young people's daily experiences with racism, shaped black youth politics and the battle for liberatory education. For these young activists, uprooting the high school curriculum from its Eurocentric moorings was not simply a political struggle, but a movement with deep roots in their personal lives. This chapter has revealed the ways in which high school youth marshaled their experiential knowledge and the intellectual rigor of the black radical tradition to make sense of the concrete conditions that shaped their lives and strategic approaches to struggle.

African American culture played an integral role in that construction of personal politics, as the relationship between black youth's sense of self and their fight for culturally relevant curriculum strengthened simultaneously. Black cultural productions of

music and art – the black aesthetic that was at the heart of the movement’s pedagogical approach – provided black girls with a language to articulate their own conceptions of black girlhood, and their understanding of race, sex, and gender.

Punitive responses to the student unrest that occurred over these struggles took shape quickly in urban communities across the country during the 1960s. As students struggled to eradicate white supremacy from school curriculums and conceptions of beauty, they did so against the backdrop of the occupation of the predominantly white police force within majority black schools. Claims of black consciousness like *Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud* became especially important for black youth as they met repressive forces like the Detroit Police Department. However, students would marshal the tactical and analytical tools they acquired from the struggle for liberatory education in their fight against police brutality and violence.

## Chapter Four: Disciplining Black Student Activism in the Model City

As 1970 comes upon us, it poses to be a difficult year indeed for the Black student. [...] this year will be a new wave of repression by the Board of Education, local school administrations, and the Detroit Police against the Black student, battle for community control of schools, decreasing job market, military draft etc.,...<sup>1</sup>

History has proven over and over again that there is no safety, no security, no peace in a situation that depends on guards. [...] Teachers, parents and students should start building together now - instead of staring at each other over the shoulders of guards!<sup>2</sup>

On Tuesday, March 12, 1968, African American students at the moderately integrated Post Junior High School staged a walkout to demand the removal of the white assistant principal, Willard Clark. Clark, the students charged, harbored racist attitudes against his black charges. When the students tried to explain their concerns to administrators through formal channels, their cries went unanswered. In response to what they perceived to be an attitude of indifference, the students staged a school-wide protest. Those leading the revolt met with Detroit Public School administrators the following day with the hope that school officials would listen to their concerns. However, when the meeting did not produce the results the students yearned for, they orchestrated another walkout two days later.<sup>3</sup> Friday's action began at noon when an unidentified student set off the fire alarm, sending 1500 students out of their classrooms and into the school yard. As the students milled about, witnesses say the students soon formed into groups and

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<sup>1</sup>General Gordon Baker, Personal Collection, Highland Park High Black Student Voice: Voice of the Coalition of Black Students of Highland Park High School (v.1 n.3) January 26, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Sell, "New Caucus on: Guards in the Schools," *The Detroit Teacher*, June 1969, Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 56, Folder: Misc. Correspondence, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>3</sup> "Probers' Report Brings Shakeup at Post School," n.d., Helen Bowers Collection Box 2 Folder 1: Decentralization 1967-77, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

lodged snowballs at police officers as they arrived on the scene. Officers met the students, and the parents and teachers who tried to control them, with the force of police batons. According to an adult witness, one police officer motioned toward his revolver to force a parent back inside of the school.<sup>4</sup>

When teachers attempted to corral students back into the school building, an unidentified police officer struck James Jackson, an African American teacher, in the head with his nightstick. In his statement to police detectives with the Detroit Police Department (DPD), Jackson explained that officers had also beaten several other teachers, including Melvin Peters and Mr. Chapman, both of whom were young, black teachers at Post. Although Jackson had identified himself as a teacher, the officer responded that Jackson's status was irrelevant.<sup>5</sup> The very presence of young black teachers like Chapman, Jackson, and Peters was the consequence of national demands for the increased hiring of black teachers in K-12 and in higher education. Student unrest at Post prompted Superintendent Norman Drachler to organize the Post Junior High School Investigation committee. This police and community violence touched off a series of emergency meetings, investigative reports, and ultimately, the removal of Willard Clark.

Student unrest at Post ignited a swift response from the local community and school officials. In addition to numerous community meetings that clergy and parents organized, superintendent Dr. Norman Drachler established the Post Junior High Investigation Committee to study the causes of student unrest. Its members included

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<sup>4</sup> Salvatore Palazzolo, "Substance Statement of Barbara Scott" (March 16, 1968), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>5</sup> Earl Gray and Elmer Hein, "Substance Statement from James Jackson" (April 1, 1968), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

parents, teachers, and students. Using questionnaires submitted to students and teachers, and interviews with local community members and school leaders, the committee revealed a troubling gap between perception and reality. Although federal officials had considered Detroit the “model city” for race relations, the city’s black student population charged that this image was unfounded.<sup>6</sup> This was especially the case when addressing the relationship between the Detroit Police Department and African American students.

Fierce repression was the cost of student activism. When students organized and mobilized their peers to stage school walkouts and building takeovers, they were well aware of the significant show of police force that they would encounter in the process. They were familiar with the stories of police harassment that circulated in their communities and in the local press. But it would seem that engaging in acts of resistance would bring this force to their feet, and in multiple forms. Between the Detroit Police Department, the Youth Probate Court, the Detroit Public School administration, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), student activists were policed from all sides.

Unrest at Post Junior High School, and at other schools in the larger metropolitan area, suggest that the punitive turn in public education marked the daily experiences of Detroit’s black students. Broadly defined, the punitive turn marked a period in U.S. history when federal welfare and social control policies became increasingly punitive in nature. Elizabeth Kai Hinton has located this turn in the mid-1960s during President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration.<sup>7</sup> In this moment, the criminalization of black youth

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<sup>6</sup> Post Junior High School Investigation Committee, “Report” (May 1, 1968), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, “‘A War within Our Own Boundaries’: Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav328>.

spurred a shift in focus for juvenile delinquency reformers. The punitive turn in juvenile delinquency policies was especially important for black youth, who were historically at the center of welfare policy decisions. Since the end of World War II, educational institutions in the U.S. functioned as sites of anti-delinquency programs, and have stood at the nexus of the welfare state and the carceral state.<sup>8</sup>

How did the punitive turn evolve and function in Detroit? Who implemented the policies associated with the turn? How did students experience and respond to the state's new approach to dealing with the urban crisis? Furthermore, what were the ideological contours of their responses? In this chapter, I argue that the increased presence of police officers in educational institutions pushed black educational activists to expand their visions of quality education to include forms of schooling that were independent of the state and challenged the logic of "in loco parentis." In the view of students, parents, teachers, and community members, the state's excessive use of force posed a threat to efforts to realize a vision of liberatory education. Instead, black communities possessed a community-centered politics of education and policing.

"In loco parentis" is an 18th century concept which, in Latin, means "in the place of the parent." English jurist William Blackstone uses the tutor-student relationship to describe the concept. According to Blackstone, when a child is under the supervision of

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<sup>8</sup>For excellent studies on the punitive turn, see Loïc Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity," *Sociological Forum* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 197–220. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01173.x; Elizabeth Hinton, "'A War within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 100–112. doi:10.1093/jahist/jav328; John Muncie, "The 'Punitive Turn' in Juvenile Justice: Cultures of Control and Rights Compliance in Western Europe and the USA," *Youth Justice* 8, no. 2 (August 1, 2008): 107–21. doi:10.1177/1473225408091372; and Deborah E. McDowell, Claudrena N. Harold, and Juan Battle, eds. *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.

his tutor, in the absence of the parent, the tutor becomes legally responsible for the child. Therefore, the tutor has the right to physically punish the child as if he were the parent and could do so without repercussions. In its discussion of the utility of the concept in 20<sup>th</sup> century public schooling, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) explains one significant difference. Blackstone's example included a private agreement between one parent and one student. However, in Detroit, the concept is meant to represent a contract between one teacher who is responsible for thirty to forty students, and their parents. In light of compulsory schooling, parents enter into a relationship with a bureaucracy, not an individual tutor. As the American Civil Liberties Union has explained, a problem arises when the school does not follow the wishes of the parent, but instead, acts on its own accord. It does not simply act in the absence of the parent, it replaces the parent.<sup>9</sup> Police violence against students, parents and teachers, compromised the authority of the state to act "in loco parentis." The use of excessive police force, the emergence of decoy and surveillance programs, and the debate over safety in schools all reflected the punitive turn.

This chapter maps the genealogy of the punitive turn through the eyes and experiences of black high school students. First, it examines black youth's experiences with anti-delinquency programs, which the local officials viewed as solutions to poor police-community relations. Next, it then illuminates how contentious police-community relations and anti-delinquency programs spurred the influx of police and police brutality into Detroit Public Schools. It explores the theoretical tools and strategic approaches

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<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Detroit Branch, American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, "Suspension and Expulsion Policies in Michigan Public Schools (Policy Statement)" (December 20, 1967), Helen Bowers Collection, Box 5-3 Students Rights 2, 1967, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

students brought to bear on their resistance to and management of disciplinary action, as well as students' alternative visions for student safety. Finally, it investigates how the War on Drugs overturned many of the advances made by student and community activists. This chapter offers a tale of young people who not only experienced the punitive turn, but who fought diligently to oppose it and to craft an alternative vision of public safety in the process.

## **Funding Anti-Delinquency Measures**

As Elizabeth Kai Hinton explains, throughout the long 20th century, educational psychologists, social workers, and other reformers sought to remedy the problem of juvenile delinquency with anti-poverty and social control programs at the local level. She contends that, while anti-delinquency programming and policy documents rarely explained how architects of these endeavors defined juvenile delinquency, authors of a report published by the Johnson administration on juvenile delinquency in 1967 offers insight into how the broader reform community understood the phrase. The report used the term to describe “‘a class of children who are incorrigible, ungovernable, or habitually truant,’ and who therefore appeared to be ‘in need of supervision.’”<sup>10</sup> In this instance, reformers viewed delinquency through the lens of the law, seeing students who were truant under the system of compulsory schooling as “ungovernable.”

While this conception of delinquency relied heavily on social behaviors that challenged the rule of law, views on delinquency were also deeply classed and gendered.

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Kai Hinton, “Creating Crime: The Rise and Impact of National Juvenile Delinquency Programs in Black Urban Neighborhoods,” in *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 41, issue 5, (2015): 3.

As a case in point, reformers viewed unwed teenage mothers and girls who socialized with “boys on street corners, at neighborhood centers or at shoddy house parties” as delinquents as well. In major cities across the U.S., youth agencies studied the causes of juvenile delinquency, and concluded “that, though most teen-age crime is committed by boys, girls are often the catalytic agents for violence.” According to Gertrude Samuels, a writer for *Times Magazine*, “Promiscuous and coarse, the girls are often rumor carriers for the boys, weapon carriers, narcotics carriers and, sometimes, disease carriers.” In 1961, an unnamed “reformed” young woman from Detroit articulated this widely-held view at a national forum on youth crime that took place in New York. While addressing a room of educators, social reformers, and law enforcement, the young woman explained ““Make the girls good, and delinquency will lessen.””<sup>11</sup> The young woman had voiced the classed and gendered character of anti-delinquency programs that emerged during the 1960s. While reformers saw youthful delinquents as the harbingers of crime, they also viewed them as a population that did not fit middle-class conceptions of social norms.

Local and federal officials viewed unemployment and the abundance of idle time as some of the dominant causes of juvenile delinquency and crime. Therefore, anti-delinquency programs usually focused on employment and recreation. The assumption was that without recreational and job opportunities, youth had the time and the financial motive to engage in delinquent or criminal behavior. While much of social science research up until the 1960s charged that black racial inferiority was the cause of racial inequality. By the end of the decade, social scientists came to attribute urban youth

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<sup>11</sup> Gertrude Samuels, “Rescue for the Wayward Girls: An Unusual Experiment in Los Angeles, Substitutiong Therapy for Punishment, Contrasts with Programs Elsewhere, Notably in New York,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1961, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

delinquency to individual responsibility, the “culture of poverty,” and structural inequality. For example, in 1966 the prominent white Detroit reformer and educational psychologist William Wattenberg argued that

The fact that populations which dwell in the central cities of the metropolitan areas tend to develop alienation, cultural values antagonistic to academic achievement, dependency on public welfare, and violence pose real threats to the survival of cities. [...] The social maladjustment is one manifestation of the effects of generations of discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

That Wattenberg continued to emphasize “cultural values antagonistic to academic achievement” in light of the Northern High School walkout that had occurred that year is surprising. Despite the realities of urban resistance and demands for improved schooling, reformers continued to view delinquency through the lens of cultural deficiencies.

Although sociologists, educators, and policy makers established anti-delinquency programs at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Geoff Ward explains, mainstream juvenile justice reformers only turned their attention to African American youth after the first Great Migration. Despite the delayed focus, by end of the 1960s, anti-delinquency programs had become an entrenched feature of black, urban life.<sup>13</sup> As local leaders came to view the War on Poverty as a solution to juvenile crime and delinquency, the role of law enforcement in the lives of black youth increased. This was most clear when the role of law enforcement expanded to include social service providers in urban communities.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of a decade, the struggle between the police and African American

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<sup>12</sup> William Wattenberg, “Introduction,” in *Social Deviancy Among Youth*, eds. William Wattenberg and Herman G. Richey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>13</sup> Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, “‘A War within Our Own Boundaries’: Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav328>. Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

residents produced greater accountability within the DPD. As the black community demanded better policing, the city explored ways to mend the relationship between law enforcement and blacks. The city placed much of its hope in anti-delinquency programs that focused on summer employment and recreational activities.<sup>15</sup> Anti-delinquency programs represented social reformers' responses to the needs of black youth during the Civil Rights era. Such programs were also meant to serve as an alternative to Black Radicalism.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, city officials and local communities had conceptualized, organized, and funded anti-delinquency programs.<sup>16</sup> However, at the start of the 1960s, the federal government and private funders began to fund these efforts. In Detroit, for example, the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program funded the Great Cities School Improvement Project.<sup>17</sup> When school administrators developed the program in 1959 with local funds, they sought to improve the high dropout rate by funding vocational education programs.<sup>18</sup> However, when it received financial support from the Gray Areas Project in 1961, it shifted its focus to making the school curriculum and personnel more relevant to the lives of its students.<sup>19</sup>

While the Great Cities School Improvement program was one of the first local efforts the federal government funded, War on Poverty funds used for anti-delinquency usually addressed employment and recreation. As a case in point, the federal government

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<sup>15</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> David B. Wolcott, *Cops and Kids: Policing Juvenile Delinquency in Urban America, 1890-1940* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Barry M. Franklin, *Community, Curriculum, and Urban School Reform* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 32.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 286, footnote 163.

<sup>19</sup> Mirel, 257.

funded Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh's Community Action for Detroit Youth (CADY) with \$202,000 while the state supplemented this grant with an additional \$109,000. The program began at the start of the 1962-1963 school year, and was a key experiment for President Kennedy's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. The program sought to address all communities that had been affected by urban renewal and displacement. As a collaborative effort between public and private agencies, CADY sought to identify the causes of juvenile delinquency.<sup>20</sup> CADY was principally interested in working with young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one who lived on the East Side of Detroit. When architects of CADY learned that "84% of those interviewed needed job counseling as well as health care," they made the Summer Youth Employment Program its primary focus. According to Sidney Fine, the anti-delinquency program CADY marked the early rise of Detroit's War on Poverty.<sup>21</sup>

In sharp contrast to theories of black cultural deficiency as the cause of inequality, the position that delinquency was a consequence of young people's beliefs that upward mobility was not within their reach, a history of family unemployment or underemployment, and inadequate recreational opportunities shaped the development of CADY. The theoretical position was that "By improving conditions within an individual's 'life space' we will also be improving his 'life chance' of not becoming a delinquent or ceasing to be a delinquent." Project staff collected data to understand the needs for

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<sup>20</sup> "Mayor Names 25-Member Board to Fight Juvenile Delinquency." *Detroit Courier*, September 1, 1962. Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 78, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>21</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 72-73.

services, communicate its programming to the public, and consult for agencies. In the minds of reformers, these programs could prevent juvenile delinquency.<sup>22</sup>

Detroit was just one of many cities to successfully apply for federal funding for anti-delinquency programs. In Syracuse, students from Syracuse University received federal funding to teach local elementary and high school students communication skills and social studies. In St. Louis, the St. Louis Planning Project sponsored a conference that sought to understand the concerns of youth, including unemployment and parent-teacher relations. The conference also encouraged students to become involved in local programs. In Washington, D.C., the Washington Action for Youth focused on youth unemployment. It sponsored the Pilot Project in Urban Teaching which allowed educators to attend Howard University's Master of Arts program in teaching and to create innovative high school curriculum.<sup>23</sup>

In Detroit, city officials turned to anti-delinquency programs as the antidote to poor police-community relations. According to the Detroit Police Department (DPD), youth committed most of the crimes reported and had the worst relationship with law enforcement. In the DPD's estimation, programs that sought to reduce crime and improve police-community relations had to focus on juveniles.<sup>24</sup> The Detroit Police Department initiated two programs in 1965, the Active Community Teams (ACT) and the Youth Service Corps (YSC). The federal government provided funding for ACT's anti-delinquency and crime prevention programs. Through this program, teams of teachers,

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<sup>22</sup> Mayor's Committee-Community Action for Detroit Youth, "A Theoretical Orientation" (n.d.), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 10, Folder 22, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>23</sup> "Cities Move Forward in Anti-Delinquency Programs," September 6, 1963. Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 117, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>24</sup> Fine, 112-113.

community members, and social workers made home visits to youth who had a history of delinquent behavior. In the first few months of its operation, crime in the area decreased by more than 35%. Its recidivism rate was approximately 6%.<sup>25</sup> The Youth Service Corps, on the other hand, marshalled the resources of the Youth Bureau of the Detroit Police Department, the Citizen's Committee for Equal Opportunity (CCEO), United Community Services and the McGregor Fund, all of which provided the financial support. The program focused on the needs of boys between the ages of 14 and 16 as it granted its charges opportunities to do police work, like report abandoned cars and assist in searches for missing children. The purpose of this program was to "develop a positive image of the Police Department" in hopes that youth would "consider law enforcement as a career." Through the program, boys earned \$1.25 an hour.<sup>26</sup>

Funding to improve police-community relations not only flowed from the coffers of local institutions, but from the federal government's Great Societies program as well. As a case in point, funding from an Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) grant supported the development of the Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) program, which was established in 1965. As the administrative arm of the War on Poverty, the OEO funded the training of 1800 officers who worked in Detroit's low-income districts. The purpose of the grant was to support officer training in human relations with the hope that such training would better prepare police officers to "'meet, without due militance, aggressiveness, hostility or prejudice, police situations involving minority groups.'" Local officials praised the effort while more than 50% of the officers who participated

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<sup>25</sup> Fine, 113.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

found the experience to be disappointing.<sup>27</sup> While the reason for this dissatisfaction is unknown, it is likely that officers did not find the sessions useful because they did not want to confront either their own biases or their limited understanding of the law.

Instructors reported that officers did not know the law or had expressed a racist attitude towards blacks. TAP revealed the expanded possibilities and limitations of the welfare state. While the welfare state aimed to refashion the relationship between law enforcement and the black community, it could not withstand the racial animus that police officers held against black Detroiters.<sup>28</sup>

Federal funding for anti-delinquency programs increased after the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, much of which focused on improving the quality of life for urban residents. Immediately following this unrest, Mayor Cavanaugh testified before the Kerner Commission, stating that “sterner measures of force and repression” would not serve the city well and argued that one approach would be to “convert social liabilities into community assets’ [...]” Such programs could then focus on improving housing, education, and employment.<sup>29</sup> As Sidney Fine confirms, legislators took an “ameliorative” approach in its response to unrest. He explains,

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<sup>27</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Scholars have raised critical questions about the successes and failures of the War on Poverty. See Annalise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggle Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ira Katznelson, “Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?” in Fraser Steve, Gerstle Gary., eds, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order: 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1989): 185–211; Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 426.

Although the Michigan legislature was ready to adopt punitive measures, it did respond to the riots by enacting legislation of substance regarding tenants' rights, open housing, urban renewal, and insurance, increasing state aid to education somewhat, and authorizing Detroit to increase its income tax.<sup>30</sup>

Before the rebellion, Cavanaugh relied heavily on federal funding for summer employment and recreational program. However, he began to look more closely to the private sector after 1967. The young mayor turned to the private sector, Fine argues, for two reasons: first, he believed that the city could only rebuild itself by supplementing support from the federal government. And second, redevelopment could only succeed when the local business community believed that they had some investment in the future of the city. Cavanaugh created New Detroit, Inc., which included business leaders of the Greater Detroit Board of Commerce, religious institutions, as well as labor leaders from the United Auto Workers (UAW). Civic groups, with funding from federal and local agencies, created recreational and youth employment programs to redirect rebellious energies to civic engagement.<sup>31</sup> On July 11th, 1968, Congress authorized the allocation of \$150 million dollars in aid to local officials who sought to develop anti-delinquency programs. The purpose of this legislation was to allow the federal government to give local officials funds for delinquency programs, allowing them to bypass state constrictions. The minimum each state could receive was \$100,000.<sup>32</sup> Just months after the rebellion, the President's Youth Opportunity Council awarded Detroit \$90,000 for its

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<sup>30</sup> Fine, 438; Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation, Inc., "Origin and Goals," n.d. Detroit Commission on Community Relations, Box 60, Folder 29, Walter P. Reuther Library. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University."

<sup>31</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 320.

<sup>32</sup> "Conferees Clear Youth Crime Bill, Accept Senate's Three-Year \$150-Million Authorization," 1968, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 457, Folder 21, Walter P. Reuther Library. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

1968 summer youth programs.<sup>33</sup> It would seem that the rebellion had accomplished what nearly two decades of leveraging traditional power alone could not.

While significant funding of anti-delinquency programs and the War on Poverty had the potential to improve police-community relations, law enforcement, political leaders, and social service agencies shattered whatever gains social programs had made towards the effort. Between the violent repression levied upon the Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party, the use of the Detroit Police Department to quell in-plant struggles, and the surveillance schemes the state and local officials deployed, the image of law enforcement in the minds of black adolescents was one of virulent racism and oppression.<sup>34</sup> By the 1960s and 1970s, black youth not only encountered the police in their communities, but they also encountered them in their schools.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "City to Get \$90,000 for Youth Program," 1968, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 468, Folder 27, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. Local officials sometimes searched for funding for anti-delinquency and crime prevention programs in unexpected places. At the beginning of 1968, Councilmember and Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for Wayne County, Mel Ravitz wrote to William Patrick, chairman of the Wayne County Planning Commission, to urge his commission to request money for crime prevention and control under the Federal 701 grant. The grant was funded under section 701 of the National Housing Act of 1954. Ravitz claimed that a coordinated effort was needed to develop crime prevention and crime control programs. The councilman made this request of Patrick's committee because, "From my point of view the subject of crime prevention and control is as amenable to sound planning as is land use and freeway routing." See Mel Ravitz, "Mel Ravitz to William T. Patrick, Jr.," February 27, 1968, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 584, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>34</sup> For more on police repression of black power activists, see Ahmad Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds., *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa, US: University Alabama Press, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10387700>; Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010); Dan Georgakas, Marvin Surkin, and Manning Marable, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*, Revised Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, "Criminalizing Kids: The Overlooked Reason for Failing Schools," *Dissent* 58, no. 4 (2011): 23–27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2011.0083>.

## **Criminalizing Black Youth Activists**

### **Policing Schools**

Between 1968 and 1971, any Detroiter could open their local newspaper and find headlines detailing the heavy presence of law enforcement in Detroit's public schools. Articles like "Students claim brutality by the police in OHS incident," "School Guards Tote Guns," "Patrols in Schools Criticized," and "Post School to Reopen?: Police Use Riot Sticks on Students, Parents" appeared often. Black students were policed from all sides: by teachers and principals who used draconian disciplinary policies and law enforcement and social welfare programs that surveilled youth activists. As Heather Ann Thompson has argued, the state's response to student unrest of the 1960s marked the origins of contemporary policing in urban public schools.<sup>36</sup> When black students and their white allies staged school walkouts, building takeovers, and other forms of protest, officers from the Detroit Police Department often met these students with excessive force. Oftentimes, it was school administrators who placed calls to the DPD. The use of police force, however, made tense relations between the police and the black community even worse. By the late 1960s, the use of police officers to ensure public safety in schools had become a point of contention between students, parents, teachers, community members, and school officials.

The story of police repression in the lives of black youth is a national one. For example, in West Virginia, a white female high school student was grounded by her parents after a local police officer reported to her mother that he had found her riding in a

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<sup>36</sup> Thompson.

car with black friends.<sup>37</sup> In Chicago, according to one individual's interview with historian Gael Graham, police officers often walked up to groups of young black men whenever there were five or more people present, and mace them. This random violence spurred black youth to respond with force. As the interviewee states, "'After that, every opportunity we had, we tried to just tear this place down.'"<sup>38</sup> In 1968, students at one high school in Los Angeles witnessed the collusion between police officers and school administrators. During one of the student protests at the predominantly Chicano Roosevelt High School, school administrators allowed police officers to taunt student activists. When students responded by throwing bottles at the cops, police officers retaliated by brutally beating two male Chicano students.<sup>39</sup> After the urban unrest that occurred across the country during the mid-1960s, students confronted police harassment in almost every sphere of their lives.

Local citizens in Detroit pressured politicians to turn to law enforcement and rehabilitative programs as solutions to crime and delinquency, even as the War on Poverty funneled funds into the city for employment and recreational programs. For example, in 1964, the Executive Board of the Detroit Council of Parent Teacher Associations adopted its "Statement on School Violence Problem," which highlighted recommendations on how to reduce violence in schools and communities. A comprehensive delinquency program, they argued, would prevent crime and rehabilitate youths, and not simply house them to clear the streets. According to these concerned parents, the truancy problem was a gateway to delinquency. They called for "increased

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<sup>37</sup>Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest*, 1 edition (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>38</sup>Graham, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

police surveillance [...] and full citizen cooperation with the police.” The council also pushed for the construction of more foster homes, rehabilitative programs, and improved truancy policies. They recommended increased counseling services, support for the Visiting Teacher program, and a return to community use of schools, which would offer community programs as an antidote to delinquency.<sup>40</sup>

Despite calls for rehabilitative measures, many in Detroit continued to look to punitive measures as the solution to crime and delinquency. The correspondence private citizens submitted to Mayor Cavanaugh also revealed the grassroots’ emphasis on the punitive approach. Between 1963 and 1964, Mayor Cavanaugh received close to 100 letters from citizens urging him to reduce crime. These letters usually arrived with newspaper articles attached to school crime statistics. In 1964, Mayor Cavanaugh, received a clipping of the news article “Crime in the Schools Points Up 5 Truths,” from a local citizen David Hirsch, which included a handwritten note accusing the Cavanaugh administration of contributing to the rise in crime. Following a school stabbing of a 16-year-old boy, the *Detroit Free Press* published its editorial and made several claims: crime in schools was a law enforcement issue, not a school issue; teachers should not be expected to handle violent crimes; part of the problem was that school administrators handled perpetrators casually; and parents should be held responsible for the actions of their children. They claimed that police could not fix problems that began at home, nor could they solve structural problems like poverty and unemployment.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Executive Board of the Detroit Council of Parent Teacher Associations, “Statement on School Violence,” February 18, 1964. Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 146, Folder 21, Walter P. Reuther Library. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>41</sup> Editorial Staff. “Crime in the Schools Points Up 5 Truths.” *The Detroit Free Press*, January 31, 1964. Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 146, Folder 27, Walter P. Reuther Library. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Hirsch charged the mayor, the school superintendent, and the Board of Education with contributing to the state of crime in schools. John P. Casey, assistant to Mayor Cavanaugh, responded to Hirsch's charges with a list of procedures and changes that the Cavanaugh administration had implemented. The city had placed ninety police officers in the schools and assigned thirty of these officers to classroom presentations on safety. Casey tried to convey to the author that officers had a sustained presence in the schools, stating that "All of these men are in and out of the schools daily." According to Casey, scout cars and cruisers monitored the schools during breaks while police officers patrolled the schoolyards on foot.<sup>42</sup> While Cavanaugh had pushed the federal government to fund many of its War on Poverty and anti-delinquency programs, he simultaneously responded to the concerns of local citizens by deploying more officers into schools as a solution to criminal activities in the schools.

Demands to increase the presence of police in schools continued throughout the 1960s, even as news reports suggested that "evidence that schools were in fact witnessing new levels of youth violence was always scant at best."<sup>43</sup> This reality did very little to slow the criminalization of black and white youth activists. And this was especially true for black power youth activists.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, draconian disciplinary policies suggested to young people that they could not look to the state for protection, for these policies also served as daily forms of repression. Under the emerging War on Crime, black youth

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<sup>42</sup> John P. Casey, "John P. Casey to David Hirsch," February 5, 1964, Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 146, Folder 27, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>43</sup> Thompson, "Criminalizing Kids," 25.

<sup>44</sup> Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 203.

activists were not citizens pushing for their civil rights and black power, but delinquents upsetting the racial order.

The criminalization of black youth began at an early age. In 1969, parents and teachers at Detroit's Guest Elementary School submitted grievances to the school administration protesting the expulsion of eight and nine-year old children.<sup>45</sup> These punitive measures were not simply the sole domain of local schools, but a part of the state's reform rhetoric and ideas about juvenile delinquency. According to reports from the 1970 Confidential White House Conference on Crime Prevention, Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker offered his "modest proposal" on how to prevent crime. Hutschnecker, who served as Richard Nixon's psychiatrist, claimed that social reformers had to examine the "criminal mind of the child." According to the report, he proposed that the

state begin a massive psychological testing program on all 6-to-8-year-olds (to unearth 'delinquent character structure') and provide a series of correctional measures for those who flunk, including ultimately 'camps' for such young people as resist the state's benevolent ministrations and turn out to be – despite them 'hard-core.'

Should any of the subjects display "'violent and homicidal tendencies'," they "would get treatment and guidance and finally, if they failed to respond, a place in Camp Hutschnecker-by-the-Sea."<sup>46</sup> While it was reported that Nixon was seriously considering the proposal, others in Washington considered the suggestion absurd.<sup>47</sup>

Although Hutschnecker did not explicitly discuss race and the implications of such a practice on black children, civil rights organizations had shown that the

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<sup>45</sup> Detroit Federation of Teachers, "Detroit Personnel Problem: Guest ES" March 12, 1969, Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 29, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>46</sup> "Dr. Hutschnecker's Modest Proposal," *Washington Post*, April 10, 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1997).

<sup>47</sup> "Psychological Testing of Small Children," Congressional Record, Senate, 91st Congress, 2nd Session, April 10, 1970, Walter F. Mondale, Law Library Digital Special Collections, University of Minnesota.

psychological community viewed black parents as unfit and unable to care for their children. As a case in point, the educational psychologist Arthur Jensen claimed that "Black children start out 15 IQ points behind white children." Likewise, a Head Start official argued that kids living in "destructive" environments "be taken from their parents at age six months to compensate for the 'disadvantage' of being Black or poor."<sup>48</sup> These ideas about race and childhood, coupled with the racial inequality students encountered in educational institutions, suggested that Hutschnecker's "modest proposal" would disproportionately affect black youth. The proposal carried what Black Studies scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has characterized as "hallmarks of colorblind logic." As Taylor argued in her discussion of the "colorblind paradigm" that President Richard Nixon deployed throughout his presidency, "the absence of racist language" was meant to suggest "the absence of racist action." This paradigm, which ignored the history of racism in the U.S., marked the beginnings of colorblind racism and shaped the discourse around institutional racism in the post-Civil Rights era.<sup>49</sup> For black Detroiters who had experienced police harassment and witnessed the domineering arm of law enforcement in the movement, "the absence of racist language" did not constitute the "absence of racist action."

Journalists across the city warned their readers against accepting such proposals as a prescription for crime in the Model City. As Hutschnecker's "modest proposal" sounded the alarm to the increasing punitive nature of the welfare state, African

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<sup>48</sup> National Urban League, Inc. and Arthur E. Thomas, "The Students Rights Issue: The Strategy for the Prevention of Genocide, A Position Paper Presented for the Education Policy and Information Center" (July 1972), Education 2, Box 39, Detroit Urban League Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>49</sup> Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 64.

American journalist Nadine Brown urged her readers to ponder how and why such measures came at the expense of better social welfare programs. Brown notes that some in the black community would support the measure because they were genuinely concerned about crime in their communities. Since the U.S. Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) department would oversee these programs, Brown wondered why this expert did not oppose Nixon's cuts to HEW, which would have funded programs to improve student's lives? Brown writes,

More food for thought is, why didn't Dr. Hutschnecker and his commission tell the government emphatically that those programs must be reestablished because they were aimed at eliminating some of the causes for criminal acts? This fact was spelled out in the Kerner Commission report.<sup>50</sup>

Although Hutschnecker did not explicitly state that these tests were largely for black and brown children, Brown argued that institutional inequality, not race, shaped the likelihood that one would engage in criminal acts.

Concerned about crime and unrest in the city and the schools, civic leaders demanded that city and state officials increase the presence of police and guards as a safety measure. In a letter to the mayor, Common Council, Police Commissioner, and Board of Education, Barbara Bailey, a parent and member of the Van Dyck Taxpayers Association, urged city leaders to use state funds to improve law enforcement. According to Bailey, Governor William Milliken had made available \$2,000,000 to improve the state's criminal justice system. For Bailey, efforts to integrate schools would prove unsuccessful if school and city officials did not improve student safety. Bailey argued, "Children have been terrorized, robbed, insulted and attacked going to and from school

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<sup>50</sup> Nadine Brown, "Open Letter to Black Community," April 25, 1970, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 15, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

and on the school premises. [...] Let's forget the word POLITICS and get down to enforcing the law and bring order and safety to our schools. [...] "Parents and guardians are not policemen, and should not be expected to patrol schools as has been suggested."<sup>51</sup> For some parents, law enforcement presented the only solution to the problem of student safety.

The *Detroit Free Press* also weighed in on the debate around school safety and student unrest. Following student protests that occurred at River Rouge High schools, writers for the *Detroit Free Press* "As We See It" column proclaimed that city leaders had responded to safety concerns and political student unrest with too much leniency. They explained that crime and school safety problems were a consequence of parents not doing their jobs, and determined that in the absence of parents, it was up to the "authority of the society." The writers called upon schools to take disciplinary actions, including the use of "security forces, suspensions, criminal prosecutions and replacement of indecisive administrators where necessary." In the minds of the authors, adult activists had influenced students to act beyond their own will, suggesting that "our children have been infected with the contagion."<sup>52</sup>

In his opinion piece to the *Detroit News*, Bradford White offered his own recommendations. Entitled "3 Steps to reduce unrest in schools," the article included calls for "More guards with enforcement powers" and regional boards that would hire security guards, so as "to avoid the appearance of an 'outside occupying force.'" White

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<sup>51</sup> Barbara Bailey, "Barbara D. Bailey to Mayor Roman S. Gribbs," December 31, 1970, Mel Ravitz Papers Box 29, Folder 3: Detroit Public Schools, 1971, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>52</sup> "Right to Public Education Includes Safety in Schools." *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1970. Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 7: 1960s School Tension. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

argued that “Youth of all colors are alike in their desire for behavioral guidance while growing up. Administrative weakness, like physical weakness, soon earns contempt.”<sup>53</sup> However, students’ experiences with police repression and decoy operations like the Mod Squad suggests that they did not view police officers as capable of offering “behavioral guidance.” And while school administrators earned the contempt of students, it was often because they were too punitive, and not because they were not punitive enough.

Student activists were also concerned about crime, specifically, the rise of drug abuse in the schools. During a “peace session” that the Cooley Parents Club sponsored following student unrest that occurred in 1969, Gregory Hicks explained that, “The real problem is who is handing out narcotics. We have to stop this.”<sup>54</sup> While Hicks did not explicitly state who was responsible for the presence of drugs in Detroit’s schools, it is possible that he was referring to another student. In his study of the punitive turn in Detroit, historian Michael Stauch revealed that high school drug dealers opposed student activism because it disrupted the drug business. According to Bomani who was a 16-year-old student at MacKenzie High School, student walkouts were “interfering ... [W]e were trying to make money...if you got people walking out of school and all that, you’re not helping me, you’re not helping the rest of these people.”<sup>55</sup> Student activists like Hicks had to contend with both the police violence and the informal drug economy that threatened the movement. They began to see the police as one of many co-

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<sup>53</sup> Bradford G. White, “3 Steps to Reduce Unrest in Schools,” *The Detroit News*, June 23, 1971, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 7: 1960s School Tension, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>54</sup> “Outsiders Blamed for Trouble: Cooley Peace Session Held,” September 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Stauch, Jr. “Wildcat of the Streets: race, Class and the Punitive Turn in 1970s Detroit,” PhD Dissertation, Duke University (2015), 376.

conspirators in a larger scheme to repress the black community. Writers for the citywide issue of the *Black Student Voice* explained,

All around us we see the teachers, administrators, and police department cooperating with dope pushers who openly push dope in elementary, junior high and senior high schools, furthering the efforts at genocide against black people.

The drug economy turned public schools into sites of contestation and power struggles that the local police failed to solve.

While there was cause for concern about the influx of drugs into junior high and high schools, parents and students did not believe that the police were willing to do much about the problem. In fact, this view was one of many factors that lead to a clash between black students at Post Junior High School – many of whom were between the ages of 12 and 14 years-old – and officers from the Detroit Police Department. According to Clarissa Love, an African American parent and the PTA president, “Boys were known for selling ‘capsules’ at one school, but police refused to respond to request for investigation and arrest.”<sup>56</sup> This inaction did very little to improve the relationship between law enforcement, the black community, and black students.

Excessive force in schools was not always physical. Sometimes, the mere presence of armed officers provoked student anxieties about the possibility of physical force. As a case in point, during an after-school variety show on the East Side at Kettering High School, private guards from Spartan Security Service, Inc. held shotguns while guarding the event together with Detroit police officers. According to the supervising guard, the school hired more protection because the school’s fundraising event was expected to

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<sup>56</sup> Detroit Commission on Community Relations, “Get Whitey Campaign in School Area” (September 19, 1968), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

draw a large crowd and a significant sum of money. Although Principal Alfred Freeman noticed the shotguns, he did not question the guards. As one parent explained, “‘This kind of stuff can provoke children to do things.’” At some point during the event, approximately ten students tried to enter the school building by rushing the door as a member of the band tried to enter after arriving late. The problem occurred because many students that had bought tickets were not allowed in the building because the auditorium had reached capacity.<sup>57</sup> Police violence and the optics of armed guards added to black youth’s concerns that schools had become prisons.

The optics of armed police and guards around parents and community members further contributed to the tension between law enforcement and the black community. In a telegram to the Detroit Common Council, members of the Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC), Black Clergy Union, West Central Organization, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and the Association of Black Social Workers explained that they would no longer accept police violence and demanded swift action. According to the authors, during the Cooley School Community Council’s monthly meeting, Detroit police displayed their guns and “a hammer was cocked directly facing black parents and students.”<sup>58</sup> Violence police attacks against parents usually occurred when students were also around. The presence of armed, and hostile officers demonstrated to students, parents, and community members, that the hostility of the white community was but one

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Ann Weston, “School Guards Tote Shotguns,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 11, 1971, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 7: 1960s School Tension, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>58</sup> PASCC, et al, “PASCC, et Al. to Detroit Common Council” (April 22, 1970), Mel Ravitz Papers Box 29, Folder 3: Detroit Public Schools, 1971, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

of many things they would have endure in their efforts to make Detroit Public Schools relevant for black youth.

### **Policing Resistance**

Parents and students were very much aware of the fact that age could not save high school activists from police attacks. As a case in point, during the Cass Tech building takeover of 1971, Jametta Lily recalled her father's warning to some of the black male leaders of the takeover, alerting them of their fate should they choose to antagonize the police: "Young brother, they will kick your ass. And I will meet you at the station. But I am not going to recognize you when I get there. Is that what you want? And you will get kicked out of school."<sup>59</sup> Likewise, at one of the Mumford walkouts that occurred in 1969, the principal called in the police to quell student unrest. Several organizations were present that day: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Republic of New Afrika, and the Black Student United Front. Mumford high school activist, Michael Humphrey (Simanga), recalled that in response to the principal's orders to disperse the students the police lined up in a formation and charged at them. During the melee, one of the police officers tried to beat Mike and RNA founder Omari Obadele's son. However, before the officer began to do damage, Humphrey recalled, a friend he had known since the first grade pushed the officer off him and pulled Humphrey away. Humphrey recalled that moment as a "radicalizing experience" for him.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015

<sup>60</sup> Michael Humphrey, interview with the author, March 1, 2017.

### **Beyond COINTELPRO: Local Surveillance of Youth and Youth Activists**

Surveillance of youth at this time of international upheaval extended far beyond the city of Detroit and became part of the national Zeitgeist. Between 1968 and 1973, CBS aired the syndicated crime drama, *Mod Squad*. The tagline was “one white, one black, one blond,” and the premise was that former counterculture youth became detectives who infiltrated criminal groups, including radical black youth groups. A cultural artifact of this moment, the show was produced by Aaron Spelling and starred Clarence Williams III, Peggy Lipton, Tige Andrews, and Michael Cole.<sup>61</sup> In addition to COINTELPRO and STRESS, black students had to worry about these growing networks of surveillance in schools and on the streets.

According to commissioner Mrs. Josephine Gomon, her tenure as a member of Children and Youth Services, another social service agency, revealed that it was all too common for the Detroit Welfare Department to threaten to terminate the welfare benefits of parents whose children participated in school demonstrations. The Welfare Department often left parents with two options: They could either force their children to leave student protests or lose their benefits. This not only criminalized student protest, but it also limited the ability of young people on assistance to assert their civil and human rights. Gomon’s discussion reveals the possibility that parental opposition to student activism may have been prompted by fear of losing their social service benefits.<sup>62</sup> This fear would have most certainly added to the concerns about surveillance by law enforcement agencies. While the contours of the practice are unknown, what is clear is

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<sup>61</sup> Donald Bogle, *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 156.

<sup>62</sup> Detroit Commission on Children and Youth, “Minutes” (March 4, 1969), Jerome Cavanaugh Papers, Box 491, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

that the War on Poverty created systems of bureaucracy that made law enforcement's surveillance of youth activists possible as Elizabeth Kai Hinton as argued.<sup>63</sup>

In other instances, local surveillance of youth was not as explicit. On April 16, 1970, police arrested Gregory Hicks on charges of armed robbery. Hicks, who was 17 years old at the time, was arrested while sitting in a car in front of Cooley High school before school started. However, witnesses reported that Hicks was attending a meeting at St. Olaf Evangelical Lutheran Church at the time of the robbery on April 15th. Hicks was released that afternoon on bond. Once word of Hicks' arrest reached the rest of the Cooley High School student body, students staged a walkout in protest.<sup>64</sup> It's not clear if police charged Hicks as retaliation for his leadership in student protests. However, evidence of police surveillance suggests that retribution was a likely motive.

In response to safety concerns sparked by student unrest, educational experts offered several recommendations. In addition to recommending that school districts include student voices in the daily administration of school policies, experts suggested that schools employ plainclothes security officers as a measure of safety. The idea was that hired security officers would dress like students and work in interracial groups. Whether or not this policy intended to include local police officers is unclear. In an interview with Laura Jackson following the 1969 unrest at Cooley, two students noted that they often saw such characters on school grounds.<sup>65</sup> However, what they described were not guards

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<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, "Creating Crime The Rise and Impact of National Juvenile Delinquency Programs in Black Urban Neighborhoods," *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 5 (September 1, 2015): 808–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144215589946>.

<sup>64</sup> Don Ball, "Teacher, School Aides Blamed after Cooley Melee," *Detroit News*, April 17, 1970, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 44, Folder 19, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>65</sup> Laura Jackson, "Interview: Students at Cooley High School" (October 14, 1969), New Detroit, Inc. Collection, Box 57, Folder 38: Student Unrest, 1969, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

sent to protect students, but instead black and white young adult police officers posing as militant youth, who urged their peers to engage in illegal activities. The students called these provocateurs the “Mod Squad,” after the well-known television show. Jametta Lily described these characters as such: “Often you could pick up a character and realize they were not a real person.” She explained that these “characters” used youth lingo in an awkward manner and “Hi Fived” constantly. They just did not quite fit in. While they made mistakes when trying to engage in youth culture, it was their use of their charismatic personality to shift the focus or organizing meetings that drew groans from student activists.<sup>66</sup> As state surveillance expanded, the lines between fact and fiction became increasingly blurred.

The presence of these figures caused many debates among students and teachers about public safety. According to a writer for the Mumford High School newspaper who interviewed one such character,

Their job Mr. Hall stated, ‘is the protection of students, the administration, and the property of the Board of Education.’ [...] ‘By my very presence I am providing you with a measure of protection and security,’ he went on, ‘I want to see that you get your education without disruption.’

John Smith, the science teacher, explained that he was happy to have security guards in the school. He reasoned that “students need protection from the hoodlums and dope pushers within and around the area of the school.” However, some students did not support the use of security guards on school property. For example, 10th grader Linda Jackson explained, “‘They tap our phones at home. They tap our actions at school. They even try to tap our minds.’” “‘Instead of ‘protecting’ the property of the Board of Education, why don’t they function in the second service they offer. That is, protect our

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<sup>66</sup> Jametta Lily, interview with the author, November 3, 2015.

education which rightfully belongs to us by getting out of schools.”<sup>67</sup> Other students suggested that the Red Squad, a Detroit-based police intelligence unit, had surveilled them as well.<sup>68</sup>

Black student activists had to not only worry about external forces surveilling them, but they had to contend with such measures from school administrators as well.

According to Malik Yakini, high school activist at Cass Tech, administrators tried to implement school IDs as a way to track students. Yakin explained,

[T]hey started instituting picture IDs, and we protested that because we thought it was again part of this whole effort to create a national database and a catalog of who was doing what. And they actually were; we weren't just tripping.

In addition to the student ID cards, Yakini argued, the school's assistant principal kept a record on members of the Black Student Caucus. Yakini discovered these folders while searching for the miniature camera Assistant Principal Koloff was rumored to have. He stated,

We couldn't find the camera, but we found the box it came in and the sales receipt. We liberated that receipt as proof that he was involved in surveillance of student activists. We also found some files in his office that he'd kept on various students and photographs that he had taken of members of the Black Student Caucus.<sup>69</sup>

While students had heard stories of police harassment and surveillance of adult activist organizations, they had their own tales of scrutiny as well.

Local law enforcement agencies surveilled high school activists with the support of institutions that handled the care of youth: the Detroit Board of Education and even the Wayne County Youth Probate Court. In the spring of 1969, Lincoln solicited Police

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<sup>67</sup> Debra Goodman, “Variety of Feelings Generated as Mod Squad infiltrates school,” *The Mercury* (May 7, 1970), p. 3, from Debra Goodman's personal collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon Fox, interview with the author, November 11, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

Commissioner Johannes Spreen for copies of the *Black Student Voice*, which was meant to serve as a form of intelligence on student protesters. Lincoln

argued that the leadership ‘for these disturbance centers’ was mostly adults ‘who are intelligent and who have become experts in the business of creating disruptions without getting themselves arrested.’<sup>70</sup>

To quell student unrest, Lincoln expanded funding for the DPD’s Special Investigation Bureau, which would allow greater surveillance of movement organizations. He also wanted to use black political leaders to oppose student protests. Lincoln explained that they had to be militants who the black community respected in order to be effective. One name put forward was Milton Henry of the Republic of New Afrika. Lincoln was concerned that adults had the ear of black youth.<sup>71</sup> While the state was charged with protecting children and youth under the guise of “in loco parentis,” it was often the main source of repression that high school youth encountered in their daily struggles for Black Liberation.

## **Race and the Politics of Public Safety in the Lives of Black Youth**

### **Debating Discipline and Punishment**

This punitive approach to discipline did not fare well in the climate of demands for community control of schools. Furthermore, it revealed the fallacy of Michigan’s use of in loco parentis as the means through which it asserted authority in the age of Black Power. With a growing black student population and a white teaching force that black parents viewed as racist or unfit to teach black children, draconian disciplinary policies

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Stauch, Jr. “Wildcat of the Streets: race, Class and the Punitive Turn in 1970s Detroit,” PhD Dissertation, Duke University (2015), 298.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 293-301.

shattered any weight that *in loco parentis* had held for decades. Teachers, parents, and community members who viewed the police as an antagonizing force in public schools debated the possibilities of reforming the relationship between police and students.

While school reformers argued that hiring more police officers would ensure student and teacher safety, history instructed many in Detroit's community otherwise. Instead, parents, students, and teachers sought alternatives to the repressive Detroit Police Department and DPS-hired security guards. Although DPS hired African American guards, black students also reported issues with them. As a case in point, black students at Murray-Wright High School had a fraught relationship with one African American guard who happened to be the son of the first African American appointed to the Board of Education, Remus Robinson.<sup>72</sup> These alternatives shifted the community's focus from policing Detroit's black youth to safeguarding their protection and safety. In this vision, mothers and fathers had a role to play, and protection and safety became a community responsibility. Examining the role of families in student protests revealed the struggle over the logic of "*in loco parentis*," or the legal responsibility placed on state institutions.

Parents like Clarissa Love, president of the Post Junior High School PTA, revealed the complex decisions parents had to make about protecting students from repressive law enforcement while ensuring their safety during racial confrontations with white students. In a two-hour phone conversation with Sargent Earl Gray of the Citizen's Complaint Bureau, Love revealed that much of the racial tension that occurred at Post Junior High School over the course of six months in 1969 was the consequence of fights between

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<sup>72</sup> Detroit Board of Education, "Personnel Committee, Murray-Wright High School Hearing" (November 28, 1969), Remus Robinson Collection Box 4, Folder 59: Murray-Wright High School hearing, 1969, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

black and white students over the protest march that created the Post Investigation Committee. Part of this was the problem of drug use. Even though students made police officers aware of the issue, the officers did very little about it. This tension was further exacerbated when the police showed up at the school and began taunting the students and calling them names. Near the end of their conversation, Lt. Sands mentioned that the police officer would likely arrive at the school with guns, “eliciting a response from Mrs. Love that they will be met with guns.”<sup>73</sup> As Love made clear, parents had to make difficult decisions about how to best ensure the safety of black youth who faced violence both from white students and police.

The call revealed possible solutions parents had considered when discerning how to best engage with police in schools. Days after her conversation with Sgt. Gray, Love called on parents and community members to discuss racial tensions that had carried over from the previous school year. A number of representatives were present, including Stan Lewin of the Housing Commission. The meeting concluded with a call for black parents to monitor the situation. Mothers would patrol school halls while fathers monitored the schoolyard and the surrounding area. The response of parents to white community violence and police repression reveals the role families played in resolving racial conflicts in schools during the late stages of school desegregation.<sup>74</sup>

Concerns about student and teacher safety came to the fore against this backdrop. Following the Cooley High school unrest that occurred in September 1969, 125 teachers organized themselves after the principal dismissed school to discuss how to handle such

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<sup>73</sup> Detroit Commission on Community Relations, “Get Whitey Campaign in School Area.” September 19, 1968, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

incidents in the future. According to local journalists reporting on the meeting, "Many teachers, both black and white, demanded more police protection and stricter security measures to prevent outsiders from entering the school building during school hours." Some teachers, however, felt that their colleagues were too concerned about their own safety from students and not concerned enough about how students related to each other.<sup>75</sup>

Months earlier, Evelyn Sell, a teacher at Burton Elementary School offered a radical perspective in an article published by *The Detroit Teacher*. Many of the commissions that emerged in response to student unrest recommended increasing the presence of guards in schools. Likewise, the Detroit Board of Education made plans to implement this recommendation, which the local biracial Committee on School Unrest had offered. According to Sell, the school board requested that the committee revise its report before submitting it to the public for fear of using "language that might be offensive to segments of the community." Sell claimed that the committee sought to "put an occupation force into the city's black schools." Despite the aims of the school board, the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) had already taken measures to ensure that safety concerns did not interfere with their efforts to strengthen already strained school-community relations.<sup>76</sup>

Sell represented a radical contingent in the DFT that viewed student safety as a community responsibility. Aware of the community violence that followed black students who had to integrate Northwest Detroit, educators sought to avoid additional tensions

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<sup>75</sup> Susan Holmes and Don Lenhausen, "New Violence Closes Cooley High School," *Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>76</sup> Evelyn Sell, "New Caucus on: Guards in the Schools," *The Detroit Teacher*, June 1969, Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 56, Folder: Misc. Correspondence, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

wrought by the presence of police officers. Proposed language for the DFT contract offered a few options.

Point No. 4 of the contract proposals reads: 'Teacher-Community committees shall be organized to formulate and implement plans for the protection of the school population during school hours and for after-school activities to communicate with parents on discipline regulations and to establish liaisons with the teacher-community committees of other schools in order to coordinate efforts when needed, as for example, when junior high or senior high schools are dismissed early. The Board shall take responsibility for implementation.

For Sell, this was the best alternative. "It is the only answer that brings teachers and citizens together to work out common problems. It is the only answer to prevent further disastrous tensions and conflicts between school staff and the surrounding community." She concluded her article with a call for an alternative vision for student safety.

History has proven over and over again that there is no safety, no security, no peace in a situation that depends on guards. [...] Teachers, parents and students should start building together now - instead of staring at each other over the shoulders of guards!

This new, young radical contingent's ideas about safety offered a view of guards – and the punitive turn they represented – as a major barrier to community education.<sup>77</sup>

Similar posts appeared in underground student papers as well. In a letter to the *BSV*, one teacher asked,

Who is the teacher's real enemy??? The students or the Board of Education or the D.F.T.??? Some of the current contract proposals and policies would make it seem as if the students are. These proposals – calling for such action as more police in the schools and crackdown on all student protest can only serve to widen the gaps that already exist between teachers on the one hand and parents and students on the other.

The teacher then invokes language that was similarly used by Evelyn Sell, the students, and radical community activists.

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<sup>77</sup> Sell, "New Caucus on: Guards in the Schools." in *The Detroit Teacher* (June 1969), Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 56, Folder: Misc. Correspondence, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

How do you think we can teach in an armed prison? [...] If we as teachers really want to teach and the students to learn we must begin to show the students we are on their side, convincing the students that our one and only role is to help them gain knowledge so they can grow to live, proud, strong, and productive lives.

The written responses from teachers like this one and Evelyn Sell suggest that some teachers saw their futures bound with the struggles that black students and communities waged for liberation.<sup>78</sup> The community and school debates over the role of police in schools and as public safety agents raged for years, and in most instances, drew upon the voices and experiences of the young people who encountered the greatest threat of repression.

### **Resisting State Repression: Black Youth and the Arsenal of the Black Radical Tradition**

Contentious police-student relations were so common in Michigan schools that John Porter, the State Superintendent, issued a report sounding the alarm to the effects of such policing. Quoted in an article entitled “Patrols in Schools Criticized,” Porter’s report argued that the presence of armed guards in schools led to the escalation of student unrest. He argued that schools should look to “trained biracial teams” of officers as a solution.<sup>79</sup> In response to the Northern High School walkout (1966), civic leaders formed the Detroit High School Study Commission. Two years later, the commission issued a report on the quality of education in Detroit and the community’s perception of the educational system. In this report, the commission offered several recommendations on

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<sup>78</sup> Northern High Black Student Voice: Voice of the UHURU (Freedom) Association of Northern High School (v.1 no.2), 69-74.

<sup>79</sup> “Patrols in Schools Criticized,” n.d., Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 45, Folder 7: 1960s School Tension, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

ways to improve classroom management and student control. The committee recommended that schools develop cooperative programs with the police department because students needed to learn about the role of police officers, beyond arresting citizens.<sup>80</sup>

Detroit's black radical and progressive community created the institutional contexts and apparatuses for student activists to realize their visions for alternatives to the punitive turn. Youth resistance was grounded in Detroit's long history of black radicals' industrial resistance to repressive shop floor management and police repression. As students encountered police violence in the schools, they turned to the history of African American life and the political works of political and economic theorists to make sense of their relationship to the police.

Some black student activists turned to Black Marxism and Black Nationalism to make sense of the role of the police in their lives and to develop a strategic approach to struggle against police repression. For these black activists, the extreme show of force used by officers in the streets and in the schools embodied colonialism and social control. Black Nationalism suggested that the history of the police had been that of a colonizing force. Although many of these activists were as young as 13 years old, the historical knowledge they developed in the political education classes, independent sites of study, and freedom schools shaped their contemporary understanding of police community relations and police brutality. If Black Nationalism revealed youth activists' ideas about race and power, Marxist-Leninism illuminated their view of the police as tools of

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<sup>80</sup> Detroit High School Study Commission, "Detroit High School Study Commission Report" (Detroit, Mich., June 24, 1968), Ernest Dillard Collection, Box 1, Folder 40: Detroit High School Study Commission Report, 1968, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

repression of the black working class, or the proletariat. This historical knowledge, in tandem with their experiences with multigenerational study groups or family members who worked in the factories, had revealed to high school youth the role of police in quelling workers unrest.

The ideas never operated in isolation. In most instances, the student papers revealed a classed and racial analysis of police repression. As a case in point, editors of the Central High School's *Black Student Voice* asked,

Are you hip to the pigs? Not the security guards, but the Detroit Police Dept, if you aren't we are. The police are put here to watch us like slaves and we can't dig it!!! We say they got to go because we are not prisoners, most of all we don't have to take no s--- off of them. We the students of the B.S.L. are now working out a solution so that the pigs can return to their pens.<sup>81</sup>

If the black community viewed the predominantly white DPD as a colonizing force, high school students interpreted the role of police as an occupying power within schools that operated like "concentration camp[s]."<sup>82</sup> In this instance, students drew upon their understanding of world history and interpreted the role of police in making "slaves" out of black youth, a status that historically, was raced through an economic lens.

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<sup>81</sup> Central High *Black Student Voice* (v.1 n.1), 1-3, General Gordon Baker's Collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



**“Black Students Strike River Rouge,” *Inner City Voice* (1970)<sup>83</sup>**

In other instances, grassroots newspapers ventured to explain how students could best engage with police officers. On Friday, February 27, 1970, Black students at River Rouge High School staged a school boycott after the local board of education removed posters of black leaders in response to the cries of white parents.<sup>84</sup> Like many student protests, this action began with concerns about representation in schools, but evolved into a larger discussion about police in educational institutions. Originally sketched in 1963, the image offers one example of what blacks thought about their relationship to the

<sup>83</sup> “Black Students Strike River Rouge High,” *Inner City Voice*, April 16, 1970, Vol. 2, Issue 4 edition, Inner City Voice Collection, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>84</sup> Len Lenhausen, “Plan Ends Boycott of 3 Schools,” *The Detroit Free Press*, March 24, 1970, Remus Robinson Collection Box 2, Folder 36: Clippings, Apr 1970, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Black Students Strike River Rouge High,” *Inner City Voice*, April 16, 1970, Vol. 2, Issue 4 edition, Inner City Voice, Bentley Historical Library.

police. It shows a little black girl who looks to be nine- or ten-years old confronting men who we can assume are police officers. Standing behind her are two little boys holding rocks and a homemade sling shot, preparing to confront the police as well. The illustrator characterizes the police as wolves with human and dog-like bodies. The swastikas drawn on the armbands of the police and the dog collar reveal black radicals' view of law enforcement as an arm of white supremacy. In the background, police officers use water hoses on the children. These children appear to represent youth who embraced nonviolence as a tactic of civil disobedience. The illustrator distinguishes these children from the others to offer a critique of nonviolence. Is this image a vision of how young people *should* respond to police violence in 1963 or is it an illustration of a history untold – of youth who *did* respond by defending themselves? Whatever the case may be, in printing this image, writers for the black community paper, the *Inner City Voice* (ICV), sought to demonstrate to black youth organizing in 1970 that even black children had to engage in armed struggle against state repression and fascism if they wanted to achieve power. Here, reverence for law enforcement had no place in the fight for Black Liberation.

While scholars are beginning to explore the role of black girls on the frontline of school desegregation battles, how might we think about young girls who, like the protagonist featured above, desegregated schools using self-defense instead of nonviolence? And what does it mean for the illustrator to place the little girl ahead of two little boys who are also confronting the police? This rendering suggests that the black radical tradition offered black girls a different conception of themselves. It made space

for girls to assert power and to respond to police violence with force. This little girl was not interested in respectability.

When the U.S. Supreme Court declared that “separate could never be equal” in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954), it was because of cases brought on behalf of black girls like Linda Brown, and because of the battles fought by high school students like Barbara Johnson. Likewise, it was Melba Pattillo Beals, Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Carlotta Walls LaNier, and Thelma Mothershed – girls of the Little Rock Nine – who endured white grassroots violence as they tried to desegregate the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. In 1963, four little girls – Addie Mae Collins (14), Carol Denise McNair (11), Carole Robertson (14), and Cynthia Wesley (14) – died in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. Therefore, it is historically accurate that the young girl in this image leads the attack in the name of self-defense.<sup>85</sup>

Students used their own underground paper to interrogate what they viewed as wanton police killings of black youth. These discussions about law enforcement often revealed their radical understanding of world history, which allowed them to place their experiences with police officers into a larger historical context. As a case in point, writers for the *Black Student Voice (BSV)* at the predominantly black Northern High School stated that, “Northern High School is beginning to look like the new Nazi Germany (the Fourth Reich) armed police are everywhere.”<sup>86</sup> With influential experts like Arnold

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<sup>85</sup> Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Diana McWhorter, *Carry Me Home Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>86</sup> Northern High Black Student Voice: Voice of the UHURU (Freedom) Association of Northern High School (v.1 no.2), 69-74, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

Hutschnecker using terms like “corrective treatment,” “mass testing,” and “camps,” students’ use of the term “concentration camp” and “Nazi Germany” held historical currency among their peers.

Students also protested the presence of police officers in schools at Board of Education meetings, and in the process offered a vision of public safety that did not rely on paid guards, but instead reflected deeply informed by notions of community, respect, and empathy. When they demanded that the school district remove police officers and security guards, they often sought to replace these figures with parents, teachers, students, and community members. As a case in point, Cooley High School students demanded that the Region Four Board of Education remove police and guards and replace them “with a trained security council.”<sup>87</sup> At Central High, the *BSV* offered several solutions to the increased presence of police and hired guards, including establishing hall patrols that included a student and a teacher or parent. Participating students would receive 2.5 credit hours in exchange for their time. The students believed that no peer should be denied the opportunity to patrol because of past infractions.<sup>88</sup> While schools argued that their decision to remove police from schools would be contingent upon student behavior, students did not trust hired guards to protect and serve students with the measure of empathy that parents, fellow students, and community members could. Likewise, students at Highland Park High demanded that parents replace police officers and private guards and receive a police officer’s salary for their time.<sup>89</sup> In their estimation,

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<sup>87</sup> Region Four Board of Education. “Region Four Board of Education Response to the Cooley Student Demands.” Detroit, Mich., March 14, 1971. Helen Bowers Collection Box 4 Folder 18: Social Issues-Student Unrest 1971. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>88</sup> Central High Black Student Voice (v.1 n.1) pp.1-3, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

<sup>89</sup> Highland Park’s Black Student Demands, 44, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

School is an educational institution. With police / private guards the school takes on an atmosphere of a prison or a concentration camp. Replacing the police / private guards with parents in (sic) just a step in the direction of making school what it should be, an educational institution. In the future there will not be a need for anyone to patrol our hallways.<sup>90</sup>

Black students possessed a vision of schooling that was the responsibility of the community. Under the supervision of community members, student behavior would presumably improve because that was the power of empathy and communal responsibility. While this vision of community-controlled policing was likely in line with the students' interpretations of Black Nationalism, it still offered a vision rooted in punitive responses, just not at the hands of the state.

Black liberals and progressives supported student demands for community policing as well. For example, Roy Levy Williams, an administrator for the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Academy, explained, "It's far more effective to have blacks dealing with their own criminals than having someone from outside who doesn't respect its citizens try to do the job." As the director of the of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Academy, a private school attended by 30 high school dropouts, Williams found that community patrols had already proven to be effective, claiming that they "reduced the crime rate in several areas."<sup>91</sup> In their list of demands to school administrators, Northern High students offered a similar reasoning for community policing when they wrote, "students [should] be allowed to discipline themselves since on the whole we could best understand and cope with a situation involving students better than a Detroit Policeman."<sup>92</sup> Some supported students because

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<sup>90</sup> The "Why's" Behind the Black Student Demands, 45, General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>91</sup> John Peterson, "Teens Ask Citizen-Police," *Detroit News*, 1969, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 55, Folder 93, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>92</sup> Northern High Black Student Voice: Voice of the UHURU Association of Northern High School (v.1 no.5), General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

they feared that the consequence of not supporting them would be mayhem. At the same meeting, Tyrone Hinton stated, “There are a growing number of students who don’t believe in democratic means and are willing to start using undemocratic means, because the Establishment just hasn’t responded to their needs in the past.”<sup>93</sup> The support students received from community members and black civic leaders demonstrated the power they possessed to create change.

Student demands revealed black youth’s conceptions of citizenship, rights, and power. Following an especially brutal response from police during a student demonstration at Northern High that occurred the same day as Cooley’s infamous walkout of September 1969, student activists demanded that officers who used excessive force against students face consequences. In their estimation,

The demand for legal justice should be an automatic right that need not be a demand. If black students are brutalized by police, and they are prepared to give testimony and evidence to support their contentions, why should there be hesitation about an effort to bring those accused to a court of law?<sup>94</sup>

They viewed the entire U.S. justice system is incapable of and unwilling to treat black Americans as first-class citizens who possessed the right to move freely without experiencing wanton police violence. Despite their view of U.S. courts as a “farce,” students still engaged the justice system because “at least in court the issues would receive public exposure and examination.” Furthermore, they argued, “It may be pointed out that to have police even around a school in the suburbs would be unheard of.” Their understanding of citizenship was undeniably linked to their understanding that race and

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<sup>93</sup> John Peterson, “Teens Ask Citizen-Police,” *Detroit News*, 1969.

<sup>94</sup> Northern High Black Student Voice: Voice of the UHURU Association of Northern High School (v.1 no.5), General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

place shaped how the police engaged with youth.<sup>95</sup>

Students learned the inner workings of the justice system, and possible solutions on reforming it, through experience and observation. In the case of student activists from the Black Student United Front, older activists like the black, radical lawyer and founding member of the League Kenneth Cockrel, Sr. provided students with the opportunity to see how the American justice system operated, especially when black lives were involved. As one of the founding members of the Black Student United Front, Cassandra Ford learned the art of argumentation by observing Cockrel's cases or cases that involved the League. Ford explains,

Sometimes, what we would do as students is come down there and sit in court, you know, just to see what was going on in the legal system. Then, you'd see it was a much bigger issue then just what was happening in the school, you know?<sup>96</sup>

They further suggested,

We must stop reactionary black organizations in our schools from planning activities that are guaranteed to bring about repression. We must try, to our best ability, to plot strategy that will bring about as little confrontations with the police as possible, and as few suspensions and expulsions as possible. This is not cowardice, but a guarantee of self-preservation, to insure that we can continue working in the schools to change them.<sup>97</sup>

To be sure, this call for new ways of organizing was the consequence of the many expulsions and suspensions meted out against black student activists by DPS officials.

As more black police officers joined the police force throughout the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, black students found allies in their efforts to navigate the violence that came with school desegregation. In some cases, black police officers provided black

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Cassandra Ford, Interview with Cassandra Ford, In person, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Citywide Black Student United Front Black Student Voice October 1970 (v.1 no.1), Northern High Black Student Voice: Voice of the UHURU Association of Northern High School (v.1 no.5), General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

students with protection as they traveled through predominantly white neighborhoods to attend school. According to Gregory Hicks, founding member of the Black Student United Front,

We'd go to school and we were on at least a few occasions attacked by residents who lived in the immediate community who just disliked seeing black students coming to Cooley High School. Some of my old friends were young police officers who were seeing this occur. [...] They would see situations where we would for no specific reason be attacked by white residents. And they were assigned to things like the scooter patrols and actually tried to help us in that regard. [...] And not that they went as far as to hold the line. They provided essentially – in the case of emergency – a kind of police presence – it wasn't major, so that we would be able to leave one area.<sup>98</sup>

As the Detroit Police Department started to increase its hiring of black police officers, black youth found allies who revealed why community policing mattered. For these youth, the presence of black police officers demonstrated an alternative vision of the relationship between law enforcement and black youth.

As the ranks of black police officers swelled, so too had the possibilities of improved relations between black youth and the Detroit Police Department. While anti-delinquency programs like police/youth sports teams and Youth Corps sought to improve relations through apprenticeships, one officer, Patrolman Mackie Johnson, met black youth where they were most comfortable – on their own turf. Patrolman Johnson spent time at the Infernoburger restaurant, and as such, developed a relationship with the youth who operated the restaurant. He would often jokingly refer to beating the Infernos in sports as “police brutality.” When police officers who patrolled the area began to harass youth from the Infernoburger, a nearby neighbor explained that the youths were responsible for running the restaurant. The offending officer decided to visit Johnson’s

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<sup>98</sup> Cassandra Ford, Interview with Cassandra Ford.

home to verify this claim. Since Johnson wasn't home, the officer transported the youth to the precinct. Once there, the police chief told the officer to release the teenagers because he was familiar with the restaurant. While the restaurant made black youth a magnet for police repression, it also held a level of respect in the community for giving black youth an alternative to anti-social behavior.<sup>99</sup> Students used the lessons they learned from culturally and politically relevant educational spaces to enter another site of struggle for power and used their experiential and historical knowledge in the process.

### **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**

Despite student and community resistance to the influx of law enforcement in DPS, and the increase in black police officers on the force, repression only worsened as time went on. Like many urban school districts, Detroit Public Schools created several commissions and committees to study the causes of student unrest and to seek solutions. Many of these committees recommended increasing the presence of law enforcement while school and city officials tried to diminish the damage of these decisions by focusing on language – or how they conveyed the message to the black community. After the 1967 rebellion, city leaders were concerned that the Detroit Police Department and black Detroiters would clash again. Therefore, the district had to, at the very least, appear to share the communities' concerns about police violence against black youth. In 1971, the Commission on Unrest and Disorder in the Schools issued its report, where it argued that DPS could solve problems with crime by cooperating with the Detroit Police

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<sup>99</sup> William Bunge, *Fitzgerald: A Geography of Revolution* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1971).

Department in a way that would not lead to “an ‘armed camp’ within the school.”<sup>100</sup> Other recommendations included purchasing devices that would secure school entrances, hiring more security personnel, requiring IDs for students in secondary schools, and granting security guards the authority to make arrests and issue tickets.<sup>101</sup>

The Detroit Commission on Community Relations evaluated the commission’s report and offered the following recommendations: appoint teenagers and adults to city commissions, include youth committees alongside decision-making bodies, develop a recreation advisory committee that included youth, organize teen drop-in centers inside of local recreation, enforce residential requirements, integrate the police force, develop better training programs, and include youth in more police programs. The idea was that young people would then have more favorable attitudes towards the police, fire department, and other city agencies. The commission also claimed that the major problem was the credibility gap in the black high schools. Eighty-nine percent of Detroit’s police force was white, and many of its officers lived in the suburbs. The assumption was that unrest occurred because of the gap between adult society and adolescent worlds.<sup>102</sup>

The Detroit Police Department continued to seek ways to repair police-student relations. On several occasions, police officers visited high schools to discuss their job and the dangers of police work. According to students who wrote and published the citywide high school underground paper, *The Rebel*, these classroom visits usually

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<sup>100</sup> Commission on Unrest and Disorder in the Schools, “Report of the Commission on Unrest and Disorder in the Schools” (July 1971), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection, Box 49, Folder 34 Commission on Unrest and Disorder on the Schools, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>101</sup> Commission on Unrest and Disorder in the Schools.

<sup>102</sup> Denise Lewis, “Memo to the Honorable Common Council Re: Report of Commission on School Unrest and Disorder” (September 14, 1971), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Box 57, Folder 7: School Unrest, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

evolved into a discussion about crime statistics that according to the authors failed to address how class and geography shaped crime in black communities. Like student authors of the *BSV*, *The Rebel* also viewed police officers as agents of capitalism sent to maintain order. Although police officers claimed that they were not there to encourage students to become police officers, students doubted such claims because of their experiences with the police. Furthermore, many of the anti-delinquency programs funded by the federal government – the police youth sports teams, urban corps, and youth corps – placed students alongside law enforcement as apprentices specifically for the purpose of encouraging them to consider a career in policing.<sup>103</sup>

The 1971-1972 school year brought about rapid changes in concerns about crime in the schools. Student unrest had simmered while the presence of drugs and violence became a constant concern for youth and the larger black community. This was largely a consequence of deindustrialization. With the loss of factory jobs, the informal economy became an alluring alternative for youths who could not find employment. It is unclear whether crimes like robbery, property damage, and physical assault were related to the drug economy. However, what is clear is that school silence on these issues in the early years of student protests produced an unbearable situation for students and teachers.

A proposed amendment to Chapter 39, Article 1 of the Code of the City of Detroit, Section 31-1-59 was one response to concerns about crime and safety. This ordinance made it a misdemeanor to be on school grounds if said individual was not there to conduct school business. The proposed language stated:

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<sup>103</sup> The Rebels. “Rebel Voices,” March 1972, New Left Collection, Box 18, Folder 3, Hoover Institution Archives.

Any person found to be in any public, private or parochial school or on the surrounding school grounds (or on fields or recreational areas used for school activities while such activities are in progress, who has no lawful business to pursue at the institutions,) [...] shall leave immediately when so directed by the principal or by any other person designated by the principal.

The DFT supported this amendment, along with many others throughout the city.<sup>104</sup> In its editorial, “Thugs in the Schools,” the *Detroit Free Press* claimed that “Quick passage of this ordinance, plus strict enforcement, would get rid of the barbarians who now cause so much disruption in Detroit schools.” Furthermore, it supported school officials who found themselves in situations where they had to chain the doors to keep students safe, although it is not clear from whom. According to the editorial,

It seems strange that two frustrated school principles (sic) who chained some school doors shut for the safety of their students and teachers against outsiders have been fined \$100 each while the thugs who cause the trouble get off with a slight tap on the wrist or nothing at all.<sup>105</sup>

Words like “thug” and barbarians were incredibly racialized, especially in a city with a predominantly black population.

Despite this support for the measure, parents and community activists did not embrace the amendment because they saw it as an effort to keep political activists out of the schools. In its discussion of the amendment, the Commission on Community Relations encouraged the Common Council to conduct more research about the matter before voting. They explained that,

there are many parents and community leaders, including some Regional Boards that are very suspicious that the school administrators are trying to close them out

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<sup>104</sup> John Elliott, “DFT Political Action Memo” (November 28, 1972), Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 48, Folder: school disturbances, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. Mary Ellen Riordan, “Statement of the Detroit Federation of Teachers” December 20, 1972, Closed Mary; and Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 48, Folder: school disturbances, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>105</sup> “Editorial: Thugs in the School,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 18, 1972, Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 48, Folder: school disturbances, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

of the schools. This significant group believes that the proposed ordinance is an attempt to prevent parents and community leaders responsibly engaged in dissent who are trying to reform what they see as a system of noneducation.<sup>106</sup>

With passage of this ordinance, activists from other schools and groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers would be prohibited from entering the premises.

As city leaders and community activists continued to explore solutions to the problem of student safety, parents became much more aware of the increasing gap between students and the police. In a letter to the Common Council, the Central High School Advisory Board explained that "Students have lost confidence in the adults and the police [...]." Despite this knowledge, parents requested more protection and security for students and teachers on school grounds and the surrounding communities. They demanded more money and authority to seal off two of the school entrances with bricks and funding for a walkie talkie system, intercommunication phones for security, industrial monitors, and heavier panic doors. They also proposed a "revision of the fire regulations covering schools."<sup>107</sup> In short, parents suggested that more police officers and more technology were solutions to crime in the schools. In acknowledging students' mistrust of the police, parents revealed their own ambivalence about these requests. But what was the alternative? As black student activists graduated and moved their activism on to college campuses and factories, the next generation of black students had to

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<sup>106</sup> "Statement of Detroit Commission on Community Relations" (December 20, 1972), Closed Mary Ellen Riordan Collection, Box 48, Folder: school disturbances, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>107</sup> Central High Local School Advisory Board and the Ad Hoc School-Community Committee of the Local School Advisory Board, "Central High Local School Advisory Board and the Ad Hoc School-Community Committee of the LSAB to Common Council," October 12, 1972, Mel Ravitz Papers Box 37, Folder 15, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

struggle with the growing militarization of the police without a significant movement to offer support.

## **Conclusion**

This is not a story of triumph, but one of struggle. Students made their communities and city officials listen, but in the end, police repression won. What if the school district had listened to the students and proposed alternatives to the use of police force? What if parental involvement was taken more seriously? What if empathy was the hallmark of student safety rather than the implementation of punitive measures? I want to suggest that the Black Power movement, and black communities more broadly, sought an alternative to the concept “*in loco parentis*.” In fact, their educational politics supported black youths’ visions of education that liberated black communities from white supremacy, of which the DPD was one arm. Notions of black criminality that shaped law enforcement policies were inherently white supremacist.

One of the rallying cries for the Black Power movement was community control of schools and community control of law enforcement. The movement’s vision for community-centered education collided with the state’s vision of schooling “*in loco parentis*.” The level of violence levied upon students, teachers, and parents by law enforcement extinguished black youth’s trust in the state. Furthermore, it suggested to parents that the state did not always act in the best interest of the child. Finally, the concept, “*in loco parentis*,” made the vulnerability of black childhood much more precarious. In their struggles to reform the high school curriculum and police-student relations, black student activists found the strategic and analytical tools they would need

to enter community struggles. These were battles that they would ultimately wage alongside the movement for community control of schools.

## Chapter Five: “To work within the community and for the community”<sup>1</sup>: Black Students, Liberatory Education, and Black Economic Development

In the November 1968 issue of *Negro Digest*, the black economist Vernon Dixon raised an important question that animated movement networks across the country: What is the role of the black student in Black Liberation struggles? Dixon began his inquiry with a concern that a college student posed at a student conference that took place after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “‘My brothers are getting shot down out there. What am I doing here?’” Dixon suggested that black students could best make sense of their role in community struggles once they had shed themselves of the “‘mindset’ of American values,” which promoted individualism, valued literal traditions over figurative traditions, and encouraged reason over emotions. Dixon went on to explain that black students would greatly benefit from finding their place in community struggles: “The black community will offer him many opportunities which have not yet been realized. In turn, this may lead him to formulate new postulates, theories, policies and actions.” Should black students willingly contribute the analytical tools and expertise they had acquired in higher education to the struggle for Black Liberation, Dixon suggested, “he may discover such strengths as non-individualistic concern for communal interests, the institution of the extended family and rich cultural forms of which the figurative tradition is only one instance.”<sup>2</sup> For Dixon, black students’ had a responsibility to apply the knowledge they acquired from educational institutions to solving social issues that shaped the daily lives of black communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Highland Park High Black Student Voice, vol. 1, no. 5, n.d. General Gordon Baker’s Personal Papers, in the author’s possession.

<sup>2</sup> Vernon Dixon, “The Black Student and the Brother in the Streets,” *Negro Digest* 18, no. 1 (1968): 28-35.

Although Dixon's article addressed concerns about how black college students related to the broader African American community, it was a question that black high school students and their communities wrestled with as well. High school youth had played an integral role in educational movements and sought to make sense of how to best marshal their education in service of Black Liberation. In Detroit, black youth had access to a broad network of movement activists who had waged struggles in African American communities for more than a decade, and who aimed to help students find their voices in broader political battles. Simultaneously, liberal civic institutions aimed to organize black youth militancy into formal channels of municipal government. These divergent conceptions of black high school youth as citizens came to the fore in the spring of 1969 when several radical and liberal factions of the movement organized youth conferences to understand urban high school youth as social change agents.

In the spring of 1969, Detroit's local civic communities and black radical organizations proposed three separate citywide conferences that sought to organize the militant youth energy that had been growing for more than three years. The Detroit Public Schools, Wayne State University, the Archdiocese of Detroit, and the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce organized its citywide Senior Government program to take place in May. Organizers viewed the citywide conference as an opportunity for high school youth to become actively engaged in the democratic process, sponsoring breakout sessions on juvenile delinquency, welfare and community development, education, legislation, and local politics. Several adult consultants attended, including C.C. Douglas, a journalist with the African American community newspaper the *Michigan Chronicle*, Detroit councilman Mel Ravitz, and James H. Lincoln, the judge of the Wayne County

Youth Probate Court.<sup>3</sup> One month earlier, the Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation (MDYF) also hosted a citywide youth conference. If Senior Government Day represented the liberal wing of the civil rights movement's efforts to capture the minds and energy of youth, the MDYF's conference characterized an important shift in the local movement. Its list of participants included the Sons of Malcolm, Black Students of Cooley, and the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. More than 200 youth attended. Police harassment gained the most attention at the conference, likely because of the New Bethel Incident that had occurred months earlier. Conference participants called for the support of Judge Crocket and proposed youth councils for each political district. Additionally, they wanted to establish a citywide student union and a leadership training institute.<sup>4</sup> While Senior Government Day relied on adult consultants to teach students about issues of the day, the MDYF treated youth participants as collaborators who endeavored to seek solutions to social issues collectively. The *Black Student Voice's* National Black Youth Conference took the democratization of civic engagement a step further by organizing black youth independently of adults. Furthermore, it called for a national black student movement that would play a significant role in broader community struggles. Its speakers list included the African American sociologist Nathan Hare, Jesse Jackson of SCLC Chicago, and Ron March, a member of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.<sup>5</sup> Although the focus and tone of each conference differed, each sought to help black students discern their role in the black community.

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<sup>3</sup> Detroit Public Schools, "Senior Government Day" (May 9, 1969), Mel Ravitz Papers Box 19, Folder 38: Detroit Public Schools, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>4</sup> Detroit Youth Foundation, "April 19 City-Wide Youth Conference" (April 19, 1969), Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection, Box 60, Folder 29: Detroit Youth Foundation, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>5</sup> Black Student Voice, "National Black Youth Conference," 1969, General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

Together, the student conferences and the article “The Black Student and the Brother in the Streets,” highlight key questions about the responsibility of black students in liberation struggles beyond the schoolyard and the campus. What was the role of black high school students in black community movements? To what extent did liberatory education shape high school youth’s views on their place in these movements? And what does their engagement with community struggles beyond the schoolyard tell us about the development and trajectory of black youth politics in Detroit? This chapter argues that, by virtue of their age, black high school students made multiple sites of liberation struggles possible. Second, it suggests that liberatory education created a path to these community struggles for black high school youth. And finally, it reveals that the high school youth at the center of this study crafted a vision of black youth politics that relied on the larger African American community’s experiential and historical knowledge. In the fight for liberatory education and against police repression, black high school youth learned how to take a strategic approach to struggle. When students encountered violence and barriers in their organizing efforts at school, they found relief and support in community members, young and old. For these students who believed that their destinies were bound together with that of the black community, regardless of class differences, it was their duty to marshal the analytical tools they had acquired in struggles around education.

Black high school youth experienced and witnessed the ways in which Detroit’s educational institutions had shaped, and was shaped by, the urban political economy. Like the broader political movement for Black Power, they conceptualized and struggled for a more self-determining role for black Detroiters in matters of income and resource

distribution and labor rights. As a case in point, the practice of tracking black students into vocational curriculums that prepared them for factory work was one of the most pronounced forms of this relationship. And in many ways, this experience revealed the shared economic and political interests among black students and the black working class. While labor exploitation was certainly a central site of struggle over economic inequality, battles over community resources and social services were equally important to the movement. In Detroit, for example, welfare recipients received \$44 in aid to provide for living expenses.<sup>6</sup> Coming of age at a moment when welfare rolls and black unemployment rates increased following a decade of economic prosperity, black adolescents across class lines had more than enough knowledge of how black Detroiters had been placed at the bottom of the urban economy. In their efforts to confront the consequences of race and class inequality, black students relied on the long history of black economic thought and liberatory education. In working with organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Unicom, and the Black Panther Party, black adolescents accessed and utilized a rich tapestry of black economic thought. Pulling at the strands of black cultural nationalism, black internationalism, anti-capitalism, and intercommunalism, they helped the movement realize many of its goals and ideas for economic justice.

Black adolescents made the decision to fight for political power beyond the schoolyard and for economic justice because their daily lives were often shaped by a multitude of forces: educational institutions, welfare and social services, employment industries, and juvenile justice, just to name a few. While campus activism was a critical

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<sup>6</sup> Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 37.

resource for the movement, the lives black high schoolers led were much more connected to political, economic, and social forces that seemed to converge in their lives simultaneously. By virtue of their race and age, and sometimes their status as working-class, black high school activists possessed a panoramic view of the social issues and aims of the Black Power movement. The role of high school student activists in the Black Power movement, then, was to marshal their status as adolescents to identify the ways in which labor, community resource development, and social services could serve as key sites of struggle for economic justice. The intergenerational character of this movement network created a path for black students to transition organically into community movements.

### **Limited Resources, Countless Possibilities: Unicom and the Black Youth Struggle for Community Resources and Black Economic Development**

The League of Revolutionary Black Worker's "community-based labor politics" built on and produced a vibrant network of community organizations: the Black Student United Front, Parents and Students for Community Control, the West Central Organization, and Unicom, just to name a few. Responding to the paucity of community-based resources that catered to the needs of black youth in Northwest Detroit, Larry Nevels, a "League stalwart," organized Unicom (Unicom). Nevels, who lived in the community near Petoskey Street and Puritan Ave, offered black youth like Gregory Hicks, Cassandra Ford, and Sandra Stewart an opportunity to determine the political and social needs of their neighborhoods and to locate solutions to community issues. Youth

activists of Unicom sought to create and find recreational, educational, and work-related resources on their own terms to meet the specific needs of their communities.<sup>7</sup>

While white ethnic neighborhoods had access to cultural and social institutions that responded to the needs of their communities, black youth often wondered where such resources and cultural centers existed for their neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup> Where was the central black community center that could parallel the importance and resourcefulness of Jewish community institutions? And where could they find financial support to create these community institutions? Before Nevels organized Unicom in 1967, city-wide political and social organizations had largely served the purpose of providing economic and social welfare resources for black communities. That was until the movement began to demand more localized control. Although bookstores and record shops were significant community institutions, they did not focus on job training, cultural enrichment, and the economic development of black families, or core needs within the black community, black activists resisted the underdevelopment of black communities by soliciting funds for diverse programming from equally assorted sources: local universities and colleges, religious institutions, civic organizations, and the United Auto Workers, an organization that members of the League and the BSUF had encountered in their battles against black labor exploitation. To meet the social, political, and economic needs of black adolescents, Unicom worked diligently to produce the spatial and financial resources needed to undertake such an endeavor. In fighting for community resources, black youth of Unicom contributed to a burgeoning movement for the creation of black community centers, an

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<sup>7</sup> Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010; Sandra Stewart, interview with the author, September 18, 2010; Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1998), 77; and Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Simanga, interview with the author, March 12, 2017.

endeavor that sought to not only create community resources, but to instill black self-pride in youth as well.

While Unicom's community resource center served multiple purposes, community centers in Detroit emerged, in part, as a response to young people's desires for recreational opportunities. For example, in 1968, dozens of Courtis Elementary School students mailed councilman Mel Ravitz letters as a part of a civic engagement project. Two students, Kim Young and Marlon Mixon, expressed concerns about the lack of recreational centers that were available to young Detroiters. Young explained,

I would like to tell you about a problem I think the children in Detroit have. The problem is that we do not have enough playgrounds and recreation centers. I believe this is the reason why most children around my age get into trouble.

Mixon wrote, "I want to know if we could have more playground spaces. We can't play in the parking lots because of all the cars coming in and out."<sup>9</sup> Keenly aware of how material resources shaped the life opportunities of their peers, Young and Mixon laid bare the realities of urban life for youth and offered a solution that many across the country considered imperative to the personality development of a growing youth population. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, black Americans had treated recreational spaces as a site of struggle for civil rights. Efforts to desegregate leisure spaces occurred alongside local struggles to create alternative, community-centered sources of recreation for black youth.<sup>10</sup> While Mixon and Young could not vote for municipal funding, they used the assignment to articulate their concerns as young people. Black high school activists were

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<sup>9</sup> Kim Young, "Kim Young to Mel Ravitz," March 18, 1968, Mel Ravitz Papers Box 16, Folder 24, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Marlon Mixon, "Marlon Mixon to Mel Ravitz," March 19, 1968, Mel Ravitz Papers Box 16, Folder 24, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

<sup>10</sup> For a history of black movements to create alternative recreational spaces, see Shannon King, *Whose Harlem Is This, Anyway?: Community Politics and Grassroots Activism during the New Negro Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

also mindful of the importance of recreation and used their voices and organizing skills to locate funding and space for recreational centers. Although high school youth spent much of their time organizing in schools, they also viewed recreation as a site of struggle for black community control.

For many of Detroit's reformers, recreation was the antidote to anti-social behavior and a viable alternative to revolutionary groups like the Black Panther Party. However, as William Bunge explains, black youth who had to navigate a city that was built around the needs of adults found that access to recreational spaces for teenagers were often limited.<sup>11</sup> In the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute's report to League member John Watson and Senator Coleman A. Young, Gwendolyn Warren and William Bunge explained the significant barriers to providing recreational spaces for the city's youth, such as unsafe playground environments where broken glass covered much of the grounds.<sup>12</sup> Bunge and Warren described a consequence of the underdevelopment of African American communities that was part of a broader phenomenon. They explained,

Children are needy, and dependent upon adults for fulfillment of their needs. After their needs to live, perhaps to play is most important. [...] Play is also a chance for exploration of the unknown, for extension of the child into spheres of life that may be threatening to him.<sup>13</sup>

This was especially true in the Northwest community of Fitzgerald, which housed Post Junior High and Cooley High schools, two schools that had experienced some of the more violent desegregation efforts in the city.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the importance space and the built environment in the lives of black youth, see William Bunge, *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, *A Report to the Parents of Detroit on School Decentralization*, General Baker's personal papers, in the author's possession.

<sup>13</sup> Bunge, 153.

Class and racial inequality shaped black youths' limited access to recreational centers. As members of Unicom explained, leisure spaces “were once available to the sons and daughters of the elite” but became “closed to the children of black workers.” Black activists tried to gain access to community and education facilities that they had hoped to turn into community centers. However, they met great resistance. While Catholic-oriented educational institutions like Marygrove College and the University of Detroit displayed racial animus towards their black neighbors, white religious institutions failed to welcome black community members as congregants. In addition to resistance to inclusion, Unicom explained that black high school youth wanted to resolve the issue of overcrowded schools and a “lack of self-pride.”<sup>14</sup> In a section of the city that had witnessed racial unrest in the schools and on the streets, Unicom became a critical community institution for black youth.

In sharp contrast to the city's recreational programs, Black Power activists conceptualized recreation as a means to achieving Black Liberation. For example, when the Detroit Commission on Childhood and Youth (DCCY) expanded young people's access to recreational, cultural, and political institutions, it included teen glamor clubs and cultural enrichment trips that placed the onus on black children to enter predominantly white spaces. While the commission tried to marshal its resources to carve out room for young people in civic and cultural institutions, its objectives fell short of the revolutionary aims black youth activists sought. Black radical youth viewed recreational spaces as a means to achieving Black Liberation. Student activists from the League's

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<sup>14</sup> “Unicom,” *Inner-City Voice* vol. 2, no. 5 (1970), 13, Collection: Inner-City Voice, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; “Unicom Proposal” (1970 1969), Personal Papers of General Gordon Baker; Unicom, “Unicom Freedom Academy Proposal” (1970), Box 94, Folder 43, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Northern High Freedom school, as a case in point, made recreation a core element of the school's curriculum. The architects of the recreation program sought to provide black youth with “a meaningful outlet and channel of energy” and to help students “develop the necessary physical skills that Black youth need to survive and move towards liberation.” The recreational program included basketball, football, swimming, weaponry, track, and martial arts. According to the curriculum, martial arts could teach black “discipline, organization and the need for the development of the higher (spiritual) self. It motivates pride and self-respect and helps keep youth from drug addiction and alcoholics.”<sup>15</sup> Despite such differences, liberal civic organizations sometimes funded radical black youth groups.

While organizations like the Detroit Commission on Children and Youth aimed to meet the recreational needs of children across the city, Unicom provided local facilities for Detroiters living in the Northwest Detroit. Located at 8815 Puritan Ave, Unicom's offices provided a wide range of political, cultural, and economic resources. Their ambitious programming included developing community organizations, jobs training, community arts programming, and scholastic readiness courses. They also aimed to meet the needs of homeowners through social programs and had hoped to facilitate parent and youth discussion panels and race relations forums. Its urban economic programs aimed to teach the local community about small business development, investments, loan corporations, banking industries, accounting, entrepreneurship, co-ops, and the federal housing association.<sup>16</sup> Its suite of classes revealed the possibilities of liberatory

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<sup>15</sup> Northern High Freedom School Proposal, 1969, General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>16</sup> “Unicom Proposal” 1969-70, Personal Papers of General Gordon Baker; “Unicom,” Inner City Voice, 1970, Vol. 2, 5, Inner City Voice, Bentley Historical Library.

education; that education, in the hands of the grassroots organizations, could meet community needs.

Although Unicom initially stood for University-Community as a signal to its efforts to access the University of Detroit's facilities for community and recreational use, the organization later changed its name to United-Community. The name change revealed that its proponents wanted to extend its goals beyond retrieving university resources.<sup>17</sup> As a student at Post Junior High School, Gregory Hicks and other young members of Unicom organized to demand better access to educational and recreational resources at the University of Detroit, including tutoring programs. Hicks, who served as the Youth Director at the age of 15 years old, explains,

It appeared to us that the University of Detroit was this great treasure that sat on this intersection of Six Mile and Livernois, but had very little relationship with the African-American community vis a vis, surrounding them. So, we wanted to use some of their facilities and become engaged with them.<sup>18</sup>

As the organization increased the demands it made of the university, the institution accelerated its antipathy towards the local community, ultimately, erected a fence around university grounds, isolating itself from the community. Radical geographer William Bunge reflected on these divisions while observing the Fitzgerald community,

Walls may exist within the community too; in Fitzgerald, the walls of Marygrove College are increasingly patrolled, and the college's protection has escalated to include private police with trained dogs.<sup>19</sup>

Although Marygrove College and the local schools had recreational facilities, combined, the infrastructure could not handle the growth in population of children and youth. Dr. Angus, the principal of Fitzgerald Elementary School, suggested that the city had not

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Hicks, email correspondence with the author, January 6, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bunge, 130.

rushed to develop additional recreational resources because of race; black children constituted a majority of the increase in the youth population.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence of this contentious relationship, Unicom changed its name to United-Community. Whereas the initial focus of the organization addressed the local community's educational and recreational concerns, this shift laid the foundation for a more community-focused agenda which included a community information center and meeting hall.<sup>21</sup> The black youth in Northwest Detroit finally had a chance to realize their vision of a local, centralized community resource center that could meet the needs of black youth.

Although Unicom formed in June 1967, its director, Larry Nevels, had already established his presence in the local schools as a supporter of black youth activists at Post Junior High and Cooley High School. When racial tensions boiled to the surface between black and white students, Nevels traveled to the schools to bring calm and order. When police repressed student protests, Unicom recorded statements from those who encountered harassment. Using his early experiences with organizing in SNCC, Nevels provided young people with the resources they needed to identify issues pertinent to their age cohort and to locate viable, immediate solutions.<sup>22</sup> Initially, the community was ambivalent about the presence of Unicom. While the source of this ambivalence is unclear, the organization's connection to black radical networks may have given many in the community pause. Nevertheless, the organization found great appeal among black students living in the area. Unicom, in its fight for resources, aimed to "instill pride and

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<sup>20</sup> Bunge, *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution*.155.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010; Gregory Hicks, email correspondence, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, 78-79; Earl Gray and Elmer Hein, "Substance Statement from Larry Nevels" March 16, 1968, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 35, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

dignity in Black youths” as an important step to improving race relations. With the assistance of youth director Gregory Hicks, the organization could tap into the needs of the young people it had hoped to serve.<sup>23</sup>

Unicom’s expansive mission came with a hefty price tag. Staff salaries and supplies cost the group an estimated \$94,240 annually. This included the executive director’s salary, as well as a \$5,200 salary for the youth director.<sup>24</sup> Unicom sought and received funding from many sources, including the charitable efforts of the Archdiocese. John Cardinal Dearden granted Unicom \$5,000 from the Special Archdiocesan Fund which sought to combat poverty in urban communities as well as racial tensions in neighborhoods that experienced white flight. Unicom’s tutoring programs and efforts to develop leadership skills among community youth was of great importance to the funder.<sup>25</sup> Nevels solicited \$1,000 from New Detroit, Inc. to fund supplies for Unicom’s Freedom Academy.<sup>26</sup> Unicom’s leaders also solicited funding from the UAW. In a letter to Walter Reuther, president of the UAW, Annette Rainwater Marion petitioned for the purchase of \$1000 in tickets to support Unicom’s concert, African Soul '69. The event planners aimed to provide local artists and entertainers with an opportunity to enjoy "first-class entertainment" and hoped to fund tickets for young people who couldn’t afford to attend. In her request, Marion stressed the importance of Unicom’s efforts to provide Detroit teenagers with economic opportunities that would serve the interest of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory Hicks, email correspondence, January 6, 2009; Unicom, “Unicom Freedom Academy Proposal” 1970, Box 94, Folder 43, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>24</sup> “Unicom Proposal,” General Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

<sup>25</sup> “UNICOM Receives Archdiocese Grant,” July 16, 1970, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/ Human Rights Department Collection Box 45, Folder 15, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>26</sup> “Annette Rainwater Marion to Walter Reuther,” August 12, 1969, UAW President’s Office: Walter P. Reuther Collection, Box 527, Folder: UNICOM, 1969, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

black community, including managing a repair garage and gas station. Money from these businesses would fund the development of a community school that would prepare youth for the world of work and for higher education.<sup>27</sup>

Some black students assumed that the local Jewish community had funded its own community centers and hoped that the black community could do the same for its youth. However, Unicom's outreach to Catholic institutions represented an important shift in black economic thought. While organizational documents do not reveal the rationale behind soliciting funding from religious institutions and mainstream labor unions, a strain of black economic thought that emerged most forcefully during the Black Power movement offers one possible interpretation of such requests. It was the view that institutions and communities that had most benefited from the exploitation of black communities should take on the responsibility of financially supporting black economic development. This view of black community development merged paths with the black nationalist view of self-help.<sup>28</sup> In addition to developing a community center, Unicom self-organized an African-style restaurant, Chic-Afric Restaurant, near Puritan Avenue under the supervision of Nevels.<sup>29</sup> The restaurant introduced local youth to community activists who would ultimately organize alongside DRUM and the League. The restaurant's African-centered focus offered black youth who managed and frequented it a community space where they could study international issues that concerned black and third world communities. Hicks describes this internationalist perspective,

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<sup>27</sup> "Annette Rainwater Marion to Walter Reuther," August 12, 1969, UAW President's Office: Walter P. Reuther Collection, Box 527, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>28</sup> We might think of the Black Economic Development Conference as an example of this ethic. See Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 1999) for more on the BEDC.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Hicks, email correspondence, March 21, 2017.

Around that period of time, we began to see the emergence of African liberation organizations. We began to see the beginning of African nations breaking away from their colonial masters and we felt the same kind of enthusiasm as they felt in association with that.

It became a space wherein young people discussed the relationship between colonial rule in Africa and Asia, and white exploitation of blacks and the working-class in the U.S.<sup>30</sup>

Unicom's efforts in the community created new opportunities for city-wide social organizations to support local development efforts. For example, the Detroit Youth Foundation (DYF) expressed great interest in supporting the needs and concerns of youth in Northwest Detroit as a consequence of Unicom's work. As the youth director of Unicom, young Hicks sat on the Board of Directors for the MYDF. According to Hicks, the organization wanted "to help local grant makers make better decisions in funding youth base activities."<sup>31</sup> The foundation sought to provide funding for programs that supported "disturbed youth in the Detroit metropolitan area" and was organized "to address the concerns and needs of youth in Metropolitan Detroit." Its philosophy stated: "Let it be very clear: it is not a matter of 'giving doles', it is the enlightened strategy of directing resources to building long-term human and physical structures for a better community." Their ideas for programming included: a City-wide Youth Conference where youth could identify issues of great concern to their peers and propose solutions. The goal was to have "maximum youth participation" and "to encourage development of employment-recreational-educational projects, of the Junior Achievement type, in various areas of the community, with business support."<sup>32</sup> As the growing black middle-class in

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory Hicks, Email correspondence with the author, March 21, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation, Inc., "Origin and Goals" n.d., Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection, Box 60, Folder 29: Detroit Youth Foundation, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Detroit gained access to local and federal funding from the Great Societies programs, they used these resources to expand black youth's contributions to the resource and economic development of black communities.

### **“Survival Pending Revolution”: Black Youth and Black Panther Party Free Breakfast Program**

The struggle for black community control of resources and economic justice extended into the realm of welfare rights and social services as well. Across the country, local Black Panther Party chapters developed social service and political programs like free sickle cell anemia testing and voter registration.<sup>33</sup> In Detroit, they even had a free prison bus ride program and free clothing giveaways.<sup>34</sup> Of these endeavors, the Free Breakfast Program represented one of the Panthers' greatest assaults on capitalism and defense of human rights.<sup>35</sup> By 1969, the Panthers would serve more than 15,000 children in six of major urban cities.<sup>36</sup> The revolution was coming, but until the revolution had actually arrived, the Panthers maintained, they had to remain attuned to the immediate needs of marginalized communities. According to the Black Panthers,

‘The overthrow of one class by another must be carried out by revolutionary violence. Until this stage is achieved we must concentrate on the immediate needs of the people, in order to build a united political force, based on the ideology of the Black Panther Party. Survival pending Revolution is our immediate task and to do this we must meet the needs of the people...through our liberation schools, free breakfast programs, and child care centers.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, "Motor City Panthers," in Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 144-145.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>35</sup> The Party, at least according to Elaine Browne, viewed the free breakfast program as a part of the struggle for human rights. See Bryan Shih and Yohuru Williams, *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution* (Public Affairs, 2016), 98.

<sup>36</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa, US:

Much like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Black Panther Party tried to acknowledge the very real economic conditions that racism and capitalism had created in urban communities. The Panthers' Free Breakfast for Children Program was conceptually shaped by Huey P. Newton's revolutionary intercommunalism, which viewed liberation struggles as a fight for communities and not nation-state actors. The political philosophy magnified the significance of creating local resources for communities.<sup>38</sup> Black youth played a critical role in realizing the movement's anti-capitalist vision and its political philosophy, intercommunalism. Black high school students who joined the Black Panther Party's social programs contributed to the movement's struggle against poverty and helped to shape its fight for "economic justice."<sup>39</sup>

The Detroit Panthers often discussed political philosophies that the national office in Oakland had described in its national newspaper, *The Black Panther*. However, the Detroit chapter "stressed the desirability of living in the spirit of the 'Self-Defense' portion of the party's official name [...] which cast violence and confrontations with the police as decidedly counterproductive to community organizing." Despite this fact, the Detroit Panthers engaged in armed violence on a few occasions before the chapter was revamped in the fall of 1969.<sup>40</sup> As was the case with the Oakland chapter, the Detroit Panthers enlarged its membership when it began to provide social services, including its free breakfast program for children. In doing so, it brought more women and youth into

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University Alabama Press, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 193.

<sup>39</sup> As Heather Ann Thompson has suggested, the Black Panther's Free Breakfast Program represented a form of "economic justice." See *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 155.

the party.<sup>41</sup> While the Oakland chapter envisioned the program as one way to build a rapport with older black Americans, the Detroit chapter focused more broadly on the assistance of black youth.<sup>42</sup>

By early 1969, the Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party (National Committee to Combat Fascism) had established its Free Breakfast Program for Children, which served, on average, forty children Monday through Friday at three locations.<sup>43</sup> Nestled away from the main office on 12<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Street, which had become a site of extreme police harassment and violence, the breakfast programs served elementary and middle-school aged children on the East side, the West side, and in the Northeast section of Detroit in two church dining halls and a recreational center.<sup>44</sup> While the Detroit chapter may have started in spring 1968, it took almost a full year for its members to establish its breakfast program, in part, because the central office believed that the Detroit chapter needed additional resources to make such an involved program possible. That meant increasing its membership.<sup>45</sup> By February 1969, the Party had already launched its

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<sup>41</sup> Murch, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmad Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds., *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Duke University Press Books, 2008); Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, "Motor City Panthers," in Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010); and Black Panther Party. Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session. (Washington, 1970), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112052607238>. There conflicting dates for the opening of the Detroit BPP Free Breakfast Program. Ahmad Rahman (191) puts it at February 1969 (footnote for paragraph which includes a quote comes from Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers*) while Jeffries (143) claims that it started in May 1969. His footnote suggests that the date comes from his interview with Lorene Johnson. In his interview at the Congressional hearing, Berry (4447), Romines suggest that it began in either April or May. Also, there are a few different figures regarding the number of children served each day at each site. Jeffries places it at 50 children (footnote suggests that this figure comes from his interview Tracy Wilson. Berry (4447) placed the number at 30-40 children. During the summer of 1970 (presumably), according to the Panthers as cited by Heather Ann Thompson, they served around 350 children at two of the breakfast program sites. (p. 90, footnote 111)

<sup>44</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, "Motor City Panthers," in Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 143-144.

<sup>45</sup> Black Panther Party. Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session. (Washington, 1970), 4447, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112052607238>.

Free Breakfast for Children programs, in addition to a free rat-removal extermination program, and a free barbershop. Its members also

recruited leftist doctors to staff a free health clinic in the Jeffries Projects, where they offered sickle cell anemia and blood pressure tests. The assumption was that these altruistic and nonviolent programs would build community support and would not provoke the wrath of law enforcement.

But this was not the case. In fact, it raised concerns among the FBI at least, that these programs sought to “‘create an image of civility, assume community control of Negroes, and to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison.’”<sup>46</sup>

For these activists, local businesses represented one of the most visible symbols of capitalist exploitation in black communities. The rebellion of 1967 demonstrated this. In countless interviews, rioters caught in the act of looting explained to reporters that they were “‘just getting back what some of what he owes us.’” When stopped by reporters for a comment, they offered stories of the mistreatment they experienced at the hands of grocers and storeowners who did not live in their communities. In response to a question about why she pilfered three television sets, one woman explained,

‘He never did treat black folks nice, always rushing you to make up your mind. And he never wanted to sell you the cheap stuff. Always talking about how another one was better, but it always cost more money.’

Later, Black Power activists would shout “Buy Black,” contributing to a long tradition of organizing in defense of black economic justice. But they also expected business owners who stayed in Black communities to do their fair share.<sup>47</sup> To that end, the Detroit

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<sup>46</sup> Ahmad Rahman, “Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit,” in Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds., *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Duke University Press Books, 2008), 191.

<sup>47</sup> Austin Scott, “‘Got Back What Store Owes Us,’ Looter Says,” *The Ann Arbor News*, July 31, 1967, Detroit, Michigan, riot scrapbooks, 1967, Bentley Historical Library; “Black Power Advocates Push for Break with U.S.,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1967, Detroit, Michigan, riot scrapbooks, 1967, Bentley Historical Library.

Panthers solicited food donations from local grocers, including Brothers Market.<sup>48</sup> If the storeowners failed to invest in the community, the Panthers threatened, they would not be allowed to stay in the community.<sup>49</sup>

Community support for the program was integral to the impact of the free breakfast program. One of the members of the chapter, Tracy Wilson, alerted local principals to the program in hopes that they would publicize information about it to parents.<sup>50</sup> Among local leaders and educators, however, there was some concern that the Party would successfully attract black youth and produce more black militants. As a case in point, in 1970, “Joe Dulin, the principal at St. Martin De Porres black Catholic High School in Detroit, warned that ‘if things don’t change soon every eleven and twelve-year-old will end up a Black Panther. Potentially, every black is a Panther.’”<sup>51</sup> Dulin and others had some cause for concern as Young Rita Smith, a student at Post Junior High School on the West side of Detroit, organized a group of her peers in 1969 to march over leftovers from their graduation party to the Panthers office.<sup>52</sup>

The young people who served breakfast at the Detroit Panthers’ breakfast program made the commitment an ordinary part of their day. Like the students who had to rise early to distribute literature at the plant gates for the League, teenage Panthers started their day earlier than many of their peers to make sure that black children had access to a basic human right, food. Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, a student at Mumford, explains,

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<sup>48</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, 143.

<sup>49</sup> Thompson, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, 143.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, 148.

I would wake up at 4:00 a.m., ride a bus forty-five minutes across town to serve breakfast to poor children in what was Black Bottom, and then retrace my steps in time for the first bell at Mumford High School by eight o'clock. My mother had sheltered me from this part of Detroit.

For Coleman-Adebayo, the experience revealed a world that had largely been unknown to her. She explains, "For the first time, I identified with people living in housing projects and subjected to police violence targeted against whole communities."<sup>53</sup> The Panther who was likely to work at the Free Breakfast Program at the Bewick location was between the age of 15 and 17 years old, and a male member. Panther member Tracy Wilson surmised that young black men represented a significant presence because many of them came from single-parent homes and looked to male Black Panther members as surrogate father figures.<sup>54</sup>

As a student at Cass Technical High School, Brenda Hicks was one of the many black youth who made the Detroit Panthers' Free Breakfast Program possible. Although Hicks was not drawn to the Party's political philosophy, she believed in the significance of their community programs, and the role it could play in challenging class and race inequality in her city. Due to her parents' disdain for the Panthers, Hicks was only available to serve breakfast to children on the weekends and during spring and summer breaks. However, she used the limited time she had to provide both sustenance and knowledge to black children who were just a few years her junior. Although she often missed church on Sundays to assist at the location near West Grand Boulevard, Hicks understood that children who needed meals during the week would most certainly need meals on the weekend. While Hicks does not recall the exact location where she

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<sup>53</sup> Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, Noam Chomsky, and Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, *No Fear: A Whistleblower's Triumph Over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA* (Chicago Review Press, 2011), 90.

<sup>54</sup> Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, 144.

volunteered, she remembers that mostly women and girls staffed the free breakfast program at her site. Older men provided transportation for the children and usually helped to cook as well.<sup>55</sup> Hicks did not arrive at her decision to join the Panthers community work without trepidation. In fact, she feared them. That was until a friend from high school invited her to his home for a meeting with other youth who wanted to contribute to the organization's community work. Prior to learning about the community programs from her friend, Hicks thought the Panthers were too militant.

It was often revealed in Panther meetings surrounding the program that parents believed that the Party used free breakfast to indoctrinate children. Parents often asked the Panthers, "What are you talking to my kids about?"<sup>56</sup> In Brenda's experience, the time she spent with the children offered much more than a daily rendition of the Panthers' 10-point platform. During her time with the children, she often answered questions about hair and black culture. These conversations, where black children did not experience much of the indoctrination that their parents worried about, gave young people like Brenda an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about both personal and political issues that mattered to them. Brenda explains, "One of the things that was important for us to share with the kids was a sense of self-pride." Conversations about black self-pride often arose from the children's questions about the afros black female Panther members wore. While it wasn't mandatory for party members to sport the hairstyle, many of the teenage girls often did, including Hicks. The children sometimes asked the girls serving them, "Why don't you get your hair pressed?" or "Why is your hair nappy?" In describing the transparent and open nature of these conversations, Hicks

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<sup>55</sup> Brenda Hicks, interview with the author, April 9, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

explains, “We tried to, many times, let the kids lead those conversations.” Hicks used these conversations as an opportunity to encourage the children to view natural hair as beautiful and to create a democratic, nonhierarchical space for them. For Hicks, these conversations were not overtly political. Reminiscing on the experience, she states, “We were just answering their questions and being as honest with them as we could possibly be.” And yet, the conversations Hicks encouraged between herself and the children revealed a more equitable relationship between the children attending the program and the Panthers who met them once they arrived.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to working with the free breakfast program, Hicks was also a tutor for the Panthers’ tutoring program. In this role, she helped children between the ages of 8 and 13 with homework, which sometimes included short history papers. The Panthers’ reputation made it unlikely that they would have been allowed to tutor children on school grounds, but the breakfast centers provided a means through which the Panthers could meet the educational needs of Detroit’s black youth. During tutoring hours, Hicks revealed to students a rich black history that many of them were unaware of. When they arrived with short papers they had drafted about the historical figures – Frederick Douglas and George Washington Carver – Hicks taught them about others like Marcus Garvey and Madame C.J. Walker, important historical actors she had learned about in her classes at Cass Tech. While none of the students Hicks worked with expressed interest in joining the Party, they were curious about the organization and had a lot of “good questions.” Many of the older children who attended the breakfast program asked probing questions about the lives the teenagers led outside of the hours they worked with them.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

While Brenda did not push the children to join the Party, she discussed the Party's beliefs and concerns about racial segregation and discrimination.<sup>58</sup> Although some parents believed that their children would encounter charges to pick up the gun from those serving their children pancakes, orange juice and eggs, black youth attending the community programs experienced the possibilities of intercommunalism.

While the Detroit Panthers organized several other survival programs by 1972, including a free lunch program during the summer, free bus rides to the local prison, and a clothing drive, the Panther lost two of its free breakfast sites by the end of 1970. In an interview during congressional hearings on the Black Panther Party, Detroit Party member Donald Berry explained the decline of the program in less than glowing terms. According to Berry,

The reason they lost the other two centers was because they were just plain lazy and careless and they would not clean up the place. Food would be left open and spoil. The people that loaned these buildings to them just made up their minds that they could not have that because if they weren't going to take care of the people's buildings then the people were not going to let them have it.

In addition to poor upkeep of facilities, he argued, the failure of party members to meet the children when they arrived for breakfast, and Party members misuse of funds, contributed to the demise of the program.<sup>59</sup> Others have suggested that only one center survived for a time because many of the members found the community work to be "tedious."<sup>60</sup> While the programs rebounded because of the arduous work of the women

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<sup>58</sup> Breakfast usually consisted of eggs, orange juice and milk, sausage and pancakes. Joel P. Rhodes and Judson Jeffries, "Motor City Panthers," in Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 144.

<sup>59</sup> *Black Panther Party Hearings, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session*. (Washington, 1970), 4447–48, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112052607238>.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffries, *On the Ground*, 158.

members, two years later, the Detroit chapter had reached its demise. This was in part due to extreme police repression that had marked the end of the 1960s.<sup>61</sup>

Although much conversation around the breakfast program has focused on the perceived indoctrination of the children receiving breakfast, examining the conversations they had with those serving them reveals that the program was also a space where black children could, perhaps, relate to black adolescents – in conversations about self-pride. It also offered children access to knowledge about unsung black historical figures. For students who believed in the Panthers ideas, but took issue with their rhetoric about armed resistance, the breakfast program became an opportunity for them to meet the needs of black youth in a way that felt safe and authentic to them.

**“The roots of the student struggle is indeed in the workers struggle...”<sup>62</sup>**

Although education, recreation, and social services were crucial sites of political organizing for black high school youth, Detroit’s adolescent citizenry was also keenly aware of the ways in which Detroit’s political economy made labor central to their coming of age stories. Access to family members who worked in the auto plants offered students a source of experiential knowledge about labor exploitation. From parents and community members, black students learned that black autoworkers encountered fierce exploitation in the auto factories. This exploitation took many forms. For example, shop-floor management often gave black workers “the worst and most dangerous jobs: the foundry and the body shop, jobs requiring the greatest physical exertion and jobs which

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<sup>61</sup> Jeffries, 158.

<sup>62</sup> Black Student United Front, “A Tribute to James Johnson,” *Black Student Voice*, n.d., General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

were the noisiest, dirtiest, and most dangerous in the plant.” Managers excluded black workers’ access to skilled and supervisory positions such as foremen and superintendent.<sup>63</sup> And if management wanted to increase production for particular car models, they turned to speed ups, which created an upsurge in work-related injuries.<sup>64</sup> When white workers needed protection from exploitation in the workplace, they looked to the United Auto Workers (UAW) union for protection. However, black workers would find very little defense in the union they referred to as “You Ain’t White.”<sup>65</sup> Early on, black students came to understand why self-determination was central to the Black Power movement's vision for liberation. Despite the union's charge to fight on behalf of all members of its constituency, black autoworkers had to fight for better working conditions on their own.

Black Power arrived at the point of production in May 1968 when black labor radicals at the Dodge Main plant took over the long battle for black workers’ rights. To push back against institutional racism and labor exploitation in the plants, they organized wildcat strikes and walkouts. Following these actions, they found support from black factory workers from other auto plants across the Metropolitan Detroit area. In response to this newfound following, this small group of black radicals organized independent unions that presented a hard-fought challenge to the mainstream unions. Out of this self-mobilization was born the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM).<sup>66</sup> Following the successful wildcat strikes led by DRUM, similar local movements developed at the Eldon

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<sup>63</sup> Georgakas, Surkin, and Marable, *Detroit*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> Georgakas, Surkin, and Marable, 28.

<sup>65</sup> “Inner City Voice,” *Inner City Voice*, date, page in collection, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection.

<sup>66</sup> *DRUM*, October 1970, 1, no. 1, Personal Papers of General Gordon Baker, in the author’s possession.

Avenue plant (ELRUM), Ford's River Rouge plant (FRUM), and at more than five other factory complexes. In January, 1969, black labor radicals established the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) as an umbrella organization for the growing revolutionary union movements. In auto plants across the Detroit Metropolitan area, black auto factory workers organized themselves to confront factory management's exploitation of black labor as well as the UAW's failure to provide black workers protection in the face of labor abuses. This monumental anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist mission to topple a repressive social order drew upon and further developed a vast network of community and labor organizations that sought to radically shift the balance of political and economic power in Detroit.

In response to the League's resistance, shop-floor management retaliated against black labor activists. Management hired photographers to take pictures of picketing workers. they used these pictures to take punitive measures, including termination of employment.<sup>67</sup> Punishments were especially burdensome for workers who were the main breadwinners in their families. Reflecting on the problems disciplinary actions posed for black labor radicals and their movement, League founding member, Kenneth Cockrel, Sr. highlighted several concerns. As community and plant organizers, he wanted activists to consider the responsibility of the movement to workers who would lose their jobs because of their political activities. This concern was a matter of determining the League's duty to the worker who had to feed his family without leaving him or her to rely on the mainstream union. If striking employees had to turn to the UAW for support, this reliance could pose a challenge to the League's efforts to transfer the balance of power

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

from the owners of production to the hands of black workers.<sup>68</sup> These concerns paved the way for the League's community and student components, as well as internal debates that would follow the organization throughout its short tenure. They also marked the beginning of the League's "community-based labor politics."<sup>69</sup>

The road to realizing the League's vision of "community-based labor politics" was paved with internal debates about limited resources and the group's ability to meet the needs of activists leading in-plant resistance. The decision to expand the organization's reach beyond plant-based organizing was both a consequence of practical concerns and theoretical positions. Mike Hamlin and Ken Cockrel argued that student and community components could organize on behalf of workers when punitive measures prohibited workers from fighting in defense of themselves. For League member John Watson, it was clear that workers rarely had the energy to manage the production of publications and organize meetings after working long hours. Furthermore, since workers rarely had the skills needed to make organization and the publication of materials possible, this work was usually left to people who did not work in the factories.<sup>70</sup>

While these practical concerns animated the League's decision to expand its political activities beyond the factories to attract community support and skills, the organization's

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<sup>68</sup> Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 1999), 71-75;

<sup>69</sup> According to historian David Goldberg, the organization's break from a "shop-floor only politics [...] redefine[d] Black Power into a revolutionary black working-class movement that connected black workers' struggles to 'community struggles around housing, welfare rights, and community control of schools [...].'" Goldberg argues that the League's entrance into community organizing signaled a new kind of labor politics that included community organizing. David Goldberg, "Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the 'Short Black Power Movement' in Detroit," in *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, ed. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 90-111.

<sup>70</sup> "To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers" (n.d.), 5-6, The Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/watson.pdf>.

theoretical outlook was equally important to the debate. Philosophically, the League viewed the black working-class as the vanguard of the revolution.<sup>71</sup> According to Cockrel, limiting the struggle for the liberation of working-class people to the “trade union context,” would make it incredibly difficult for non-workers who also experienced the impact of class repression to engage in struggle.<sup>72</sup> Although General Baker and his supporters urged the League to focus its energies on in-plant organizing, Luke Tripp and John Williams tried to bring more attention to political education for the workers.<sup>73</sup> But as the struggle for community control of schools intensified in 1969, the League decided that it had to intervene in the battle. In the process, it gained the community support it sorely needed to make in-plant struggles successful. Since the League’s founding members had a long history of organizing community movements – as college students and welfare rights activists – this new trajectory emerged organically. Tapping into the student struggles that were already taking place in the junior high and high schools, the League established its student component, the Black Student United Front (BSUF) following its founding.<sup>74</sup> Theoretically and practically, the role of black students in labor struggles was to forge a new path and possibility for “community-based labor politics” and to lessen the impact of economic reprisals for black labor radicals.

From the perspective of high school activists in the Black Student United Front, collaborating with black factory workers made practical sense. Black students recognized that racism in high school apprenticeship programs (much like apprenticeship programs

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<sup>71</sup> League of Revolutionary Black Workers, “The League of Revolutionary Black Workers General Program” (July 1970), League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) [series]: LRBW Program, July 1970, Box 1, Madison Foster Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>72</sup> Georgakas and Surkin, 74-75.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 72-75

<sup>74</sup> James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers*, 1 edition (Cambridge, Eng. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 149.

that had been established for adults) and school policies tracked them into the general curriculum and limited their employment opportunities. Students saw skilled trades as an alternative to factory work because they were aware that factory management often placed black workers in the worst working conditions. Instead, black students demanded access to apprenticeship programs in plumbing, masonry, and carpentry.<sup>75</sup>

Acknowledging the likelihood that for many Detroit Public School graduates education led to work in the plants, the BSUF published the following in its open letter to graduating seniors:

Most of you will be factory workers at Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors. [...] We realize that it is you that will see more clearly than any of the graduates who will become doctors or lawyers exactly what the average student gets out of 12 years of education – the assembly line.<sup>76</sup>

While Watson was concerned that factory workers did not have the energy to organize its own base, black youth knew that they could endure the work of printing and distributing literature before and after school hours. According to Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, “We had the time and the energy, the passion and zeal to do that. And that was our role and function to a large degree. More often than not, issues of school were secondary.”<sup>77</sup>

While shared political and economic interests energized this relationship, so had students’ ability to see their futures bound with that of their parents and the black working class.

As students spent more time studying diverse political frameworks, BSUF activists came to conceptualize the black worker-student alliance through the lens of a Marxist-Leninist critique of capitalism. Viewing traditional schools as a means to

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<sup>75</sup> Black Student United Front, “Black Student Voice” (n.d.), General Gordon Baker’s personal collection.

<sup>76</sup> Black Student United Front, “Open Letter to the Seniors,” *Black Student Voice*, n.d., General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

<sup>77</sup> Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

maintaining capitalism, the students saw their destinies and struggle bound to that of the worker who resisted class exploitation in the plants. In this conception of education, labor and big business collude to meet the economic interests of the ruling class, and thus maintain inequality in the schools. Editors of the *Black Student Voice*, the BSUF's paper, exclaimed,

The Black Student United Front understands that the educational system in America serves no other purpose than that of a garbage can for industry. These industrial garbage cans supply industry with an abundance of cheap, unskilled black labor, the cornerstone of the American economy.<sup>78</sup>

Even more alarming to the students was what they viewed as “indoctrination,” or a curriculum used to prepare students to become future factory workers.<sup>79</sup> For these students, the schools had already etched out their destinies at the bottom rung of the urban political economy.

In addition to the teachings of Marx, black students learned about the cruelties of the world of work from watching adults in their communities encounter dangerous working conditions. Many students witnessed their loved ones return to them at the end of the workday with work-related injuries that were likely the result of speed-ups. Some parents returned to their children with missing fingers, likely from having an injury caused by a punch press. Students also learned that when black workers organized against such practices discipline from management was swift.<sup>80</sup> As black students watched their loved ones endure dangerous work conditions and political repression in the factories, they

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<sup>78</sup> Black Student United Front, “B.S.V. supports D.R.U.M.,” *Black Student Voice*, n.d., 2, no. 4, General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>79</sup> Black Student United Front, *Black Student Voice*, October, 1970, General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

<sup>80</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

acquired a kind of experiential knowledge that they would later come to understand through a Marxist and Black Nationalist lens.

In an era where marketing and consumer research disaggregated age groups for the purposes of selling goods, black youth viewed their life chances within the context of a black collectivist vision of the movement, seeing the ordinary black worker, regardless of age and by virtue of their race, as integral to an intergenerational revolution. Although conventional wisdom and scholarly research had argued that youth and adults occupied different world spheres, and therefore had no common experience, black students and workers believed otherwise. In explaining how he and his peers arrived at their commitment to the Black Power movement, BSUF founding member, Gregory Hicks states,

More than anything else, it was the view that we were essentially going to become our parents and whatever they were encountering in the world of work, we would therefore encounter and it made some logical sense for us to understand and become actively involved in changing the dynamic.

The BSUF's conception of the black freedom struggle as an intergenerational phenomenon animated their visions of a black worker-student struggle. As Hicks reveals, "We wanted to change that overall dynamic. And in our more romantic sense, we wanted to take over control of those plants and run them in a more humane and equitable fashion."<sup>81</sup> With the full force of black labor and community activists behind them, black students found the point of production to be another site of struggle for the black student movement.

Using their status as adolescents, activists of the Black Student United Front marked their place in the struggle "at the point of production" alongside black labor

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

radicals who were merely 10-12 years their senior. In addition to juggling their high school studies, students like Marsha Lynn Battle, Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, and Warren McAlpine II spent their mornings traveling to the Dodge Main plant in Hamtramk, MI to distribute the League’s newsletter. As early as 5 a.m., Battle made her way through the loud, and monstrously large Dodge complex with her surrogate uncles, General Gordon Baker and Chuck Wooten. Reflecting on this experience, Marsha recalls feeling “in awe of the people who could go into that mall, that industrial looking” space. Once work shifts changed, Marsha returned home to prepare for school. Traditional high school events like homecoming seemed “frivolous” to her. She focused, instead, on the factory workers. Distributing leaflets as a teenage girl, Battle encountered older male laborers who were not as welcoming as Chuck and General. However, she not only found her voice in the movement, but also became one of many teenagers who made it possible for the League to organize its political base in the factories.<sup>82</sup> In an interview with *The Fifth Estate*, League member Watson describes the importance of community help in distributing the League’s literature, stating that community members could not face punitive measures such as firings, a common consequence for radical workers.<sup>83</sup> While Watson did not offer much discussion of the role of youth like Marsha who passed out leaflets at the plant gates, the “community” likely consisted of a significant number of black students.

Other young people like Darryl Mitchell not only distributed the League’s leaflets, but also helped to produce and maintain what the League called its “propaganda

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<sup>82</sup> Marsha Lynn Philpot, interview with the author, October 27, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> “To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.”

apparatus.” As a member of the BSUF and the League, 16-year old Darryl Mitchell printed the League’s mimeographed literature, an experience that he says allowed him to combine his love for set type printing and his commitment to the revolution. While Mitchell spent his early years in high school using his skills in printing to forge school notices, he found that printing was essential to the life of any movement because it was a critical part of organizing a political base. But the benefit Mitchell received from this experience was equally important. He explains, “It was great because it allowed me to become educated, because you have to read. You have to learn how to edit. You have to learn how to work with different people and work in a collective. It socializes you.”<sup>84</sup> Historically, social movements have viewed political literature as an important means to organizing a political base. According to Watson,

The publication is an organizing tool in and of itself in that workers themselves begin to write for the publication and distribute in the plant. Through recruiting reporters and through the distribution of the publication, we develop a network of communication throughout the plant, throughout the department.<sup>85</sup>

In contributing to the print and distribution of the League’s paper, *DRUM*, students relieved workers of the physical pressures of this organizational work, alleviated concerns about economic repression, and for a moment, contributed to the movement’s efforts to re-order the place of black workers in the exploitative relationship between the owners of production and the workers who toiled from below.

Through its own production of literature, the BSUF brought the struggles that laborers were waging at the point of production into the walls of Detroit’s public schools. Warren McAlpine, like Marsha and Daryl, offset printed and distributed the League’s

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<sup>84</sup> Darryl “Waistline” Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010.

<sup>85</sup> “To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.”

leaflets as well as its community newspaper, *The Inner City Voice*. As a founding member of the Black Student United Front, McAlpine used the skills he acquired from printing at the League's Courtland office to print the Front's paper, *The Black Student Voice*. Like *The Inner City Voice* and *DRUM*, the student paper became a political organizing tool for black high schoolers. To create a city-wide student organ, the BSUF offered the League's printing machinery to other student groups who wanted to print underground student newspapers for their own high school's chapter of the BSUF. This plan created several *Black Student Voice* newspapers at schools like Osborn High, Northern High, Cooley High School, and Highland Park High. Using the League's equipment, the Front created a city-wide organizing base. In doing so, black students accomplished several goals that the worker-student alliance wanted to achieve. Activists of the BSUF realized these aims by using the paper as a discursive space that challenged their peers to rethink previously held notions about generational gaps in the black community. They tapped into their peers' familial ties with factory workers and highlighted the similarities between the conditions factory workers encountered in the plants and what black students encountered in the schools. Finally, they tapped into students' concerns about their futures. "There can be no separation, in relations to the workers and students struggle. 'The roots of the student struggle is indeed in the workers struggle...' 'The character of the Workers Struggle is Revolutionary in essence.'"<sup>86</sup>

This discursive contribution to black labor radicalism expanded the League's presence in black communities and among black youth. As a case in point, the Black Student United Front sought to create empathy for the black workers' movement among

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<sup>86</sup> Black Student United Front, "A Tribute to James Johnson," *Black Student Voice*, n.d., General Gordon Baker's personal collection, in the author's possession.

students by emphasizing the shared class struggle that material conditions had generated for black students and black workers. Editors of the *BSV* explained,

D.R.U.M. has faced and are still facing bitter opposition, especially from the racists UAW (United Auto Workers), and the entire Chrysler Corporation, since D.R.U.M. aims to unite black workers. In conclusion our struggle must be linked to the black workers struggle. Their struggle is our struggle; our struggle is their struggle; we are all struggling against the same capitalist ruling class.<sup>87</sup>

Building on both class solidarity and familial ties, black student activists called upon the peers to support black workers who the U.A.W. had failed to shield from labor exploitation. Editors of the paper claimed,

The majority of black fathers in the city of Detroit are factory workers. They work 8 to 10 hours a day, 5 or 6 days a week in order to feed clothe and shelter black students. These black workers are forced to slave like dogs by some of the same forces who control the school board and they need help.

Furthermore, they argued,

By helping supporting black workers, we as students will be able to forge greater bonds of cooperation between ourselves and our parents for our problems are the same – we are both oppressed by the same forces. Black youths and students should also understand that they too will soon be workers, that only 10% of black high school students go on to college and the other 90% go into the street looking for jobs, factories and docks, etc. Therefore black youth and students can be considered pre-workers – workers to be or unemployed workers.<sup>88</sup>

The *Black Student Voice* provided students with the means through which they could bring labor issues to their school peers. In making plain what was at stake for black youth, they revealed the limited possibilities that a life in labor presented and the ways in which economic injustice was an intergenerational phenomenon that required an intergenerational struggle.

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<sup>87</sup> Black Student United Front, “B.S.V. supports D.R.U.M.,” *Black Student Voice*, n.d., 2, no. 4, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

<sup>88</sup> “Attention Black Students,” flyer, General Gordon Baker’s personal collection, in the author’s possession.

Black factory workers were keenly aware of the important role student activists played in the League's in-plant activities. In its review of the year 1970 and renewed calls for revolution in 1971, the League held that,

Workers and students will become as one, the worker realizing that his salvation from oppression will be due partly to the aid of the students. And the student realizing that he will as soon as he leaves his present scene of oppression, the schools, be subjected to a more blatant form of oppression, the plant.

But more importantly, 1971 would become the year in which the League expanded its commitment to black students and their fight for quality, anti-racist education.

The year 1971 will find workers in the schools, uniting with their children to obtain a quality education in their own schools, and students at the plants, helping to educate and organize the workers, and lending support to their struggle for elimination of racism, capitalism and imperialism.<sup>89</sup>

The League's investment in the student struggle around community control and police repression had paid off.

In forging an alliance bound by a shared destiny, black workers and students sustained the movement that began with DRUM as some of these student activists went on to work in the plants when they graduated or left high school. The black student-worker alliance produced the black labor movement's next phase of radical leadership, which was by and large, female and likely a consequence of the feminization of the workplace. According to Cass Ford, a BSUF member, her relationship with the League provided her with transferrable skills such as organizing and mobilizing groups for a common cause. Cass explained,

I know being in the League helped me organize and helped me actually develop some kind of leadership so people would see me as a leader and respect me. It also gave me an idea what I needed to do and what not do in terms of getting people together.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "Black Students in '71," *Inner-City Voice*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1971), in the author's possession.

<sup>90</sup> Cass Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010.

According to Sandra Stewart, General Baker “was the one who told me about an opportunity with the Urban League to go over and ask them for a referral to go into General Motors.” Describing her earlier experience with rejection, she states,

And it's interesting because I had gone to General Motors the day before and asked them about a job application and they told me they weren't hiring. When I asked the Urban League to give me a letter of referral when I went to the employment office, they told me to come in.

Sandra began work at General Motors in 1973. Of this experience, she states,

I can remember them not having (*sic*) a lot of female union officials. And when I went in and I inquired about getting involved in the union, I was told I couldn't even volunteer in the union. I carried a lot of writing leaflets and protesting and trying to help people out.<sup>91</sup>

The decision to raise concern about the role of women in the auto plants was a consequence of her political training with the League. As a BSUF member, Stewart had a clear understanding of what was possible and what it would take to propel the labor movement into its next phase.

For activists of the Black Student United Front, the auto factories represented another site of struggle in their efforts to upset the whole system of white supremacy. Marshalling their status as youth and their critical studies of radical and anti-imperialist works, black students sought to shift the balance of power in the world of work away from white factory management to black factory workers. The Black Student United Front made several contributions to the League, and by extension, the black labor movement. First, it provided the labor movement with foot soldiers who were battle tested. Second, it created the intellectual space that would eventually produce future black factory workers who could enter the plants as laborers and political organizers.

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<sup>91</sup> Sandra Stewart, interview with the author, September 18, 2010.

Third, it introduced the League to students who may not have otherwise had a relationship to labor, thus enlarging the community support greatly needed by the parent organization. And finally, in organizing across multiple sites of struggle simultaneously, the BSUF sustained the intergenerational contours of the black labor movement.

## Conclusion

Questions of economic justice pushed high school activists to self-organize and self-mobilize beyond the schoolyard. While community control of schools and police repression were important sites of struggle for black youth, battles around labor exploitation, community resource development, and social services provided black adolescents a different access point to the Black Power movement. At factory plant gates, in their communities, and in basement cafeterias, black adolescents carried and amended the aims of the Black Power movement in every sphere of American life.

Black adolescent activists, along with women and community members, made the League's diverse and expansive agenda possible. League activist, General Baker recalled "They were an integral part. We could not have done all of the stuff that we've done had it been for them." Baker goes on to explain,

Those students was so militant. [...] We had the best students. Most of them were honor roll students. They organized those schools and they would not take no stuff! We had to go and back them up all the time. Try to help them get through the struggle they were faced with. [...] They were inspirational to us too.<sup>92</sup>

Alonso Chandler, another League member confirmed, "I have so much respect for those kids back then because of what they were doing. They were trying to integrate their

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<sup>92</sup> General Gordon Baker, interview with the author, July 15, 2010.

lives with what was being taught to change the educational system.”<sup>93</sup> Black students brought to bear the ideological tools they had acquired from their struggles around culturally relevant curriculum and police repression on to their engagement with the League’s in-plant activities. While not all youth arrived at the movement through educational activism, educational battles were certainly a key path to the movement for many.

Despite the ever-present concern that political organizations over-extended themselves by waging political fights in multiple sites of struggle, black adolescents made diverse political agendas possible. As the League and the Black Panther Party’s programs demonstrate, it was common for black radical organizations to organize multiple programs that sought to meet the diverse needs of black communities. They fought for political rights by turning to electoral politics. They established poverty programs, created informal educational institutions, and produced print and media apparatuses. Organizations that sought to improve the lot for black Detroiters in many spheres of public and private life largely accomplished such expansive aims because of black youth. With the assistance of the Black Student United Front, repression from shop-floor management became a little less weighty for black labor radicals. High schoolers’ contributions to the propaganda apparatus and the discursive space they offered to black labor in the *Black Student Voice* expanded community support for the League. Furthermore, the work of black youth provided the next cohort of radical labor leadership that would be essential to the survival of black labor radicalism.

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<sup>93</sup> Alonso Chandler, interview with the author, July 15, 2010.

Black adolescents developed and deployed political organization and mobilization skills in response to the unmet needs they encountered in their daily lives. Youth activists of Unicom created spaces where they were often told they did not belong. In doing so, they realized the Black Power Movement's vision of self-determination and black unity. And yet, even the notion of self-determination was limited by the organization's material needs. What did it mean to turn to the U.A.W. for funding, the same organization that had failed to represent black labor activists who fought against labor exploitation? It meant fighting diligently to demonstrate the responsibility that institutions owed the young people whose communities it had so often exploited. And while the Detroit Panthers Free Breakfast Program for Children encountered valleys, the conversations students like Brenda Hicks had with the children represented the peaks and the unexplored possibilities presented by one of the Party's most celebrated social programs. Whether it was distributing movement literature, waging a struggle for community resources, or contributing to free breakfast and lunch programs, black adolescents translated the movement's ideas into action.

From black nationalism and Marxist-Leninism to intercommunalism and anti-capitalism, black adolescents marshalled the long and vibrant history of black economic thought in service of the movement's efforts to redefine black American's shared destiny. Young people's notion of a shared destiny, was in part, a product of multi-generational activism that had defined the character of Detroit's "short Black Power movement."<sup>94</sup> In following the stories and lives of black youth activists who were on the path to joining

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<sup>94</sup> See Goldberg and Griffey for more on the "short movement" as a historiographical paradigm. David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

the working class, the professional class, or the lumpen proletariat, Black Power's footprint in unexplored spaces becomes more legible. When Dixon published his article, "The Black Student and the Brother in the Streets," in 1968, Black Power activists and theorists wondered about the role of black students in the movement. At that time, many of the students who feature prominently in this history were barely adolescents. And yet, their battles for economic justice suggest that they saw class struggles as the link between them and the brother in the streets.

## Conclusion

*I think it's important that this history be recorded so that those who are coming after me can look back upon the legacy of the things myself and other people my age have been involved in just as I have studied and read about those who came before me.*<sup>1</sup>

Malik Yakini

Between September 1969 and January 1970, the Office of Students and Youth in the Office of Education received 137 reports detailing “serious disruptions” that had occurred in schools across the country. In his letter to Michigan Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Toby Moffett, the director of the Office of Students and Youth, categorized these disruptions as disturbances over racial tensions, the presence of police officers in schools, and school policies. According to Moffett, forms of disorder included walkouts, sit-ins, and absenteeism. He stated that the causes of student unrest had initially ranged from concerns over the quality of cafeteria food to rigid dress codes. But in time, student unrest occurred over “more substantive issues” like the right to publish, to assemble, and to create political organizations. Moffett addressed student unrest that had occurred in Detroit as well as Chicago and Elizabeth, New Jersey. In his letter, he asked policymakers to consider implementing solutions that would slow the tide of student unrest and demonstrate to students that officials took their concerns seriously. Such proposals included forming student-parent-faculty councils and student courts, and time during school to have informal discussions between school administrators, students and parents. Furthermore, Moffett explained, school boards should welcome parent and student participation during board meetings. Unrest in secondary schools during the

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<sup>1</sup> Malik Yakini, Interview with the author, July 23, 2010.

Black Power era grabbed the attention of the American polity in such a way that produced meaningful responses from both the federal and local government.<sup>2</sup>

While the “flashpoints” of this history – the walkouts and the sit-ins – made local and national headlines, the experiential and historical knowledge that made these heady moments possible remained illegible to school officials, and until now, historians. This study has revealed the ways in which high school youth marshalled their experiences with segregation, violence, and the black radical tradition to inform the strategic approaches they took to multiple sites of struggle for Black Liberation. It has examined the familial and communal networks that supported this generation of activists, as well as the movement culture they helped to shape.

Although urban historian Thomas Sugrue has claimed that “geography is destiny” in postwar America, the lives that black migrants and their offspring tried to fashion for themselves demonstrated black American’s battle to redefine their destinies.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the postwar period, black Detroiters met resistance at every turn as they tried to carve out space in formerly white enclaves. Battling structural racism in housing, employment, policing, and education, they produced a culture of resistance. At the heart of this local movement culture was an intergenerational tradition that relied on rigorous study of concrete conditions and a conception of black history and culture as a source of knowledge about power and politics. Within this movement, black high school youth

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<sup>2</sup> The Office of Education was then used interchangeable term to describe the U.S. Department of Education. Toby Moffett to Rep. Charles Diggs, March 9, 1970, Box 2, Folder 6, Remus Robinson Collection Papers, 1928-1970, The Walter P. Reuther of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-War Detroit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

found adult allies, analytical tools, and material resources to launch their own struggle for liberatory education.

These Black student activists carried the organizing skills and theoretical approaches to struggles they gained in the movement into their adult lives – as labor activists, educators, and civic leaders. Many of the young people who led the Black Student United Front entered the factories when they left high school while others pursued higher education. They often maintained connections with their movement networks as well. The lives they led after high school, and the work they continue to do, reveals the legacy of Detroit’s “short Black Power movement” and its struggles for liberatory education. The culture of resistance that the black radical tradition nurtured proved to be crucial to the life-long commitments that its young people made to social justice struggles. And the diversity of black thought that shaped the production of black youth politics in the Motor City launched a generation of activists whose analysis of class and race would ultimately shape the quiet moments of struggle that have shaped post-Civil Rights America.

When the League split in 1971, Gregory Hicks maintained ties with Kenneth Cockrel, Sr, a founding member of the League and radical lawyer. Both Cockrel and Hicks joined the Labor Defense Coalition and helped to dismantle the decoy and surveillance squad, STRESS. Years later, Hicks joined the Detroit Alliance for a Rational Economy (D.A.R.E.) and served as the Vice President of Programming for the Detroit Urban League. During the 2000s, he joined the Detroit Charter Revision Commission as the Executive Director and would later pursue a doctoral degree in Sociology at Wayne State University. As a student, Hicks gained critical insight into how municipal structures

worked. But he had already learned the importance of studying these structures to understand how local power worked.<sup>4</sup>

While Hicks continued to work with urban civil rights organizations, many of his peers, including Darryl Mitchell and Cassandra Ford, went to work in the auto factories where they joined the ranks of black labor activists. When Mitchell dropped out of high school, he attended Highland Park Community College for a few years to become a drug counselor. But for much of his life, he was an autoworker at the Ford Motor Company where he retired from after thirty years. Over the years, he maintained his relationship with General Gordon Baker and joined the League of New Revolutionaries for America (LNRA), an anti-capitalist organization that consists of members of the older League of Revolutionary Black Workers.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, when Cassandra Ford left school, she entered the Cadillac auto factories in 1974. Once there, she began organizing to improve working conditions for women. Since the League did not have a base in the Cadillac plants, Ford brought her experiences as a high school organizer to bear on a plant that had little or no commitment to the League. As a black, female worker at Cadillac, Ford encountered harassment from men who asked her why she was working or where her husband was. She took these concerns to the UAW International Union. These questions made Ford realize that it was for her time to take up the struggle for women in labor. Years later, Ford went to work for the General Motors company where she was appointed the safety trainer, and later, the alternate health and safety representative. Her position was likely a consequence of the Richard Nixon administration's passage of the Occupational Safety

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory Hicks, interview with the author, July 17, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Waistline and The League of Revolutionaries for a New America (<http://www.lrna.org/index.html>), accessed February 15, 2018.

and Health Act in 1970.<sup>6</sup> After working thirty years in the plants, Ford retired and became the financial secretary for retirees. Other members of the Black Student United Front, like Jeri Love, left the city of Detroit, but continued to organize around social justice issues. When Love graduated from Cass Technical High School, she moved to Ohio and later Los Angeles, and remained committed to labor struggles. But since the 2000s, she has worked as a freelance writer and photographer.<sup>7</sup>

Black student activists who organized independently of adult organizations pursued degrees in higher education or became educators. When Shirikiana Aina graduated from Cass Technical High School, she enrolled at Wayne State University for two years where she joined the Association of Black Students. There, she helped to create the Association of Black Communicators, along with Jemetta Lily, her friend and fellow activist at Cass Tech. Aina later decided to transfer to Howard University for its Communications program, where she became interested in film. She received her bachelor's degree in Film and a master's degree in African Film Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. She later directed the documentary *Brick by Brick* and several other films.<sup>8</sup> Aina is now the co-owner of Sankofa Video Books and Café in Washington, D.C. with her husband and Ethiopian filmmaker, Haile Gerima who wrote and produced the film, *Sankofa*. Jemetta Lily also attended Wayne State University. Since the 2000s, she's worked as an early childhood professional and later developed the Wayne

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Babson, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986)

<sup>7</sup> Darryl Mitchell, interview with the author, July 20, 2010; Cassandra Ford, interview with the author, August 5, 2010; Jeri Love, interview with the author, October 30, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> University of California, Los Angeles, Film and Television Archive, "L.A. Rebellion: Shirikiana Aina, <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/shirikiana-aina>)

Children's Healthcare Access Program. (WCHAP) where she is the President and Principal Consultant for Dynamic Solutions for Change.<sup>9</sup>

Many of these black high school activists carried their commitment to Afro-centric education into their own classrooms as educators. Malik Yakini attended Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in Ypsilanti, Michigan where he became a member of the Black Student Association. Upon graduating from EMU in 1978, Yakini went to work for the federally-funded Comprehensive Youth Services Program. Soon after, the Detroit Public School system hired him as an Adult Education teacher. In this role, Yakini helped to develop the African American Life and Studies curriculum, which DPS added to its social studies curriculum. This work led him to join one of Detroit's first Afro-centric schools, Aisha Shule.<sup>10</sup> After encountering issues at Aisha Shule, Yakini left to create his own school, Nsoroma Institute on the East Side, which operated for twenty years. He is now the Executive Director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Michael Simanga (Humphrey) left high school while organizing a Detroit chapter of the Congress of African People after his time studying under Amiri Baraka in Newark.<sup>12</sup> Although Humphrey worked in Detroit's auto factories briefly, he soon left to form the Atlanta chapter of the National Black United Front (NBUF). After earning his PhD in African American Studies from Union Institute and University, Humphrey has dedicated his life to teaching. He is a lecturer in the Department of African American

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<sup>9</sup> Dynamic Solutions for Change, <http://www.dchange.org/Jametta%20Lilly%20%20bio%20%20highlightsL%20ECDv123-3.pdf> (accessed 2/14/18)

<sup>10</sup> For more on Afro-centric schooling in Detroit, especially during the 1970s, see Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory*, Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People*, and William J.V. Neill, *Urban Planning and Cultural Identity*

<sup>11</sup> Food First, "Malik Yakini," <https://foodfirst.org/team/malik-yakini/>, accessed February 15, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 26.

Studies at Georgia State University and the author of *Congress of African People: History and Memory* and “We Declare Our Right to Be a Human Being” in *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X, Real Not Reinvented* The former Detroit Panther and Cooley High School student, Dorita Smith, has spent much of her life as a museum educator.<sup>13</sup>

The story of black high school student activism in Detroit is a story of young people who possessed “freedom dreams” that were deeply informed by living history. It was a vision where young people saw their destinies “all bound up together” with their adult counterparts and the broader African and African American community.<sup>14</sup> They fought for a conception of black education that could arm them with the knowledge and resources they needed to improve the social, political, and economic conditions of urban America, and they aimed to do so with an analysis of race, class, and gender that had deep roots in the Great Migration.

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<sup>13</sup> Malik Yakini, interview with the author, July 23, 2010; Michael Humphrey, interview with the author, March 1, 2017; and Dorita Smith, interview with the author, July 10, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> My use of the concept “freedom dreams” derives from Robin D.G. Kelley’s *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Jones argues that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, black women used existing black institutions to fight for various issues. They worked alongside men, even when it was challenging. She claimed that the women’s question was at the heart of anti-slavery and civil rights movements. Giddings’ work also revealed that only when black women are treated as full citizens is when the entire black race will as well. Both books speak to a kind of collectivism that we haven’t seen in studies of black youth activism.

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