GHETTO NATION: BLACK POWER AND THE DETROIT REBELLION OF 1967

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A THESIS

Submitted to Adams State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. in United States History

October 2016

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Black Nationalism and the Detroit Rebellion of 1967
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Masters of Arts in Humanities: United States History, has been approved and accepted by the following:

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ABSTRACT

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By the 1960s, millions of African Americans faced pervasive discrimination in housing, education, employment, and law enforcement in the wholly unprecedented environment of the American ghetto. In the urban areas where institutional racism was most oppressive and the evolution of civil rights activity was most acute, violence was inevitable. After several long, hot summers of urban unrest throughout the United States, Detroit, Michigan exploded on July 23, 1967.

The most comprehensive study of the Detroit Rebellion of 1967 is Sidney Fine's *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967.* In his evaluation of the meaning of the violence, Fine's conclusions stray little from the official account as reported by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders; he acknowledged the presence of legitimate grievances held by urban blacks but rejected the idea that the violence was a political statement meant to bring about change.

This revision to Fine's interpretation is based upon an analysis of the political meanings of violence; a reconsideration of contemporaneous social science research; the increased scrutiny of riot commission politics; and a reevaluation of the intensification of civil rights activity as revealed by the burgeoning field of Black Power scholarship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Dr. Edward R. Crowther for his technical and scholarly assistance, his high expectations, and his passion for civil rights justice.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The American Ghetto

"If you call it a riot, you're taking sides."
– Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs[1]

On Monday, July 24, 1967, the front page of the *New York Times* reported that the Detroit Rebellion of 1967 was underway – although the *Times* did not characterize the disorder as "rebellion." On the contrary, the *Times* used language that ascribed an altogether different meaning to the violence. "Thousands of rampaging Negroes," as the *Times* saw it, "firebombed and looted huge sections of Detroit last night and early today." In scenes that would persist over the next four days, "[g]reat clouds of smoke from flaming tenements and shattered businesses and homes lay over much of the city as dusk came, and the smell of smoke pervaded the night air." The triggering event was an otherwise routine encounter between the largely white Detroit Police and black ghetto residents. Within twenty-four hours the violence had spread to the main thoroughfares of the city. "A four mile section of Woodward," the *Times* article continued, "was plundered by looters, and a three-mile section of Grand River was hit by looting and firebombing, which raged along 18 blocks of 12th Street." The country tuned in to the dramatic scenes emanating from Detroit as "[v]iolence spread uncontrolled over much of the city."[2]

Another article sharing the space above the fold in that Monday edition of the *Times* summarized the concluding session of the First National Black Power Conference from Newark, New Jersey – a city still smoldering after it had erupted in violence only a few weeks earlier. More than 1100 delegates representing over 280 organizations and institutions cheered as the conference adopted a "black-power manifesto." The manifesto included an agreement to boycott Negro churches "not committed to the 'black

revolution.'" They demanded the establishment of "'Black national holidays' to honor such 'national heroes' as the late Malcolm X." There was broad approval for wresting social and economic control from the white power structure by establishing "'black universities' [and] Negro-controlled financial institutions." There was broad support for a resolution calling for the "refusal to accept birth control programs on the basis that they seek to exterminate Negroes." Another resolution called for "Paramilitary training for Negro youths." And, following the massive white backlash to more than a decade of integration efforts, delegates cheered with "enthusiastic support for a resolution for 'starting a national dialogue on the desirability of partitioning the United States into two separate nations, one white and one black.'"[3]

Over several long, hot summers in the mid-1960s, hundreds of inner city areas throughout the United States experienced disorders; some small and brief, others more violent and deadly. The wave of violence contradicted what many Americans had learned to expect about civil rights activity over the course of the previous decade; that is, if there was to be any violence, it would come from those resisting change, not from those struggling to bring it about. Indeed, for many observers, the urban disorders had nothing at all to do with civil rights; they were not even disorders, they were riots. Modern celebrations of the civil rights movement tend to confirm this view by honoring the peaceful demonstrator who got his head cracked open and condemning the one who picked up a brick to make his point. For others, however, the violence represented nothing less than a rebellion against the white power structure of a country whose racialized history contradicts the regularly articulated ideals of the nation itself.[4]

When contrasted with the dignified nonviolent civil rights protestor of historical memory, it is very difficult to see a brick-wielding black man in front of a burned out building as anything but a "rampaging Negro," as the *New York Times* described him.[5] The television images broadcast from Detroit in July of 1967 did nothing to dispel the belief that inner city blacks in America were simply out of control. A closer examination of this urban environment, however, reveals a world where oppressive institutional forces limited African American opportunity and pilfered African American dignity. A more thorough telling of their history reveals ancestors whose troubles mimicked their own. Most importantly, a comprehensive analysis of attitudes and perceptions has the potential to reveal deeper meaning to their actions.

In the past twenty years, historians Timothy B. Tyson, Peniel E. Joseph, and others have initiated new thinking about Black Power's scope, influence, and interconnectedness with more popular accounts of civil rights history. This new historiography challenges the previous marginalization of Black Power. In 2009, Joseph wrote:

> This wave of scholarship on the era has begun to demystify, complicate, and intellectually engage demonized, dismissed, and overlooked actors and struggles by providing nuanced, well-researched, and weighty narratives that document the profound implications of black power politics for the study of African American history and U.S. history more broadly.[6]

In the years leading up to the rebellion, Detroit exhibited many of the characteristics revealed by this new Black Power historiography.

The finest single account of the Detroit Rebellion is Sidney Fine's *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967*. His extensive research focused largely on government records, organizational records,

and media accounts. He sympathizes with the "rioters" whose grievances he views as legitimate. He reports on the presence of radical militant activity in Detroit but does not believe that this contributed to the violence. Fine clearly prefers "riot" to "rebellion," although he does not view the violence as completely meaningless. "The riot is best seen as a form of protest designed to call attention to the condition of blacks," Fine concluded, "but it does not appear to have been aimed at restructuring political power in the city."[7] The current argument is offered as a revision to Fine's conclusion.

Grace Lee Boggs said, "If you call it a riot, you're taking sides."[8] Her implication is that "riot" is equivalent to meaningless violence devoid of social or political significance beyond the destruction itself. In its present iteration, however, use of the word "riot" need not necessarily imply a lack of political or social agency.

Some of those who have studied riots have argued that these events are important and meaningful aspects of history. Historian Robert M. Fogelson, in his 1971 *Violence as Protest*, described those that rioted in the 1960s in terms of a growing sense of black solidarity. He argued that many young urban blacks are "nationalistic" and "exceptionally conscious of their racial heritage." Simultaneously, they are "materialistic," acutely aware of and "deeply influenced by American standards."[9] Other work published in the few years after the long, hot summers confirmed the presence of social and political motivations within the acts of violence. In *The Revolt of the Urban Ghettos, 1964-1967* (1970), Joseph Boskin characterized rioting as potentially an act of racial brotherhood and that broad community support for rioting was often more widespread than official accounts have determined.[10] Eugene H. Methvin made the most provocative assessment

of an organized effort to bring about violence. In *The Riot Makers* (1970), he suggested that rioters "were waging the American Revolution all over again."[11]

In another work published after *Violence in the Model City*, Paul Gilje argued that "riots have been instrumental in compelling political change and have reflected major social developments. To tell the story of rioting in American history is in large part to rehearse the story of *all* of American history."[12] In *Rioting in America* (1996), Gilje encouraged the examination of what motivates rioters. He wrote that, "We must therefore focus our attention on the little guy – the man in the street – and determine what he thought and believed."[13] Following Sidney Fine's observation that "Black nationalist and black power groups proliferated in Detroit in the 1960s," serious consideration should be given to the effect these groups had upon the man in the street.[14]

Just one year before the Detroit Rebellion, during the Meredith Mississippi Freedom March, Stokely Carmichael branded a strain of radical civil rights activism that had been coursing its way through decades of the black freedom struggle. Carmichael's invocation of "Black Power" on a muggy Mississippi night inspired Southern blacks to stand up to white resistance. According to Black Power historian Peniel E. Joseph, Carmichael's speech that night "forever altered the course of the modern civil rights movement." Three days later, Carmichael appeared before a national television audience on CBS's *Face the Nation.* When asked about Black Power and its suggestion of violence, Carmichael turned the conversation to the meaning of democracy to dispossessed citizens; he spoke directly to the economic inequalities generated by racism; he compared America's troubles at home to America's troubles in Vietnam; and he framed the civil rights struggle as a human rights struggle. Sixteen months after the

assassination of Malcolm X, Carmichael's calm demeanor and "aura of self confidence" marked the emergence of the new leader of Black Power; an old movement with a new slogan.[15]

In contrast to the civil rights movement, Black Power expressed impatience. It forcefully called on America to live up to its promises. It spoke to the poverty generated by racism. It reached beyond America's shores and forged a brotherhood with others burdened by the colonial yoke. It is important to point out that, by 1967, the civil rights movement personified by Martin Luther King began to debate these same Black Power themes. King's 1966 campaign in Chicago illuminated the dark relationship between poverty and racism. His 1967 public stand against the Vietnam War, while angering many of his followers, raised serious historical questions regarding the West's treatment of non-white peoples around the world. While dividing the civil rights community, King's strategic evolution represented an important characteristic of Black Power and the popularly remembered civil rights movement; as Tyson has written, the two seemingly incompatible movements "emerged from the same soil."[16]

Essentially, the civil rights and Black Power movements diverged most dramatically in their faith – or, lack of faith - in white society. In *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (2010), Joseph writes that key Black Power figures like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael "questioned the legitimacy of democratic institutions whose doors were closed off to African Americans."[17] Making claims of institutionally based racism set Black Power advocates apart from organizations that fought for integration and, in doing so, "openly questioned America's capacity to extend full citizenship to African Americans." Malcolm's associations with reforming prisoners

and Carmichael's associations with black sharecroppers in the South highlighted the plight of neglected American "underdogs." Their attitudes towards impoverished ghetto residents distinguished them further from largely middle-class participants in the civil rights movement. Black Power's challenge to America was based less upon philosophical arguments of justice and more upon the raw evidence of "democracy's shortcomings."[18]

Malcolm X, and then Carmichael, stood as national, and sometimes international, spokesmen for a relatively structure-less movement grounded in a variety of applications and interpretations of black self-determination. In *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (2008), Thomas J. Sugrue situated Black Power within a complex variety of black activism including its social and cultural manifestations arising out of a "long-running black self-help tradition." Lacking any specific organizational structure made Black Power a difficult idea to nail down, but it also allowed the slogan to become "a synonym for all varieties of black militancy, even when they varied enormously." In this interpretation, one need not adopt any rigid set of Black Power ideologies - for they did not exist - to be impacted by the overriding messages of racial pride, cultural expression, political and economic self-determination, and potentially, the lingering notion that nonviolence had its limits.[19]

Much of the new Black Power historiography focuses on the social and cultural forces that provided the movement with a spiritual foundation. Black Power's global outlook and identification with anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia developed simultaneously with a burgeoning black cultural identity with African overtones. As Joseph writes, Komozi Woodard's *A Nation within a Nation* (1999), "was among the first to take the era seriously as both a political and cultural movement."[20] Political aims of

self-determination were enriched by music and poetry with African rhythms. Black Power figures adopted African names, dress, and natural hairstyles. Black publications such as *Liberator*, *Soulbook*, *Negro Digest*, *Muhammad Speaks*, and *Freedomways* commented on the volatile political climate of the early 1960s with a literary and intellectual bent. Bookstores in cities like Harlem, Newark, and Detroit became repositories of black cultural nationalism.[21]

In an influential 1999 article, "Black Like Mao," Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch identified similar cross-currents within "the previously obscure Revolutionary Action Movement." RAM was organized in Ohio in 1962 and chapters were established in many urban areas including Detroit. Kelley and Esch place RAM "at the center of early black power-era political and cultural activism"[22] Marrying political radicalism with a black cultural consciousness broadened the scope of Black Power while demystifying its violent characterizations. RAM's emergence from the shadows, Joseph writes, "critically expands the movement's cast of organizations and characters."[23]

Black Power's cast grows even larger when considered in light of its interconnectedness with the civil rights movement. While Tyson argued that the two movements "emerged from the same soil,"[24] Joseph takes the metaphor one step further by situating the civil rights and Black Power movements as branches of the same tree. In *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour* (2006), Joseph sees Black Power originating in the 1950s when it "paralleled, and at times overlapped, the heroic civil rights era."[25] From the 1954 *Brown* decision to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the heroic period is well documented with iconic images of dignified protestors peacefully challenging Jim Crow in the South. An examination of early Black Power's less publicized activism during the same period,

however, "reveals a political landscape where early black power militants and civil rights activists operated alongside each other and forged pragmatic working relationships."[26]

An examination of Detroit during the evolution of Black Power reveals local manifestations of the movement's most prominent characteristics. First and foremost, Black Power arose in Detroit as a result of the rapid pace of demographic change. As the "arsenal of democracy," Detroit's retooled auto industry attracted tens of thousands of blacks during World War II. Following the war, jobs generated by America's insatiable appetite for automobiles made the Motor City a favored destination for blacks streaming out of the South. From 1940 to 1960, the black population of Detroit soared from less than 150,000 to over 482,000, a 220 percent increase. In 1940, less than one in ten Detroiters was black. Twenty years later, more than one in four were black.[27]

While popular accounts of the civil rights movement focus on the Southern freedom struggle, activists in the North faced their own less publicized challenges. As neighborhoods throughout the North were rapidly transformed by the huge influx of black migrants, white resistance was often hostile. As Thomas J. Sugrue has written, "Cross burnings, arson, window breakings, and mobs greeted black newcomers to white neighborhoods in nearly every major northern city between the 1920s and the 1960s."[28] In Detroit, Northern Jim Crow meant that hundreds of thousands of blacks were crowded into the most densely populated areas of the city. Federal loan policies, restrictive real estate covenants, and massive white resistance maintained hard and fast racial boundaries embraced by private and public forces of control.[29] Homeowner associations fought aggressively to keep blacks out of their tightly knit, often ethnically homogenous, communities. "In Detroit, between 1945 and 1965," as Sugrue has observed, "nearly two

hundred white neighborhood associations formed – most with the explicit purpose of keeping blacks away."[30] Despite organized and often violent resistance to neighborhood integration, once black families began to move in, it was only a matter of a few years before previously all-white neighborhoods became almost exclusively black.[31]

Large concentrations of black people and mistreatment at the hands of whites provided fertile ground for radical ideas to flourish. In 1940, the Twelfth Street area of Detroit was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood whose "business district bustled with shoppers going to its kosher butchers, bakeries and delicatessens, and its haberdasheries." Blacks began to move into the area in 1947. By 1960, less than one in twenty-five residents was white. As the transition from white to black occurred, many of the businesses in the Twelfth Street area remained in the hands of those who no longer lived in the neighborhood. Outside ownership of these businesses served to drain the area of its economic resources. Many of these white-owned businesses, whose hiring practices and credit policies often infuriated blacks, were looted and burned during the rebellion.[32]

Blacks faced challenges in the workplace, too. "Once hired," according to Sugrue, "blacks found themselves placed in the least desirable jobs, disproportionately in unskilled and semi-skilled sectors, usually in the dirtiest and most dangerous parts of the plant."[33] Overall, blacks in the United States made 53 cents for every dollar whites earned and unemployment for blacks was roughly double that of whites. In the early 1960s, as the economy waned and Detroit's automobile factories turned more to automation, blacks were the first to go.[34]

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders - a riot commission established to investigate the urban unrest of the mid-1960s, commonly referred to as the

Kerner Commission - confirmed that housing and education segregation fiercely limited opportunities for ghetto residents. Over 40 percent of the non-white population in the United States was considered poor in 1964. Densely packed neighborhoods of underemployed blacks created islands of poverty in America's cities.[35] Poverty bred crime; alcohol, drugs, gambling, and prostitution became regular features of ghetto life. Unemployed and underemployed young blacks living in this environment were regularly drawn toward alternative ways to make money; which obviously attracted the attention of the police. In this "atmosphere of hostility and cynicism" the slightest incident between police and ghetto residents had the potential to unleash a torrent of anxiety and frustration, as it did time and again throughout the mid-1960s.[36]

The most pernicious aspect of ghetto life was the overcrowded and dilapidated segregated school where a culture of low expectations almost guaranteed that the conditions in the ghetto would persist. This has "severe effects on education," according to the Kerner Report, because "teachers are forced to concentrate on maintaining classroom discipline, and thus have little time and energy to perform the primary function – educating the students."[37] Perhaps most degrading for the African American child is the irrelevance of the ghetto school's curriculum. "Few books used or courses offered," the report continues, "reflected the harsh realities of life in the ghetto, or the contribution of Negroes to the country's culture and history."[38]

For the poorest blacks, housing and education segregation left them living in slums. Government programs meant to ease some of the physical conditions of the poorest areas actually made those problems worse. In Detroit, "Negro removal," the reality of urban renewal programs, "destroyed four homes for every home built." Low

income housing was demolished and replaced, if at all, by middle and upper income homes. As the Black Bottom neighborhood of Detroit was razed, for example, blacks had little choice but to move to established black neighborhoods in other parts of the city. Blacks displaced by seemingly well-meaning programs saturated neighborhoods such as the Twelfth Street area. It is no coincidence that Twelfth Street experienced some of the most devastating violence during July of 1967.[39]

The conditions in the ghetto shaped an entire generation's outlook. By 1967, Detroit blacks in their forties and fifties had largely been born in the South. Their children, on the other hand, were raised in the unprecedented circumstances of the ghetto; in large part, it was these young people who were much more likely to participate in the rebellion. A survey of the Twelfth Street riot area determined that "Fifty-nine percent of [Detroit's 60,000][40] rioters were between 15 and 24 years old." Many had arrived as young children during the Great Migration or had been born in Detroit during the baby boom following the war. Their experiences, expectations, and attitudes were shaped by urban factors far removed from the rural moments of their parents. By the mid-1960s, an entire generation of young urban blacks had come of age where crime and negative interactions with the police were regular features of ghetto culture.[41]

In Detroit, as in other urban areas, a small burgeoning black middle-class existed side by side with poor and working-class blacks. In a 1965 report titled The *Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote that, "the emergence and increasing visibility of a Negro middle-class family may beguile the nation into supposing that the circumstances of the remainder of the Negro community are equally prosperous, whereas just the opposite is true at present, and is likely to

continue so."[42] The Kerner Report affirmed Moynihan's observation. "Between 2 and 2.5 million Negroes - 16 to 20 percent of the total Negro population of all central cities – live in squalor and deprivation in ghetto neighborhoods." Even as middle-class blacks in Detroit had escaped many of the most degrading aspects of ghetto life, a rigid system of segregation limited their mobility and their opportunities.[43]

The instability of large numbers of Negro families tended to impact all Negro families. As Moynihan concluded, "because of housing segregation it is immensely difficult for the stable [family] to escape from the cultural influences of the unstable one." Blacks raising children in Detroit found it extremely difficult to keep them away from the most corrupting influences of the worst parts of the ghetto. Many of the children of the middle-class "are therefore constantly exposed to the pathology of the disturbed group and constantly in danger of being drawn into it." The squalor and deprivation were just around the corner.[44] It should come as no surprise, then, that housing issues, a dearth of employment opportunities, concentrated areas of poverty, and the failure of the schools were all cited as primary grievances of Detroit's rioters and those sympathetic to the rioters.[45]

Moynihan wrote that "large numbers of Negro youth appear to be withdrawing from American society." However, in order to withdraw from American society, Negro youth must have at once been a part of it. The reality is that blacks of the inner city "share almost no community life with whites."[46] Contacts with whites were often limited to business owners, landlords, and the police; and many of these interactions were fraught with racially charged tensions. White business owners exploited ghetto residents by charging higher prices for low quality goods. Credit practices made many residents

beholden to white creditors who lived in the suburbs. Landlords divided single family residences to maximize rents. As to the police, ghetto residents often saw them as the forces of an occupying army. Much of the violence during the Detroit Rebellion was directed at this white presence in the ghetto.[47]

The 400-plus page Kerner Report was widely distributed throughout the country. For many whites, this became their first glimpse into what it meant to be black in America. "Our nation is moving toward two societies," the commission concluded, "one black, one white – separate and unequal." The report's allusion to the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy V. Ferguson, 1896*, illustrated an elemental feature of the American landscape following the Civil War. Thirteen years after *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down *Plessy*, America's large urban areas remained heavily segregated; the vast majority of African Americans lived in a separate world wholly unknown to the vast majority of whites.[48] Perhaps most shocking to whites who knew little of the ghetto was the report's assertion that white society was responsible for the deplorable conditions under which many blacks lived:

> What white Americans have never fully understood – but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.[49]

Whether middle-class, working-class, or poor, all Detroit blacks lived in an overwhelmingly racist city. Dr. Luke Tripp recently reflected on his experiences growing up in Detroit of the 1950s. Much of the racism Tripp faced bubbled up from systemic cultural pressure. His African American family moved into a predominantly Polish working-class neighborhood in 1954. A friendly immigrant family lived next door even though they could barely speak English. Yet, as they adapted to their new community,

white immigrants learned how to be accepted. "Other Polish-American neighbors would often call us niggers," Tripp recalled. He believes that, as they assimilated, European "immigrants quickly learned that being called 'white' meant better treatment; so many of them discriminated against blacks just so they could be accepted as 'white' and therefore 'American.'" The process of cultural assimilation bred individual acts of racism just as other broad aspects of daily life were shaped by cultural norms that encouraged racism. As Tripp lived it, "institutional racism" beat down on blacks when they shopped in stores, looked for work, went to school, and interacted with the police.[50]

Racism affected all classes. Marsha Battle Philpot grew up in 1960s Detroit. She recently recalled that as a young girl she enjoyed hanging out at her father's Twelfth Street record shop on the west side of town. A legend in the early pre-Motown recording scene, Joe Von Battle "is regarded by many as a cornerstone in the building of the 'Detroit Sound.'" Since 1953, Von Battle had been recording and distributing the sermons of the Reverend C.L. Franklin of New Bethel Baptist Church. His daughter Aretha was first recorded by Von Battle as she sang in New Bethel's choir. He also recorded many Blues and R&B artists like John Lee Hooker as these forms gave birth to Rock 'N Roll. Marsha is too young to remember when Joe's Record Shop (and recording studio) had been on Detroit's east side during the 1950s. When urban renewal programs and freeway construction resulted in the destruction of many of the buildings around his Hastings Street business, Von Battle was forced to relocate. In 1960, despite the inequalities and segregation, he successfully reestablished his business on Twelfth Street, only blocks from the epicenter of the Detroit Rebellion.[51]

Marsha spoke fondly of her early memories. However, when asked about racial attitudes in Detroit during the early and mid-1960s, her demeanor became more serious. "We were so aware of inequality," she said. The recollection of a single incident reminded her of the degradation of living as second-class citizens. While helping her father shop for a birthday present for her mother, a white clerk at a high-end department store approached Von Battle and told him, "You can't afford to shop here." Marsha had not thought about this scene for a while. The "memories just blacked out," she recalled sadly, "the shame of it." She learned at a young age that there were "stores in town I knew I wasn't welcome."[52]

As a businessman, Von Battle was able to shield his family from some of the most humiliating aspects of growing up black in Detroit. It was a different story for those in the poor and densely populated areas of town. There was "widespread poverty" in Detroit, Tripp said. It was an "intensely racist" city and the "police department was the most repressive." Overt instances of abuse and brutality angered blacks but these were not as common as the persistent and pervasive presence of racially motivated "micro-aggressions" that attacked the dignity of black people.[53]

The alienation experienced by urban blacks was exacerbated by their unprecedented access to a televised white American life. According to a survey of hundreds of those arrested in the Detroit Rebellion, 84 per cent reported having a TV in their home.[54] By 1963, television had become an American fascination. Viewers tuned in regularly to shows like *Route 66*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *The Fugitive*. For urban black viewers in Detroit, however, TV entertained them with scenes from a white world where blacks were rarely portrayed. For example, some of the most popular shows among a

sampling of riot arrestees in Detroit were westerns like *The Virginian*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, and *Gunsmoke*.[55] As popular culture historian J. Fred MacDonald has observed, "Although African Americans played a crucial part in the history of the actual West, only rarely did they appear in the video West created by Hollywood." Millions of white kids identified with the gun-slinging cowboy or the white rancher carving out a living on the plains. Their place in American history and their role in American society could be imagined. Black kids received an equally powerful message about their role in American society; they were largely invisible. Another message may have been delivered to young blacks who enjoyed TV westerns; guns and violence can solve problems.[56]

Other shows like *I Spy*, *Mission Impossible*, and *Star Trek* introduced black characters, yet their roles were secondary to almost completely white casts.[57] In one program, a large black cast played the foil to a white star. "I'm tired of looking at television," Stokely Carmichael told an audience in 1966, "and seeing Tarzan beating up black people. I want to see some of those black people beat the hell out of Tarzan and send him home."[58]

Television programs with all those white faces regularly reinforced notions of Negro inferiority and second-class citizenship. Perhaps the most glaring portrayal of a white-run world, however, was found in TV commercials. "[E]very day, every hour," John Hersey writes of the black man in the ghetto, "he is sanctioned by the pretty white girl in the commercial lighting up and taking a deep puff… or naked in the shower behind the ripple of glass, arms raised to the white, white lather in her blond, blond hair."[59] Hersey imagined how, "to poorer blacks, the lilywhite commercials act as an ironic affront" to their dignity.[60] For the generation that came of age in Detroit of the 1950s and

early 1960s, TV became a daily reminder of the wide gulf between the American dream and the ghetto. "Through television and other media," reads the Kerner Report, the "affluence [of the white world] has been flaunted before the eyes of the Negro poor and the jobless ghetto youth."[61]

Many of the black faces that did appear on the television screens of ghetto homes were found on the evening news. The generation that came of age by the mid-1960s had been raised during the infancy of the widely televised civil rights movement. A majority of those who rioted were fifteen to twenty-four years-old. A twenty year-old Detroit rioter in 1967 would have been seven as the Supreme Court proclaimed that segregated schools violated the Constitution. He would have been eight as Martin Luther King came to national prominence during the Montgomery Bus Boycott; thirteen as the Greensboro Four attempted to integrate North Carolina lunch counters and sixteen when Birmingham exploded in 1963. Television provided dramatic and unprecedented access to these events.

Blacks and whites in the early 1960s had very different perceptions of civil rights progress. For many whites in America, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had fulfilled the promise of civil rights equality. For many urban blacks, however, promises of political equality did little to alleviate economic inequalities and institutional discrimination. Many whites, including liberals who saw themselves as defenders of racial justice, viewed the landmark legislation of the 1960s as culminating victories in the struggle for civil rights justice; to many blacks, they amounted to nothing more than broken promises. Federal laws that called for the protection of voting rights and an end to discrimination did little to ameliorate the crushing resilience of

institutionally based attitudes and practices that defined the daily life of ghetto residents. Civil rights legislation did not change the neighborhood; it did not change the schools; and it did not change police behavior.[62]

Whether effective or not, civil rights milestones raised hopes that conditions would improve. For many blacks, however, this hope only led to frustration fed by the contradictions of daily life in Detroit. A post-riot survey of those who lived in the Twelfth Street riot area concluded "that the riots sweeping the nation's cities are rooted in deep frustrations but have many similarities to a revolution of rising expectations."[63] For a time, it was thought that Detroit's relatively prosperous black community was immune to the violence that was sweeping through other cities during the long, hot summers. On the contrary, some have argued that this prosperity actually increased the intensity of Detroit's violence. "It was not surprising," as Sidney Fine wrote, "that Detroit, where blacks had made greater progress than blacks elsewhere but where they had been led to expect still greater advances, experienced the worst riot of all."[64]

Sidney Fine agrees that rising expectations of blacks in Detroit contributed to the violence. He is less sure about other potential influences. "It is difficult, if not impossible," Fine surmised without conviction, "to speak with certainty regarding the identity of the Detroit rioters and the reasons why they behaved the way they did."[65] His uncertainty mirrors the conclusions of the Kerner Commission as it considered the influence of Black Power, "We cannot measure with any precision," reads the report, "the influence of these organizations and individuals in the ghetto."[66] Most important to the current argument is that both the premier scholar of the Detroit Rebellion and the federal government have left open the question of Black Power's influence.

In a contemporaneous review of Fine's book, historian Joe Trotter wrote that "although [*Violence in the Model City*] illuminates the role of civil rights leaders, nationalists, and, to a great degree, street-level participants through the use of survey data, Fine is less clear on how the riot took shape within the dynamics of the changing black community."[67] Perhaps most significant in this changing social environment is that the civil rights movement thoroughly failed to address ghetto grievances. For poor and working-class blacks in America's inner cities, Fogelson argued, "the ghetto's conditions are conclusive proof that the moderates' tactics are ineffective, their strategies irrelevant, and their goals misguided." Rejection of the dominant themes of the civil rights movement, including a philosophical commitment to nonviolence in pursuit of racial integration, created an ideological vacuum where new tactics, strategies, and goals might develop. In Detroit, Black Power ideas offered an appealing alternative.[68]

Chapter II begins with a review of the civil disorders as they spread throughout hundreds of urban areas beginning in 1963. As ghetto residents rose up against oppression, the mainstream media portrayed their behavior in a manner that marginalized their social and political agency. Despite this, dramatic images emanating from cities throughout the long, hot summers of the 1960s informed ghetto residents across the country about the legitimacy and means of revolution. By July 1967, the methods of effective urban disruption had been well laid out.[69]

Chapter III evaluates the new historiography of Black Power and explores its impact upon the masses of young blacks coming of age in the ghetto. Historian Peniel E. Joseph, perhaps the most significant figure in Black Power historiography, has recently argued that the overt displays of militancy captured by the news media distort Black

Power's more expansive cultural influences. These characteristics of Black Power may not have been readily apparent to whites put off by the angry rhetoric of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, but, for young blacks of the segregated ghetto, the uplifting message contradicted the treatment they received at the hands of white police, white landlords, white merchants, and a school system that did little to enrich their sense of dignity.[70]

Chapter IV examines the radical activity in Detroit in the years leading up to the rebellion. Waging a long struggle against housing and education segregation, consumer exploitation, and employment discrimination, many activists became frustrated with tenacious white resistance. By 1963, an amazing collection of organizations led by a parade of militant characters were extolling a robust message of militant nationalism and challenges to white authority. It is the veracity and preponderance of these militant messages that carve out Detroit's unique place in the struggle for civil rights and the subsequent eruption of violence in Motown. Evidence presented in this chapter includes the Senate testimony of Lieutenant William R. McCoy of the Detroit Police Department and interviews with 1960s black radical Luke Tripp.[71]

Chapter V reviews the violence that engulfed Detroit in July of 1967. While the fires were burning just outside the church of black nationalist Albert Cleage, the sermons he delivered captured the essence of the rebellion; the anger of the black community and the hope that something positive would arise from the ashes. Other Cleage sermons provide stark contrast to the popularly recounted religious overtones of the civil rights movement.[72] Perhaps the best evidence that Detroit was in all-out rebellion is the desperate reaction of local, state, and national officials to put it down. President Lyndon B. Johnson took to the airwaves twice during the rebellion; first to announce the

introduction of federal troops and then, with the violence still raging in Detroit, to announce the establishment of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. This commission was to be like no other, he told the country. Most significantly, it took over 17,000 police, National Guardsmen, and soldiers from the United States Army to end the uprising. In the immediate wake of the violence, militant activity continued as different organizations jockeyed for influence in the rebuilding of the city. Black Power activists were emboldened by the newly found respect they had gained from the white power structure of a city that faced the palpable threat of more violence.[73]

Chapter VI argues that the Kerner Commission was constituted as a symbolic political gesture and that their final report dismissed much of the unpleasant evidence that their own social science investigations revealed.[74] An analysis of *The Harvest of American Racism* report reveals political and cultural attitudes consistent with those identified in Black Power's new historiography. When considered alongside the deplorable conditions in the ghetto and the proliferation of Black Power ideas throughout Detroit, it becomes increasingly difficult to view these revelations as singular characteristics. Rather, taken together, they represent the foundation for rebellion.[75]

The Harvest of American Racism was written with the understanding that the conclusions were intended to inform public policy making. Aware that there would be debate regarding the value of their work, the social scientists included three different potential scenarios following three different public policy choices.[76] An analysis of these three scenarios is the subject of Chapter VII. Whether intentional or not, the policy decisions made in the wake of urban unrest in the 1960s shaped the next half century of urban race relations in America. For this, a proper respect for the conclusions and

recommendations of the *Harvest* report, which were largely rejected by the Kerner Commission, has the potential to inform the challenges faced by America's cities today.[77]

CHAPTER II

Before Detroit: The Long, Hot Summers

"To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."
– James Baldwin[1]

In order to fully fathom the significance of the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, it is essential to understand its place in the wave of urban riots shaking the country at the time. In the mid-1960s hundreds of urban areas in the United States experienced civil disorders of varying degrees. Riot statistics measured the inevitable; property damage, fires, stores looted, arrests, gunshots, sniper fire, rounds of ammunition discharged, number of troops required to restore order, wounded civilians, and the dead. Detroit would erupt with more force than any other urban riot of the 1960s, a crescendo to the larger revolution that was occurring in America's inner cities.

In 1963, serious disorders occurred in Savannah, Georgia; Cambridge, Maryland; Chicago, and Philadelphia.[2] In 1964, a number of racially charged and violent incidents took place in Jacksonville; Cleveland; St. Augustine, Florida; and Philadelphia, Mississippi. In Harlem and in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, "[f]iremen fought fires started with Molotov cocktails. When bricks and bottles were thrown, police responded with gunfire. Widespread looting followed and many persons were injured." In Rochester, the National Guard was called in to restore order. New Jersey experienced disorders in Jersey City, Elizabeth, and Paterson.[3]

Many of the outbreaks of violence were triggered by seemingly minor confrontations between white police and black citizens. For example, Philadelphia experienced two nights of rioting after an incident involving police and a Negro couple

whose car had stalled. Describing these police encounters as routine overlooks the underlying currents of animosity that existed between the country's largely white urban police forces and the black ghetto residents they were charged with protecting. The resentment segregated blacks felt towards white police forces ran deep in the ghetto.[4]

For white America, televised riots sparked by "routine" encounters with police were evidence that many ghetto residents simply had no respect for the law. An increasingly prosperous America struggled to understand racial violence; and, in 1965, middle-class America was certainly not prepared to consider that a Molotov cocktail heaved into a plate glass window had political significance. In March of that year, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Johnson Administration, ventured into the ghetto for an answer. The Moynihan Report affirmed many of the racial stereotypes that had been assigned to inner city blacks. For all its flaws, however, it also shined a bright light on a problem that the entire country would be forced to confront.[5]

Moynihan concluded that the problems of the burgeoning inner cities were a result of the breakdown of the Negro family. While laying the blame for this on America's long history of racism, Moynihan described the Negro family as a sick patient in need of care.[6] "It was by destroying the Negro family under slavery," Moynihan wrote, "that white America broke the will of the Negro people." Slavery and racism were the causes, but the undeniably acute attack was directed at the poor black family, particularly the failings of poor black men.[7]

The emphasis of the report, like the mainstream media accounts of the riots, focused on the behaviors of black people. Implicating America's long history of racial oppression, the slightly sympathetic Moynihan Report was harsh in its observation that

"the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban areas is approaching complete breakdown." As an attempt to explain the causes of the riots, Moynihan's description of the Negro family supported the apparently obvious conclusion that black kids being raised in dysfunctional homes were prone to lawbreaking and violence.[8]

As images of young black males behaving violently were broadcast into American homes, Moynihan's characterizations were largely confirmed in the minds of whites. "Three centuries of injustice," Moynihan added, "have brought about deep-seated structural distortions in the life of the Negro American. At this point, the present tangle of pathology is capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world." The political debate focused on white solutions to black problems. Conservatives argued for law and order measures while liberals, like Moynihan, proposed government programs to address the inequalities. Black Power advocates, on the other hand, increasingly called for black solutions to black problems.[9]

While calling for jobs and education programs to solve these problems, Moynihan's conclusions influenced official interpretations of the urban unrest that would continue to plague many of America's cities. The blunt conclusion of the Moynihan Report was that the ghettos were sick and rioting was a symptom of the illness. TV did little to assuage this characterization. Ironically, by blaming history, modern society was largely off the hook.

The violence escalated in 1965. In the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles a police encounter with a young Negro male developed into widespread rioting. Again, a seemingly routine traffic stop triggered days of violence. Police tried to restore order as

firemen battled blazes set with exploding bottles of gasoline. The *New York Times* reported on the third day of rioting that, "The rattle of gunfire was heard increasingly in the Negro section during the hot, smoggy evening as the police confronted roving bands of rampaging Negroes."[10] According to the *New York Times*, LA Chief of Police William Parker "blamed [the] violence on 'young hoodlums who have no respect for the law.'"[11] The law and order chief had no sympathy for rioters. "When you keep telling people they are unfairly treated and teach them disrespect for the law you must expect this kind of thing sooner or later," Parker said.[12]

Local officials struggled with the scope of the violence. The *Times* reported that "Two thousand heavily armed National Guardsmen moved into Los Angeles last night to battle rioters in the burning and looted Negro area."[13] The article added that "The Guardsmen were under orders to use rifles, machine guns, tear gas and bayonets in support of a battered contingent of 900 policemen and deputy sheriffs."[14] As the predominantly white soldiers patrolled the riot torn area, "crowds numbering in the thousands were chanting, 'White devils what are you doing here?'"[15] The Kerner Report summarized the violence. Almost 4,000 were arrested, 34 were killed, hundreds injured and property damage was measured in the tens of millions of dollars.[16]

Following the outbreak of violence in South LA, California Governor Edmund G. Brown established the McCone Commission to investigate. From the outset, he was very clear that the violence was not a protest. He described what the commissioners were to investigate as "a senseless, formless riot – not a civil rights demonstration."[17] By relying on Moynihan's descriptions of ghetto pathology, the McCone Commission further embraced the riff-raff theory of rioting; it was the criminal tendencies of a few that

produced riots. They were the most poverty stricken and uneducated; many of them, the commission assumed, had only recently arrived to LA from the rural areas of the South. The riff-raff theory aligned conveniently with the preconceived notions of the governor. It is not surprising then that the McCone Commission described rioters as "marauding bands" who "seemed to have been caught up in an insensate rage of destruction."[18]

Los Angeles had been ranked by the Urban League as first among sixty-eight cities "in terms of ten basic aspects of Negro life – such as housing, employment, income." As the McCone Report pointed out, Watts had a higher than average home-ownership rate, "the streets are wide and usually quite clean; there are trees, parks and playgrounds. A Negro in Los Angeles has long been able to sit where he wants in a bus or a movie house, to shop where he wishes, to vote, and to use public facilities without discrimination. The opportunity to succeed is probably unequaled in any other major American city."[19] Yet, for five days and nights during the long, hot summer of 1965, Watts exploded.

At the time, there were a few who viewed the riots as legitimate protests against long standing grievances of police brutality, housing and education segregation, and employment discrimination. For example, the report acknowledged the poor condition of the schools. Recommendations were made to reduce class sizes, ensure quality teachers, upgrade deteriorating school buildings, provide free and reduced price lunches, add libraries, implement additional counseling services, and improve transportation.[20] The primary responsibility to improve life in Watts, though, rested with the residents themselves, who the report claimed were ungrateful for the gains that had been made in civil rights. The "disadvantaged Negro" could not be helped, according to the report,

"unless he himself shoulders a full share of the responsibility for his own well being."[21] In this assessment, Negro leaders were "absolutely essential" to "raise the disadvantaged Negro to… a position of equality."[22]

One member of the McCone Commission challenged the commission's findings. The Rev. James Edward Jones, one of two blacks on the commission, wrote that Negroes had a "right to protest when circumstances do not allow him to participate in the mainstream of American society." He added that many in South Los Angeles were alienated from white society. "As long as an individual 'stands outside looking in,'" Jones wrote, "he is not part of that society;'" and further, "that society cannot say that he does not have a right to protest." Jones also criticized the final report for insisting that the young black man in the Watts ghetto "must shoulder a responsibility which he has never been given the opportunity to assume." The presence of another black commissioner gave the pretense of diversity but, as a Superior Judge and former police officer, Earl S. Broady did not join in Reverend Jones's dissent.[23]

While the official account of the Watts uprising determined that it was not a protest, others disagreed. Against the advice of Governor Brown, Martin Luther King visited Watts after the violence had subsided. He was clearly trying to draw attention to the grievances of ghetto residents; however, the residents themselves did not necessarily appreciate the gesture. A *Time* magazine article claimed that King's visit "inadvertently revealed that though he may be heeded and respected by Southern Negroes and Northern middle-class Negroes, he has little standing among slum dwellers." When asked about King's visit, a Watts resident asked, "Martin Luther who?" The article added that moderate civil rights organizations were out of touch with blacks in America's inner

cities. "Neither the N.A.A.C.P. nor the Urban League," reads the article, "has any practical influence over problem-level Negroes." There were others in the country, however, who saw in Watts their own neighborhood and their own grievances. In Detroit, the *Time* article adds, one of the city's "most militant leaders," the Reverend Albert Cleage, claimed that Negroes there "'had a tremendous sense of sympathy and identity'" with the rioters in Watts.[24]

Despite its unorganized and seemingly leaderless character, Watts pealed back a scab and the subsequent bleeding should have sounded an alarm. The most obvious evidence that called for an examination of the deeper underlying causes of the riots was the relationship between ghetto residents and the police. Across the urban landscape, it became increasingly clear that the tensions in the inner cities could be easily sparked into widespread violence. The media acknowledged that police practices might be cause for concern. "Many Negroes at the scene [in Watts] complained about alleged police brutality," the *New York Times* reported, "but few cited specific instances to support their charges." It appears that the media and the police were reluctant to consider that police brutality against a civilian population might be cause to act out violently, while at the same time, "Officials were at a loss to explain the cause of the rioting."[25]

The *Times* article included hints that rioters might be up to more than Chief Parker imagined. It described the neighborhoods around the riot area as "generally clean and tree-lined. Some of the single-family homes are in decay but most are well kept with green, well-tended small lawns." Another unexplained observation by the *Times* was that a "neatly dressed young man selling a black Muslim newspaper" said, "'the cops, they keep coming in here and busting heads.'" If the presence of well-tended lawns, neatly

dressed young men, and black Muslim newspapers characterized the Watts neighborhood, neither the *Times* nor Chief Parker appears to have inquired about their meaning.[26]

Criticisms of the police are mentioned in the McCone Report, but just as quickly dismissed. Holding the police even partly responsible would have hobbled the very institution that would be depended upon to maintain order which was clearly the primary purpose of the commission's existence. A criticized police force would not be effective; measures must be taken then, to ameliorate the criticism of the police, not the behavior of the police.[27]

In 1966, television continued to broadcast urban violence directly into American living rooms. The Kerner Commission noted that the outbreaks of violence in 43 incidents that year "were usually ignited by a minor incident fueled by antagonism between the Negro population and the police."[28] 4,200 National Guardsmen were needed to quell the violence in Chicago. Over 500 were arrested including 155 juveniles. Three were killed including two children.[29] Just as order was restored in Chicago, National Guardsmen in Ohio were called into the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland where Guardsmen responded to "widespread reports of 'sniper fire.'"[30]

During June of 1967, several more cities experienced violence including Tampa, Cincinnati, and Atlanta. In Tampa, rioting was sparked after a policeman shot a black youth in the back. As violence broke out, the police exercised restraint. They also entered into negotiations which resulted in the withdrawal of the National Guard in return for the promise not to riot. In Tampa, and later in Atlanta, Negro youth patrols were established. In some cases, blacks who had rioted one night became peacemakers the next.[31]

By July of 1967, several cities in New Jersey were on the verge. In Newark, a black cab driver was taken into custody for driving without a license. A rumor spread that he was being beaten. This spark set off a massive wave of chaotic violence. Within days of the arrest heavily armed National Guardsmen patrolled the streets. They responded aggressively to suspected sniper fire. Images from Newark show Guardsmen firing into residential buildings. A *New York Times* headline from Saturday July 15, 1967 reads "Negroes Battle with Guardsmen." In language that was becoming all too common throughout a succession of long, hot summers, the *Times* reported that "National Guardsmen and state police using armored personnel carriers fought pitched battles in the streets of Newark last night against rampaging Negroes."[32] Another article on the front page of the *Times* included additional revolutionary language. "Gunfire crackled through the streets of this riot torn city" and the governor "declared Newark a city in 'criminal insurrection.'"[33]

Urban guerilla warfare tactics in densely populated areas have devastating consequences. Police firing at fleeing looters inadvertently shot a three year-old girl in the eye. She had been in her bedroom. Driving home from a restaurant, a black family encountered a National Guard roadblock. After turning around and driving away a Guardsman fired at them. A ten year-old named Eddie was shot through the head. In another incident, a resident tried to tell police that innocent people were being shot. "Tell the black bastards to stop shooting at us," the sergeant is reported to have replied. "They don't have guns; no one is shooting at you," responded the resident. As Guardsmen and state troopers were unleashing "mass fire at the Hayes Housing Project," three women were shot dead, one while trying to move her two year-old daughter away from a

window. In another incident, an eleven year-old boy was shot dead while he took out the garbage.[34]

A Sunday article summarized Saturday night's mayhem. "Two Negro Women were killed in clashes between snipers and the National Guard and the police… Terrorists ranged outside the ghetto and gunfire – including bursts from machine guns – resounded in downtown Newark."[35] The Monday July 17 *Times* reported that the violence had spread to a Newark suburb. "A white policeman was beaten, kicked and shot to death by a rampaging Negro mob last night…"[36] The Tuesday *Times* declared the rioting was over although, "A Negro was shot and killed by the police." This would be the final fatality associated with the Newark violence. The final numbers: over 4,000 policemen and National Guardsmen, more than 1,200 wounded; 26 dead, 24 of them black.[37]

The Kerner Report eventually identified some of the "misconceptions regarding snipers" in Newark. There was confusion between city police, state police, and National Guard because they had different communication systems. The Guardsmen lacked riot training and "had had little contact with Negroes." A single shot fired might be reported multiple times as the bullet "caromed and reverberated a mile or more through the city."[38] As the Newark director of police told the Kerner Commission, "'it was so bad that, in my opinion, Guardsmen were firing upon police and police were firing back at them… I really don't believe there was as much sniping as we thought."[39]

For the vast majority of Americans, riot analysis began and ended with media portrayals supplemented by self-serving politically motivated accounts like the McCone Report. Institutional bias in the white mainstream press coupled with institutionally biased government accounts of racial problems in America established profound barriers

to understanding the causes of the riots. The story of a black journalist who covered many of the urban riots of the 1960s illustrates many of the limitations of trying to understand the causes of riots through media accounts.

As rioting broke out in Paterson, New Jersey in August of 1964, the first full-time black reporter hired by the *Associated Press* entered the fray. In Paterson, Austin Long-Scot, along with a number of local residents, was rounded up by "helmeted, club wielding police" and herded inside the fence of a housing project. As it turned out, three of those being penned up and guarded by a policeman were African American reporters. One of the young "street dudes" asked Long-Scot, "'How come you don't tell how we see things? How come we don't see that in *The New York Times*? Why don't you tell the truth about our lives? I mean, y'all are brothers! If we can't trust you to do it, who can we trust?'" These young people were certainly aware that news accounts failed to accurately portray conditions in the ghetto.[40]

Decades later, Long-Scot reflected upon the early years of an integrated mainstream press. Black journalists were subjected to institutional biases that limited their ability to report accurately on the motivations of rioters. Journalism in America had only recently begun to hire black journalists. However, these trailblazers were under enormous pressures to satisfy white editors who held power over their newly won positions. A riot report produced by a black newsman gives the pretense of objectivity, while the final version of his work had to survive a gauntlet of editorial pens held by white men.[41]

The ghettos of America were strange lands to most Americans. As Long-Scot saw it, "the raw and bleeding world of street violence among powerless people was just too

far from the more structured and privileged world of newsrooms and legislative discussions."[42] Long-Scot wanted to report things that would unsettle American society, but he knew that "our white editors were not interested in all of the truths we black reporters saw out on the streets."[43] Those white editors were part of a white majority whose Cold War anxiety left little cultural space to question the economic and political institutions of the United States. Riot commissions and the media affirmed the more compelling and easily digestible narrative that the violence had little to do with failing American values. The white editors "balked," Long-Scot adds:

> ...when we began reporting things that would shake their faith in a just and compassionate America. We saw victims of American Apartheid, people beaten down and broken. They saw a disruption of the peace that their life experience considered not just normal, but obligatory. They discounted our experience because it was not their experience, and when it came time to deciding what's news, they insisted on the news judgments their experience called for.[44]

In this self-affirming cycle; a Cold War take-it-or-leave-it patriotism shaped the riot narrative. Newspaper accounts of the riots confirmed television's violent images. These media accounts were built upon biases created by official government reports of the riots and the situation in the ghettos. In turn, these official accounts affirmed for the rest of America the assumptions they developed through the media.

On the eve of the Detroit Rebellion, TV had provided Americans with intimate access to the urban violence of the previous three years. TV also reached into the ghetto. While white suburbanites developed all-too-often erroneous assumptions about life in the inner cities many of them had fled, ghetto residents viewed burning neighborhoods on TV that must have looked much like their own. In a survey of hundreds of Detroit riot arrestees, eighty percent of those reporting confirmed that they had seen previous riots on television.[45]

Perhaps more than any other serious student of the riots, conservative Harvard political scientist Edward Banfield affirmed media-driven assumptions about rioters. Banfield concluded that television played a critical role in escalating riot violence in the 1960s. "Prior to the advent of television," Banfield argued, "it would have been very difficult for the authorities to have brought the possibilities for fun and profit in rioting to the attention of the lower class even if they had wanted to do so." This rather critical assessment of rioter motivations does little to defend the characterization of what happened in Detroit as "rebellion;" it does, however, properly recognize the pervasive power of television.[46]

Further, if TV taught some rioters how to go out and have fun when the chaos started, it also conveyed something much more profound. TV coverage of the riots educated young blacks that the problems in their own ghetto were shared by others across the country. Images and stories that were broadcast into Detroit homes included black people who were living under circumstances not unlike the black neighborhoods of Detroit. Their grievances were similar; housing, jobs, discrimination, schools, and most directly, the police. Whether out for fun and games or rebelling against an unjust society, rioters on TV were standing up to authority; and they were doing it in a way that forced the white man to listen (and watch).

Even as Banfield was critical of television's role in escalating the intensity of riots, he acknowledged that the pattern of urban riots promoted a growing awareness of injustice. He writes that a rioter "doubtless threw his stone with the force of ten because he knew (having heard it over television perhaps) that he was not a boy out raising hell but a victim of injustice fighting for a college education." What Banfield failed to

consider is that the boys out there raising hell were increasingly aware that they were in fact the victims of injustice; that their grievances were legitimate; and that there were many other sources of information beyond the white mainstream press.[47]

Television film crews were not the only ones venturing into the ghetto. In the nearly two years between Watts and the Detroit Rebellion, a group of social scientists conducted the Los Angeles Riot Study (LARS) and the reports were issued in June of 1967. Their investigations revealed the social conditions that contributed to the August 1965 violence in southeast LA. Coordinated by Nathan Cohen at UCLA, LARS challenged the "growing body of myths" about Watts and subsequent riots throughout the mid 1960s.[48] According to political scientist Lindsey Lupo, LARS "contradicted much of the McCone Report." For instance, it found "that most of the [Watts] rioters were well-educated California natives with legitimate and well-articulated grievances toward political and social institutions."[49] This is in stark contrast to McCone conclusions that rioters were predominantly newly arrived immigrants from the South who were struggling to assimilate. The McCone Commission had failed to identify even the most basic characteristics of who the rioters were.

In her denunciation of the McCone Report, Lupo claims that "the McCone Commission minimized the implications of the riot violence by discrediting the rioters and their demands."[50] She adds that "there was virtually no effort made to understand the rioters or the poor living conditions of southeast Los Angeles."[51] Following the model established by the Moynihan Report, the McCone Commission focused their investigations on identifying the pathology of the rioters, "effectively depoliticizing their behavior by portraying them as poor blacks lacking in education with a criminal

background."[52] The focus on the behavior of blacks impeded analysis of the ghetto conditions which gave rise to the behavior and left no space upon which to assess the potential political implications of the rioting.

The McCone Report also incorrectly determined that only two to five per cent of the riot-torn community actually participated in the riot. The LARS study found that likely fifteen percent were active riot participants. Even among those who did not actively participate, sympathy for the rioters was extensive. This was true even among those who expressed disapproval of the violence; which, Cohen wrote, "was often coupled with an expression of empathy with the motives of those who participated, or a sense of pride that the Negro has brought worldwide attention to his problem."[53]

Subsequent interpretations of the McCone Commission's riff-raff theory raised serious doubts regarding the ability of politically oriented riot commissions to come up with anything but politically driven observations and recommendations. Historian Robert M. Fogelson later argued that the McCone Commission conveniently adopted the riff-raff theory "to obscure the ghetto's legitimate grievances."[54] More recently, historian Malcolm McLaughlin challenged the riff-raff theory; particularly its secondary assumption that rioters had little support from those in the riot-torn communities:

> In many cities, when riots began, men, women, and children of all ages gathered on the streets and took part enthusiastically in looting. Even those members of black communities who later claimed not to have taken part, when asked in surveys, were more likely than not to express sympathy for the rioters. Many of those riots were community uprisings.[55]

Not surprisingly, LARS also concluded that "[t]he grievances of the people in Watts were numerous." Poor neighborhood conditions, discrimination from merchants and employers, and mistreatment by police, were all cited frequently by survey

respondents.[56] The social scientists determined that dissent within the riot-torn communities was more over the issue of whether violence was a viable means of achieving anything positive. Despite the disagreements over potential solutions, the residents of Watts knew first hand what the grievances were.[57]

Perhaps the most devastating condemnation of the riff-raff theory is the characterization of militants in Watts. LARS psychologist T. M. Tomlinson concluded that the militants tended to be better educated long-term residents of the city. The study described them as "the cream of urban Negro youth in particular and urban Negro citizens in general." They are the "most deeply aggrieved" and reported more frequent negative interactions with police. They are "markedly anti-white" and "more likely to advance the Negro cause by any method necessary." They are more likely to describe the Watts violence in revolutionary terms such as revolt, rebellion, or insurrection.[58]

For many young Watts residents, their grievances were increasingly articulated with Black Power ideals. In the LARS report exploring the ideological foundations of the rioting, Tomlinson bluntly states that the "fiery preaching" of Malcolm X denounced the "evils of whites and white-dominated society" and these words "served to awaken a long dormant sense of black identity, especially among the youth." By interviewing rioters and engaging with the people in the riot torn community, Tomlinson discovered that Black Power ideals were an important impetus to the violence in 1965. Rather than engaging in an "insensate rage of destruction,"[59] many rioters were hoping to instill "fear and hostility in the white community."[60]

The majority of militants and non-militants alike, Tomlinson continued, "is aggrieved, angry, and disaffected [and] appear to be deeply committed to bringing about

change." The study asserted that the riots have political purpose and represent the beginnings of a "riot ideology." This ideology "emerged in its clearest form in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riot and has been blown across the country on the winds of pervasive Negro discontent." The study concluded that, despite local differences, this riot ideology arose because "Negro Americans" across the country "share a belief that their lot in life is unacceptable."[61] A similar, more pronounced influence of Black Power ideals would be revealed in the wake of Detroit's violence in 1967.

Differences among militants and non-militants in the LARS study suggested that militant numbers could grow. Some of the non-militants expressed similar levels of disaffection from society although they differed in the methods they were willing to employ to bring about change. Impatience with other methods, the study suggested, could make militant methods more appealing to the non-militant group. Others expressed similar grievances, but poverty and a sense of hopelessness limited their action. This group might join in, though, if they were to see some success develop with militant tactics.[62]

A companion study of LARS was also released in June of 1967, a full month before the Detroit Rebellion. "The Politics of Discontent," by David O. Sears and John B. McConahay, foresees this more militant future. "No longer is the black man timid and frightened of angry confrontation with the white man," the scientists concluded. "Now, he is ready to move against the white man in even a para-military operation, willing to think of revolution and speak its rhetoric, willing to applaud his brothers' fight with the white man."[63] Riot commissions and the media would continue to portray rioters as

rampaging and marauding Negroes, while the social science explored the deeper, political meanings behind the violence.

Shortly after the McCone Report was issued near the end of 1965, John McCone explained to *Time* magazine that the report was a practical approach to the problem. He was not interested in "'broad philosophical questions. We wanted to do something," he said, "not get bogged down in sociological speculation. We wanted immediate solutions, not theories.'"[64] Sociologists may begin with theories but they also talk to people. The commission, on the other hand, failed to interview even a single rioter during their investigations. As Lupo has written, "commissioners were not at all interested in why the riots happened in the social sense," but only in the "legal and law enforcement sense." In the end, the commission identified problems in terms of "a breakdown in law enforcement," Lupo adds, "rather than a breakdown in societal institutions."[65] By blaming poverty and offering token gestures of racial uplift the McCone Report dodged a critical assessment of the institutional forces that cultivated that poverty.

CHAPTER III

Black Power Reimagined

"And we cherish the conventional story of Dr. King and nonviolence, in fact, precisely *because* that narrative demands so little of us."
– Timothy B. Tyson[1]

The new historiography of Black Power provides a new lens through which to view the entire post-World War II civil rights era; its marginalization by officials bent upon defending American virtue in the midst of Cold War ideological clashes; its reimagined relationships with better known aspects of the civil rights movement; its international ramifications and collaborations; and most pertinent to the current argument, its local manifestations during the most tumultuous domestic crisis of the twentieth century.

The iconic and memorable images of the Black Power movement tell an important part of the story. A clenched black fist and a leather-clad, gun-toting Black Panther symbolize the strength and zeal of the movement. Dramatic symbols such as these have also inhibited a fuller understanding of the chronological, geographic, cultural, and intellectual scope of Black Power. Over the past two decades, civil rights historians have begun to reassess Black Power's role in contrast to and in concert with the conventional narrative of the civil rights movement. Peeling back the layers of these images has revealed both a more nuanced and more complex movement. Historian Peniel E. Joseph has demonstrated that, rather than operating on the margins, Black Power was a "parallel" movement rich in complexity, culturally consistent in its origins, and intellectually sound in its arguments. Pulling Black Power out of the "long shadow" of

the more moderate civil rights movement, a new school of civil rights historians has begun to "reimagine" Black Power.[2]

When Stokely Carmichael popularized "Black Power" in 1966, he was assigning a political slogan to a collection of ideas that had been emerging in the African American psyche since the 1950s. "By 1966," Joseph generalizes, "black power defined a movement for racial solidarity, cultural pride, and self-determination."[3] Historian Russell Rickford has recently described Black Power that "in its broadest conception represented a groundswell of ideas and activities designed to infuse blackness with radical possibility."[4] Thomas Sugrue has acknowledged, too, that in 1966, "Black power was not a new phenomenon; it named an impulse that reflected the richness, complexity, and contradictions of black political thought."[5]

The marginalization of Black Power during the civil rights era served political purposes for entrenched institutional American power structures. Unlike the gradual change prompted by the Supreme Court's language in the *Brown* decisions, Black Power, especially as perceived in its most radical and vocal pronouncements, posed a serious threat to the status quo. If the 1954 *Brown* decision was greeted with revolutionary fanfare, the subsequent 1955 *Brown II* decision gave white segregationists all the wiggle room they needed to dodge the alleged unconstitutionality of legally segregated schools. As historian James T. Patterson has written, after ordering desegregation to move forward at "all deliberate speed," local segregationists "resorted to all manner of ruses to evade the ruling."[6] It was in response to the massive white backlash following early civil rights demonstrations that black activists diverged into separate camps. Those who interpreted the backlash as evidence of America's incapacity for change adopted new strategies and

goals. "Of the two movements," Joseph states bluntly, "Black Power was more vocal and robust in its criticism of American racism and the failure of American democracy. Black Power activists remained skeptical of democracy's capacity to extend full citizenship to African Americans while civil rights activists expressed steadfast faith in America's transformative abilities." Conservatives were able to refer to Black Power activism as evidence that civil rights activity was getting out of hand. Liberals were inclined to embrace the moderate civil rights movement as a more reasonable option to Black Power radicalism. Across the political spectrum, neither side was motivated to see Black Power as a legitimate and parallel movement.[7]

When contrasted with the widely broadcast events of what Joseph describes as the "heroic period" of the civil rights movement, Black Power ideology challenged more than America's ability to live up to its own ideals, it challenged the ideals themselves. Black Power activists, for the most part, had much less faith in American democracy, rejected integration as a means of achieving equality, and tended to amend nonviolent protest with violence when necessary. For this, Joseph writes, Black Power has become "demonized as the civil rights movement's 'evil twin.'" Despite their propensity to deceive, the provocative images of Black Power also accurately portray an element of the movement. Radical black activists were, in fact, angrily confronting American society and its enduringly racist social, economic, and political structure.[8]

In contrast, the stars of the more familiar and widely celebrated civil rights movement are nonviolent activists challenging local and state institutions to end Jim Crow segregation in the South. By the mid 1950s, the Supreme Court's condemnation of segregation prompted organized resistance to entrenched racial practices in the South.

Brown v. Board of Education, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Little Rock Nine integrating Central High School, sit-ins in 1960 North Carolina, integrating the University of Mississippi, singing children filling jails in Birmingham, and the iconic March on Washington (for Jobs and Freedom) in 1963, are all permanent features of America's historical landscape. The political capstones of this heroic period are the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Taking place largely in the South, the drama of these events has "overwhelmingly shaped" our "historical understanding" of the entire era.[9]

These potent images obscure an important aspect of the environment in which activists fought for change. The notion that integration was a remedy to injustice was dependent upon the premise that the majority of Americans could be taught to accept integration. By making appeals to the American consciousness and putting pressure on the systems that denied equal treatment, black students in Little Rock, Freedom Riders, and sit-in protestors all believed that the United States had the capacity to live up to its constitutionally expressed ideals. White backlash could be overcome, Martin Luther King believed, through the dignity of taking blows without striking back. His was a faith in the eventual soundness of American values. Black Power advocates did not share in this faith.

Black Power's more pronounced challenge to American virtue occurred during the hottest moments of the Cold War which further estranged early Black Power advocates. It also meant that African Americans struggling for justice at home had potential allies beyond America's shores. Joseph writes that many black radicals "found kindred spirits" in those around the world casting off white imperialism. Paralleling the

heroic period of civil rights in the American South, the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, Ghanaian independence in 1957, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, all "galvanized black radicals waging war in the civil rights movement's long shadow." Casting that shadow were images of dignified black protestors standing up to abusive white segregationists. This generated a degree of sympathy from white liberals and, in several cases, forced the hand of the federal government to intervene on behalf of those demanding their civil rights. In contrast, black radicals were more likely to be branded as anti-American subversives sometimes touting Marxist and Socialist ideas as potential remedies to blacks facing indignities throughout America.[10]

Ironically, the American story is replete with the struggles of blacks demanding the justice enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. "Since the nation's inception," Peniel Joseph writes, "black Americans have been among the most vocal, eloquent, and longstanding proponents of American democracy."[11] These antecedents to Black Power are as old as the country itself. In *Ghetto Revolts: The Politics of Violence in American Cities* (1973), Joe R. Feagin and Harlan Hahn present compelling historical evidence that the urban riots of the 1960s were a continuation of a long struggle of blacks resisting white oppression. "Much of this collective behavior," Feagin and Hahn argue, "has been intentionally, if often unsuccessfully, directed at altering the shape of the power structure of American society."[12]

Long before the hypocrisies of Jim Crow supplanted the hypocrisies of American slavery, the nation's history is rich with stories of blacks pronouncing their situation unjust in fully American ways. Using "one careful estimate," Feagin and Hahn assert, "major conspiracies to revolt numbered 250 cases in the first 250 years of slavery in the

[English colonies and then the] United States."[13] Some rebelling slaves demanded their freedom and called for "a redistribution of economic power and resources."[14] These simultaneous calls for economic as well as political justice were keystones of the Black Power agenda of the 1960s. Indeed, many of the riots of the 1960s were fueled by economic conditions and occurred even after legislative civil rights victories had put to print the promise of political equality.

Many of the episodes of black struggle against oppression followed periods of black migration. Northern urbanization and industrialization in the late nineteenth century attracted blacks from the South. This brought increasing numbers of blacks into close proximity with one another which, as Feagin and Hahn point out, "grouped people posing a political threat near established interest groups of whites." Rigid segregation practices limited black opportunity to challenge established big city power structures but the proximity served to illuminate racial disparities.[15] By the early part of the twentieth century, segregation also contributed to the development of urban enclaves that bound blacks together. "The city-ward movement," Feagin and Hahn report, "saw a rise in black consciousness and group pride, coupled with new organizations, such as civil rights groups and the black press, and an increase in other resources, including educational attainment."[16] Similar cultural foundations and aspirations characterized the ghettoized urban areas of the United States in the 1960s.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the social and cultural landscape of American cities was transformed by waves of black immigrants. A small black middle-class began to acquire the economic strength necessary to promote black institutions. A celebrated example is the Harlem neighborhood of New York City where an artistic and literary movement

contributed to the emergence of a new uniquely black American identity. Northern segregation in all its repugnance also promoted the development of black institutions and made the Harlem Renaissance possible.

The cultural awakening inspired new considerations of what it meant to be black in America. It is no surprise, then, that this cultural rebirth included a political wing. Harlem was witness to a "new type of black militancy" best illustrated by Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).[17] Garvey's efforts included the consolidation of black resources and the promotion of black pride. The UNIA also made attempts "aimed at helping blacks return to Africa." Feagin and Hahn suggested that "Garvey may well be seen as a precursor contributing to the emergence of black power and black self-determination strategies in later decades."[18] In the twenty-first century, Black Power historians argue convincingly that Garveyism laid the foundation for black militancy in the 1950s.[19]

The Great Depression ushered in an unprecedented challenge to American institutions but also, as Peniel Joseph has written, "introduced the possibilities of social, cultural, and political revolution at home and abroad." Between the world wars the heart, soul, and mind of this revolution were in Harlem. Geographically part of New York City, spiritually, Harlem served as the staging ground for all manner of revolutionary activity. As a city-within-a city, Harlem was alive with an animated assortment of political activity as socialists, communists, nationalists, and more competed for attentive ears. Harlemites were exposed to a wide spectrum of political thinking but often with "propaganda that recounted the history of Negro oppression and offered a blueprint for black liberation." While supporters of varying political orientations jockeyed for support

within an increasingly enlightened African American city, the legitimacy of revolution became grounded in a shared history of being black in America. In this vibrant black community the YMCA "served as a debating society, intellectual training ground, and incubator for… a hotbed of political activity." In barbershops, churches, and bookstores, blacks discussed ideas as diverse as "class struggle, Pan-Africanism, and trade unionism." Revolutionary activity required recruitment which meant that many of the pamphlets that were distributed "compressed decades of social history into easily digestible prose." The revolutionary ideas were formulated by intellectuals of various political stripes while their appeals were commonly grounded in the contradictions of African American life that were evident to all.[20]

The World War II generation of black Americans experienced first-hand the gravest contradictions. Black soldiers were sent overseas to fight for freedoms they themselves were denied at home. The global conflict also presented great opportunity for those hoping to make American society more just. Returning home after the war, blacks were invigorated by the prospect of holding America accountable for the moral vision it put forth to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. World War II forced America's hand and domestic racial strife was almost inevitable.[21]

Perhaps one of the most notable early Black Power figures of this postwar era is Robert F. Williams. A 1999 biography of Williams, *Radio Free Dixie* by Timothy B. Tyson, illuminates his life while invigorating the late twentieth century reassessment of Black Power.

As a sixteen year-old in 1941 Monroe, North Carolina, Williams organized a protest over discrimination in a National Youth Administration defense training program.

This activity "launched his FBI subject file, marked 'Security-C,'" for communist.[22] The training helped him secure a job in Detroit at the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant. He joined a militant interracial labor union and associated with members of the Socialist Workers Party. He participated in the June 1943 Detroit race riot that took 38 lives. Drafted in the closing months of the war, Williams experienced the military's version of Jim Crow. He resisted white authority and spent several months in the brig for insubordination. Returning home, Williams, like many black veterans, became involved in local efforts to dismantle Jim Crow.[23]

Struggling to achieve his dream of becoming a writer, Williams rejoined the military after recruiters convinced him that he could take courses in radio and journalism. When these recruitment promises were broken, Williams wrote letters to Congressmen Charles Diggs of Michigan and Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem. He wrote the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) complaining of racial discrimination in the Marines. In a letter to President Eisenhower Williams essentially renounced his citizenship. By the time Williams returned to North Carolina following a dishonorable discharge, he had come under the regular surveillance of Naval Intelligence.[24]

Chastened by service in the segregated military and empowered by his interactions with Northern radicals, Williams became the president of the NAACP chapter in Monroe. Membership had tumbled as many middle class members had withdrawn under the threat of white reprisal against integration efforts. These more subtle ramifications of the white backlash did not discourage Williams. By recruiting young people and army veterans into the NAACP, Monroe became an extremely militant branch

of the normally rather subdued organization. Efforts to challenge Jim Crow were met with a massive white backlash that former members of the chapter had dodged by quitting the organization. Klan rallies held near Monroe in 1956 and 1957 "were estimated by local newspapers at up to 12,000." Cars filled with Klan members drove through black neighborhoods firing their weapons. Williams and other members of the NAACP branch received death threats and, in 1957, they exchanged gunfire with a KKK caravan. Through his union experiences, his time in the military, and in his own backyard, Williams learned that a forceful response to intimidation was the only effective way to maintain dignity.[25]

Williams drew national attention over an incident in Monroe that illustrates the intransigence of white segregationists in the 1950s. In 1958, two black boys, ages eight and ten, were arrested after it was discovered that they had been kissed on the cheek by a white girl. The mothers of the two boys were fired from their housekeeping jobs and one of them was served with eviction papers. Gunmen fired dozens of rounds into the home of one of the boys and "hooded terrorists burned a wooden cross on their lawn." The family dog was found shot to death. As one of the boys recounted later, "The Klan was all outside, trying to get in the jail, demonstrations, torches at night… People was out there trying to kill us."[26] Robert Williams provided armed men to protect the homes of the two boys. Within a week of the kissing incident, the boys were sentenced "to indeterminate terms" in a reform school for Negroes and, "If they behaved well," the judge reported, "they might be released before they were twenty-one."[27]

Williams and other members of the Monroe NAACP organized a publicity campaign that eventually reached an international audience. A story in the *London News*

Chronicle "made the kissing case front-page news around the world."[28] At the height of the Cold War, as Tyson writes, the "kissing case" became "a global metaphor for the American racial dilemma."[29] Attracting the support of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Williams became a regular feature in their newspaper the *Militant*.[30] The organization also supported Williams as he "addressed audiences at labor halls, liberal churches, and college auditoriums across the country," including Detroit.[31] For those intent upon marginalizing the most aggressive defenders of civil rights justice, Williams's associations provided ample fodder to attack the early Black Power hero as un-American.

In the spring of 1959, another instance of white justice for blacks in Monroe became a turning point for Robert F. Williams and affirmed his reputation as a militant radical. After preventing a black mob from attacking a white man accused of assaulting a black woman, Williams encouraged the angry members of the black community to trust the justice system. It would be the last time Williams demonstrated faith in America's capacity for change. An all-white jury acquitted the white man in a trial that had jurors laughing as the black woman recounted the story of her assault. Williams became the target of black anger for having prevented the mob from carrying out its own form of justice. For Williams this became "a burning moment of anger and shame." He told UPI reporters on hand to cover the trial "that it was time to 'meet violence with violence.'" Straying from his burgeoning commitment to armed self-defense, Williams told the reporters that "We must be willing to kill if necessary… In the future we are going to have to try and convict these people on the spot… if it's necessary to stop lynching with lynching, then we must be willing to resort to that method." Williams's activities and his pronouncements continued to be monitored by the FBI.[32]

In July of 1959, Williams began publishing *The Crusader Weekly Newsletter*. Using much of the language that would become associated with Black Power and black nationalist beliefs, Williams's philosophy "stressed black economic advancement, black pride, black culture, independent black political action, and what he referred to as armed self-reliance." *The Crusader* reported on local and national black history and connected the "Southern freedom struggle with the anti-colonialism of the emerging Third World, especially African nations."[33] A newsletter produced by a militant local chapter of the NAACP in a Jim Crow state epitomized the local to national to international interconnectedness of Black Power.

As Williams increasingly argued for degrees of black self-determination, he found friends and supporters outside the country. Following the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s, Williams, along with other activists and intellectuals in Harlem, formed the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. On a speaking tour including Detroit Williams supported Castro and compared the Cuban Revolution to the struggle of African Americans. Williams accepted an invitation to visit the island where he was greeted as a hero.[34] Williams found a "kindred spirit" in Fidel Castro. During a visit to New York to attend the meetings of the United Nations in the fall of 1960, the Cuban leader camped out in Harlem at the Hotel Theresa. Among his visitors were "Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Malcolm X, and Robert F. Williams."[35]

Williams's notoriety in national and international circles did not diminish his commitment to the local fight in Monroe. For years, Williams and members of the NAACP had been struggling to integrate the municipally owned country club. An early

victory occurred when club officials were so stunned by the arrival of four black golfers that the desegregation of the golf course came about without much of a fight. When Williams's group demanded that the club allow blacks to become actual members, however, a firestorm erupted. Most significantly for white segregationists, black membership in the Monroe Country Club would have blacks and whites swimming in the same pool. This met with the type of resistance one would expect in a relatively small town with over ten thousand Klan members nearby.[36]

Four years before Watts, when it appeared evident that the KKK was planning a night raid into the black neighborhood in response to the agitations occurring at the swimming pool, Williams and other members of the NAACP hunkered down. Monroe, North Carolina became an armed camp. Barricades were erected. Armed sentries were posted. Men with rifles climbed trees. Williams, Timothy B. Tyson writes, "unpacked two machine guns, loaded them, and walked briskly into the backyard, where he fired a quick burst from each weapon." In his living room, "Williams's sons… carefully stacked dozens of other rifles [and] Robert unearthed a case of dynamite" which had been hidden away under a doghouse.[37]

A white couple inadvertently turned into Williams's heavily defended neighborhood. The details are sketchy but, in the end, Williams was forced to flee. He was now a fugitive wanted by the FBI for kidnapping. His escape took him back to Castro's Cuba but distance did not silence him. In exile, he continued to publish *The Crusader* and copies were distributed to black radicals throughout the United States. Williams also broadcast a radio program, *Radio Free Dixie*, "heard on clear evenings as far north as New York" and certainly, Detroit. Williams's nationalist message included

the claim that black Americans were a colonized people and that the challenge of America's ghettos was part of a larger international struggle against white imperial powers. In the Cold War environment of the early 1960s, Williams's flight to Cuba branded this early Black Power force as an enemy of the state. For black radicals in America, he was an inspiration.[38]

The story of Robert F. Williams reveals many of the complexities of early Black Power; its Northern and Southern manifestations, its international influences, and perhaps most importantly, the power of the government and the media to marginalize those things it finds distasteful. In *Radio Free Dixie* (1999), Timothy B. Tyson's biography of Williams begins to bring Black Power out of the shadows. Williams's life intersected with both the well-known events of the civil rights movement and the lesser-known moments of the early Black Power period. Williams's international relationships illustrate Black Power's interconnectedness with revolutionary struggles against white imperialism. In this global conception of Black Power, advocates viewed the plight of African Americans as oppressed colonial subjects whose rights included challenging that oppression.[39] Coinciding with and inspired by African independence movements, a full appreciation of Black Power requires understanding its relationship with the collapse of European empires and its associations with the diversity of Cold War conflicts that peppered the post-World War II world. Robert F. Williams's life touches on many of these divergent Black Power themes and serves as a complicated example of how "Black Power militancy both paralleled and intersected" with the better known characters and events of the civil rights movement.[40]

One of those better known characters is Malcolm X. Popular accounts of Malcolm's life, though, were distorted by a media that introduced him to America as part of a 1959 documentary about the Nation of Islam. Hesitant to give credibility to an outspoken critic of the United States, media portrayals and subsequent historiographical accounts have Malcolm "belatedly entering history only in 1959."[41] For this and more, Peniel E. Joseph describes Malcolm X as "nothing less than the civil rights era's invisible man… entering only to dispute King and denounce America as an unapologetically racist and doomed land."[42] Understanding a broader conception of Black Power requires a reassessment of probably the best known black militant in American history and no one has done a more thorough job of this than Peniel E. Joseph. "Malcolm," Joseph proclaims, "remains the most important key to understanding the Black Power Movement's gestation."[43]

Malcolm X arrived in Harlem in 1954 and for years "tapped into" the rich legacy of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance. His influences included mentors from the generation that had kept alive the "embers of Garveyism." Black nationalist ideas percolated in Harlem throughout the Great Depression and World War II. Nurtured by writers and artists who supplemented political thought with cultural representations of a new black American identity, Malcolm entered a world where the possibilities of African American independence were on bold display. In this environment Malcolm became "Harlem's most important grassroots political leader," an aspect of his life that would make him the central figure of early Black Power.[44]

Malcolm's lack of popularity with mainstream America is understandable. In Harlem's Temple No. 7 Malcolm "publicly condemned white racism for creating urban

ghettos, condoning lynching, and maintaining a society that was so bankrupt that African Americans were forced to organize, protest, and march in order to gain citizenship rights that were supposedly guaranteed." In 1957, Malcolm became the NOI's national representative. "Malcolm's advocacy, following the teachings of [Elijah] Muhammad, of self-defense elevated him as the primary rhetorical opponent of Martin Luther King." If Martin Luther King was seen as disruptive to the social order, Malcolm was outside looking in and pointing a finger at the perpetrators of centuries of oppression.[45]

Malcolm's association with the Nation of Islam contributed to the popular impressions that nudged him to the margins of civil rights activism. This conventional narrative, however, barely scratches the surface of the complexities of Malcolm's activities and associations. "Malcolm," Joseph writes, "had wisely looked outside the confines of the Nation of Islam for political allies." In New York and Detroit, he practiced his own brand of coalition politics through his association with non-Muslim activists such as John Henrik Clarke, John Oliver Killens, Grace and Jimmy Boggs, and Albert Cleage. "These local militants," Joseph writes, "stressed racial pride, the connection between civil rights and the Third World, and political self-determination through pugnacious and at times deliberatively provocative protests that laid the groundwork for Black Power." Malcolm found common ground with local black activists who rejected King's commitment to nonviolence. It is no coincidence that Malcolm's early activism arose out of the same Harlem that bore witness to Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. [46] Despite the Nation of Islam's reluctance to engage in public demonstrations, Malcolm increasingly interacted with a host of radical actors that Joseph describes as "leading intellectuals and activists who would shape early Black Power struggles."[47]

"Outside of New York City," Joseph adds, "Detroit played the most important role in Malcolm X's political development." He formed a relationship with the Reverend Albert Cleage, "the face of [Detroit's] black militants during the early Black Power period. A black nationalist street speaker disguised as a Baptist preacher, Cleage's powerful sermons drew the dignified and the damned to his citywide pulpit." Cleage's "key allies" included "grassroots activists" Grace and Jimmy Boggs who served as "mentors to an entire generation of young militants" in Detroit. Malcolm's brother served as "Detroit's leading Muslim minister. Milton Henry, another important Cleage ally, had "an especially close relationship" with Malcolm.[48] By 1959, when the popular media branded the NOI a racist hate group, Malcolm had so broadened his relationships with other black radicals in New York, Detroit, and across the nation, that his association with the Nation was only a part of his multi-faceted persona. By the early 1960s, he had become "the avatar of a new movement for black liberation," Joseph exhorts, "one anchored in the quest for self-determination."[49] Malcolm's relationships and interactions with Detroit radicals anchored this Midwestern hub of Black Power.

Local civil rights activity in the North and the South intersected with international events. As the Southern Leadership Christian Conference (SCLC) and the NAACP challenged America from within in the 1950s, Malcolm, like Robert F. Williams and a growing number of black radicals, framed the struggle for black justice in global terms and took inspiration from the African and Asian independence movements that renounced Western imperialism. For example, while Martin Luther King was emerging as a national figure during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, delegates from twenty-

nine nations from Africa and Asia gathered at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia.

African American novelist and reporter Richard Wright attended the Bandung Conference because he was struck by the idea that "the underdogs of the human race were meeting." World War II had shaken the world in many ways; not the least of which was the manner in which it sounded the death knell of Western Imperialism as it had been practiced. "Almost all of the nations… had been, in some form or other, under the domination of Western Europe."[50] As the days passed at the conference Wright noticed the "[n]egative unity" which had brought them together - the shared experience of colonialism - was giving way to "something that hinted at the positive. They began to sense their combined strength; they began to taste blood."[51] As Peniel Joseph has written, Bandung "incited black radicals in the United States" whose shared history of slavery and Jim Crow was perhaps giving way to something similarly positive.[52]

Two years later, in 1957, while nine black high school students were facing angry mobs of white segregationists as they integrated Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas, the African nation of Ghana declared its independence. Television coverage of the Little Rock Nine affirmed their place in historical memory. Black radicals inspired by these brave high school students were equally encouraged by the news from Ghana. For them, these two events were part of the same struggle.[53] As four black college students sparked a sit-in movement in 1960, Fidel Castro was celebrating the first anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. While the press portrayed the tensions that would escalate during the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, black radicals, like Luke Tripp in

Detroit, Michigan, were aroused to action both by Castro's vision and the courage of those integrating lunch counters in defiance of Jim Crow.[54]

Luke Tripp was a high school senior in 1959 Detroit. "When I was in the 12th grade," Tripp recalled years later, "I remember being constantly angry in my American history class because the text books presented slavery as a benign institution and fostered an image of America as a nation founded and dedicated to humanitarian principles." American slavery contradicted this image and blacks growing up in Detroit in 1959 experienced the legacy of this contradiction. "[M]y lived experience," Tripp adds, "convinced me that the standard American story was a lie."[55] Despite his misgivings about America, Tripp applied to West Point and to the Naval Academy because he believed it was an "opportunity to get a high quality education at full government expense. I was not motivated by any patriotic feelings. In fact I was very critical of America and what it stood for. I believed that the country was morally bankrupt, and I still believe that today [2015]."[56] Looking back, Tripp found relief in his rejection by America's military academies. If accepted in 1959, "I would undoubtedly [have] been actively involved in the unjust, barbaric Vietnam War in the 1960s, fighting against the Vietnamese people who were struggling to liberate themselves from French and American imperialism."[57] In 2016, Dr. Luke Tripp is a professor at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. He has no regrets about the choices he made following his rejection by the military academies. "By taking another path I became a militant activist and a draft resister against the Vietnam War and a leader in the Black liberation movement, which I joined at age 19 in Detroit in 1960."[58]

Tripp's international outlook was shaped by black radicals like Robert F. Williams, whom Tripp sees as hero; and Frantz Fanon, who wrote extensively about the damage done to indigenous people as a result of colonization. Tripp concluded that many blacks in Detroit suffered from the psychological conditioning that came from being "colonized." Powerless black people were constantly filled with "anger and rage," he said. In the early 1960s, Tripp went on, "Detroit was like Johannesburg, South Africa." Identifying with other oppressed people around the world, including revolutionaries in Africa and Asia, many blacks in Detroit were beginning to speak of a global brotherhood of non-white people. When asked how he believed this colonized condition contributed to violence in 1967, Tripp said that there is no doubt about it. The uprising was largely "spontaneous," but, he added, as large segments of the black population acted out, they were behaving in a manner consistent with other colonized people living in similarly oppressive circumstances.[59]

In 1966, six years after Luke Tripp became politically radicalized in Detroit, Martin Luther King took his Southern freedom struggle north to Chicago. Television cameras documenting the experience gave the generalized impression that King's style of activism had suddenly arrived in the North. In reality, as Joseph points out, "King's journey to Chicago did not so much move civil rights politics north as publicize preexisting local struggles."[60] As Southern civil rights moments were making national headlines, black activists like Luke Tripp engaged in direct action against discrimination and segregation in Northern cities. The absence of a legal justification for Jim Crow led these activists to attack the private enterprises that used a variety of methods to maintain a segregated society. For example, Tripp's organization, Uhuru, "engaged in direct

confrontation with institutions that practiced anti-Black discrimination." One of their targets was the Kroger and A&P chain of grocery stores. In the early 1960s, Uhuru members challenged the "lily-white" hiring practices of these private businesses that often relied upon black customers for their business. By picketing, leafleting, and demonstrating, Uhuru put local pressure on locally situated businesses to end discrimination.[61] In *The Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (2008), Thomas J. Sugrue shines a bright light on these largely overlooked activities in the North while arguing that Northern activists faced off against a more pernicious strain of Jim Crow that thrived in the cultural realm without the legal target of a "Whites Only" sign.[62]

In the public arena, real estate practices and an entrenched strain of Northern racism operated together to establish cultural, yet physically based boundaries. Utilizing grassroots strategies designed to correct local injustices, activists in the North did not rely upon dramatic displays intent upon awakening the conscience of America. Rather, they often engaged in direct action that targeted specific instances of discrimination. In Detroit, for example, Luke Tripp and other members of Uhuru directly challenged the Detroit Police Department, the mayor's office, and local banks that engaged in discriminatory practices.[63] Militant groups throughout the North and Midwest had been waging these battles for at least a decade before Martin Luther King journeyed to Chicago. "In many cases," Peniel E. Joseph writes, the "national press virtually ignored urban militants in the North, who waged their battles for jobs, equal access to education, and open housing far from the media spotlight." King's arrival shined a light on Northern

poverty but he was not the first to engage in direct action against Northern style Jim Crow. [64]

Local Northern activity intersected with international events. In 1961, black activists in Harlem staged a demonstration at the United Nations over the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Protestors included Maya Angelou, LeRoi Jones, and Mae Mallory. The groups represented included the Liberation Committee for Africa, On Guard, the African Nationalist Pioneer Movement, and the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage. At one point, Joseph writes, the demonstration reached Times Square "featuring virtually every black militant group in the city." Local activists, including jazz singers, and poets and writers from the Harlem Writers Guild, shared a common bond with Lumumba. Together with black nationalists and communists, they called on the nations of the world to acknowledge and condemn the assassination as an affront to the global black freedom struggle.[65]

In the early 1960s, a wide array of radical organizations took shape in Detroit. In the same year of the UN demonstrations, Detroit activists, including Albert Cleage, and brothers Richard and Milton Henry, organized the Group on Advanced Leadership (GOAL). This group of militants challenged the black leadership of Detroit and "specifically opposed black participation in machine politics."[66] In March of 1962, Tripp and a group of "Black revolutionary Marxist students" formed the leadership cadre of Uhuru, which means "freedom" in Swahili. Besides engaging in local direct action demonstrations, this group "studied the works of the revolutionary leaders of China, Cuba, and the Soviet Union and the writings of Black scholars, socialists, and liberation fighters."[67] Also in 1962, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was formed in

Ohio by black college students, "a precocious group of revolutionaries committed to black nationalism and socialism who communicated with Malcolm X and Robert Williams."[68] Black radicals established a Detroit branch of RAM in 1963.[69] Also that year, Cleage and members of GOAL worked with moderates to form the DCHR. This coalition sponsored a massive civil rights demonstration of over 125,000 people in Detroit's "Walk for Freedom." GOAL also hosted a conference in November of 1963 "whose key participants represented nothing less than a genealogy of Black Power's local character, national ambitions, and international vision."[70]

Once Black Power is seen as a liberating influence among an oppressed people, it becomes much easier to imagine its individually constructed conceptions seeping into the entire fabric of the black community. The 60,000 who took to the streets of Detroit in July 1967 were not all members of Uhuru, or GOAL, or RAM, but it is clear that the Black Power ideologies put forth by organizations like these gave voice to what young black people were experiencing. Historian Russell Rickford has recently argued that Black Power, in its broader sense, influenced "legions of rank-and-file black Americans [who] appropriated nationalist discourse while rethinking the nature of citizenship and freedom."[71] When asked about the pulse of the community in these years, the attitude, the energy and the racial pride, Marsha Battle Philpot would say years later, "It was in the air." The mood in Detroit was hopeful, filled with radical ideas, inspired by a broad range of civil rights activity; not in contrast to the Southern civil rights movement, but in concert with it.[72]

Viewing local radical activity in light of Black Power's historical antecedents, its international complexities, and its intertwined relationships with the largely Southern

civil rights movement brings into focus a more complex and significant movement that bears further study. Black Power's reach was vast and its manifestations were varied and complicated. As Sugrue has written, the slogan "lumped together widely disparate social movements and ideologies and… became a synonym for all varieties of black militancy, even when they varied enormously."[73] Yes, the militancy "varied enormously," yet, at its core, Black Power spoke of racial pride and an end to second-class citizenship. It began to occupy a space in the psyche of young urban blacks as they interacted with one another, with exploitative white merchants, and most certainly when they encountered an abusive white police force. Russell Rickford has argued persuasively that blacks in Detroit and elsewhere had "theorized, improvised, and amended Black Power concepts at the grassroots, writing an assertive new chapter of struggle in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools." These various conceptions of Black Power must be viewed in contrast to the second-class status foisted upon black people by white people. "An expansive view of Black Power," Rickford argues, "must unearth the movement's democratic character, demonstrating how aspects of nationalist thought proved relevant to everyday strivings of African Americans and thus garnered wide support in black communities."[74] The complexities of this more expansive conception of Black Power emerged dramatically in Detroit in the watershed year of 1963.

CHAPTER IV

Radical Detroit: 1963-1966

"The Black community was patrolled by a nearly all white police force that intimidated, humiliated, and harassed Black people on a daily basis."
– Black radical Luke Tripp (on growing up in 1950s Detroit)[1]

Detroit's militant history parallels and intersects with the development of the early Black Power movement. Like their national counterparts, Detroit radicals had contentious relationships with moderate civil rights groups that had more faith in white society's capacity for change. The most prominent figure in Detroit's early Black Power activism was the Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. His interactions with the city's radical community, its white leadership, moderate blacks, and the national figures of the early Black Power movement illuminate the diversity of civil rights activity emanating from and winding through Detroit.[2]

The evolution of Malcolm X exemplifies Detroit's radical disposition and the city's interconnectedness with the local, national, and international black militant freedom struggle. In the summer of 1953, shortly after his jail house conversion to the Nation of Islam's version of Islamic faith, Malcolm became the assistant minister of NOI's Temple No. 1 in Detroit. His successful street based recruiting efforts in Detroit tripled the membership there. His subsequent success in Boston and then in Philadelphia led to his assignment as principal minister of Harlem Temple No. 7. By interacting with ghetto residents up and down the east coast and west to Detroit, Chicago, and LA, historian and Malcolm X biographer Manning Marable has written, Malcolm learned early on that NOI's success was dependent "on its being immersed in the black community's struggle for daily existence." This practical approach would eventually put

him at odds with the Nation of Islam whose separatist teachings rejected civil rights activity. Despite the limitations imposed by NOI's philosophy, Malcolm became actively involved with the variety of black militants that collectively embodied the early Black Power movement. Perhaps more than any other city beyond Harlem, Detroit was an eyewitness to the growing prominence and evolution of Malcolm X.[3]

Malcolm's militant influence in Detroit paralleled the more publicized emergence of the Southern freedom struggle in the mid to late 1950s. In the same year that nine black students integrated Little Rock High School with the support of federal troops, Malcolm delivered a four week series of lectures at Detroit's Temple No. 1. In one meeting "attended by over 4,000 people" Malcolm called upon the "Negro intelligentsia" to unite" in order "to eliminate immediately the brutal atrocities that are being committed daily against our people." Fully ten years before the Detroit Rebellion, Malcolm warned the black middle class that if they failed in this venture, "then the little man in the street will henceforth begin to take matters into his own hands."[4]

Albert Cleage and other local militants developed strong relationships with Malcolm and the NOI minister was a "great hit with the general public in Detroit."[5] As Peniel Joseph has argued, "local [Detroit] black militants found a kindred spirit in Malcolm." These militants included "Christian ministers [like Albert Cleage], black socialists [like Grace and Jimmy Boggs], youthful revolutionaries [like Luke Tripp], and advocates of self-determination who were unimpressed with the civil rights movement's philosophy of nonviolence."[6] Much of Malcolm's appeal was his open willingness to challenge the white power structure and the few middle and upper-class blacks who

claimed to represent the interests of all black people. In this conception of Black Power, class consciousness and race consciousness walked hand in hand.

For blacks in cities like Harlem and Detroit, their introduction to Malcolm X occurred on the streets where he preached a message of racial uplift. The rest of the country met Malcolm through a 1959 television news broadcast titled *The Hate That Hate Produced.* Hosted by Mike Wallace, the program portrayed black Muslims, black nationalists, and other black radical groups as "black supremacists" while Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and other moderates were described as "more sober-minded Negroes." In turn, one black radical referred to the NAACP as "the National Association for the Advancement of Some Colored Folk."[7] As Joseph has written, the "documentary ushered in the first interracial political controversy of the civil rights era, pitting black separatists against integrationists." To many white Americans, however, "the blatantly one-sided" program marginalized the radicals as hypocrites for practicing the same kind of racial demagoguery as the KKK and the White Citizen's Councils.[8]

Any attempts to marginalize the militant message among blacks in Detroit failed. "Black nationalist and black power groups proliferated in Detroit in the 1960s," wrote Sidney Fine, "and the city became a center for militant black organizing and thinking."[9] For example, the Group of Advanced Leadership (GOAL) was organized in November of 1961 by Cleage and brothers Richard and Milton Henry. GOAL "forge[d] strong relationships with Black Muslims, nationalists, trade unionists, civil rights leaders, and Socialists."[10] Their activities reached deep into the Detroit community, particularly among young people and, like many civil rights organizations in the early 1960s, GOAL initially struggled nonviolently in support of integration. To Cleage, who Fine describes

as the "most articulate spokesmen among the black militants," integration was not assimilation.[11] In Cleage's vision of integration, blacks would not simply adopt white ways as they abandoned their black identity. He fought with the school board of Detroit to introduce text books that depicted blacks and whites "engaged in common activities." He made appeals for the hiring of black teachers and administrators and the teaching of black history. He argued that teaching black children the virtues of slave owners was an affront to black consciousness. Within a few years, though, Cleage and others in GOAL determined that white intransigence ensured that integration would never work; a conclusion reached, though, only after measuring the white man's capacity for change.[12]

Cleage's failed efforts to imbue the black educational experience with the acknowledgement that blacks had played significant roles in American history led him to argue that the only way to achieve justice was through "black separatism."[13] Through the *Illustrated News* and the GOAL radio program, Cleage criticized moderate Negro leadership and their dependence upon the good will of white people.[14] He "excoriated 'Uncle Toms' and accommodationists" who selfishly abandoned their dignity for the material comforts of a white world to which they were granted minimal access.[15] Cleage simply did not trust white people and his radicalism put him at odds with the NAACP, the Detroit Urban League and other black organizations that curried favor with the white power structure of Detroit.[16] As Cleage abandoned integration as a means of achieving equality, he helped lay out a spiritual and cultural foundation upon which to build a new black political identity. Just months before the rebellion, Cleage unveiled in his church a painting of a Black Madonna and eventually renamed his church in her honor. Arguing

the geographical and historical absurdity of a white Jesus, Cleage said that, "Black people cannot build dignity on their knees worshipping a white Christ."[17]

Other militant organizations emerged in Detroit in the early 1960s, many involving the participation of young people. Uhuru was formed in March 1962 by a group of radicalized black students at Wayne State University.[18] Members of Uhuru included militant nationalists Luke Tripp, Charles Simmons, and General Gordon Baker. Uhuru "rejected nonviolence as a tactic in combating 'the anti-Negro machine that is America.'"[19] Tripp recently reflected on the significance of Uhuru:

> Uhuru was a loosely structured highly dedicated cadre of Black students who were committed to the struggle against injustice, mainly caused by racism, capitalism, and imperialism... Its modus operandi was direct action; many times it had confrontational encounters. It studied the philosophy, strategies, and tactics of socialist revolutionaries and liberators of color who fought against white supremacy and combined this knowledge with its own analysis, concrete experience, and perspectives.[20]

Uhuru merged nonviolent protest with the threat of violence. In June of 1962, Tripp and others demonstrated peacefully against the racist hiring practices of a Kroger's grocery store in Detroit. Their handbill claimed that they would continue demonstrating until "Kroger's lily-white hiring policies" were changed or until the store "has been resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely annihilated."[21] The Detroit police made note of Uhuru's activities and put the group's members under surveillance.[22]

Another black radical group, the Detroit chapter of the Revolutionary Action Movement was formed in Detroit in early 1963 by General Gordon Baker, Jr. The first RAM cadre had been formed the previous year in Ohio by black radical Max Stanford, another example of Detroit's interconnectedness with the national black radical scene. The RAM Manifesto in Detroit "stated that RAM was officially organized... by Afro-

Americans who favored Robert F. Williams and the concept of organized violence." The manifesto included that RAM "oriented its program to education and political revolution; a black political party which must have revolutionary objectives and not peaceful coexistence; the need for a black revolution that could and would seize power."[23] By 1963, as Williams broadcast *Radio Free Dixie* from Cuba, Detroit radicals like Tripp, Simmons, and Baker took inspiration from a black revolutionary who had sprayed machine gun fire in his backyard in anticipation of a raid by the KKK.[24]

The spring and summer of 1963 marked a significant turning point in the black freedom struggle. Most prominently, the SCLC's Birmingham Campaign provoked a violent and widely televised white backlash. In support of the hundreds of courageous protestors – many of them children - who had been jailed in Birmingham, Detroit staged a massive demonstration. On full display was the diversity of civil rights thinking in Motown. In August, the nation's capital hosted a seemingly similar demonstration; one for the history books. A review of these three events dramatically illustrates Detroit's central role in the complex web of civil rights activity; its Southern and Northern counterparts, its moderate and radical temperaments, its class divisions, and its national versus local manifestations.

Early in 1963, Martin Luther King and the SCLC had decided to take the fight to the belly of the beast; Birmingham, Alabama was one of the most staunchly segregated cities in the South. If nonviolent civil disobedience was meant to provoke a response, local officials in Birmingham were happy to provide it. In May, televised images from Birmingham alerted the nation to the sacrifices being made by nonviolent protestors battling Jim Crow. Hundreds of children were carted off to jail. The *Washington Afro-*

American reported that, "About two-thirds of the [thousands of] jailed demonstrators were children – under 18 years of age with some as young as eight."[25] And in the *New York Times*, "There was no resistance to arrest by the laughing, singing groups of youngsters."[26] The next day, though, news stories showed peaceful protestors, including many young children, being attacked by fire hoses and police dogs.[27] By May 8, the *Times* report would take on a tone that would be sounded for the next several years. "Rioting Negroes Routed by Police at Birmingham," read a *Times* headline. "The police and firemen drove hundreds of rioting Negroes off the streets today with high-pressure hoses and an armored car. The riot broke out as 2,500 to 3,500 persons rampaged through the business district." Considering King's insistence upon provoking Birmingham's racists, it is no surprise that a nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience had turned extremely violent.[28]

After local officials agreed on a desegregation plan, it appeared that the Birmingham protest and the violence were over. On the night of May 11, however, bombs exploded at a black-owned hotel where Martin Luther King had stayed and at the home of King's brother who was participating in the Birmingham Campaign. "Bombs Touch Off Widespread Riot at Birmingham," blared the *Times*. "Angered by the attacks, thousands of Negroes poured into the streets and engaged the police, firemen, state highway patrolmen and Jefferson County deputy sheriffs in a running battle that raged through four or five blocks."[29]

The violence finally subsided under the threat of federal intervention. President Kennedy had sent troops to bases near Birmingham which created a confrontation between Kennedy and Alabama Governor George Wallace. In a telegram sent to the

president, Wallace implored, "May I ask under what authority you would send Federal troops into this state?"[30] Civil War themes of this sort would punctuate the escalating violence for the next five years as local and state officials wrestled with their ability to maintain order.

Kennedy had little choice but to intervene. Television had provided America a front row seat and the entire country bore witness to the sacrifices being made by Southern blacks who had been encouraged to take blows without striking back. Peniel E. Joseph writes that images emanating from Birmingham "played out like a made-for-television morality tale. Birmingham's spring of racial tumult and grisly violence riveted America and attracted notice from the rest of the world." For Martin Luther King and the SCLC, Birmingham was a resounding success marking a high point of nonviolent civil disobedience as a means of achieving racial justice. The white backlash was intense, but this was the point. As the country and the rest of the world looked on, hundreds of dignified black school children laughed and sang their way to jail. Yet, the widespread sympathy expressed for these youthful protestors was matched with revulsion at the predictable ugliness of massive Southern white resistance.[31]

Birmingham of 1963 transformed the civil rights movement. In *But for Birmingham*, historian Glenn T. Eskew argues that Birmingham represents an important crossroads for the local and national civil rights movements where "the push for reform from below came changes in the system from above." Birmingham was an industrial city and its socio-economic characteristics resembled those of many Northern cities. It is no coincidence that the events in Birmingham inspired Northern activity among similarly situated blacks.[32] As journalist and historian Diane McWhorter has written, the events in

Birmingham "nationalized the faltering civil rights movement and galvanized public opinion behind federal legislation to abolish segregation."[33] However, while the iconic images from Birmingham portray the power of nonviolent civil disobedience over brutal white resistance, they tend to downplay the violence from demonstrators that capture the event in a different hue. During the campaign, allegedly peaceful demonstrators hurled bricks and Coke bottles at police and firemen. And, Birmingham was the site of the first urban riot of the 1960s.[34]

As images of the Birmingham Campaign in the spring of 1963 "galvanized public opinion," they did so around images that told only part of the story. During the rioting that followed the dynamiting of the hotel King had used, the Reverend Wyatt T. Walker used a megaphone to encourage rioters to go home. Instead of heading his advice, "someone heaved a brick at him."[35] This image, had it been captured and broadcast to the world alongside the now-iconic photograph of a police dog attacking a young black man, would surely have told the fuller story of Birmingham. A month after the brick was heaved at him and sticking to the script that has shaped historical memory, Reverend Walker wrote, "We believe that Birmingham will prove to be a watershed in the history of the nonviolent revolution in America." Indeed, it was that; it was also much more.[36]

Detroit reacted to the Birmingham "morality tale" on several fronts; sympathy for the children, anger at the white backlash and, perhaps most significantly, reflection on the violence. The gut-wrenching scenes of black children being bullied by white local officials prompted action. Albert Cleage believed that Detroit should demonstrate its solidarity with Southern blacks by staging a massive march to "show people how we feel about Birmingham but also conditions here in Detroit." Cleage and his unlikely ally, the

Reverend C. L. Franklin, worked together to organize a "demonstration so big," Cleage said, that "the police would be afraid to show up."[37] On May 17, 1963, the ninth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and only days after Kennedy and Wallace had faced off over the deployment of federal troops into Alabama, eight hundred blacks met to establish the Detroit Council for Human Rights (DCHR). The march was scheduled for the following month.[38]

As pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit in the 1950s, the Reverend C.L. Franklin enjoyed celebrity status. Located on Hastings Street in Paradise Valley, just north of the Black Bottom neighborhood that fronted the Detroit River, Franklin reached out to all of Detroit's black community. Some New Bethel members were a bit troubled, as Franklin biographer Nick Salvatore has written, by "their pastor's friendship with the Hastings Street prostitutes, gamblers, drug dealers, and club operators." Yet, Franklin openly embraced these relationships from the pulpit while reminding his flock that Satan is everywhere, not just on Hastings Street.[39]

In 1951, a local radio station began broadcasting Franklin's Sunday night sermons and in 1953, Joe Von Battle approached Franklin after a Sunday sermon and convinced him that people would buy his recorded sermons. Less than a half mile south on Hastings Street was Joe's Record Shop and recording studio. Joe set up his equipment in New Bethel and pressed the records in his shop.[40] The recordings were a great hit, especially with the crowd outside Joe's Record Shop where speakers set up on the sidewalk boomed the preaching and music into the heart of Paradise Valley with "ecstatic crowds swaying to his voice." The New Bethel Choir included Franklin's daughter Aretha who would gain some national attention herself. She was first recorded as she sang at New Bethel

and later as she became one of Motown's biggest stars. The sermon recordings were distributed around the country and Franklin's growing notoriety helped nurture a friendship with Martin Luther King. [41]

As Franklin, Albert Cleage, and others formed the DCHR to organize the Birmingham sympathy march in 1963, it was Franklin's relationship with King that gave the new local organization the upper hand over the "entrenched black leadership, religious and secular."[42] Indeed, both Cleage and Franklin had criticized the NAACP for ignoring the poor and working class blacks of Detroit. Franklin had directly confronted the middle-class-focused organization in a 1955 letter which sarcastically asked the NAACP to spell out exactly what it was that they did for black people. As Salvatore has written, to the "working people for whom the Hastings Street neighborhood was home, the activities of the NAACP simply did not affect their lives."[43] On the national level, competing organizations and personalities also vied for the spotlight and financial backing. King's support of the DCHR march promoted the interests of the SCLC and, in the struggle to gain supporters, gave the SCLC an edge over the NAACP. "Franklin's rift with the local NAACP," Joseph wrote, "was part of the national infighting between factions… whose allegiance was split between Roy Wilkins [of the NAACP] and [Martin Luther] King [of the SCLC]."[44]

Less than two weeks before the scheduled march, NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was gunned down outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi. Evers had become a prominent figure in Mississippi and in the nation and his death seemed to coincide with other events in 1963, including Birmingham, which indicated the black freedom struggle

was taking a violent turn. Despite the tension aroused by Evers's death, the planning of the Walk for Freedom went forward. [45]

Birmingham offered compelling evidence to Cleage and Franklin that whites would never fully embrace integration and they argued that the demonstration should be for blacks only. It was not to be. Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh, union boss Walter Reuther and former Governor John B. Swainson joined Cleage, C.L. Franklin and Martin Luther King at the head of the estimated 125,000 who marched down Woodward Avenue to Cobo Hall. Detroit's march became the largest demonstration in US history. It was "as if a huge dam had burst," reported the *Detroit News*.[46]

Once it became clear that the event would be a success, the NAACP had hundreds of signs printed up and distributed to marchers.[47] In a sea of messages that called for an end to housing discrimination and appeals to join the NAACP were more provocative placards carried by young people like Uhuru members Luke Tripp and Charles Simmons. Among these were many that read, "White Man Wake Up, or Wake Up Dead."[48] While marchers sang "We Shall Overcome," Simmons wrote later, "[W]e carried our own signs [such as] 'Negroes with Guns Shall Overcome.'"[49] As Luke Tripp recently recalled, Uhuru served as the "youth contingent" of march organizers. The signs they carried that day reflected their commitment to the ideas of exiled militant Robert F. Williams. "Williams was one of our heroes," Tripp said.[50] Williams's *Negroes with Guns* had been published the previous year and had become, according to Timothy B. Tyson, a "kind of bible of black militance."[51] When asked how other marchers reacted to these messages, Tripp recalled that it just wasn't that big of a deal, the idea that "if someone came at you

with a gun you would shoot back." The signs "didn't upset them," Tripp recalled, "it wasn't that controversial."[52]

Martin Luther King was clearly the main draw at the Walk for Freedom. Riding the wave of success following the Birmingham Campaign, King continued to defend nonviolent civil disobedience. His message was evolving, however. Only weeks before speaking in Detroit, he had crafted his now historic "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Disappointed with Southern white liberals who objected to the forcefulness of the Birmingham Campaign, King expressed his own growing impatience. "If [the Negro's] repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways," King wrote from his cell, "they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history." While King himself was unprepared to encourage violence, he was all-too-willing to exercise a power familiar to Black Power advocates, the threat of violence. "Millions of Negroes," he wrote, "out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare." King was all too aware that an assertive and provocative commitment to nonviolence took one to the doorstep of violence. Indeed, Birmingham was a concrete and recent example of the tenuous relationship between a philosophical commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience and violence itself.[53]

When King "stepped to the podium [in Detroit], thousands greeted him with a 'sudden burst of thunder' that throttled Cobo Arena's high rafters."[54] King invoked the lines that would be made famous two months later at the March on Washington including his rapturous thanks to "God Almighty." Yet, like a politician shaping his message to fit the crowd, the Detroit version of King's most famous speech had a radical edge; it

expressed a new urgency, one that was impatient and even a bit combative. "The price that this nation must pay for the continued oppression and exploitation of the Negro or any other minority group," King extolled in Detroit, "is the price of its own destruction." Popularly viewed as a warm-up to the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech delivered at the March on Washington a few months later, it was only in Detroit that King spoke of a "magnificent new militancy within the Negro community all across this nation."[55]

Other, more militant references were made by King in Detroit that reflected an intersection of the civil rights movement and Black Power's international focus. "We know that our brothers and sisters in Africa and Asia," King intoned, "are moving with jet-like speed toward the goal of political independence." Black Power advocates had long associated the struggle of African Americans to the larger global struggle of non-white people around the world. King's embrace of this idea in Detroit was a signal that he, too, was struggling with the slow pace of progress in the tenth year after *Brown*.

With Mayor Cavanagh, Walter Reuther, and other local white officials standing by, Albert Cleage directed his radical message to the grassroots. "Negroes are discriminated against on every hand, right here in Detroit," he said. "We have served notice on the state of Michigan and the City of Detroit," Cleage proclaimed, "that we are part of the freedom struggle." His crescendo echoed with, "We must FIGHT and FIGHT and FIGHT."[56] Almost four years later, Cleage reflected on the significance of the Walk to Freedom by comparing it with Jesus's "triumphant entry" into Jerusalem. His sermon notes dated March 19, 1967, just four months before the Detroit Rebellion, speak to the failure of what should have been a triumphant entry in June of 1963:

> Black people as far as the eye could see… We marched down Woodward Avenue… filled up the Arena and every Convention Room in Cobo Hall, and sat

> all over the lawn and the streets and everywhere. That was a triumphant entry... We were protesting against everything that was happening in Birmingham, Alabama and all over the South. It was a nationalistic protest against an enemy who was beginning to be revealed to us. As we marched down Woodward Avenue, we didn't know exactly what we wanted to do any more than the people who entered Jerusalem with Jesus. In a sense we wanted a nation… That is why 300,000 people came together to walk down Woodward Avenue. We felt that somehow we had to become a Black Nation if we were to find escape from the racial oppression which we saw revealed on television every night. Just walking together seemed to be a move in that direction. And so, in a sense, it was the same kind of Nationalistic demonstration that Jesus had when he entered Jerusalem that we had walking down Woodward Avenue. Instead of Jesus we had Dr. Martin Luther King. And whatever you think about him now, when you marched down Woodward Avenue, you thought Dr. King was the leader who was going to build a Black Nation and give us deliverance. In a sense we were giving him the same kind of loyalty that the people who entered into Jerusalem with Jesus gave to him.[57]

To Albert Cleage, the Walk to Freedom had been hijacked by white liberals and Uncle Toms. His sermon notes from 1967 reflect a bitterness that the Walk to Freedom had failed to inspire the masses to create a black nation:

> There the mayor got up and gave his greetings, and told us what good niggers we were. He was up there talking and black people were still marching down Woodward Avenue. He was talking and we knew that he was destroying the very thing that we had walked down there for. We had a feeling that if it was possible for 300,000 of us to come together, we certainly hadn't come together to listen to Mayor Cavanagh, who was one of our oppressors. He wasn't one of us.[58]

As moderates worked for political victories that might benefit a few middle-class blacks, Cleage drew battle lines. "During the few minutes which I was given to speak," Cleage bragged later, "I voiced our need for protest and struggle against the enemy, and I have never heard such a thunderous response."[59] Unlike the subsequent March on Washington, Detroit's Walk for Freedom showcased the full vitality of a broad spectrum of civil rights activity. As Peniel Joseph observed, "Detroit's freedom walk reveals the blurred lines between civil rights and Black Power activism, where a known ally of Malcolm X could co-organize a sympathy march to support demonstrators in

Birmingham."[60] In Detroit, the lines were indeed blurry. By the time King reached the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, however, the old guard civil rights leaders had brought those lines back into clear focus.

The two months between the Walk for Freedom and the March on Washington revealed these new fault lines of the civil rights movements. In Harlem on June 29, less than a week after the huge demonstration in Detroit, Malcolm X addressed five thousand people who "packed street corners and sat on fire escapes to listen to Malcolm's call for a 'moral reformation.'"[61] Malcolm blamed the white man for the drugs and prostitution that plagued Harlem and claimed that President Kennedy was projecting an image of American freedom overseas while ignoring the serious challenge to those freedoms in regards to black people. He also called for the creation of a separate black state.[62] The next day, Martin Luther King visited Harlem where the "integration leader" denounced Malcolm's call for black independence.[63] In Camden, New Jersey on Sunday, Malcolm fired back by attacking King. The rhetorical back-and-forth continued throughout the summer.[64]

As King, Malcolm X, and others battled over the national civil rights agenda, local activists in Detroit continued challenging the obstacles in their daily lives. Only a few weeks after the rousing Walk for Freedom, radicals in Detroit directed their anger at the police. Following the fatal shooting of a black woman named Cynthia Scott, Uhuru and GOAL organized a demonstration of seven hundred people at police headquarters.[65] In a speech at the demonstration, Uhuru chairman Luke Tripp said: "Negroes are becoming tired of second-class citizenship and are standing up and ready to fight for their rights… If we don't get our freedom, get out the hanging tree."[66]

Tripp commented years later that the large number of protestors afforded a degree of safety from police retaliation.[67] The 100 or so placards carried in front of police headquarters aggressively reflected this power in numbers:

"All Gestapo Police Belong in Hell"
"UHURU Will Resort to Mau Mau Tactics"
"100 Years Non Violence – Too Long"
"Time is Running Out 1863 – 1963"
"Put Negro Cops in Our Neighborhoods"
"Give Me Liberty or Detroit Cops"
"We Want Blood" [68]

After protesting directly to the Detroit Police Department, Uhuru "staged a sit-in at the lobby of the mayor's office." At the August 1, 1963 protest Uhuru distributed a handbill that called for the "Immediate disarming of all policemen." It also claimed that the "police department has repeatedly proven it is incapable of handling firearms intelligently." Uhuru insisted that all white policemen must be withdrawn from black neighborhoods because the police department was "a remarkably efficient anti-Negro machine." Uhuru made demands "which must be wholly and completely met if peace is ever to exist between this city's politicians, their absurd fascist Gestapo minded force, and the thousands upon thousands of people living in the black ghetto!"[69]

At another rally on August 27, Uhuru urged Negroes to "take up arms and take what he wants by force… The Negro should get weapons, even if it's only screwdrivers and chisels, and tear down police headquarters brick by brick." Apparently following the recommendations put forth by Robert F. Williams, Uhuru also announced that they were prepared to sabotage the water supply to the suburbs.[70]

Detroit was not the only city inspired by Birmingham. In 1963, Northern activists participated in "1,412 separate civil rights demonstrations." In cities across the country

like Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, these Northern activists, inspired by their Southern brothers, took to the streets, as Thomas J. Sugrue has reported, "with more disruptive and coercive tactics, pushing at the boundaries of direct action. All over the North, black nationalists, separatists, and radicals joined demonstrations, sometimes clashing – but also cooperating – with advocates of nonviolent change." Not surprisingly, their more forceful activity in the North also resulted in some "tense confrontations between young black men and the police." The civil rights and Black Power movements intersected in 1963 but as they moved on, it was clear that a binary characterization was fully inadequate to explain the complexities of civil rights activity in the mid 1960s. What is evident, however, is that the movement as a whole was trending towards revolution.[71]

By 1963, even as Northern activists had been inspired by the Southern struggle and were willing to adopt some of its strategies, the faster pace of city life seems to have bred an impatience that led many of them to question the feasibility of its goals. As a former governor of Michigan observed, "large segments of the Negro population are losing confidence in interracial approaches to the problems of gaining full civil rights."[72]

The day after Uhuru delivered its call to arms against the Detroit Police Department, the nation's capital overflowed with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators during the March on Washington. Superficially resembling the Walk for Freedom, the iconic March on Washington more accurately represented the political victory of moderate civil rights leaders over the efforts of Black Power leaders like Albert Cleage, Malcolm X, and Luke Tripp. The radical intrusions into the Walk for Freedom were nowhere to be found in DC. Malcolm would later write that the entire event was

completely staged; the Farce on Washington, he called it, hijacked by "white liberals to stem the real revolution, the black revolution."[73]

To Malcolm X, the original conception of a march to the nation's capital was a "militant, unorganized..., leaderless," and nearly spontaneous uprising of the grassroots. He "envisioned thousands of black brothers converging together on Washington – to lie down in the streets, on airport runways, on governmental lawns – demanding of the Congress and the White House some concrete civil rights action."[74] Malcolm believed "it was young Negroes... sick and tired of the black man's neck under the white man's heel" that were the force behind the march. The Kennedy administration was terrified because in this environment, as Malcolm wrote, "The right spark... could set off a black uprising." When Kennedy tried to get the Negro "leaders" to "stop the planned March" they told him "they hadn't begun it" and that "they had no control over it."[75] To Malcolm, the moderate civil rights leaders had been bought off by the Kennedy administration and white liberal interests. A "reported $800,000 was donated," he wrote, "to a United Civil Rights Leadership council that was quickly organized by the 'big six'" (Martin Luther King and the SCLC, James Farmer and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), John Lewis of SNCC, A. Phillip Randolph, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and Whitney Young of the National Urban League). Four prominent whites were added, "one Catholic, one Jew, one Protestant, and one labor boss," who now made up the " 'big ten' [who] would supervise the March on Washington's 'mood' and its 'direction.'"[76]

For middle and upper-class Negroes, "who had earlier been deploring the March on Washington talk by grass-roots Negroes," the revolutionary protest was transformed into a "picnic." Prominent white figures began to announce that they would attend. Now

that "white people… were going to march," Malcolm wrote disdainfully, "Those 'integration'-mad Negroes practically ran over each other trying to find out where to sign up. The 'angry blacks' March suddenly had been made chic. Suddenly it had a Kentucky Derby image. For the status seeker, it was a status symbol."[77]

Still hoping to achieve at least the appearance of black unity, the "organizers" of the March on Washington invited Malcolm X to participate as long as he "adhered to nonviolence."[78] Malcolm was willing to accommodate this request but, when he arrived in Washington, he learned from reporters about "rumors that some of the march's more militant speeches were being censored."[79] The rumors were true. James Baldwin and Malcolm X were both considered as participants but neither made it to the podium that day. Robert Kennedy had met with Baldwin earlier that year and the resulting publicity included Baldwin's assessment that the Attorney General was incompetent and ignorant. For his part, Malcolm had been openly criticizing King and President Kennedy in a long series of speeches. John Lewis of SNCC was given the opportunity to speak but his message was tempered by the old guard's demand for black unity. Lewis's story illustrates the challenges faced by civil rights activists in an environment where militant voices were struggling to be heard.

The day before the march, a written copy of the speech Lewis hoped to deliver in front of the Lincoln Memorial was circulated among A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins and other "leaders" of the march. In it, Lewis challenged the legitimacy of both political parties when it came to the interests of blacks. "The party of Kennedy," Lewis had written, "is also the party of [Southern segregationist and racist]

Eastland."[80] The party of Lincoln was no better. Suggesting that justice for blacks existed outside the Washington power structure, Lewis had hoped to ask, "Where is our party?"[81]

After conferring with King and Randolph, Lewis toned down his revolutionary rhetoric. Some of the changes were subtle as "serious revolution" in Lewis's original draft became a "serious social revolution." Other more direct passages were completely removed. Invoking America's long history of racial oppression, Lewis had hoped to say, "The revolution is at hand and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery."[82] If King and Randolph hoped to gain concessions from the Kennedy administration, it is not surprising that they encouraged Lewis to refrain from inferring that the president was a slave master. At stake was the passage of a civil rights bill recently introduced by Kennedy. To the moderates, Lewis's words would have jeopardized what eventually became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. "We will not wait for the courts to act," Lewis wrote in the censored speech, "for we have been waiting for hundreds of years. We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory."[83]

Sounding more like Stokely Carmichael, who would take over the reins of SNCC in 1966, Lewis seemed poised to jumpstart the revolution. "We will march through the South," Lewis threatened, "through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did… We shall pursue our own scorched earth policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground."[84] As John Lewis revealed later, King and Randolph convinced him to soften his message. "We've come this far together," they told him, "let's stay together."[85]

Other efforts were made to manage the message of the March on Washington beyond censoring the speakers. The marchers themselves, according to Malcolm X, "had been instructed to bring no signs – signs were provided. They had been told to sing one song: 'We Shall Overcome.' They had been told how to arrive, when, where to arrive, where to assemble, when to start marching, the route to march… Yes, I was there. I observed that circus."[86] If any of the marchers that day believed that "Negroes with Guns Shall Overcome," the popular recollections of the March on Washington do not reveal it.

This interpretation of the March on Washington portrays one of the most iconic moments of the civil rights movement as a coordinated effort to marginalize the more radical and nationalistic message that had gained momentum in Detroit. Historical memory reinforces the perceived effectiveness of the alliance of white liberals and the conservative black leadership. It celebrates the peaceful gathering of hundreds of thousands of marchers in Washington as King preached brotherhood and integration. On the other hand, the militant message that percolated in Detroit during the Walk for Freedom was almost completely scrubbed out. Popularly viewed as a warm-up to the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, it was only in Detroit that King found common cause with "our brothers and sisters in Africa and Asia," and only in Detroit that King spoke of a "magnificent new militancy within the Negro community all across the nation."[87]

Popular accounts have been so regularly affirmed through Black History month celebrations it is almost as if the radicalism King expressed in Detroit never happened. Indeed, the entirety of the Walk for Freedom, at the time the largest civil rights demonstration in history, "was destined for obscurity. The significance of the Detroit

event," Peniel E. Joseph writes, "- as a mass demonstration cosponsored by northern militants and allies of Malcolm X, on the cutting edge of early Black Power militancy - was relegated to a footnote."[88] The Walk for Freedom showcased the full spectrum of moderate to radical thinking where Black Power stood at the podium with King. In the end, though, the planning and execution of the March on Washington represented nothing less than the maturation of moderate civil rights activity; managing the message, limiting the spontaneity, and securing the favor of those in power. Detroit's footnote of an event may have been dismissed by the media and subsequently the history books. In Motown, however, it inspired a local battle between the moderates and the radicals.

In Detroit, C.L. Franklin used the success of the march to promote the development of the Northern Negro Leadership Conference; an organization he hoped would stand as a Northern counterpart to King's SCLC. Cleage served briefly as head of the Conference Planning Committee of Franklin's organization. Emboldened by the Walk for Freedom, which he believed "epitomized… an 'epidemic of militant action' sweeping the nation," Cleage invited "radical activists" and "suspected Communists" to become part of the NNLC. The differences were too much to overcome. Cleage resigned from the committee and used his own organization to host the Grassroots Leadership Conference; a gathering of militants scheduled the same weekend as Franklin's first NNLC meeting.[89]

While Cleage and Franklin battled over Detroit's civil rights leadership, Luke Tripp and Uhuru continued their struggle on the ground. On October 11, 1963, Uhuru conducted a demonstration during a ceremony of the Detroit Olympic Committee which was organized to bring the 1968 Olympics to Motown. As a small group of protestors at an organized gathering to celebrate and promote Detroit's reputation, Uhuru argued that

the Olympic Committee's promise of jobs and investment would do little to alleviate the problems in the ghetto. Uhuru's activities that day were nonviolent yet disruptive enough to land Tripp in jail.[90]

As the crowd cheered, Uhuru members booed, Tripp recalled. A speaker would say something about how wonderful Detroit was and "they said 'yeah' and we said 'boo.'" Before the ceremony was over, Tripp and the other protestors headed back to Wayne State to attend their classes. He and his comrades learned that the police had arrested Uhuru member John Watson and that they were searching for the rest of them on campus. Tripp and his comrades went to Albert Cleage's church to seek support. It was there that Attorney Milton Henry of GOAL advised Tripp and his comrades to turn themselves in. Henry also agreed to represent them in their new legal struggles.[91]

Tripp was arrested and charged with disturbing the peace. They just "wanted to punish us," Tripp said. Even though the evidence just did not support the charge, it was as if they were saying, "we're gonna try to disrupt your life." The jury was "virtually all white" and clearly "hostile." In the end, having proper legal representation led to an acquittal, but the entire experience confirmed what Tripp already knew about Detroit. "It was like Johannesburg, South Africa," Tripp said several times, trying to explain the indignity of being a black man in a white world. In the end, the Detroit police were successful at disrupting Tripp's life; but he has no regrets about the turn of events following the arrest and trial. The next year, Tripp and three Uhuru colleagues traveled to Cuba to "express our solidarity" with the revolution. Inspired by meeting with his hero Robert F. Williams and his wife Mabel, Tripp and the others returned to Detroit where "we intensified our struggle against U.S. imperialism and racism."[92]

In the month after Tripp's arrest, Albert Cleage and GOAL, including Detroit Marxists James and Grace Lee Boggs, hosted the Grassroots Leadership Conference. Formed after C.L. Franklin's Northern Leadership Conference had all but excluded the militant voice, the November 1963 "conference featured notable civil rights renegades" who invited Malcolm X to deliver the keynote address.[93] "In Detroit," as Peniel E. Joseph writes, "Malcolm laid the ideological foundations for nothing less than a political revolution by blacks who sought to control their own destinies."[94] In his "Message to the Grassroots," delivered on November 10, 1963 to an audience of two thousand people, Malcolm drew up the "blueprint for a national movement for black self-determination." Establishing his growing independence from NOI, Malcolm spoke in clear political language that called for a black revolution in the United States in solidarity with the anti-colonial struggles of non-white brothers in Africa and Asia.[95] Developing an allegory out of the long history of American slavery, Malcolm challenged the audience to consider that they themselves were still slaves. Back on the plantation:

> … the house Negro… loved the master more than the master loved himself… If the master got sick, the house Negro would say, "What's the matter, boss, we sick?" We sick! He identified himself with his master more than his master identified with himself. And if you came to the house Negro and said, "Let's run away, let's escape, let's separate," the house Negro would look at you and say, "Man, you crazy. What you mean separate? Where is there a better house than this? Where can I wear better clothes than this? Where can I eat better food than this?" That was the house Negro. In those days he was called the "house nigger." And that's what we call him today, because we still got some house niggers running around here.[96]

The masses of field Negroes, on the other hand, hated the master. The field Negro got leftovers; he was a "gut-eater." He "was beaten from morning to night." He would do anything he could to get away from the master. "When the [master's] house caught on fire," Malcolm said, "that field Negro prayed for a wind; for a breeze. When the master

got sick, the field Negro prayed that he'd die."[97] Malcolm saw no difference between the Uncle Toms on the plantation, the house Negroes, and the Uncle Toms who had hijacked the March on Washington:

> It was the grass roots out there in the street. It scared the white man to death, scared the white power structure in Washington, D.C. to death; I was there. When they found this black steamroller was going to come down on the capital, they called in Wilkins, they called in Randolph, they called in these national Negro leaders that you respect and told them, "Call it off." Kennedy said, "Look, you all are letting this thing go too far." An Old Tom said, "Boss, I can't stop it, because I didn't start it." I'm telling you what they said. They said, "I'm not even in it, much less at the head of it." They said, "These Negroes are doing things on their own, They're running ahead of us." And that old shrewd fox, he said, "If you all aren't in it, I'll put you in it. I'll put you at the head of it. I'll endorse it. I'll welcome it. I'll help it. I'll join it."[98]

As 1963 came to a close, the brief alliance of moderates and radicals had given way to a much clearer delineation of the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement. New battle lines had been drawn. The March on Washington strengthened the alliance between the old guard of the civil rights movement and white liberals while both groups sought to marginalize the militant voices. Landmark federal civil rights legislation followed in 1964 and 1965 that popularly legitimized moderate civil rights activity. For that part of the black population that had eked out a place in the white man's world, federal political victories were sound affirmations that progress was being made. On the ground, though, among the grassroots, these victories did little to address the very real problems of jobs, housing, and police behavior. Of course, at this point, the ghettos were starting to burn.

For residents of the ghetto, 1963 marked the emergence of new voices that spoke to the heart of what it meant to be black in America. They spoke in broader terms with deference to a long history of oppression that had carved out deeply held racial attitudes

that could not be undone with federal legislation. A new generation was increasingly discontent with the ends and means of the struggle to integrate. As Thomas J. Sugrue has observed, "Nineteen sixty-three marked the beginning of an intense contest over the future direction of the black freedom struggle."[99] Tactically speaking, the contest was over the use of violence. Strategically, though, the differences were marked by the willingness to trust white people and their capacity for change. Given the choice, white liberal pragmatists sided with the moderates who were not threatening to tear down society. The grassroots, on the other hand, empowered by leaders like Malcolm X and Albert Cleage, were discovering a new black identity built on racial pride, impatience, and a propensity to explode.

By 1964, political and racial divisions were exposed, new alliances formed along class lines, and the radical elements of the civil rights movements gained credibility and stature. Years before the rebellion, blacks in Detroit were at the juncture of this evolution of civil rights activity with access to a full-throated and uncensored display of Black Power ideology. National organizations were adopting a more radical stance, as well, and Detroit militants welcomed the change. For example, CORE "opened an office on Twelfth Street as a base of operations" only blocks away from the blind pig - a street name for an illegal after-hours bar - which would become the epicenter of the 1967 riot.[100] Like much of the civil rights activity in the early and mid-1960s, the Detroit chapter of CORE increasingly "had more in common with the new black power groups," Sidney Fine concluded, "than with the mainstream civil rights organizations."[101] Manning Marable stated simply that CORE in Detroit was now "oriented toward Malcolm X"[102]

A decade after *Brown*, the Reverend Albert Cleage had only to walk outside his church on Linwood Street to see that the ten year struggle to gain civil rights had failed to address the day to day lives of young black people in Detroit. Federal legislation purporting to protect the civil rights of African Americans did little to remedy the problems that faced the urban poor in Detroit. The Civil Rights Act did not end housing and education segregation. It did not make young blacks in Detroit appealing candidates for employment and it most certainly did not tame the Detroit Police. It was time, Cleage believed, for blacks to separate, not integrate. Cleage's message reverberated from his pulpit, resonated in radical publications, and struck the Detroit airwaves. Abandoning nonviolence, he argued passionately that blacks should take what is rightfully theirs. Inspired by Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams, Cleage believed that "blacks must be prepared to defend themselves 'against brutality by striking back when knocked down.'"[103] Three years before the Detroit Rebellion, Albert Cleage was calling on ghetto residents to battle the Detroit police.

Cleage's battle-cry reflected an often-overlooked aspect of civil rights history. Across the moderate to radical spectrum of civil rights activity, there was broad acknowledgement that, even among those committed to the very real power of nonviolence, individuals who ventured into the dangerous territory of white supremacy carried with them the right of armed self-defense. In *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (2014), veteran civil rights activist and journalist Charles E. Cobb, Jr. dispels the myth that the willingness to use violence was limited to a fringe group of radical militants. Indeed, NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers "customarily traveled around Mississippi armed, with a rifle in

the trunk of his car and a pistol beside him on the front seat."[104] Actually, it was only a small handful of activists who were "firmly and philosophically committed to nonviolence as a way of life." Among these were SNCC chairman John Lewis and the mentor of the Nashville movement, James M. Lawson.

Surprising to those immersed in popular accounts of history is that Martin Luther King "acknowledged the legitimacy of self-defense." After his Montgomery, Alabama home was bombed in 1956, King applied for a permit to carry a concealed weapon. A visitor to the King home in these days described it as "an arsenal." Cobb recognizes that if King developed a deeper commitment to nonviolence, it was more over the futility of engaging in a violent struggle against a vastly superior force. As to his eventual philosophical commitment to nonviolence, Cobb adds, King "came to this outlook slowly."[105]

This is not meant as an argument in opposition to the effectiveness of nonviolent protest. Indeed, as a tactic, if not a philosophically motivated strategy, nonviolence has been extremely effective. The argument here, however, is that for those challenging a superior force with nonviolence, being prepared to defend oneself made perfect sense. Cobb's quote of SNCC field secretary Worth Long is worth repeating here. "Now you can pray with them or pray for 'em, but if they kill you in the meantime you are not going to be an effective organizer."[106] When Cleage called on Detroit ghetto residents to "be prepared to defend themselves 'against brutality by striking back when knocked down,'" he wasn't telling them to start a fight; it was simply that there comes a time when it becomes necessary to engage in self-defense.[107]

Others in Detroit were preparing to add a bit of offense to their defense. The testimony of Detroit Police Lieutenant William McCoy before a permanent subcommittee of the US Senate reveals the violent predilections of some within Detroit's radical community in the years leading up to the rebellion. McCoy presented the subcommittee with copies of *The Crusader* which had been published in 1964 by exiled revolutionary Robert F. Williams. The police detective testified that these publications and many others had been readily available on the streets of Detroit.[108] The cover of the May-June 1964 edition of *The Crusader* depicts a larger-than-life black soldier towering over a burning city. The soldier is labeled "Afro-American Revolt."[109] The article within does not debate the need for an armed revolution against white racist oppression; it considers the feasibility of winning that revolution. It also provides ideas for the "poor man's arsenal" including "Molotov cocktails" and acid bombs made with light bulbs.[110] It advises that returning servicemen from Vietnam can help gain access to "hand grenades, bazookas, light mortars, rocket launchers, machine guns and ammunition." It suggests methods of sabotage to disrupt energy supplies, transportation arteries, and communication systems. It also clarifies the enemy. "Uncle Toms," Williams wrote, "should be as much a target as racist whites."[111]

The October 1964 edition of *The Crusader* has a front page photograph of Williams in China shaking hands with Chairman Mao. "Calling Upon the People of the World," the front page reads, "to Unite to Oppose Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism and Support the American Negroes in Their Struggle Against Racial Discrimination."[112]

McCoy provided the subcommittee with another magazine published in 1964 by the Revolutionary Action Movement. *Black America* included "excerpts from the speeches of the Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. of Detroit." Cleage's article invoked the long history of white oppression, just as his sermons did. "Black Nationalism or Black Brotherhood offers a powerful weapon ready at hand," Cleage wrote in *Black America*, "because it has been forged by the chains and shackles of oppression… The negro has been persecuted, abused, oppressed and discriminated against because he is black." He wrote that "the white man's hatred has fashioned a black nation within a nation." To Cleage, the nearly all black ghettos of America constituted this "black nation within a nation."[113] The magazine also contains an advertisement for Cleage's Group on Advanced Leadership: "*HEAR THE GOAL SHOW - EVERY SATURDAY - 6PM to 8PM WLIN – FM Radio 92 on the Dial - Afro-American Broadcasting and Recording Company*"[114]

Detroit Socialist James Boggs also appears in *Black America*. In an article titled "Two Myths That Have Failed," Boggs directly confronted integration and democracy. He called "for a total change by revolutionary means of this society and the construction of a society which eliminates the exploitation of other races, classes and nations… The role of the revolutionist is not to encourage others to become part of a system. It is to change the whole system."[115] Another article by Malcolm X encourages blacks to take what is rightfully theirs without having to "beg." He excoriates Uncle Toms for negotiating for what the black man "should have had a hundred years ago."[116]

While Cleage, James Boggs, and Malcolm X wrote about the philosophical foundations of the black freedom movement, black radical Max Stanford communicated

directly to the man in the street. There would come a time, Stanford warned, when the black man will be "forced to think like a guerilla fighter [with] the power to stop the machinery of government – that is, the power to cause chaos… mass chaos – especially in the major urban areas in the North."[117]

Chairman McClellan asked Lieutenant McCoy: "Was this publication distributed in Detroit, do you know?" Lieutenant McCoy replied: "Yes, sir. This was sold in Detroit."[118] McCoy provided another RAM publication titled: "Black America Arm Yourselves For a War of Self-Defense and Survival." McCoy said that this was also distributed in Detroit. "It sells for 10 cents," McCoy testified. McClellan asked when it was sold in Detroit. McCoy replied: "I believe it was in 1964." The Chairman adds: "That was about 2 years before any rioting occurred?" McCoy's reply: "Yes, sir."[119]

It seems unlikely that the youngest of those who took to the streets in 1967 were well versed in the radical publications circulating in Detroit in 1964. There is a great deal of evidence however, that the militant attitudes of characters like Cleage, Boggs, and Luke Tripp were dramatic examples of a larger radicalization of a significant portion of the city's black youths. The Detroit Education Project is a case in point.

Overseen by the nationally organized Northern Student Movement, the Detroit Education Project "ran a successful and well-funded tutorial program involving several hundred tutors and over 1,000 high school students." While supporting the academic needs of ghetto youth, the NSM worked with local leaders in the fight against school and community-based discrimination. Detroit's centrally located Wayne State University was typical of the areas targeted by NSM as they "ran tutorial programs in debilitated areas accessible to college campuses." NSM emerged from a "loose group of campus

organizations raising funds for [SNCC]" and its evolution paralleled the national organization's radicalization. By 1965, NSM excluded whites and shifted its primary focus to "Black Nationalism."[120]

The Detroit Education Project became the Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) and it was organized "against poor housing, unemployment and police brutality." Black nationalist Alvin Harrison became chairman of ACME in 1965 and also director of the Afro-American Youth Movement (AAYM).[121] In 1964, several ACME members were arrested in a home police claimed was a blind pig. No one was actually charged with a crime. In May of 1965, seven ACME members were arrested for resisting arrest as they showed up at the police station to support a colleague who had been arrested for driving without a license.[122] Lieutenant McCoy testified that as he participated in a teach-in at Wayne State University, Harrison pointed at the American flag and said, "'That's your flag, Baby, not mine.'"[123] In that same month, an AAYM member gave a speech at the organization's headquarters on Kercheval Street. "Don't let the white brothers take over the community. If you don't act now, we won't have any rights. Get black clothes and guns, and fight the police. They are our enemies."[124] In the next year, young blacks in Detroit, including high school students would continue to challenge white authority.

In April 1966, students at Detroit's Northern High School staged a boycott in protest of the censorship of an editorial for the school newspaper. Written by an honors student the "editorial criticized the social promotion policy of the school and its failure to prepare students for college."[125] The editorial claimed teachers at the school did not believe black students could learn. Students were well aware, too, that black school

facilities were inferior to the predominantly white schools. What they must also have been aware of is that Detroit's black high schools prepared very few students for college. "Only about 20 percent of the class scheduled to graduate in 1966," Fine reports, "had actually achieved a twelfth-grade academic level."[126]

High school students participating in a boycott might easily be viewed as opportunists playing hooky under the banner of social activism. This was not the case with Northern. During the boycott, over 1000 students organized the Freedom School held at a nearby church. Teachers and students from Wayne State University served as faculty. Students received lessons in civil disobedience and their first homework assignment was "to write an essay on what was wrong with Northern. 'I wasn't learning anything,' wrote one student. 'I want a better education and to be taught by teachers who care,'" wrote another.[127]

Reactions to the boycott revealed once again the fault lines of civil rights activity in Detroit. The non-confrontational NAACP chapter president "advised the students to return to Northern" because he "was not sure that the level of education in the Freedom School was superior to that at Northern."[128] On the other hand, the boycotting students also received advice from the now-more-militant Detroit chapter of CORE, and at one point, "a group of students for whom [Albert] Cleage served as spokesman began planning for a one-day walkout at other high schools."[129] The moderates told the children to go back to school while the militants hoped to build solidarity with other black youth whose schools were as deplorable as Northern.

According to a report that would not be issued until after the rebellion, the High School Study Commission found that the schools of Detroit were completely failing in

their effort to educate black children. A cochairman on the committee described black Detroit high schools as "appallingly inadequate, a disgrace to the community and a tragedy for the thousands of young men and women whom we compel and cajole to sit in them."[130]

At a conference held in May to discuss the concerns raised by the boycotting students, writes Fine, "black nationalists dominated the proceedings. Their demand that black administrators should replace white administrators in ghetto schools 'shot through the community[,] raising a massive reaction.'"[131] While protesting specifically against the actions of a single white principal, the students were actually demanding black control of black schools. Clearly reflecting the tenor of 1966 civil rights activity in Detroit and the nation, high school students in the year before the rebellion stood up to the white power structure. Their methods were nonviolent yet their stand was based upon a burgeoning racial pride that was surely influenced by Detroit's black nationalist climate. "The Northern boycott," as Fine writes, "'focused' the community's attention on the Detroit educational system as never before."[132] Testifying before the Kerner Commission following the upheaval in 1967, the superintendent of Detroit's schools said that he now understood "'a little better' why there had been a riot in Detroit."[133]

During the spring and summer of 1966, Alvin Harrison and his organizations ACME and AAYM continued to rally young people. In March 1966, Harrison led a demonstration against East Side General Hospital. The picketers were "mostly children." In June of 1966, members of Harrison's groups, along with members of the West Central Organization (WCO), picketed several city buildings including police headquarters and recorder's court. This protest of police brutality resulted in a meeting with Police

Advisory Assistant Hubert Locke.[134] On July 23, 1966, "Black Power Rallies" were held in different parts of the city. On Twelfth Street, Harrison "denounced the city of Detroit as 'Upper Mississippi.'"[135] The black nationalist also spoke at a political rally near ACME and AAYM headquarters on Kercheval Street. According to Lt. McCoy, Harrison "stated that black power means that no longer will the businessmen on Kercheval… treat Negroes with contempt and rob them of their wages by charging high prices. He encouraged Negroes to go and take what was theirs."[136]

While Alvin Harrison and other Detroit militants challenged the white institutions that took advantage of blacks in black neighborhoods, Dr. King took his fight to the white neighborhoods of Chicago. In June and July of 1966, in an effort to end housing discrimination, King and the SCLC targeted white neighborhoods from which blacks had been excluded. In a series of marches, demonstrators were pelted with rocks, bricks, and bottles. King was wounded when a rock hit him in the head. Whites held a sign which read, "The Only Way to Stop Niggers is to Exterminate Them." Confederate flags were flown. Chants included, "Nigger go home," and "Kill Martin Luther Coon."[137] White mobs numbered in the thousands including women and children. "I had never seen, even in Mississippi," King said, "as much hatred and hostility on the part of so many people."[138]

"The depth of white hatred in Chicago appalled him," Historian Harvard Sitkoff writes. Of course, the hatred King experienced in Chicago was nothing new to urban blacks who had been struggling for housing justice throughout the North for more than a decade. It was Chicago that led King to believe, like Albert Cleage, Luke Tripp, and General Baker, Alvin Harrison, and other Black Power advocates, that, "Rather than

seeing racism as simply irrational prejudice by individuals, King described it as the systematic exploitation of the African-American minority by the white majority." It wasn't just individuals that discriminated; racism emanated from institutions hardened by centuries of white racism. This realization, which at one point thrust King into a deep depression, had been a central argument of those who opposed integration; it was the white response to civil rights activity that pushed it towards violence. Indeed, centuries of civil rights progress had always been tempered by the white man's capacity for change.[139]

By 1966, King understood that what he had experienced in Chicago was the same intense racial animosity that defined life in the ghetto for millions of young blacks; the barriers erected by northern segregationists were tall, well defended, and braced against revolution with racial hostility that King himself discovered was more intense in areas of the North than in the Deep South. "Let us be dissatisfied," King urged, "until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice." King was calling for a revolution of nonviolence against the institutions that oppressed; a goal shared by black radicals who differed only in their adoption of other means of revolution.[140]

King's visit to Chicago highlighted the geographic diversity of civil rights activity. In Detroit, local radical activity continued to be influenced by the presence of national Black Power advocates who saw the urban riots as part of the same struggle King was battling in Chicago. Five days after Alvin Harrison's political rally on Kercheval Street, the new chairman of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael, delivered a speech at Cobo Hall in downtown Detroit.[141] "Now, let's get to what the white press has been calling riots," Carmichael wailed, "What's happening is rebellions not riots." He spoke to

the violence in the ghetto and the need to exert that violence in a new direction. "We have got to go out and find our young blacks who are cutting and shooting each other," he advised, "and tell them they are doing the cutting and shooting to the wrong people."[142]

Carmichael rejected government welfare programs and said, "Just give us the money you stole from us, that's all."[143] Adopting a Black Power strain of civil disobedience, Carmichael said, "We don't have to... obey any law that we didn't have a part to make, especially if that law was made to keep us where we are. We have the right to break it." He also suggested that blacks had the right to destroy the institutions that made and implemented these unjust laws. "We have to be able to smash any political machine in the country, that's oppressing us," Carmichael dares, "and bring it to its knees."[144] On August 7, 1966, a thirty minute version of the same speech was broadcast over Detroit radio station WKNR. A transcript reads:

> Now, these guys - those guys over there. They're called the press. I got up one morning and read a story. They were speaking about a cat named Stokely Carmichael. I say he must be a ba-a-a-d nigger [laughter]. For he's raising a whole lot of sand... No I'm no Negro leader, so I don't ever apologize for any black person. And don't you ever apologize for any black person who throws a Molotov cocktail [shouts and applause]. Don't you ever apologize [continued applause]. And don't you ever call those things riots, because they are rebellions, that's what they are [applause]. That's what they are [continued applause].[145]

In the steamy hot summer of 1966, the temper of civil rights activity across a wide range of political thought and feeling was moving toward a more aggressive and action-oriented phase. Two days after Carmichael's broadcast, a mini-riot erupted in the Kercheval neighborhood only blocks away from Cobo and very near the headquarters of ACME and AAYM. The violence was sparked when, reports Fine, "a Big Four [police] cruiser, manned by an all-white crew, observed seven black males 'loitering' and allegedly impeding traffic."[146] A crowd of about one hundred gathered as the black males

and the police began fighting. Rumors spread through the neighborhood. Along a mile stretch of Kercheval, stones were thrown at the police, windows, and cars. A white motorist was beaten.[147]

The police mobilized quickly with a strong show of force that outnumbered the rioters. Later that night, based on a tip from the FBI, the police stopped and searched four vehicles. A large cache of weapons was discovered including guns, knives and bricks. One of the vehicles was occupied by General Gordon Baker of Uhuru and RAM, and Glanton Dowdell, who would later paint the Black Madonna unveiled in the church of the Reverend Albert Cleage.[148]

On the evening of August 10, about two hundred police "dispersed a small group of rioters, and made forty-three felony arrests."[149] According to Detroit Police Lt. McCoy, one of those arrested had encouraged juvenile boys to "blow up the white man's cars." As McCoy testified, "He displayed a 6 foot piece of rope and said, 'Dip one end in the gas tank until you get it wet, pull it out and insert the other end, light the rope, then run. Make sure you get a white man's car.'" If metaphorical sparks were necessary to ignite metaphorical powder kegs on this night, however, it seems as if Mother Nature stepped in and said, "Enough of this madness." A rainstorm moved in and doused whatever sparks were getting ready to fly.[150]

The next night, August 11, there was some firebombing but only a few arrests. Two black juveniles were told "to get 2 gallons of gasoline and pour it into the street along the curbs. When the cops showed up, they were to light the gasoline 'in order to burn the police.'" One of the boys was given a Molotov cocktail to burn down a liquor store. Again, large scale violence was averted. A few incidents occurred on August 12

but that was the end of it. Praising the police and community response, the police commissioner called what had happened "'a rampage, not a riot' and insist[ed] that it was not a racial disturbance."[151]

The Kercheval Incident was viewed by some as an indication that Detroit might not succumb to the large scale disorders that had afflicted other ghetto areas of other cities. Further, the quick and forceful response by the police on August 10 was seen as confirmation that local officials had developed the proper tactics to avert disaster. As is already known, this confidence was misplaced. [152]

Stokely Carmichael returned to Detroit in October where he spoke to thirteen hundred blacks and "at least fifty whites" crowded into Albert Cleage's church. The audience, Joseph has written, represented "two generations of civil rights and Black Power activists." With Rosa Parks in attendance, Carmichael's tribute to her as his "hero" affirmed the shared roots of both movements. Indeed, by evolving from the "front lines of southern civil rights demonstrations" to the titular leadership of Black Power, Carmichael embodied the potentialities of the black freedom struggle. He spoke against America's involvement in Vietnam. He served up an "indictment of the black middle class as racial poseurs who abandoned their less successful brothers and sisters in urban ghettos." He urged the creation of black institutions. When he spoke about his blackness, he said, "We're not anti-white, it's just that as we learn to love black there just isn't any more time for white."[153]

Black Power personalities and ideals were marginalized for their radicalism and militancy because they were certainly both. However, in Detroit of 1967, the marginalization of the message does not preclude a profound and sustainable effect upon

the masses of urban blacks encouraged to rethink their place in American society. These various conceptions of Black Power certainly did not inspire all to overthrow the government. They did, however, introduce a new and empowering black dynamic. Detroit's radicalism had been a feature of the urban landscape for over a decade. For perhaps the first time in African American history, writes Russell Rickford, blacks were learning how they might "exercise genuine power within the United States." Given the oppressive circumstances within the ghetto, it becomes plausible to consider that this exercise of power might manifest itself angrily with bricks and Molotov cocktails.[154]

CHAPTER V

Detroit: 1967

"At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence."
– Frantz Fanon (translated from the French by Richard Philcox)[1]

Only a few months before the Detroit Rebellion, Martin Luther King drew parallels with the violence in America's streets and the violence of war. "Beyond Vietnam" was delivered on April 4, 1967 at Riverside Church in New York. "As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men," King said, "I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems." The angry young men were confused. "They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted." The rioters struck a nerve with King because they were making a morally legitimate point. "Their questions hit home," King admitted, "and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government." The only thing missing from King's speech was raising his black fist in solidarity with his Black Power brothers.[2]

America was waging war in Southeast Asia and in the streets of her cities; the military had become an all-too-common answer to her problems. Millions of tons of bombs were being dropped on Southeast Asia; while at home thousands of heavily-armed police, National Guardsmen, and federal troops were putting down rebellion in the same manner rebellion has been put down for centuries. And, as the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong demonstrated a powerful commitment to fight back against the most powerful

military in history, so too did the oppressed of America's cities prepare themselves for a conflict they were very unlikely to win.

In 1967, there is evidence that radicals in Detroit were preparing for the inevitable fight. During his testimony before a subcommittee of the US Senate, Detroit Police Lieutenant William McCoy shared a copy of the "Black Guard Organizing Manual" which "pertains to methods, training, and developing soldiers as guerillas."[3] As the self-defense wing of the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Black Guard organized to establish "freedom schools, rifle clubs," and plans to wage "urban guerilla warfare." Like King and anti-war protestors, members of the Black Guard based their challenge to America's military might upon principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence. The political legitimacy of RAM and its Black Guard was based upon the belief that "African-Americans constitute an internal colony of the United States, an oppressed nation situated within the boundaries of the oppressing nation, white America."[4]

Apparently sharing King's observations about Vietnam and the streets of America, the cover of the "Black Guard Organizing Manual" displayed an image of a black fist grasping a rifle. The manual describes the selection and screening process to join the Black Guard. Basic training includes political, physical, spiritual, and para-military components. The command structure and organization is well laid out including squads, platoons, and the guidelines for dividing a city into "Sections" and "Areas." These political groupings served as a framework for electing representatives to city, county, state, regional, and national councils.[5]

The manual includes the methods to organize in the high schools and junior high schools which "should first be flooded with cultural, revolutionary, and Black Guard

propaganda." Recommendations include "setting up Black History Clubs (Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, Malcolm X) or Black Power Committees." Another area of recruitment is "all the gangs" in the city who should be encouraged "stop fighting among themselves and explain why the DEVIL wants to keep them fighting… These brothers may be reached in pool rooms, bars, parties, jails and barber shops."[6]

Black Guards were also encouraged to study the philosophy of Robert F. Williams, who remained in exile, the honored guest of Chairman Mao in Red China. Mao's criticisms of America's race relations were bolstered as Williams continued to publish the *Crusader* from China. Before arriving in China, Williams had visited with Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi, where he offered to "set up a propaganda system for broadcasting to the troops – black troops in South Vietnam."[7] For Black Guards in Detroit, the mission appeared to be much the same. Their Black manual encouraged Black Guards to work towards the "destruction of… all the Western elements… in the Black community." The Black Guard should "keep the community flooded with propaganda. Posters should be made in big bold letters and hung up all over the community."[8]

Lieutenant McCoy confirmed that the Black Guard propaganda campaign was underway in the months leading up to the Detroit rebellion:

> Lt. McCoy: "In the spring of 1967, posters began appearing in the Negro neighborhoods reading *Unite or Perish* and *Join the Black Guard.*"
> Chairman McClellan: "When did you find that?"
> McCoy: "In the spring of 1967."
> McClellan: "That was before the riot?"
> McCoy: "Yes, sir; it was."
> McClellan: "The Black Guard was advertising or soliciting recruits?"
> McCoy: "Yes, sir."
> McClellan: "Was this found in the neighborhood where the rioting occurred?"
> McCoy: "Yes, sir."
> McClellan: "You don't know how many of them were up?"

McCoy: "No. We received quite a few reports. Many of them were scraped off by people in the neighborhood. Some of them we were able to recover ourselves."
McClellan: "That was not the only one you had?"
McCoy: "No, sir."
McClellan: "They were plastered generally over that neighborhood where the rioting occurred?"
McCoy: "Several different neighborhoods; yes, sir."
McClellan: "And that was how many months before the rioting began?"
McCoy: "In the spring of 1967, April and May."
McClellan: "In other words, 2 or 3 months prior to the time the rioting actually broke out."
McCoy: "That is correct."[9]

After reviewing the "Black Guard Organizing Manual," Lieutenant McCoy provided the Senate subcommittee with a fourteen-page booklet that detailed the Second Annual Black Arts Convention to be held at Albert Cleage's Shrine of the Black Madonna church. The four day convention was dedicated to "our Black Shining Prince, Brother Malcolm X, who taught us that freedom should be achieved by any means necessary."[10] From June 29 to July 2, three weeks before and less than a mile away from the epicenter of the rebellion on Twelfth Street, sessions were held that focused on black nationalism and separatism, white oppression, black cultural pride, education, economics, politics, and global affairs. Inquiring about the convention speakers, Chairman McClellan asked, "Are all of these militants and advocators of violence?" Lt. McCoy replied, "The majority of them are; yes, sir."[11]

Featured sessions at the Black Arts Convention included *Black Unity and Black Youth*, *Inner City Schools*, *Racism in Education*, and *Economics and Self Help*. James Boggs gave a presentation titled *Vietnam and the World at War*. Like Martin Luther King only a few months earlier, Boggs challenged the legitimacy of the war and claimed a brotherhood with the non-white peoples of the world. Boggs also encouraged resistance to the draft.[12] Other sessions identified in the program focused on jazz, black theatre,

literature, and history. "The time has come when we must take a fresh look at our culture with revolutionary zest and zeal. We need genuine Black Sociologists and Black Historians," the program continues, "reflecting on our past, present and future. We must not allow ourselves to be fooled and hoodwinked by historians, who either overtly or covertly tell us that we have never contributed anything to civilization." Black Power personalities were honored at the convention and Uncle Toms were singled out for derision. "We need our own Black heroes," reads the program, "and we must pick them ourselves. Brother Malcolm, Brother Garvey, and Brother Stokely are some of OUR heroes. We must not allow the power structure, along with Uncle Roy [Wilkins of the NAACP] or Whitey [Whitney] Young [of the National Urban League] to do this for us."[13]

Lieutenant McCoy's testimony about convention attendees spoke directly to the potential of rioting in Detroit. On July 1, 1967, a delegation from the Cincinnati, Ohio chapter of SNCC was at the church. One of the members announced, "We already had our riot and we're here to show you how it's done."[14] Perhaps the most militant participant at the Second Annual Black Arts Convention was H. Rap Brown, who had taken over the national chairmanship of SNCC. While standing on top of a car on Twelfth Street he declared that "the United States is on the eve of black revolution." He "urged the Negroes to get guns" and that their brothers in Vietnam should "come home… because their war is here in the United States." SNCC had come a long way since John Lewis had agreed to tone down his revolutionary language at the March on Washington four years earlier. "Motown, if you don't come around," Brown threatened, "we are going to burn you down." Chairman McClellan asked McCoy, "How long after that

before they started the process of burning the town?" McCoy's reply: "Three weeks," The baffled senator added, "And yet they tell us it happened because of other reasons and not because of these agitators?"[15]

In the early morning hours of July 23, 1967, Detroit police raided a blind pig at 9125 Twelfth Street in Detroit, Michigan. This was the third time in a year that this after-hours illegal bar had been raided. Police encountered a much larger-than-expected late-night crowd and it took more than an hour to arrest and transport over 80 prisoners. On that Saturday night and early Sunday morning, many of those who were partying in the blind pig "were well known in the community." Some of them were "leaders of neighborhood associations" that "were holding a party for two Negro soldiers about to be sent to Vietnam and two just returned."[16] At 3:50 A.M. or so, ten to twenty spectators had gathered to watch the arrests and heckle those being taken into custody. As the last police vehicles were leaving the scene, a bottle arched through the air and then exploded the back window of a police cruiser.[17] Within a week, 43 people would be dead, over 1100 injured, and over 7000 arrested. Thousands of stores were looted and burned. Hundreds of families were displaced. Property damage was measured in the tens of millions of dollars and over 150,000 rounds of ammunition were discharged within some of Motown's most densely populated neighborhoods.[18]

In 1967, Twelfth Street in Detroit was a commercial area whose nightlife included drinking, drugs, gambling, and prostitution. However, following the pattern established by rigid segregation and urban renewal programs, wandering a block or two away from Twelfth Street meant traveling into largely middle-class black neighborhoods. Many streets included single family homes with grassy yards that defy the general

understanding of the ghetto. Poverty was to be found nearby, too, a great deal of it. The epicenter of the Detroit Rebellion along Twelfth Street included "crowded apartment houses [that] created a density of more than 21,000 persons per square mile, almost double the city average."[19]

Outside the blind pig, before dawn on Sunday morning, the logistics involved in arresting scores of community members drew the attention of increasing numbers of street people. By 4:40 A.M., as the last prisoners were being loaded into a police vehicle the crowd had surged to about 200. As the hour wore on, the crowd's mood had turned into anger directed at the police and the manner in which they were treating the arrestees. It was reported that the police were "dragging people down the stairs" from the second floor bar and that they had beaten prisoners. A few in the crowd began to curse at the police. The accounts here vary, but as the throng grew in size, it also seemed to grow in confidence. William Walter Scott, who served as a doorman at the blind pig, exhorted the onlookers by asking, "'[a]re we going to let these peckerwood motherfuckers come down here any time they want and mess us around?'" After throwing a bottle at the police he "shouted to the crowd, 'Get your god damn sticks and bottles and start hurtin' baby.'"[20]

Historian Joseph Boskin has argued that the early moments like this in a riot, or a potential riot, can be fueled by a sense of racial pride and brotherhood in the face of a commonly experienced injustice. Boskin acknowledges that riots are often spontaneous, but he has determined that the underlying causes are often borne out of a "serious undercurrent of animosity."[21] In a speech delivered years later, General Gordon Baker of the Revolutionary Action Movement described how this animosity had been building up on the streets of Detroit:

> People were just sick of the kind of police brutality we were living under in this city…
> At that time we lived under the terror of the Big Four…
> Four big white guys that rode around in a big police cruiser with four doors…
> They rode the streets of Detroit with Billy clubs…
> And they'd come by and we'd be standin' on the street corner and they'd say, "Go home."
> We hollered back, "No, you go home, we at home."
> "Well don't be there when we get back."
> And we'd say, "Hurry up."
> They'd come back and jump out with their Billy clubs and fights broke out…
> That's how the Kercheval Rebellion started in 1966…
> And that's pretty much what we had in 1967 with the arrest of so many people at the blind pig…
> When they rode those paddy wagons up the street and started lining up people…
> People got sick of it and the rebellion started…[22]

The bold behavior of a few in the early moments of the Detroit Rebellion seems to have given the crowd a sense of power. It also seems to have encouraged others to join in. As the sun rose in the east and many Detroiters were getting ready to go to church, "about thirty windows had been broken and the police had made their first looting arrest." By 8 A.M. the numbers along Twelfth Street had reached about three thousand. At this point, the Detroit Police engaged in a sweep maneuver to disperse the rapidly growing multitude of looters and onlookers.[23] General Baker reflected on this first day of the rebellion in relation to the Kercheval Incident:

> Let me say a few things about 1966, Kercheval…
> Detroit at that time had a new police force called the Tactical Mobile Unit…
> They had special blue and white cars, they were fast, they had sawed-off shotguns with bayonets on the end of 'em. So, the Tactical Mobile Units ran down Kercheval Street and ran everybody off the street and everybody had to retreat. People went up to Mack and the Tactical Mobile Unit was effective at stoppin' the rebellion from spreadin' at Mack…
> I was arrested with two other guys for carrying concealed weapons in an automobile, and I'll never forget it, it rained real hard that night. It rained so bad we'd get wet in the county jail, so you know how bad it was outside, so the rebellion didn't spread, it didn't go nowhere. And I think that pretty much set the Detroit Police Department and Detroit city leaders up thinking the Tactical Mobile Unit they had could handle any rebellion in the city. So they laid back on

> their laurels waitin' for '67 and when that happened that Tactical Mobile Unit, once it ran down Twelfth Street people ran out behind and started throwin' bricks behind 'em and the Tactical Mobile Unit was outflanked from the very beginning...
> All those rebellions in the 60s were rebellions of people fightin' against the police...
> The character of the people that was in the rebellion was not people that you'd normally think of being the lumpens and stuff like that, it was workin' people like you and I that went in to take these things.[24]

According to a social science investigation conducted later, as the police withdrew from the Twelfth Street area, a "carnival atmosphere developed in the streets as everybody – women, children, old people included – indulged in acts of material gain that previously only existed in the realm of fantasy." Defying the myth that rioters were only a few misguided youth, "thousands of people from all parts of the surrounding community were drawn into the spree. With friends and neighbors participating in the sacking of 12th Street, with normal psychological and social restraints removed, great numbers of normally law-abiding people were irresistibly drawn in."[25]

This "high degree of community participation in the violence" directly challenges official accounts, Joseph Boskin has noted. If the rioters are a troublesome few, local officials can justify the use of force and explain the disturbance in terms of the social pathology of a few individuals. On the other hand, if the rioters are many and they have the support of the community, this suggests broader social problems that provide potential evidence of the failure and breakdown of social institutions. Blaming a few misguided and lawless youth - the McCone Report's riff-raff - leaves the police and city officials off the hook. Further, these official characterizations of the violence are often consistent with the mainstream media's reportage, especially in an age where newsroom decisions are made by white editors and television executives who have very little

knowledge of the ghetto. Official pronouncements supported by mainstream media accounts distorted public perceptions and hindered a deeper understanding of the violence.[26]

The early hours of the rebellion exposed other misperceptions. At about 11 A.M., a group of black officials headed to Twelfth Street where they made an attempt to calm the crowd. Hubert Locke, Administrative Assistant to the Detroit Commissioner of Police, and John Conyers, one of two black congressmen from Detroit, traveled into the riot area with other so-called black leaders. Conyers got up on the hood of a car with a bullhorn and told the crowd they should all go home. The young blacks in the crowd had no respect for these blacks that radicals considered Uncle Toms. After "[b]ottles smashed on the curb, and a rock landed near [the] car," Locke, Conyers, and the rest abandoned the mission. Upon their return, the police commissioner commented that the ostensible peace-makers "'were practically white when they came back.'" Black radicals in Detroit would very likely have been relieved to learn that the police commissioner was beginning to understand the dynamics of his city's race relations. The Sunday morning efforts to disperse the crowd had failed dramatically. By noon, the number of those in the streets had swelled to eight or nine thousand.[27]

Less than a mile from the blind pig, down on Linwood Street, Reverend Cleage held his Sunday service only a few hours after the raid. In his pulpit before the Shrine of the Black Madonna, Cleage explained what was happening just a few blocks away:

> And last night we had our own riot here in Detroit…
> More and more of these eruptions are rebellions and not riots…
> Everybody says we don't know why that happened…
> Is it a riot or rebellion?
> Everybody that participates is not gonna be a great freedom fighter…
> An upsurge in spirit and a lack of hope…

> There were no such riots when Negroes everywhere knew their place. The man had made it for us. There wasn't any possibility of a riot. There is some good with what's going on. It must be. Black people no longer know their place…
> There's some kinda struggle goin' on out there…
> Fewer and fewer black people are feeling that they are a part of the white man's world, the realization that the white man is the enemy.[28]

Referring to a young black man who had been interviewed on television during the previous week's Newark rebellion, Cleage touched on the complexities of rioter motivations:

> He knew what he was fighting for, maybe he did some looting, I don't know, you couldn't tell, but he also knew what the freedom struggle was all about…
> He said he was just tryin' to run all the white people out of the district, simple clear cut statement…
> All over the country now we got young people who have an awareness of what the problem is, participatin' in the rebellion who understand the nature of the rebellion…
> There are people like this in Detroit, Newark, who are willing to even destroy themselves if they can express antagonism, if they can strike out against oppression…
> Some of these very individuals today who we call hoodlums, who in their own way are striking out, we may remember as heroes…[29]

When asked by a radio station to help calm down the rioters, to encourage them to "cool it," Cleage "refused, saying that he had been telling whites for years to do something that would have made it possible to 'cool' it."[30]

As the violence escalated on Sunday afternoon, city officials were still hoping to avoid a panic and therefore were reluctant to share news of what was happening. Within just a few miles of the blind pig on Twelfth Street, more than thirty-four thousand fans were enjoying a Sunday afternoon doubleheader between the hometown Tigers and the New York Yankees.[31] It wasn't until near the end of the second game that the police were authorized by the mayor to let spectators know which streets to avoid on their way home. No explanation was given at the time but fans at the game reported that smoke from

nearby fires had drifted in to the stadium over left field. Cavanagh's efforts to keep a lid on things would prove futile because the city was on fire.[32]

Tigers outfielder Willie Horton rejected the advice of team officials who had warned all the players to go directly home. Reflecting on that Sunday night in a recent interview with the *Sporting News*, Horton remembers driving to Twelfth Street where he stood on top of his car still wearing his uniform, "the word Detroit stitched across his chest." Horton knew that the Tigers did not want him out there. What he would learn is that the rioters didn't want him out there either. "'Go home, Willie,' they told him."[33]

By 2 P.M., Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh requested the help of the Michigan State Police. By late afternoon, Cavanagh requested that Governor George Romney authorize the National Guard.[34] According to Hubert Locke, in *The Detroit Riot of 1967*, the black assistant police commissioner reported that a little after 9 P.M. on Sunday night came the "first confirmed report of sniper fire." By 9:35 P.M., there were "reports of sniper fire directed at firemen." A police radio report alerted officials that "a gas station was 'selling gas in buckets and bottles.'" Huge sections of the city were on fire.[35]

Many of the guardsmen deployed to Detroit that Sunday and Monday had just concluded their summer training and by Sunday night expected to be headed back to their homes and day jobs. They had not been trained to deal with urban violence, especially on the scale they were to experience in Detroit. Once guardsmen came under fire from snipers, or at least believed this to be so, they tended to respond aggressively, shooting first and asking questions later. "The arrival of the National Guard in Detroit," Fine wrote, "was followed by an escalation of the violence."[36] In one official summary, "the

Army reported that the 46th Division had fired 155,576 rounds of ammunition" into the most densely populated areas of America's fifth largest city.[37]

As the sun set on Sunday, the city was about to experience a long night of violence. In the first day of the riot "[o]ver 300 fires had been set, with more than 40 raging out of control." In the last hour of July 23, "incidents of looting and arson were reported on an average of three per minute in an area covering 11 of the city's 13 police precincts."[38] By 3 A.M., both Mayor Cavanagh and Governor Romney had communicated with officials in Washington about the availability of federal troops.[39]

Romney was hesitant to describe the violence as an "insurrection," an apparently necessary condition for the president to authorize federal military action in Detroit. His concern revolved around the voiding of insurance policies if this language was used.[40] Insurance claims aside, characterizing the violence as an insurrection would have implied that the participants were involved in "an act of rising in revolt, rebellion, or resistance against civil authority or an established government."[41] It is no surprise that a governor with presidential aspirations was hesitant to use revolutionary language such as this. Despite his reluctance, the streets of Detroit were getting out of control.

As Detroit Police, state police and guardsmen were patrolling the city, and the need for federal troops was being hashed out among the politicians, the violence escalated. In the early morning hours of July 24 a white male was shot by a white store owner. A 23 year-old white female was shot "apparently by a sniper" and a "23 year-old white male was shot by guardsmen. Reports indicated that the man was alleged to have been sniping. However, companions [of the victim] insisted they [were on a rooftop] only

to protect their building from fires nearby."[42] These early casualties were white. However, of the 43 deaths attributed to the rebellion, 33 were black.

An explosive mixture of factual and fictitious information put the entire city on edge. It was discovered early on that the police had been ordered to step back and avoid using force to prevent looting. In a survey conducted after the riot, over 85 percent of the police reported being "bothered" by having to stand by as crimes were committed. Looters taunted the police who are reported to have threatened to lash back aggressively when given the chance. And they did. The initial restraint exercised by the Detroit Police in the early hours gave way to a liberalized shoot policy.[43] According to General Gordon Baker, the police were eventually given a shoot-to-kill order.[44] Tensions were further aggravated after "intelligence reports" suggested that "there would be attacks on the homes of middle-class Negroes, and that they, in turn, were arming themselves."[45]

After a lull in the afternoon of Monday, July 24, the evening began with a series of reports that guardsmen, police, and firefighters were being shot by snipers. Detroit was beginning to resemble a war zone. In the last hour of July 24 "two police precinct, two command post, and five fire stations were under attack by snipers."[46] In return, Detroit police, state police, and guardsmen were all firing away. Nineteen suspects were shot on Monday alone.[47] News and military helicopters flew overhead. Over ten thousand armed men in uniform patrolled the streets. Fires filled the air with smoke. Bursts of machine gun fire echoed across the urban landscape. Tanks and other military equipment rolled through neighborhoods. The actions of rioters and the reaction of local, state and federal officials, Joseph Boskin asserts, "assumed certain features of conventional warfare." Not

only were the "weapons and tactics employed... standardized in the past thirty years," but the attitudes of many ghetto residents reflected their view that they were in a war.[48]

Late on the night of July 24, President Johnson authorized the use of federal troops, federalized the Michigan National Guard, and just before midnight, went on TV to speak to the nation.[49] In his address, the president adopted the tone set out by the McCone Commission. "Pillage, looting, murder and arson," the president told the nation, "have nothing to do with civil rights."[50] In Romney's official request for federal troops, he "said he had no evidence of any 'organized state of insurrection,' but he added," as reported in the *New York Times*, "that there was also no evidence that it did not exist."[51] Detroit was exhibiting all the characteristics of an urban guerilla war, yet the officials calling in the troops were very reluctant to use war language to describe what was going on. Federal troops began arriving to Detroit in force by 2:30 A.M. on July 25.[52]

The Tuesday, July 25 *New York Times* reported "Tanks in Detroit" and that "President Johnson rushed 4,700 Army paratroopers into Detroit at midnight last night as Negro snipers besieged two police stations in rioting that brought near paralysis to the nation's fifth largest city." As the federal troops were mobilizing, "police and National Guardsmen were battling with snipers." The *Times* article seemed to confirm the need for additional firepower as "Negro snipers fired into windows and doors [of police stations], and policeman fought back with machineguns, shotguns and high velocity rifles." Mayor Cavanagh is reported as saying, "It looks like Berlin in 1945."[53]

Attempts were made to restore order on Tuesday during the day but by evening police were again receiving reports of sniper fire, looting, and arson. During a single hour of Tuesday night, as Hubert Locke documented, "reports of police and guard patrol units

under gun fire came in from eight locations scattered around the city." Locke added, "In the last 25 minutes of Tuesday night, the police department logged 15 reports of sniper fire, 4 lootings, and 4 fire bomb incidents."[54] Throughout the day on July 25, Detroit Police "officers killed five black looters and one black sniper."[55] It was the next three hours, though, from midnight to 3 A.M. on Wednesday July 26, that Locke described as "the worst periods of the riot."[56]

Seven riot-related deaths occurred during this short span. Two of these casualties were clearly innocent victims caught in the wildly sporadic gunfire. The *Detroit Free Press*, based on its own investigation deduced that Helen Hall, a white woman from Oakdale, Connecticut, visiting Detroit on business, was killed in her hotel. She opened the drapes of a hall window and "died seconds later as bullets began to slam into the building."[57] It is not known who fired the fatal shot that killed Helen Hall. It was later determined, however, that she was shot with a deer rifle. It is also known that police in their quest for more firepower borrowed weapons and ammunition from gun stores and pawn shops.[58]

In another tragic incident, there is little controversy regarding who fired the fatal shot. While National Guardsmen were seeking the origin of sniper fire they positioned a tank in front of a building where they supposed a sniper to be. Reports indicate that someone inside the building lit a cigarette near a window. Guardsmen opened fire with rifles and the tank's .50-caliber machine gun. The lone fatality of this barrage of gunfire was four year-old Tanya Blanding who "toppled dead, a .50-caliber bullet hole in her chest."[59] The largely inexperienced and fatigued guardsmen were certainly on edge. A National Guard Sergeant was fatally shot in the early hours of Wednesday July 26. He

"was one of two law enforcement officers and two firemen who lost their lives during the July riot."[60]

The young white middle-class guardsmen knew little of the city they were called on to patrol. The same cannot be said of the Detroit police. In an interview given years later, General Baker claimed that the police were targeting known militants. Baker was arrested on Sunday night and pined away behind bars at Ionia Penitentiary for the next two weeks:

> I was arrested the very first night of the rebellion and the order to shoot to kill was given on Tuesday. My house was raided on Wednesday. If it hadda been official police business, they'd 'a' known I was already in Ionia. Individual police officers were goin' around killin' whoever they wanted to... these killin's just takin' place indiscriminate...[61]

Baker's accusations of zealous and uncontrolled police behavior were made by others. On July 26, three young black men were found shot to death at the Algiers Motel in an incident that would symbolize the upheaval as a rebellion against police brutality. Three Detroit policemen and a private security guard were implicated in the three deaths. Accusations of torture, terror, and execution would be levied at the four cops. In the end, no one was convicted of any crimes related to the incident.[62] The chaos on the streets of Detroit certainly provided cover for a great deal of nefarious activity. A July 26 *New York Times* headline reads "Troops Battle Detroit Snipers, Firing Machine Guns from Tanks." The front page story reads that "National Guard tank crews blasted away at entrenched snipers with .50-caliber machine guns early today after sniper fire routed policemen from a square-mile area of the city."[63]

After the early hours of Wednesday morning, "the riot's intensity began to subside [and] the battles became less fierce and less frequent."[64] The *Detroit Free Press*

described the next day, July 27, "'the first day of real peace' since the beginning of the riot."[65] That night, President Lyndon Johnson again addressed the nation. As he spoke, days of urban rioting had wreaked havoc on Detroit. The fires in the Motor City were still burning. Thousands had been arrested and their numbers clogged jails and makeshift detention centers. The president announced that he was creating a commission to investigate the Detroit riot and the hundreds of other riots that had plagued the country for the previous four years.

The violence was nearly over. On July 28, there was a "predawn gun battle on Twelfth Street" and on July 29, there was "an unsuccessful early morning attack on a Guardsman by a rioter armed with a bow and arrow!" By July 30, the "only 'riot-connected problem'... was sightseeing as 'swarms of people' flocked to Twelfth Street," eager to see in person what they had been viewing on television for the previous week.[66]

As sightseers toured up and down Twelfth Street and Linwood Street, Reverend Cleage held his Sunday service before the Shrine of the Black Madonna:

> We do not pray for racial peace because justice has not yet come...
> At the very time they are denouncing black people for criminal acts they are downtown in the hall of justice, in the city county building, carrying on criminality much worse than anything any person arrested is charged with...
> A prisoner's right to a lawyer is a time honored constitutional right...
> Excessive bail, they put bail on little children who picked up something in the street, of 10,000 dollars...
> This is the court using its power to oppress, to participate in the oppression and to keep black people off the streets...
> Criminality, who is the criminal? Most black people up and down the street just took it...
> Judge says "we will prove them guilty..."
> The court is already prejudging people who have been picked up by our cracker police department that has discriminated against black people down through the ages...
> It wasn't only the words and acts of the judge...
> The whole procedure, take him down, don't let him make a phone call, don't let him communicate.[67]

An investigation into the treatment of over 7000 arrestees confirmed Cleage's accusations. As Sidney Fine has demonstrated, prisoners were abused. Firearms were used wantonly. Searches were conducted without warrants. Women were molested. "Numerous instances of police abuse of prisoners" included cuts to the head, broken jaws, bruises, concussions, black eyes, and knocked-out teeth. A cup of coffee was thrown in a prisoner's face and a cup of urine was served to a thirsty and "falsely arrested female prisoner." A black woman reported that she was told she could avoid arrest in return for sex. Many prisoners were threatened with firearms and at one point a guardsmen fired blanks into a crowd of arrestees.[68] Many believe that the deaths during the Algiers Motel Incident were nothing less than executions.[69]

A team of social scientists examined the treatment of prisoners during the Detroit Rebellion. "Virtually all rights normally allowed to prisoners," their report concluded, "were abrogated."[70] General Baker was arrested on the first night for violating the curfew:

> We were told that the bondsman had gone fishin' and that my bond was set at $15,000…
> 5000 people ended up locked up on Belle Isle for almost a month with police officers patrolling the island, so obviously I was fortunate enough to at least get to a prison where I had my own cell and own mattress and some decent food to eat and some turnkeys that knew how to treat prisoners and not some police officers on Belle Isle...
> In these periods, the incidents we go through, you know all these civil liberties that you talkin' 'bout tryin' to establish laws that get rid of 'em, they already got 'em in place, they doin' what they want to.[71]

Cleage's sermon on Sunday July 30 expresses the view that the real criminal was the United States of America:

> Now we go back and look at America's whole fabric….

> Ask yourself again and again, who is the criminal, who is the criminal in Vietnam? America is the criminal in Vietnam…
> America was a criminal nation from its very beginning…
> Everything that America has was stolen from somebody else…
> It was criminal until they won…
> When you win then it's not criminal anymore…
> If we win then we're not criminals…
> Understand that and you won't get so excited when the white man starts telling you how criminal you are or how many of our people are criminals…
> Black people are engaged in a freedom struggle and a lot of things they gonna have to do are gonna be defined by the white man as being criminal…
> Every step of the freedom struggle has been filled with criminal acts…
> Black people are fighting against white oppression and don't let anybody tell you it was something else…[72]

Black nationalist Albert Cleage had reason to characterize the upheaval in Detroit as part of the freedom struggle. Indeed, the violence had all the markings of war. Early on, an organized sweep maneuver by the Detroit Police was met by a somewhat organized rear guard maneuver. Citizens were restricted in their mobility. The Michigan National Guard made ready use of modern military machinery. Additional troops were called in to supplement the restless guardsmen. Some believed that militant leaders were targeted. The city certainly resembled a battlefield. Innocent civilians were killed by the military and arrestees were treated more like prisoners of war than citizens charged with crimes.

As the violence in Detroit was winding down, the U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders was established on July 29, 1967. Per Executive Order 11365, the Kerner Commission was ordered to "investigate and make recommendations" as to the "origins of the recent major civil disorders in our cities, including the basic causes and factors leading to such disorders and the influence, if any, of organizations or individuals dedicated to the incitement or encouragement of violence."[73] The commission was asked to evaluate all the riots that had been plaguing the nation, especially the most

recent and most violent of the long, hot summer of 1967. Their report was guided by three questions: "What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?"[74]

LBJ claimed to have given the commission the power to explore the riots without political consideration because it "is far, far too important for politics." In his direction to the commission, LBJ told them, "As best you can, find the truth and express it in your report."[75] LBJ's commitment to the truth was hobbled before the first meeting. In an address to the nation, two days before announcing the establishment of the commission and while Detroit was still under siege, the president spoke in law and order terms. "First – let there be no mistake about it – the looting, arson, plunder, and pillage which have occurred are not part of the civil rights protest. There is no American right to loot stores, or to burn buildings, or to fire rifles from the rooftops. That is crime – and crime must be dealt with forcefully, and swiftly, and certainly – under law." [76] His firm stand may have reassured fearful Americans. It also limited how much truth the Kerner Commission would be permitted to uncover.

Other executive branch actions further narrowed the scope of the commission's work. In a phone call to New York Mayor John Lindsay inviting him to serve as vice-chairman, the president laid out his expectations for commissioners. "I want nothing but competence and I want nothing but compassion and I want nothing but… uh… patriotism." Other members were chosen to give the appearance of diversity which would supposedly enhance the credibility of their findings. "I'd have a governor," the president told Lindsay, "I'd have a mayor. I'd have a businessman. I'd have a Negro, maybe Roy Wilkins." After encouraging Lindsay that he would be in good company, Johnson said,

"And I don't want you to even consider thinkin' about it, I just want you to say 'yes, sir.'" Lindsay's reply: "Yes, sir, I will."[77]

Before the commission had met for the first time, the mandate had been set; the riots were not a protest; rioters were criminals; and the conclusions the commission reached would be "nothing but… patriot[ic]." If the rioters were actually protestors who were challenging the veracity of American democracy, it seems unlikely that the commission was established in a manner that left any room to bear this out.

CHAPTER VI

Riot Commission Politics: The Kerner Report and The Harvest of American Racism

"I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."
– Barry Goldwater (1964 Republican presidential nomination acceptance speech)[1]

Riot commissions throughout the twentieth century have consistently served the primary political purpose of providing the appearance of action in the face of urban unrest. Testifying before the Kerner Commission, the "distinguished and perceptive scholar" Dr. Kenneth B. Clark announced that he had investigated the work of previous riot commissions dating back to 1919. He described the experience as "a kind of Alice in Wonderland with the same moving picture reshown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction." The commission took Dr. Clark's comments seriously enough to include them in its final report. This gesture might be viewed as an attempt to express the genuine hope that this commission would not fall down the same rabbit hole that had consumed the others. Or, it might also be seen as a craftily designed conveyance of false sincerity within a political climate ill-suited for the truth. In the end, the Kerner Report exhibited elements of both views. As an attempt at sincerity, the report broke new ground in analyzing the sociological foundations of the riots. As a practical matter, however, the report's recommendations and subsequent efforts at implementation most assuredly found Dr. Clark back in Wonderland viewing the "same moving picture" show.[2]

Unlike previous riot commissions, the Kerner Commission took serious and legitimate steps to understand the causes, course, and consequences of the riots. Social science had been gaining the respectability necessary to inform policy making, so the

commission made the early decision to send more than 100 social scientists into the ghetto.[3] Overseen by Assistant Deputy Director for Research Robert Shellow, social science teams were deployed to twenty-three cities where twelve-hundred people were interviewed. It is important to note that the analysis was conducted under deadlines determined by the commission and public pressure generated by the media.[4] Given the time constraints, Shellow and his team decided to "follow… what might best be termed a case study method emphasizing process." Of fifty-six cities that had experienced disturbances, a representative sample was chosen, Shellow writes, "based on their duration, estimated number of participants, extent of damage, and the level of law enforcement response." Data collection included interviews of officials, the business community, and ghetto residents. Existing studies of social and economic conditions were gathered from a variety of sources. Data evaluation was conducted by political scientists, sociologists, and experts in collective behavior.[5]

In riot-torn neighborhoods, social science teams gathered information on the racial and political attitudes of those who participated and those who did not. Residents shared their views on the police, the schools, and the businesses in their communities. Rioters and non-rioters were compared and contrasted in terms of educational achievement, employment, age, gender, perceptions of civil rights leaders, and more.[6] Historian Ellen Herman has written that "science's good reputation bolstered the legitimacy" of the commission. By employing "an army of experts to conduct large scale research on the rioting process," this commission made an early commitment to explore the roots of the violence unlike any other riot commission in history.[7]

There were signs, though, among the scientists, that they were hired only for political cover. When Shellow informed a staff superior that four or five months did not provide much time to do their work, he was told, "That's not important . . . what's important is that you've got that Ph.D." [8] As Herman observed, the "researchers were often quite conscious of their contradictory position in the policy-making process and of the likelihood that their work would be used as window dressing for a policy based more on political considerations than scientific evidence."[9] If the researchers had misgivings about the role they would play, however, it doesn't appear to have kept them from pursuing their task with vigor. Indeed, their work uncovered sociological and psychological aspects of rioting that defied the conventional understanding of riots; much to the dismay of the politicians looking only for window dressing.

As Shellow had informed his superior, the scientists had only a few months to do their work under the deadlines assigned by the commission. While this imposed limitations, the speed with which the social science teams were mobilized allowed the scientists to enter the field while memories of the violence were still fresh in the minds of those they studied. This was particularly true in the case of Detroit where University of Michigan psychologist Nathan Caplan understood the importance of conducting timely investigations. Coming home from a family vacation, he saw the smoke rising over Detroit and then visited Twelfth Street on the second day. "I came back from there," Caplan recalled, "convinced that somebody has got to study this thing and get some sense of the inner dynamics while it's still possible to get real-time data on its social/economic reality."[10]

Even under time constraints, a number of things worked in their favor. The recently released LARS study of the 1965 Watts uprising had been conducted without the pressures of a commission deadline. This more articulate expression of what had happened in South LA provided a sociological base from which to assess the more recent upheavals. Also, in Detroit, the Department of Labor had ordered a sociological investigation eventually titled "The Detroit Riot… A Profile of 500 Prisoners," and the Detroit Urban League, in conjunction with the *Detroit Free Press*, produced a report titled, "The People Beyond Twelfth Street: A Survey of Attitudes of Detroit Negroes After the Riot of 1967." The scientists also observed early on that eight other disturbances broke out in Michigan directly after the July 23 outbreak in Motown. Newark was the only other city where this "clustering [of disturbances] was extensive." The scientists had a great deal to work with, especially when studying the social dynamics of the recent violence in Detroit.[11]

As the teams of scientists visited the riot-torn cities, the Kerner Commission began their investigation. From August 1 through November 7, 1967, the commissioners heard testimony from over 100 people including mayors and other government officials, business leaders, union representatives, and civil rights leaders.

Detroit mayor Jerome Cavanagh appeared before the commission on August 15, 1967. Joined by a number of city officials, Cavanagh attempted to portray what had happened, not surprisingly, in terms that would not undermine Detroit's federally funded anti-poverty programs. His task was a difficult one. As recently as March 1967, the mayor had bragged that Detroit had not had a riot due to the successful implementation of recently enacted Great Society legislation.[12] For local officials in Detroit, and other urban

areas across the country for that matter, there was a great deal of incentive to analyze the riots in a way that kept Great Society dollars flowing. If the riots were viewed in terms of the failure of these programs, on the other hand, the funds might dry up. Expressing the violence in a way that illuminated the desperate situation in the inner cities became a legitimate call for additional funding. The previous few years had also seen the emergence of new voices with a stake in how the riots were characterized. Indeed, much of the local implementation of poverty programs in Detroit was overseen by blacks who ostensibly represented the interests of the poor. For them, defending the war on poverty was tantamount to a defense of their newly evolved positions of authority. Even after the violence, this group defended the success of their work by arguing that only a small fraction of youth enrolled in anti-poverty programs had participated in the riot.[13]

Regardless the political and financial incentives, Mayor Cavanagh expressed great sympathy for the plight of blacks in Detroit. "The offending party is the nation and the injured party is the Negro population," the mayor testified. Without condemning his own police force and other local institutions that practiced pervasive discrimination in housing, education, and employment, Cavanagh characterized the situation in Detroit as evidence of the need for more funding. This federal support should be based on "a new principle," he added, "the principle of reparation for long-standing injustices, reparations for the "great discrimination" against blacks and the denial of equal opportunity. This call for reparations was clear acknowledgement that, to Cavanagh at least, the violence had a purpose, that it raised an issue that needed to be raised. He wasn't aware of it at the time but the social science would confirm Cavanagh's assertion that great damage had been

done long before that bottle crashed through the window of the police cruiser on Twelfth Street.[14]

Perhaps the most dramatic gesture Cavanagh made to convey his sympathy for the residents of Detroit's black community was the number of black dignitaries that accompanied him to Washington. Amazingly, among this group was black nationalist Alvin Harrison. The radical activist who had held Black Power rallies on Twelfth Street, had described Detroit as "Upper Mississippi," had proclaimed that the Detroit police were the enemies of black people, and whose organizations had been implicated in the Kercheval mini-riot of 1966, is described in the Kerner Report as "Citizen Representative, Neighborhood Legal Services."[15] While it seems surprising that Harrison would be put forth as a representative of the citizens, his new role reflected a post-riot attitude in Detroit, as Sidney Fine has written, that "initially enhanced the credibility of black militants and weakened and frightened the moderates."[16]

Cavanagh's calls for reparations contrasted sharply with conservative demands for law and order solutions so, as the commission moved forward, much of the debate rested with determining the right balance of guns and butter. What they failed to consider, however, is that any butter they recommended would be administered through poverty programs overseen by local white officials and a handful of blacks in new positions of authority. In turn, any guns would be administered by local police departments who were seen by many ghetto residents as the source of the problem. In either case, the local forces of control over black lives would be preserved.

The full Kerner Report was released on Sunday, March 3. It was reprinted widely in newspapers, sold by the government printing office, and also published by Bantam

Books. Millions of copies of the report circulated throughout the United States. Because of this, and the fact that it was an analysis of the "USA Riots," and not just a single situation, the Kerner Commission became, as Lindsey Lupo declared, "[p]erhaps the most well-known riot commission in American history."[17] At over 400 pages, the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* served as a primer on African American history, a critical portrait of the social and economic conditions in the ghetto, an honest analysis of race relations in America, and a sociological examination of the black American underclass. Part of its popularity must be attributed to the fact that, for the first time, white America was introduced to the ghetto.

The primary problem of the inner city identified in the report should have come as no surprise to the millions of Americans who had fled the inner city to the suburbs. Residential segregation exists, reads the report, because "Negro families… have been effectively excluded from white residential neighborhoods." Blacks who had moved into white neighborhoods reported "[i]ntimidation and threats of violence" including whites "throwing garbage on lawns and making threatening phone calls… burning crosses in yards and even dynamiting property." Real estate practices kept blacks out of white neighborhoods including middle-class blacks who knew the "psychological" pressure they would face if they tried to integrate a white neighborhood.[18] Blacks also faced discrimination in employment and in segregated schools which the Kerner Report noted "are a result of white attitudes based on race and color." Unemployment afflicts the Negro population at rates far exceeding that of whites and, many of those that are employed are underemployed with the result that many blacks work in the least skilled jobs at the lowest pay. Up to 20 percent of all Negroes live in these "disadvantaged

neighborhoods" where "[f]or decades, social, economic, and psychological disadvantages have impaired their work capacities and opportunities."[19]

In the poorest areas, a "culture of poverty" impairs health and life expectancy. Rates of illegitimate births, narcotics addiction, juvenile delinquency, fatherless families, and venereal disease are all significantly higher in these disadvantaged neighborhoods whose densely populated streets included over two million American citizens.[20] In these areas "garbage collection and other sanitation services are grossly inadequate." As a result, there were upwards of 14,000 cases of ratbite in the US during 1965.[21] After touring a ghetto neighborhood, commissioner and Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris commented that the militant message must be quite appealing to those who lay awake at night in fear of being bitten by rats.[22]

The physical realities of ghetto life for the poorest blacks promoted anti-social behavior which cultivated a cycle of despair. The damaging effect is most pronounced upon young people who, as the Kerner Report states, "are acutely conscious of a system which appears to offer rewards to those who illegally exploit others, and failure to those who struggle under traditional responsibilities."[23]

> The culture of poverty that results from unemployment and family disorganization generates a system of ruthless, exploitative relationships within the ghetto. Prostitution, dope addiction, casual sex affairs, and crime create an environmental jungle characterized by personal insecurity and tension.[24]

It is important to note that a summary of the highly anticipated report was made public on March 1, 1968, two days before the entire report was released. Charged with writing it, the most left-leaning member of the commission, John Lindsay, presented it only days before the announced release of the full report. Given very short notice to amend it, the summary was delivered to the media as Lindsay had written it. The result

was a document describing a national crisis in language harshly critical of American society.[25]

As Lindsay had intimated, it must have been quite uncomfortable for middle-class America to discover that the conditions in the ghetto and the subsequent violence of black people were the white man's fault. "White racism," Lindsay announced in the summary, "is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II."[26] LBJ had asked the Kerner Commission to determine if outside agitators or organizations were responsible for the violent urban upheavals of the mid-1960s.[27] There actually was a very large group responsible for inciting the violence; they just happened to be white. As the Kerner Report proclaimed, white society is "deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."[28]

As far as the black militant organizations that Johnson may have actually been thinking about, the commission did not uncover any grand conspiracy of black radical activists. In fact, there are only a few explicit references to Black Power in the entire 400-plus page report. Concluding that there was no organized force behind the disorders, the report notes that "Black Power articulated a mood rather than a program."[29] It also describes Black Power in paternalistic terms that could have been embraced by black moderates such as Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the National Urban League:

> We do not refer to versions of Black-Power ideology which promote violence, racial hatred, or advocate total separation of the races. Rather, we mean the view which asserts that the American Negro population can assume its proper role in society and overcome its feelings of powerlessness and lack of self-respect.[30]

The Kerner Commission went looking for Black Power influences among rioters without understanding its manifest currents of disaffection from American society.

Beyond the fleeting references to a kinder and gentler Black Power, many of the observations within the larger report reflect the presence of the version of Black Power the commission sought to reject. In the most oft-cited line, Lindsay wrote that, "This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."[31] Lindsay's clever twist of *Plessy V. Ferguson*'s "separate but equal" precedent reflected the Jim Crow reality of the urban North. It also spoke directly to the failure of decades of integration struggles fought after *Plessy* was overturned in *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954*. But by 1968, Black Power advocates had largely abandoned integration as a means of achieving equality. They were not necessarily opposed to integration from the outset; they simply concluded that white resistance to integration efforts in the previous decade and a half doomed the strategy to failure. This is perhaps the single most significant distinction between the views of Black Power advocates and the moderates. Ironically, the traditional movement's most hated Supreme Court decision had become the Black Power movement's basis for the only real possibility of equality. By abandoning the primacy of integration, Black Power advocates essentially called for a legitimate form of *Plessy*'s "separate but equal."[32] Lindsay's reference to "separate and unequal," then, accurately captured the circumstances which underscore a Black Power ideology that had only recently begun to embrace the harsh realities of an intensely segregated nation.

Abandoning the goal that the races should eventually live together peacefully carved out a new space in which violence had a potentially meaningful role. To go to war

to live together makes little sense. Going to war to demand equality does. The Kerner Report speaks to this idea that rejects the characterization of violence as meaningless and, further, acknowledges that the message of violence was being delivered to the origins of the inequalities:

> The frustrations of powerlessness have led some to the conviction that there is no effective alternative to violence as a means of expression and redress, as a way of "moving the system." More generally, the result is alienation and hostility toward the institutions of law and government and the white society which controls them.[33]

Further embracing the presence of Black Power thinking among rioters, the Kerner Report portrayed the typical rioter as a noble figure whose propensity for violence was born of a legitimate and justified hostility to injustice:

> The typical rioter... rejects the white bigot's stereotype of the Negro as ignorant and shiftless. He takes great pride in his race and believes that in some respects Negroes are superior to whites. He is extremely hostile to whites [and] he is almost equally hostile toward middle class Negroes... He is substantially better informed about politics than Negroes who were not involved in the riots. He is more likely to be actively engaged in civil rights efforts, but is extremely distrustful of the political system and of political leaders.[34]

This is not the typical rioter of McCone, Moynihan, and the news media. It is, in fact, exactly the rioter more accurately described by Detroit radical General Gordon Baker. "The character of the people that was in the rebellion," Baker said in an interview years later, "was not people that you'd normally think of being the lumpens and stuff like that, it was workin' people like you and I that went in to take these things."[35]

Given the deplorable conditions in America's ghetto neighborhoods, the discrimination that held blacks back, the culpability of whites, and this new characterization of the typical rioter, it appeared that the commission was prepared to offer recommendations equal to the national crisis at hand. If John Lindsay had had his

way, this is exactly what would have happened. In January, two months before the report was issued, a conservative member of the commission, California Representative James C. Corman, informed the president that Lindsay "has taken effective control of the commission. A majority now accept Lindsay's thesis that the cities are in a state of war, a $40 to $50 billion program is essential, the cities' expenditures should be compared with outlays for Space and Vietnam." Johnson was expecting recommendations in line with his newly instituted Great Society programs, so the calls for increased funding for housing, education, police training, and more did not come as a surprise. What shocked the president was the price tag.[36]

If LBJ was looking for a Great Society solution to address inner city violence, there was little chance he would accept a report that condemned the Great Society; not for its goals, but for its lack of resources. As Johnson biographer Robert Dallek has written, by early 1968, the War on Poverty and the war in Southeast Asia created an annual budget deficit in the neighborhood of $20 billion. Kerner Commission recommendations in February had projected costs of $11.9 billion in 1969 and $24.5 billion in 1971. "Johnson," Dallek writes, "thought the cost could run as high as $75 to $100 billion over several years."[37] Others advised the president that money could go a long way in preventing future violence. As special counsel to President Johnson at the time, Harry McPherson visited Harlem in August of 1967. As Malcolm McLaughlin has written, McPherson knew that "the urban poor were likely to cause havoc unless appeased by federal programs." Speaking in the earthy language that characterized the Johnson White House, McPherson told the president, "When the baby's got his mouth on

the nipple, he can't holler."[38] In the end, the realities of 1968 severely limited the chances that billions of dollars would flow into urban areas.

Federal funding aside, some of the more practical recommendations in the Kerner Report did not rise to the national crisis outlined in the report's observations. "Neighborhood Action Task Forces" were recommended to improve communication between government and the residents of the ghetto including a "Grievance-Response Mechanism." The commission also suggested that police departments should evaluate their patrol practices, hire more black officers, and assign their best cops to the most difficult areas. Reluctant to criticize local authorities, these recommendations failed to address the systemic problems portrayed in the report's observations. As Luke Tripp recently commented, the "institutional racism" in police departments serves as an obstacle to even the most well-meaning policeman. In many cases, Tripp believes, the most abusive police are often the black cops who must prove their commitment to their brethren in the department, not their brothers in the ghetto.[39] A 1968 survey of blacks in 15 cities confirms Tripp's observations. 73 percent of all blacks surveyed believed that black policemen treat blacks no better than white policemen.[40] As symbols of the oppression of many urban blacks, the badge and the gun trumped skin color.

While Kerner's neighborhood communication and policing ideas would ostensibly ameliorate the sources of the problems, a great deal of the recommendations centered on, as Sidney Fine has determined, "the strengthening of the forces of control."[41] Encouraged to improve police-community relations and engage in riot control training, these measures essentially called for beefing up the police. Whites in Detroit agreed. According to a survey given a few months after the riot, a majority "thought that

strengthened police protection was 'the most important thing' the city government could do to prevent another riot."[42] The commission recommended stronger police forces and better policing. By controlling rumors, using the minimum level of force necessary, properly dispersing crowds, and acquiring portable communications equipment, police would be better able to manage potential disorders. Federal funding for community service officers, training in non-lethal weapons development, and the overall improvement of criminal justice systems would address some of the superficial problems.[43] While tens of billions of dollars were not available to bolster Great Society programs, "Johnson believed that an anticrime program costing $100 million," Dallek writes, "was excellent politics and sensible economics."[44] White fears could be allayed at a fraction of the cost implied by the Kerner recommendations. For those living in the ghetto, however, anticrime measures could only be seen as increasing black "alienation and hostility toward the institutions of law and government" described in Lindsay's summary.[45]

Local forces of control implementing federally recommended programs did little to relieve the alienation and hostility experienced by urban blacks. Improving the police required the cooperation of the police. Increasing funding for locally managed poverty programs required the cooperation of the existing structures in the cities. As Lindsey Lupo has observed, the commission was hesitant to address "institutional racism" because they were "dependent on those very institutions to implement the recommendations it did offer."[46]

Compounding the internal political pressure was the intensity of a politically and socially volatile world. If, in early March 1968, Americans believed that Lindsay's

indictment of white society would result in action equal to the force of the words, the events of the rest of that tragic year would see that belief swept away. The United States was reeling from the Tet Offensive, seriously questioning America's role in Vietnam. By March of 1968, Robert Kennedy was contemplating a run for the Democratic nomination for president, joining Eugene McCarthy in challenging a sitting president from within his own party. At the end of that month, LBJ withdrew from the presidential race. Only a few days later, Martin Luther King was assassinated. Robert Kennedy's brief run for the White House ended violently in June. The Democratic Convention in Chicago brought familiar scenes with some unfamiliar faces; white cops and young white protestors battling outside the convention hall. There were hundreds of major demonstrations against the war on over one hundred campuses around the country. By the end of what William Manchester refers to as "The Year Everything Went Wrong," Richard Nixon was headed to the White House and the Kerner Report, including its condemnation of white racism, was all but forgotten.[47]

Social science informed the Kerner Report but only to the extent that the political environment of 1968 would allow while the conclusions and recommendations of those who studied the riots most closely were rejected out of hand months before the final report was issued. In a 176 page report titled *The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967* the social scientists tried to shine an apolitical light on what they clearly concluded was a political problem. The incendiary nature of their findings, rather broadly lit up by the title, destined the report to unpublished obscurity.[48] The Harvest report concluded that many of the riots of the mid-1960s were political statements demanding politically-based solutions. In their

recommendations, the scientists called for nothing less than a transfer of power from the local white-controlled institutions to the black militants who more properly represented the interests of urban blacks. This, of course, doomed any chance that *Harvest* would become part of the debate swirling around race relations in the United States.[49] The Executive Director of the commission's professional staff, David Ginsburg, reportedly threw the report back at the commission's Assistant Deputy Director for Research. Robert Shellow and his team, including 120 staff members, were fired in December 1967.[50] A surviving copy of the manuscript dated November 22, 1967 is housed at the University of Michigan Law Library. The front page of the report offers the disclaimer that, "This document has neither been submitted to nor approved by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders."[51]

It is unclear whether President Johnson was given the opportunity to review the *Harvest* report. There is evidence, however, that Johnson was prepared to distance himself from Kerner Commission findings; at least in the area of massive funding proposals. It can only be speculated as to how he might have reacted to the recommendation that black militants were on the verge of taking control of America's large urban areas.[52]

Less controversial was the *Harvest* report's assertion that riots are often carried out by an array of actors with varied motivations. For example, of the twenty riots studied from 1967, *Harvest* concluded that some outbreaks were more politically motivated than others. Half of them had "little or no political content." Four cities experienced riots with "some political content." Six cities, including Detroit, had riots that were seen as exhibiting "pronounced political content." Common among the riots were the underlying

grievances of urban blacks so well laid out in the Kerner Report. However, while the *Harvest* report determined that there were differing levels of political intensity in the riots studied, the commission's account is limited to identifying the degree to which the riots were planned and organized by black militants. Missing from the official narrative in the Kerner Report is the overall impact of Black Power and black nationalist ideas upon a significant number of rioters. It is to this question that *Harvest*'s most intriguing observations are found.[53]

An analysis of the characteristics of the highly political riots revealed a clear connection between riot participation and seeing the "failure of the political structure as a major cause of the rioting."[54] This broad condemnation places the violence in an entirely different light which has the potential to give the violence more meaning. In other words, if a local political structure is functioning, it would be to local institutions that disgruntled blacks could turn to address grievances. In the absence of a politically sound community, the systems that might redress grievances nonviolently simply do not exist. This dynamic played out in some cities much more than others. For example, *Harvest* noted that Detroit was among the highly political riots that "were characterized by a considerable degree of political awareness before the outbreaks."[55] Further, these cities were also witness to the "rise of militant leadership groups" that gave voice to the black experience, the failure of moderate civil rights activity, and an alternative means of achieving racial justice.[56]

The research in Detroit also revealed that many assumptions about rioter motivations and behaviors were misguided. For example, the relative prosperity found within Detroit's black population suggested that, leading up to the riot, Detroit might be immune from the violence that had been consuming other cities. The *Harvest* report

resolved that the opposite was true; the presence of a sizeable black middle-class had actually served as an aggravating factor in the riots.[57] This was especially observable in Detroit where "the center of the fiercest activity in the riot was an upper-middle class neighborhood… and most of the rioting took place in the more stable and economically secure West side ghetto rather than in the depressed East Side."[58] The *Harvest* report suggests that this correlation may exist because the "middle class tends to raise the level of political awareness in a Negro community. This is especially true in the case of Negro militants and activists, for the most part disaffected members of the middle class."[59] Albert Cleage of the Group on Advanced Leadership, Luke Tripp of Uhuru, and General Gordon Baker of the Revolutionary Action Movement serve as concrete examples of this class-based relationship, black militant activity, and increased political awareness in Detroit.

Additionally, the presence of a strong black middle-class usually indicates the likelihood of an "old, established [black] leadership which blocks the access of militant youths to the political process."[60] This generational distinction poses a direct challenge to the power of middle-class blacks in positions of authority and also diminishes the ability of the white leadership to take measure of the pulse of the larger black community, particularly among young people. Therefore, the presence of blacks in new positions of authority cannot lead to the assumption that these largely older and middle-class blacks were in tune with Negro youth. Indeed, much the opposite is true. For example, black congressmen Conyers and Diggs were ignored when they tried to calm the Twelfth Street crowd in the first hours of violence near the blind pig. Two black congressmen, purporting to represent the residents of the ghetto, standing as symbols of civil rights

progress, were treated as Uncle Toms. In Malcolm X's vernacular, the field slaves had become restless and the house slaves held no sway. These older men, *Harvest* suggested, "do not, and perhaps cannot, represent the interests of Negro youths."[61] The most salient observation made by *Harvest* regarding this generational divide is that the scene that played out in the early hours of the riot "reflects a common pattern in the development of social movements." The young people challenging the older people were not necessarily being disrespectful. They were, *Harvest* implies, behaving as many other groups have behaved in the past when a new generation is unwilling to tolerate the abuses accepted by their parents.[62]

The courage to challenge white authority and the established black leadership did not bubble up spontaneously. The environment in which these children were raised was rich with rising expectations nurtured by the promises of the civil rights movement. The Kerner Report spoke to this impatience:

> The expectations aroused by the great judicial and legislative victories of the civil rights movement have led to frustration, hostility, and cynicism in the face of the persistent gap between promise and fulfillment.[63]

General Gordon Baker also reflected on the legislative victories that promised much and delivered little:

> We done passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964… and ain't nothin' changed… So the legal system, as you approach it, when you get a law changed, don't nothin' change, didn't nothin' change… So you're frustrated with this… You're in the streets in the civil rights movement battling for a new law, you get the new law and it don't mean a damn thing…[64]

It was these frustrated and cynical young people raised in the ghetto, the *Harvest* report notes, who were more inclined to participate in a riot. This challenges another assumption; that rioters were largely made up of recent arrivals to urban areas. Having

left the rural South, so the argument goes, many blacks had trouble adjusting to urban life. The implication was that once new arrivals became more acclimated to the urban environment, the riots would diminish. The McCone Commission relied on this explanation to forestall conclusions that conditions in South LA were responsible for the violence in 1965. The reality in Detroit - with similar findings revealed by the recently released LARS study - is that 95 percent of young Negro rioters had grown up in the city. Of those who did not participate only 27 percent had grown up in Motown. If any conclusions can be drawn from this it would be that recent arrivals were much more likely not to participate in the riot. Growing up in the urban and increasingly militant environment of Detroit increased the likelihood of participation.[65]

Frustrated and cynical young people grew up in a highly charged political environment that taught them they had a right to expect more. The result, as *Harvest* concluded, was the rise of a new political class. In the years leading up to the 1967 riots, "the actions of youthful Negro participants have become more pointed and more political."[66] The boycott of Detroit's Northern High School in 1966 is cited as an example of the increasing "tendency among Negro youth to challenge both white authority and white society as a whole."[67] These students were acutely aware of the injustice in their school and found the courage to speak up. They found help, too, within the black militant community. Albert Cleage supported many of the boycotting students who could walk from their school to Cleage's church, while passing by the blind pig on Twelfth Street, in less than thirty minutes. These students must have been aware of the conditions on Twelfth Street and certainly their association with Cleage included some element of Cleage's black nationalist message.

Regardless, the Northern High School students challenged white authority in an environment as damaging as any in the urban ghetto, the segregated school. When considered in light of the broad range of militant activity within Detroit of 1966 and the proud youthful rioter described by the Kerner Report, the student boycott of Northern High School appears to be the product of a larger force within the Detroit community. "It was in the air," said Marsha Battle Philpot, describing Detroit's radical intensity in the months leading up to the rebellion. Lacking scientific rationality, Philpot's comment still captures the nebulous influences of Black Power thinking; increased pride, confidence, and frustration paired with hope in the face of shared injustice.[68]

In their comparisons of those who rioted and those who did not, the *Harvest* research backed up the idea that pride and confidence could motivate young people to take to the streets. "In Detroit," for example, "rioters were much more favorable to being black than were non-rioters."[69] A majority of those who rioted believed that they were smarter than whites while only about a quarter of the non-rioters felt this way. Rioters exhibited similar differences among other stereotypes regarding bravery, dependability, and more.[70] During his testimony to the Kerner Commission, urban anthropologist Elliot Liebow "suggested that," according to historian Ellen Herman, "rioting was not the logical endpoint in a downward spiral of self-esteem but rather the behavioral response of men who were attempting to assert some form of power and control, who rejected a sense of self as lazy, incompetent, and irresponsible."[71] In this sense, rioting served a psychological and sociological purpose. Rather than viewing rioters as lashing out in an uncontrolled rage, participation in a riot might be viewed as a perfectly rational and healthy activity that demonstrates hope that things might change. In this interpretation, it

is the non-rioter who, living under similar oppressive circumstances, may be more psychologically distressed. The rioter has made a bold statement with the confidence that his actions may bring about change while the non-rioter appears to have lost hope.[72]

Additional evidence challenged the stereotypical views of riot participants. For example, rather than looting and rampaging out of selfishness, greed, and opportunism, *Harvest* characterized some rioters as "finally standing up to whites [together] and refusing to be oppressed."[73] This shared experience had many rioters feeling emotions not uncommon among soldiers in battle. They reported that rioting together gave them "a feeling of camaraderie and unity they had never experienced before."[74] As difficult as it might be for mainstream America to acknowledge, the report argued that the "central characteristic of these youth is that they are motivated by a strong sense of idealism as far as American values are concerned. They accept those basic values, but experience bitter anger against a society which prevents their realization." In essence, *Harvest* determined that many rioting Negro youth were behaving in a manner consistent with more celebrated events in American history, demanding aggressively that the country live up to its own ideals.[75] When Eugene H. Methvin suggested that rioters "were waging the American Revolution all over again," he was calling upon readers to compare rampaging Negroes to patriots. He was reminding them that, to King George III, these celebrated founders of the United States were rampaging colonials ungrateful for all the privilege they had as subjects of the British Empire.[76]

In measuring rioter attitudes in Detroit, the researchers referred to a survey of 500 riot arrestees. Although only a minority appeared to be sympathetic to black nationalism in its more organized and formal forms, when the ideas underscoring black nationalism

were identified, the scientists uncovered a "general positive relationship" to riot participation. In other words, blacks in Detroit need not belong to a formal organization in order to be acting out of black nationalist impulses. This becomes especially relevant when the attitudes of the entire community are considered. In another survey of blacks in Detroit's riot-torn neighborhood, the "data reveal a general feeling that the riots represented meaningful protests against injustice," and nearly two thirds believed that the targets of the riot "deserved attack."[77]

Other studies confirmed some of the trends identified in *Harvest*. Seven months after *The Harvest of American Racism* was rejected and four months after the publication of the Kerner Report, "Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities" was published as part of the *Supplemental Studies for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. While engaged by the Kerner Commission, an introductory note states that the "studies were conducted independently of the Commission" and "are the work of their authors."[78] Like the *Harvest* scientists, then, the "Fifteen American Cities" researchers appear to have conducted their work relatively free from the political pressure that tempered the Kerner Commission.

This supplemental study identified many of the trends hinted at in the Kerner Report and the more assertively stated observations put forth by *The Harvest of American Racism*. On the question of black separatism, for example, the "Fifteen American Cities" study determined that six percent of blacks aged 16 to 69 favored the formation of a separate black nation within the United States and a strong majority favored integration. Although the numbers demonstrated strong support for integration, they might also indicate the potential for revolution:

> [W]hen we say that six percent of the sample advocates the formation of a separate black nation, we are implying that some 200,000 Negroes in these 15 cities feel so little a part of American society that they favor withdrawing allegiance from the United States and in some sense establishing a separate national entity.[79]

The authors of the "Fifteen American Cities" study, Angus Campbell and Howard Schuman, add that since black separatism is a deviation from "a very widely held norm," - that is, connection to the country into which one is born and raised - that the relatively small number should be taken seriously. Considering other data gathered in the report regarding lesser degrees of black nationalist and Black Power thinking, the scientists speculated that additional studies "might well find the force behind black nationalism to be considerably greater than its numbers suggest."[80] Indeed, when moving from the political to the cultural aspects of black separatism, the results were much more pronounced. Blacks in the fifteen cities demonstrated strong support for nurturing "a positive black identity, a realization of the significance of black achievement, both in Africa and in America, and a desire to contribute to the development of the black community." What the scientists found most remarkable is the support for an idea that had not even been on the radar only a few years earlier. Over 40 percent of blacks age 16-69 believed that "Negro school children should study an African language." The scientists regret that this was the only question that measured black cultural identity without "implying rejection of whites." In other words, when black nationalist ideas are measured outside of questions that call for a total separation from whites, the numbers imply a more pronounced feeling of racial identity and uniqueness. While not necessarily calling for wholesale separation, a significant number of all blacks in the country identified with the unique standing of their race in American society. Campbell and

Schuman recommended further study while they believe that the unexpected responses from this single question regarding the desirability of teaching young blacks an African language suggested "a considerable potential for the growth of black cultural identity in America."[81] It is important to consider that the long, hot summers of violence in American cities directly preceded the gathering of these opinions.

The study also measured the impact of black expectations. In the decade and a half since *Brown v. Board of Education*, unprecedented legal and political victories nurtured the promise that America would finally live up to its creed. According to "Fifteen American Cities," however, by 1968, "a full third of [urban blacks] does not believe 'real progress' has been made for most Negroes." Even larger numbers "believe discrimination in employment and housing are major facts of life for Negroes today." Zeroing in on those who would react most pointedly to the dashed hopes of rising expectations, Campbell and Schuman describe how a small number of radical thinkers can influence the behavior of the entire group:

> Largely contained within this third is a much smaller group of individuals who see violence as necessary to right injustices they believe are the lot of the Negro in America. This group is small but not trivial in numbers. More important, these individuals have the sympathy and perhaps to some extent the support of the larger minority… The use of violence as a form of protest has special meaning for Negroes at this point in history.[82]

The Harvest of American Racism drew similar conclusions regarding the rationale for violence in their study of riot torn areas and further, predicted, that if trends continued, a "growing minority" of Negroes will accept that violence is both "legitimate and necessary" as a form of protest against injustice. This trend is particularly acute in the highly politically charged areas of cities like Watts, Newark, and Detroit, and "if continued into the future, would mean irreparable fractionation of whole cities into

enemy camps." The inevitable outcome, according to the social scientists, amounted to escalating violence:

> The beginnings of guerilla warfare of black youth against white power in the major cities of the United States: that is the direction that the present path is taking this country. The history of Algeria or Cyprus could be the future history of America.[83]

Robert F. Williams, Luke Tripp, Albert Cleage, Gordon Baker, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Malcolm X all identified with the global struggles of non-white people against the legacies of Western imperialism. *The Harvest of American Racism* suggested that elements of this nationalistic identification had similarly influenced a significant minority of young black people in the United States and that one of the results of this identification was taking to the streets and attacking the symbols of oppression. This can only be seen as Black Power's ideas taking root in the ghetto.[84]

It is in the final pages of the report that the social scientists offer their recommendations. *Harvest* concluded that a new and rising political class, black youths, militant and growing, deserved recognition; not just to prevent further violence, but to acknowledge that much of the riotous behavior was consistent with previous episodes in American history that are celebrated for bringing about positive change. This rising class is at the "forefront of a massive urban black movement" that "is beginning to take on organizational form; the number of militant groups grows daily."[85] Their demands derive from "a growing desire for ownership and control of the areas in which Negroes live."[86] Merging historical patterns with their psychological and sociological investigations, the *Harvest* report asserts that:

> The classic conditions of rebellion are thus evident in the ghettoes today: a major social force, independent in its thinking, imaginative ready to take the initiative, and increasingly aware of its own potential, is virtually locked out of political

> power. When established political relations no longer reflect predominant social forces a rising class – in this case Negro youth – is inclined to take matters into their own hands.[87]

Harvest considered two alternatives to inaction. The first was a "Harsh and ruthless repression of the Negro Movement." By stationing large numbers of troops in trouble areas, arresting radical leaders, and killing large numbers of rioters when violence erupted, a "semblance of order" could be maintained.[88] In this, *Harvest* predicted that:

> As young French-educated Algerians fought a war of attrition against the French, so we might expect to see young militant American-educated Negroes refusing to accept the military occupation of Negro areas. Preferring to die on their feet, than living on their knees they will, ala guerilla movements in other developing areas, go underground, surfacing periodically to engage in terrorist activities.[89]

The shock value of this scenario seems to be an attempt to bolster appreciation for the second alternative which the scientists describe as a "Way to Save America." Through a massive intervention of non-militaristic federal power, *Harvest* recommended nothing less than a replacement of the local white power structure with representation that reflects the will of inevitable majority black populations. Staving off the threat of continued violence is a motivating factor behind the recommendations but the scientists were mostly guided by the preservation of American values. In their view, rioters were standing up to the institutional racism of local white power structures. It would be only a short time before the cities under siege would contain large black majorities. A commitment to democratic principles mandated that those in this new majority should manage local affairs to meet the needs of the new electorate. The political reality, the *Harvest* researchers concluded, calls for a:

> ...transfer of power on real decisions about program policies to the young militants in ghetto areas. This may be politically unpalatable to many local politicians and some conservative Negroes as well. But it is consistent with a concept of government which places the well-being of the whole community over

> the vested interest of entrenched local power groups. In this instance, the well-being of the whole community requires the recognition of Negro youth as a major power bloc. Since local government has shown no willingness to do this, then the federal government must.[90]

Harvest saw the riots as an emerging rebellion of aggrieved citizens embracing Black Power ideas. To prevent future riots, then, meant negotiating with the militants; therefore acknowledging their legitimacy. In their recommendations for maintaining civic peace and recognizing the emergence of a new and legitimate power bloc, the report suggests "the funding of programs for economic and political development designed by major militant organizations."[91] Essentially, *Harvest* called for billions of dollars to be managed by heretofore marginal black leaders. The white power structure of America's urban areas would have been squeezed out.

Not only did the commission reject *The Harvest of American Racism* for inclusion in the Kerner Report, it appears that they took steps to ensure its censorship. A copy of the report can be found in the LBJ Library and, as Malcolm McLaughlin has reported, "across its front page, hastily scrawled letters spell out the word 'DesTRoy' in green ink."[92] Social science had reached the point where it could inform policy making but the policy makers were still politicians. David O. Sears, PhD, a co-author of *Harvest*, recently reflected on those heady days of 1967 and 1968. "I can picture their chief staff member, a lawyer named Ginsburg… There was also a guy named Victor Palmieri who soon after had some interest in running for mayor of LA, but did not. They were the political guys protecting the commission. We were just social scientists… in a highly charged political atmosphere." Just social scientists, indeed; Sears is a Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Political Science at UCLA, his academic home for more than half a century.[93] Another Harvest co-author, Gary T. Marx, Ph.D., is currently

Professor Emeritus at MIT.[94] Another, urban anthropologist Elliot Liebow resigned his position at the National Institute of Mental Health in 1984 after learning he had only a year to live. He spent his final days working at a soup kitchen and a homeless shelter for women; taking notes on the street people he studied his entire life.[95]

While mayors like Jerome Cavanagh of Detroit were calling for reparations to remedy a long history of white oppression of blacks, they were not volunteering to step aside as federal funds flowed to the militants. Yet, this shaking up of the existing white power structure is exactly what *Harvest* recommended because the institutional practices of local white governments were responsible for the conditions that produced the rebellion. *The Harvest of American Racism* called for black control of black communities just as Reverend Albert Cleage had been doing for years. The incendiary document called for measures equal to the national crisis described by the Kerner Report; so it is no surprise, then, that those in power flatly rejected this social science bombshell and then appear to have actively attempted to hide its findings.

Under different circumstances, the Kerner Report's recommendations might have been implemented with the full funding and force demanded by the national crisis spelled out in John Lindsay's summary and the report's observations. However, even Lindsay's grandiose recommendations operated within a Great Society framework, albeit with a call for huge increases in funding. What they all failed to see is that the riots were not a call for additional handouts. The riots were an attack on an American way of life that, for millions of young ghetto residents, was a lie. The political solutions, as McLaughlin concluded, "cast black ghetto residents as passive objects to be molded by federal policy directed by a liberal political project and tended to overlook their capacity to shape their

own destinies."[96] Money certainly would have ameliorated ghetto conditions, but there remains the question as to whether any amount of money would have addressed the root of the problem which called for "a more thoroughgoing democratization of American society, its political institutions, and its economy."[97] When confronted with this institutional reality, the politicians, all of them, balked.

CHAPTER VII

Jim Crow is Alive and Well

"One does not build a safety net for a race of predators. One builds a cage."
– Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2015[1]

The Harvest of American Racism imagined three likely paths for America in the wake of the long, hot summers. Would America recognize the political legitimacy of a new black majority emerging in the ghetto? Or, would America arm itself, hunker down, and hope that blacks would continue to limit the destruction to their own neighborhoods? Or, thirdly, would America enter the ghetto with such force that continued rebellion would be suicidal? In post-riot Detroit, there were signs that each of these three scenarios had the potential to play out.[2]

In August 1967, as Detroit turned its attention to rebuilding the city and its shattered relationships, Albert Cleage seized the opportunity to define the upheaval in terms that promoted black self-determination. He argued loudly that blacks, and blacks alone, should rebuild the riot-torn black communities.[3] He and a number of other militants organized a group called the City Wide Citizens Action Committee (CCAC) which sought to, according to their founding papers, "have Negroes control the rebuilding… to insure that these new buildings, businesses, and other constructions are owned and operated by Negroes."[4] A number of moderates joined CCAC which suggested that the militant message had gained some credibility as a result of the violence. *City* magazine characterized the organization as "possibly the most broadly based Black Power organization in any city."[5]

With rumors of additional violence rattling Detroit and its suburbs, Cleage made sweeping pronouncements that implied he held the power to order up a new round of

chaos. "We don't like it the way it was," Cleage said, "we will rebuild it the way we want it, all of us together – or it will be torn down again and again and again. We are determined to control or own community." The alternative, Cleage warned, is "black warfare." Unsure whether Cleage and other militants actually held the power to start and direct another riot, the city of Detroit moved forward with hopefulness and caution.[6]

The New Detroit Committee was organized to revive post-riot Detroit. The 39 member committee included Mayor Cavanagh, Governor Romney, James Roche from General Motors, J. L. Hudson of Hudson's Department stores, Walter P. Reuther of the UAW, and Henry Ford II, who headed up a prestigious list of Detroit's white elite. New Detroit's goal was to reclaim the city's reputation through the coordination of public and private resources. Perhaps trying to appease the militants, or maybe just buying a little "riot insurance," New Detroit founders Cavanagh, Romney, and Hudson reached out to Detroit's blacks. Nine members of the committee were black, and three of those were militants, including Alvin Harrison.[7]

Despite Cleage's threats, or perhaps in reaction to them, New Detroit expressed a willingness to work with CCAC. According to *The Harvest of American Racism*, this was "perhaps the first time that powerful whites have agreed to work actively with militant nationalist leaders." Whether motivated by fear or not, those with a serious stake in Detroit's future saw value in embracing Albert Cleage.[8] In this perilous environment, Sidney Fine described Cleage as "the most influential spokesman for black militancy and black nationalism in Detroit following the riot."[9]

Cleage's efforts to interpret the violence in a way that solidified his credibility were challenged by many moderate blacks who considered him a "Johnnie-come-

lately."[10] In the wake of the violence these moderates formed the Detroit Council of Organizations (DCO) and then made competing claims to represent the interests of Detroit's blacks. In December 1967, Cleage attempted to bring more black moderates and militants together through the creation of yet another organization, the Federation for Self Determination (FSD). The integrationists within the DCO "wanted no part of the new organization." Four years after Malcolm X delivered his "Message to the Grassroots," his plantation analogy continued to reflect the divisions in Detroit's black community.[11]

Both the FSD and the DCO made funding proposals to New Detroit and the committee decided to offer each organization $100,000. There were strings attached, however, including the stipulation that recipients of the grant money could not use the funds for political activity. Members of New Detroit, including Hudson and Ford, were sympathetic to the demands of the militants but they were unable to convince FSD to accept the conditions of the grant. Perhaps in his greatest pronouncement in support of black self-determination, Albert Cleage and the FSD refused to accept what they considered to be a huge welfare payment.[12]

There were other signs that the violence had served the purpose of promoting, if not legitimizing, the militant message. In August 1967, Cleage started publishing a weekly forum in the black run *Michigan Chronicle* newspaper and membership in his church surged "at a phenomenal rate."[13] The entire city was being introduced to the Reverend Albert Cleage whose "rise to power [was] aided materially by the extensive publicity given him by the white press."[14] Another recently founded black newspaper, *Inner City Voice*, promoted militancy in Detroit and its founders hosted H. Rap Brown's return to the city in August. In a speech to hundreds of listeners, Brown continued to

stoke the anger expressed so violently only a few weeks before. The SNCC chairman's rhetoric, along with Cleage's threat to burn down the city if blacks were not given a primary role in rebuilding black communities, contributed to the fear which gripped the city.[15]

Cleage's church once again served as a center of black hope and black self-determination. At the end of August, the Shrine of the Black Madonna hosted a people's tribunal that openly demonstrated disdain for Detroit's criminal justice system in the wake of the abuses committed during the rebellion. In a mock trial organized by CCAC, the mock jury returned guilty verdicts against the two Detroit police officers, a National Guardsman, and a private police officer implicated in the fatal shooting of three black youths during the Algiers Motel Incident on July 26, 1967. Blacks were reminded that there were alternatives to the justice system which had imprisoned thousands during the rebellion.[16]

The formation of CCAC and the mock trial were early signs that the violence had empowered the militants; not the first time in American history that this has happened. If the *Harvest* report had become part of the national debate, Americans would have been reminded that much of the history of the United States has been influenced by such violence. In many cases, the violence has preceded ethnic "political incorporation," the dramatic path recommended in 1967 by *Harvest* as "A Way to Save America." To dismiss the riots because of their violence and criminality is to ignore the significance of similar, yet more celebrated, episodes of American history. In essence, the *Harvest* report had recommended that America embrace many of the black nationalist arguments being made in the months following the Detroit Rebellion.[17]

Cleage's threat of "black warfare" was not to be taken lightly, either. In this volatile environment of post-riot Detroit, *Harvest* predicted that to do nothing would be catastrophic.[18] By "continuing along the same path," Detroiters could expect increased violence, including guerilla warfare waged by blacks against whites. Following the patterns observed in Watts and Detroit, growing numbers of blacks would sympathize with, and perhaps join together with, their violent brothers. In this case, "ghetto riots will, perhaps, be better organized; and the results will be considerably bloodier than they have been thus far."[19] Essentially, *Harvest* predicted that to do nothing was tantamount to provoking civil war. Indeed, again citing historical precedent, *Harvest* adds that "[t]he most vicious conflicts in American history have taken place around the question of racial dominance."[20]

Preparations for civil war were already underway as early as July 1967. During and after the rebellion, the sale of handguns, long guns, and ammunition escalated as blacks and whites prepared for armed conflict. Rumors of blacks attacking white suburban neighborhoods and of armed whites seeking revenge in the inner city were rampant. Other rumors in the terrified white community had black maids poisoning their employers, young whites being castrated, the water supply being cut off, and expressway motorists being terrorized with sniper fire and exploding drums of gasoline. The social scientists made the recommendation to acknowledge the legitimacy of militant leaders like Albert Cleage because to do nothing would only escalate the violence.[21]

Fear of additional violence might lead to a potential third scenario, one well laid out in *The Harvest of American Racism*. Based upon the rather simple idea that "a stable civil society requires that the monopoly of violence rest in the hands of the government,"

Harvest's alternative "Garrison State" emphasized the primacy of maintaining order. By responding to the riots with a policy of "extreme repression," uprisings and potential uprisings would be met aggressively; large scale arrests, liberal use of lethal force, suspension of civil liberties, and large military occupation of trouble areas. "It has worked before," reads the report, "It will work again." The garrison state scenario is presented as a dire warning and not as a practical alternative that might be embraced by white America. The rather idealistic social scientists seem to have assumed that Americans simply would not wish to live in a country that treats its citizens this way. They were wrong; by 1967, the fundamental foundations of a garrison state were already taking hold.[22]

In *Rise of the Warrior Cops: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (2013), investigative journalist Radley Balko identifies the garrison state built up in the wake of mid-1960s urban unrest.[23] Balko provides extensive evidence that "the real beginning of the story of modern police militarization" directly followed "the social upheaval, civil unrest, and culture wars of the 1960s."[24] Indeed, he argues that the Watts riot was "the first major incident to nudge the United States toward more militaristic policing." Unable to effectively control rioters who threw bottles, bricks, and Molotov cocktails, and certainly completely unprepared to deal with the randomness of sniper fire, the LAPD sought the advice of those becoming more adept at dealing with guerilla warfare: the American military fighting in Vietnam. As the civil unrest escalated over the next few years, America's police forces began adopting a militaristic attitude to deal with rioting and other protests. [25]

As *Harvest* predicted, a successful campaign of "extreme repression" included the abandonment of civil liberties.[26] This too was already underway. As a black radical in Detroit, General Gordon Baker understood this aspect of government behavior necessary for the suppression of rebellion. "Even before '67 rebellion they had what we call the Rap Brown Law," Baker said years later, "If they catch three people on the street corner, there was a conspiracy to riot, and they could arrest you."[27] Baker knew first-hand how easily police could incarcerate outspoken militants. When trouble began in Detroit in July 1967, he found himself in jail the first night, locked up for violating a curfew which had been imposed only a few hours earlier. He was told that the bondsman had gone fishing. Two weeks later, he was released and the charge was dropped.[28]

Returning to Detroit in August 1967, H. Rap Brown made ominous predictions about the government's willingness to set aside civil liberties in the name of order. He warned hundreds of listeners that the federal government was planning to round up blacks and put them into concentration camps. With over 7000 arrested during the Detroit Rebellion, the idea that the government was intent upon isolating troublemakers was not an unreasonable observation. Conservatives calling for law and order solutions to urban unrest may not have been openly proposing concentration camps, but they definitely were not opposed to imprisoning those they held responsible for inciting the violence.[29]

In addition to the large scale arrests of radical leaders, Brown's incendiary rhetoric in Detroit reflected a legitimate concern that the official response to the riots would involve a militarization of the forces of control and subsequent crackdown on those who resisted. With fresh images of heavily armed troops shooting up their city, the citizens of Detroit were already quite familiar with what *Harvest*'s garrison state might

look like. What they were surely unprepared for was the extent to which the official forces of control were willing to go. The violence had emboldened the militants but it had also emboldened federal and local officials supported by fearful whites and many moderate blacks who now believed that the riots justified a massive deployment of firepower.[30]

As urban police forces began to militarize in the wake of the urban unrest of the 1960s, they did so with the full force and funding of federal anti-crime policies. These measures increasingly targeted the inner city where militarizing steps were often justified with arguments that crime is out of control, that drugs are ravaging the cities, and that the police themselves are under fire, going to work each day concerned that it may be their last. For 50 years, these arguments have been used to arm police with tanks, armored personnel carriers, .50-caliber machine guns, riot gear, helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, military assault rifles, sniper rifles, shotguns, bayonets, pepper spray, tear gas, gas masks, flash-bang grenades, bullet proof vests, night vision goggles, and grenade launchers.[31] Today, military practices are part of the daily routine of police forces across the country. As Balko writes, "Police today are armed, dressed, trained, and conditioned like soldiers."[32]

The reality of modern policing stands in stark contrast to the policing recommendations made in *The Harvest of American Racism*:

> The authority of the policeman ultimately rests on the awe and respect which the agent of public order earns. It is not based on the effectiveness of his use of weapons. What we need is a new movement in police practice which emphasizes the nonmilitary aspects of the policeman. The policeman must be seen by the people as distinguished, the kind of man who is worthy of their support.[33]

In a remarkable irony, harsh anti-crime measures were introduced into the daily lives of urban blacks through Johnson's Great Society antipoverty programs. Historian Elizabeth Hinton has argued that, as early as 1965, the Law Enforcement Act and the Housing and Urban Development Act exemplified the "entanglement of Great Society policies" which "yielded new possibilities for supervision in segregated urban public schools, housing projects, and within families on welfare."[34] Liberal antipoverty measures paired with conservative demands for law and order:

> ... allowed law enforcement officials to use methods of surveillance that overlapped with social programs... to effectively suffuse crime-control strategies into the everyday lives of Americans in segregated and impoverished communities. In time, the entire spectrum of domestic social programs actively participated in national law enforcement.[35]

As the police began to militarize in the late 1960s in response to urban unrest, another modern feature of America's social and political landscape began to emerge. Segregationist George Wallace's 1968 run for president was based on "law and order," which *Time* magazine described as a "rallying cry" for an American public "dismayed by random crime, disrupted universities and violent demonstrations in downtown streets." For others, "law and order" was a euphemism justifying the "repression of the black community."[36] Wallace's growing popularity was not lost on Republican Richard Nixon. In his campaign, Nixon wooed disaffected Southern Democrats into a new Republican majority by capitalizing on anti-black sentiment. His efforts echoed the imposition of Jim Crow in the nineteenth century when denying the right to vote based on race had been prohibited by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In turn, local and state governments in the South developed seemingly race-neutral voting policies such as literacy tests and poll taxes that effectively excluded disproportionate numbers of blacks

from the electorate. Similarly, in 1968, Nixon recognized that the legal and moral victories of the civil rights movement had made explicit references to race politically risky. Subsequently, his campaign message focused on "law and order" while avoiding explicit pronouncements of race.[37]

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012), legal scholar Michelle Alexander reveals how Nixon's strategy reflected a new post-civil rights era norm for communicating about race in America. During the past 50 years, Alexander has argued persuasively, racially-neutral federal anti-crime and anti-drug policies have been implemented in a manner that overwhelmingly targeted the ghetto. With fresh images of rioting in America's streets, it took no stretch of the imagination to conclude that the lawlessness and disorder portrayed in the 1968 campaigns of Wallace and Nixon were largely the responsibility of young black men. Nixon confidante and close advisor H.R. Haldeman reflected on this new dynamic: "[Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to."[38]

Whether couched in the sympathetic language of fighting poverty or the practical law and order language of making the streets safe, federal policies of the 1960s began to deliver many aspects of *Harvest*'s garrison state to the ghettos of America: suppressed civil liberties, militarized police, and the subsequent mass incarceration of the very demographic that was largely responsible for the riots of the mid-1960s. By targeting black youth, *Harvest* also accurately predicted the large scale arrests that would characterize the garrison state. Indeed, as Hinton observes, it was the "merger of

antipoverty programs with anticrime programs that laid the groundwork for contemporary mass incarceration."[39]

Johnson's War on Poverty combined with new opportunities for law enforcement to directly engage the neighborhoods that had erupted in violence during the long, hot summers. Then, using racially coded language to win the election of 1968, Nixon continued to target blacks with his racially colorblind yet racially polarizing rhetoric. Nowhere was this more damaging to America's urban blacks than in his all out declaration of a "war on drugs."[40]

Oddly, Nixon's declaration came at a time when, as Alexander points out, "illegal drug use and abuse was not a pressing concern in most communities."[41] Nevertheless, over the course of the next few decades, "Huge cash grants were made to those law enforcement agencies that were willing to make drug-war enforcement a top priority."[42] Those grants were used to militarize the police who used their new toys, embodied in the SWAT team, to wage an aggressive war on drugs targeting the most vulnerable communities. In some jurisdictions, over 90 percent of SWAT team deployments are carried out to serve search warrants, many for minor drug offenses.[43] The result is that, "Convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States."[44]

As the civil unrest of the 1960s was broadcast into the homes of white middle-class America, it was not difficult to make the argument that beefing up the police was necessary. Following the conclusions of the Moynihan Report that the black community in the ghetto was sick and that rioters were nothing more than criminals, enacting anti-crime measures had the broad support of white America. For 50 years, the federal

funding of law enforcement programs has militarized America's police forces while incentivizing activities that distanced police from the citizens they were pledged to serve and protect.[45]

Ironically, Moynihan himself was calling for a drastically different government intervention into a national crisis. As Ta-Nehisi Coates has recently written, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "The Negro Family" was not intended to castigate the residents of the ghetto. On the contrary, it was meant to awaken the American consciousness to an American problem. Moynihan's ideas included jobs programs, family planning support, and a guaranteed minimum income. However, subsequent interpretations of the report focused on the breakdown of the Negro family and discounted the message that white America's long history of slavery and Jim Crow was responsible. As Coates has written, "Moynihan's aim… had been to muster support for an all-out government assault on the structural social problems that held black families down… Instead his report was portrayed as an argument for leaving the black family to fend for itself."[46]

White America largely adopted Moynihan's conclusion that black inner city communities were a "tangle of pathology." The police forces of America militarized and directly targeted the black youth who were, Hinton observes, "prone to rioting and, by extension, to criminality."[47] Incredibly, the *Harvest* report offered the establishment of a garrison state as an ostensibly untenable outcome by noting that, "The question is whether Americans want to live in the kind of society that will require."[48] Hinton offers evidence of America's dark answer to *Harvest*'s now not-so-rhetorical question:

> By the dawn of mass incarceration in the 1980s, as the scale of resources allocated to federal crime-control measures ballooned from $22 million in 1965 to approximately $7 billion before Ronald Reagan's presidency, contact with the

> police, a stay in a juvenile detention center, and a long term in prison had become parts of ordinary life for a generation of black Americans.[49]

In a recent *Atlantic* article exploring the devastating effects of mass incarceration on the black family, Ta-Nehisi Coates shares some extremely troubling statistics. Since the urban uprisings of the 1960s, the number of incarcerated Americans has gone from 300,000 to 2.2 million, a six hundred percent increase.[50] "Among all black males born since the late 1970s," Coates writes, "one in four went to prison by their mid-30s." Dropping out of school almost guarantees a prison sentence for black males. Seventy percent of black males born since the late 70s who dropped out of school have spent time in prison. The blatant racial disparities in incarceration rates mean that the age, gender, and race of those who rioted in the 1960s eerily resembles today's prison population. "In 2000," Coates lamented, "one in 10 black males between the ages of 20 and 40 was incarcerated – 10 times the rate of their white peers."[51]

The ironic legacy of Moynihan's "The Negro Family" is that mass incarceration has only exacerbated the "tangle of pathology" that has been inflicted upon the ghetto by militarized police and a criminal justice system that destroys families. "By 2000," Coates continues, "more than 1 million black children had a father in jail or prison" and, somewhat defying the reality of grave numbers of fatherless families in the ghetto, "roughly half of those fathers were living in the same household as their kids when they were locked up."[52] In the nation's capital, Michelle Alexander adds, 75 percent of "young black men… can expect to serve time in prison. Similar rates of incarceration can be found in black communities across America."[53]

While living in a disadvantaged area increases the likelihood of criminal activity, racial disparities reflected in crime statistics are far more egregious than can be explained

by poverty. The Sentencing Project, an organization committed to criminal justice reform, has been reporting on the criminal justice system for 30 years. Racial disparities in police activity and the various steps of the criminal justice system have overwhelmingly targeted those who resemble the typical rioter of the mid-1960s. Studies carried out over several decades have revealed that while white secondary school students were more likely to have abused illegal substances, their black peers were twice as likely to be arrested for drug crimes. In a study released in 2011 black drivers pulled over by police were three times more likely to be searched by police. In a New Jersey study "racial minorities made up 15% of drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike, yet 42% of stops and 73% of arrests made by police were of black drivers – even though white drivers and racial minorities violated traffic laws at almost identical rates." In a Florida county, "148 hours of video footage documenting more than 1,000 highway stops by state troopers showed that only five percent of drivers on the roads were racial minorities but minorities constituted more than eighty percent of the people stopped and searched by the police."[54]

Just as literacy tests and poll taxes effectively excluded disproportionate numbers of blacks form the voting rolls of the late nineteenth century, and Richard Nixon's intentionally race-neutral campaign rhetoric and strategy mobilized anti-black sentiment in the late 1960s, seemingly race-neutral crime and justice policies and practices have created outcomes that demonstrate the pervasive presence of racism in American society. Explicit racism is rare in the colorblind society. Implicit racism, on the other hand, is deeply embedded within the law enforcement and criminal justice systems. This implicit racism influences the vast majority of all Americans who associate blacks with adjectives like "dangerous, aggressive, violent, and criminal." This type of racism is most evident

when individuals must make quick judgments with little information: a rather definitive example being the moment young black men interact with the police, a moment that can transform the life of a black man. In a clear statement backed up by extensive research, The Sentencing Project has pronounced that "subconscious racial associations influence the way officers perform their jobs."[55]

The racial disparities continue throughout the criminal justice process. Poor blacks are more likely to receive an inadequate defense because they are represented by "overworked, underpaid attorneys – therefore increasing their chances of being convicted." Once minority defendants are convicted, "they are likely to be sentenced more harshly than white defendants convicted for similar crimes." When income was considered as a variable blacks with incomes less than $5,000 were sentenced most harshly of all, receiving sentences that were on average 6.2 months longer; 13% more time behind bars than their white peers. Blacks are significantly less likely to receive leniency for assisting law enforcement even when the data is controlled for severity of the offense, prior criminal history, and more. In a study of 2001 death penalty cases, "the presence of five or more white male jurors dramatically increased the likelihood of conviction… while the presence of one or more black male jurors substantially reduced the probability." Punishment after conviction is polarized along racial lines when the defendant is black and the victim white; a disparity which disappears when the defendant and victim are of the same race. In another study, blacks convicted of murder were 38% more likely to be sentenced to death even when controlling for variations in the crimes.[56]

Rather than becoming a new and legitimate power bloc as *Harvest* recommended, black men in this country have been methodically subjected to a new form of civic and

economic disenfranchisement. Once a black man, or child for that matter, comes into contact with the criminal justice system, his prospects for leading a productive civic and economic life are in serious jeopardy. A black man with a criminal record can be legally denied a job. He can be discriminated against as he seeks housing and education. He may be ineligible for jury service. He can't enlist in the military, and is disqualified from certain employment and professional licenses. He can't possess a firearm. In the ultimate testament to second-class status, he may, as a convicted felon, be denied the right to vote. And, there is no doubt that this emasculation of citizenship falls most heavily upon the same demographic that took to the streets in rebellion during the 1960s. In some cities, as Alexander states, "as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives."[57]

This denial of political, economic, and social liberties to a huge segment of the American population has created what Alexander describes as an "undercaste." The young black men who have been "shuttled from their decrepit, underfunded inner city schools to brand-new, high-tech prisons" are released into a world that almost guarantees their return to prison.[58] Above all, these men have lost their dignity in the eyes of the larger world. It is no surprise then that many of them seek out dignity in the only place it can be found; in the criminal and incarcerated world of their peers.[59]

By misinterpreting Moynihan and largely ignoring the Kerner Report, the American people have conveniently adopted exactly what the news media and official government accounts would have them believe: Negroes prone to rampaging belong in jail. Coates writes:

> As the civil rights movement wound down, Moynihan looked out and saw a black population reeling under the effects of 350 years of bondage and plunder. He believed that these effects could be addressed through state action. They were – through the mass incarceration of millions of black people.[60]

The reality of modern American criminal justice can be viewed as the cumulative effect of federal riot control policies. Indeed, as Elizabeth Hinton has observed, "the threat the uprisings [of the mid-1960s] posed to American law and institutions… needs to be understood as the central catalyst behind the punitive turn in twentieth-century domestic policy." In this assessment, then, the Detroit Rebellion of 1967 was put down by a repressive campaign of surveillance, intimidation, arrest, and incarceration.[61] It is no coincidence that "uprisings sparked… by the presence of exploitative and exclusionary institutions in black neighborhoods" resulted in the magnification of the oppressive force of those same institutions; in the battle between the black rioter and the oppressive institutions he opposed, the institutions won.[62]

The political consciousness that emerged in the mid-1960s among black youth posed a serious threat. The official response was "extreme repression" because, in the end, Americans decided overwhelmingly that they were perfectly willing to live in a society that treats its citizens this way.[63] For blacks growing up in America's inner cities for the last 50 years, the enlargement and militarization of police forces, and the subsequent mass incarceration of black males is no fictional nightmare of *Harvest*'s garrison state. It is the stark multi-generational reality for a large segment of the American population. The Black Power revolutionary consciousness that manifested itself in the Detroit Rebellion of 1967 didn't just fade away; it was crushed into submission.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion: Celebrating the Myth

"Cries of Black Power and riots are not the causes of white resistance, they are the consequences of it."
– Martin Luther King, Jr.[1]

The standard study of the Detroit riot, Sidney Fine's *Violence in the Model City*, relies heavily upon official records and an extensive, yet superficial, interpretation of social science survey data. In this effort, Fine's conclusions regarding the meaning of the violence stray little from those reached by the Kerner Commission.[2] On the other hand, the grassroots study of the Detroit Rebellion has not yet been written. Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs once said that, "If you call it a riot, you're taking sides."[3] In order to describe the clearly riotous behavior as rebellion, however, requires the near impossible task of assessing the motivations of tens of thousands of individuals who participated; not to mention the attitudes and perceptions of hundreds of thousands of others who shared their grievances. *Violence in the Model City* and the Kerner Report have made clear the severity of those grievances and their role in the upheaval. Less clear is how the grievances and potential remedies were transformed into riotous activism in a city where Black Power ideas flourished.[4]

In one of only a few citations of *The Harvest of American Racism* within *Violence in the Model City*, Fine briefly considered the view that the riots amounted to a robust political statement:

> Some students of the 1960s and some members of the Kerner Commission staff thought that the disturbances not only constituted a protest against existing social conditions but also "a concerted attempt to achieve political objectives that had not been gained through other means." What the riots entailed, David Boesel [co-author of *The Harvest of American Racism*] thus contended, was "the breaking of white control over black territory and the autonomous exertion of

> power over that territory by the black masses themselves." More important, according to Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn, was the fact that 75 percent of the adult black respondents on Twelfth Street in a post-riot survey indicated that they expected to have more say about their neighborhood as the result of the riot and 50 percent thought they would have more power. It appears that those who thought the Detroit riot had a political dimension, that it was aimed at restructuring political power since other means had failed, were reading too much into the event.[5]

Fine's interpretation of the survey data is used to counter Boesel's contention that rioters were exercising their power over black territory. Another interpretation of the same data, however, seems to actually support Boesel's contention. Three-quarters of the people living in a neighborhood that had just been largely destroyed by a riot believed that the violence would give them a stronger voice; and half thought they would have more power as a result. It is not reading too much into the event to question how those surveyed got the idea that this type of violence could increase their political power; an idea consistent with the presence of a revolutionary consciousness fed by Black Power ideology.[6]

Fine also demonstrates some selective use of social science observations. Citing sociologist T. M. Tomlinson, Fine wrote, "What produces riots is the shared agreement by most Negro Americans that their lot in life is unacceptable." Fine acknowledges that grievances exist which might result in violence but fails to thoroughly consider Tomlinson's report. Fine continues:

> Given "the lot in life" of Detroit's blacks and their legitimate grievances regarding education, housing, jobs, and the police, as well as the general state of race relations in the city, there was certainly a good deal of combustible material lying around in Detroit that could be ignited.[7]

However, Fine offers no view on Tomlinson's assertion that the grievances are "coupled with the view by a significant minority that riots are a legitimate and productive

mode of protest."[8] Again, Fine will go only so far as to say the rioters had something to complain about. Missing from his analysis is Tomlinson's larger conclusion from the same report that the majority of militants and non-militants alike "is aggrieved, angry, and disaffected [and] appear to be deeply committed to bringing about change."[9] Nor does Fine include the observation that violence represented the beginnings of a "riot ideology" that "emerged in its clearest form in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riot and has been blown across the country on the winds of pervasive Negro discontent."[10] Fine has adopted the slightly sympathetic tone of the Kerner Commission and essentially rejected the social science interpretations that were rejected by the commission.

Embracing the Kerner Report's conclusions, Fine subjected the commission itself to little scrutiny. This may be the result of the report's extraordinary admission of white culpability in the ghetto, a wholly unprecedented position in the history of riot commission politics. Adopting a sympathetic tone gives the report some credibility but it does not extinguish the political pressures inherent within the politically conceived commission.

In a 1970 article reflecting on his experiences with the Kerner Commission, former Executive Director of Research Robert Shellow writes, "We were disappointed that [the Kerner Report] ducked the challenge of giving meaning to the riots, a meaning which we felt was implicit in the data developed by the commission itself."[11] The rejected *Harvest* report, on the other hand, takes a clear position on the meaning of the violence:

> Of the many different tendencies evident in the outbreaks, the most salient and increasingly the predominant one is the political. At one level the riots reflect simply a demand for recognition; at another the violence takes the form of political confrontation, a sort of pressure group politics in which the pressure is

> Negro violence; at the highest level they have a tendency to become out and out political rebellions – efforts to abrogate, though not to overthrow, the power of the state.[12]

Fine clearly did not give much credence to these conclusions; the report was rejected, after all. When considered alongside the subsequent scholarly work regarding the increased scrutiny of riot commission politics, however, the motivations behind the report's rejection come into question. Add to this investigation a reimagined Black Power intimately interconnected with the civil rights movement and the previously marginalized movement now has the potential to reveal a more thoughtful narrative. As the social science hinted at the potential political agency of rioting, Black Power thinking gave potential structure to the collective behavior of those who took to the streets. The lens provided by the new historiography offers insight into the impact of this Black Power thinking in Detroit. Indeed, this more broadly conceived Black Power has the potential to illuminate wide swaths of civil rights history; an opportunity for further study along many fronts.

Perhaps the most significant observation regarding radical civil rights activity is that, across the largely unreliable moderate-to-radical civil rights spectrum, the entire movement, over time, adopted a more radical bent. Civil rights activists of all types became increasingly frustrated with an often-violent white backlash. Chagrined by the geographically broad resistance to change, some activists questioned the efficacy of their commitment to nonviolence and, in time, many of them modified their approach. To describe these adaptations as "radical," however, sidesteps the origins of their transformation. Black Power activists were not born radical. They were radicalized by their environment; one populated by a stubborn majority.[13]

Three personalities exemplify the chronologic and geographic scope of Black Power. Robert F. Williams links the Black Power movement to its World War II antecedents, its Southern manifestations, and its willingness to consider alternatives to nonviolence. After serving in a Jim Crow army, Williams adopted methods that demonstrated faith that the war had awakened America to her own injustices. When it was discovered that this faith was misplaced, Williams and his followers in North Carolina decided to challenge the resistance more assertively.[14] Malcolm X links the Black Power movement to its Harlem antecedents; its political roots running deep into 1920s Garveyism, and its cultural necessities birthed during the Harlem Renaissance. Malcolm was branded a radical for his brash condemnation of white racism; a message he delivered on street corners for over a decade, long before the white world took notice.[15] Stokely Carmichael links the Black Power movement to the civil rights movement's youthful contingent. After experimenting with nonviolence, Carmichael and many of these young blacks abandoned the approach favored by Martin Luther King. Like Williams, Carmichael's nonviolent activism in the South evolved in reaction to local officials who, in this case, jailed him dozens of times. His early effort to register voters was met with a white backlash meant to deny a basic right protected by the US Constitution.[16] Carmichael stands as testament to the impatience of young blacks who were promised so much. His full-throated evocation of Black Power in 1966 catapulted the slogan to national prominence while affixing a label to a collection of ideas that had been coalescing around white resistance to change. His eloquent rage alerted America to the severity of her injustices and endorsed the legitimacy of those who would reject their commitment to nonviolence.[17]

These national Black Power personalities identified with the increasingly universal and global reach of Black Power ideology; an international outlook made clear by the new historiography's powerful lens. Finding common cause with the full breadth and complexity of the legacy of European imperialism, the 1960s marked a high point in the struggles against the centuries of devastation imposed upon the non-white peoples of the world; and more contemporaneously, upon the dramatically increasing numbers of blacks populating America's cities.[18]

This global conception of the black freedom struggle was not limited to a radical few. When Dr. King described the US as the greatest purveyor of violence in the world in April 1967, he was attempting to reconcile his faith in America's capacity for change with the inherent contradictions revealed by carpet bombing in Southeast Asia. In so doing, King embraced a pursuit of justice which eclipsed the integration of schools and lunch counters. Indeed, his merging of the civil rights and anti-war movements, which so alienated the Johnson administration and many members of King's own organization, was an embrace of a key element of Black Power ideology.[19] Further, King's appeal to his government paralleled the conclusion of the *Harvest* researchers who wrote, that, "a growing number of Negro youth… are simply demanding that America live up to its ideals."[20]

When the lens of the new Black Power historiography is directed at Detroit, it not only reveals militant and radical hotspots, it brings into clear focus the interconnectedness of local, national, and international universal Black Power themes.[21] As central figures in a newly reimagined Black Power history, Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael influenced and interacted with Detroit's urban

blacks. World War II industrial demands brought Williams to Detroit where he participated in the city's 1943 race riot. His race and class consciousness influenced Detroit radicals General Baker and Luke Tripp. Williams's *Crusader* magazine was widely available in Detroit, and his radio broadcast, *Radio Free Dixie*, reached the city's airwaves.[22] Sidney Fine's single reference to Williams in *Violence in the Model City* characterizes him as "an advocate of the use of 'organized violence' by blacks to win their freedom." There is no mention of Williams's time in Detroit and no mention of his relationship with Detroit radicals. Fine simply does not evaluate the potential influence Williams may have had on Detroit radicals and on the entire black community who had broad access to his revolutionary ideas.[23]

Similarly, Fine's four references to Malcolm X cast him as a shadowy figure invoked only to provide radical contrast to moderate civil rights activity.[24] Contrary to Fine's portrayal, Malcolm's impact in Detroit runs deep, beginning in the 1950s. He was the successful assistant minister of NOI's Temple No. 1 where his street-based recruiting efforts tripled membership. In that capacity, over 4000 people attended a four week series of Malcolm X lectures. Malcolm had a strong relationship with the Reverend Albert Cleage and other Detroit militants. And, as biographer Manning Marable has written, Malcolm was a "great hit with the general public in Detroit."[25] His "Message to the Grassroots," a down-to-earth speech directed specifically at unsophisticated urban blacks, was delivered in Detroit in November 1963; his words captured the spirit of the class consciousness that was an integral part of the Black Power movement.[26] Malcolm influenced Detroit's radicals and they influenced him. "Outside of New York City," Black Power historian Peniel E. Joseph writes, "Detroit played the most important role in

Malcolm X's political development."[27] T.M. Tomlinson observed that the "fiery preaching" of Malcolm X denounced the "evils of whites and white-dominated society" and these words "served to awaken a long dormant sense of black identity, especially among the youth." Fine cites Tomlinson's report but does not include the social scientist's comments on this critical figure in Black Power history and his impact on young blacks, especially in Detroit.[28]

Fine's references to Stokely Carmichael serve to marginalize his influence as well. For example, as evidence that Detroit "militants attracted few followers," Fine points out that, speaking in Detroit in July of 1966, Carmichael "attracted an audience of only five to six hundred to an auditorium that seated twelve thousand." In comparison, "The previous month, Martin Luther King, Jr., had preached nonviolence in the same auditorium to a standing-room-only crowd."[29] It is important to note that Carmichael had only recently gained national attention in June of 1966 in his evocation of "Black Power." Further, his Cobo Hall speech in Detroit was broadcast over the radio where Carmichael said, among many other provocative comments, "don't you ever apologize for throwing a Molotov cocktail."[30] Two days later, Alvin Harrison and General Gordon Baker were implicated in incidents related to the Kercheval mini-riot that nearly launched the city into chaos.[31]

In contrasting support for Carmichael with support for King, Fine's binary approach overlooks the complexities of civil rights activity and, perhaps more importantly, its evolution over more than a decade. In a critical example, Fine fails to note that, by 1966, King had become much more radical himself. In the last two years of his life, King set about answering the question, "Where do we go from here?" His

revolutionary answer was "that we must honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society." Poverty, racism, and the war in Vietnam were all symptoms of an America failing at her struggle to live up to her founding words. This is not the King of popular history. It is the more radical King whose revolutionary path largely parallels the recently reimagined broader conceptions of Black Power.[32]

The revolutionary consciousness emerging in the ghettos was not only a product of the increasingly radical influences of Black Power advocates; it was a reaction to the radicalization of the entire spectrum of civil rights activity. Fine's references to King ignore this radicalization. For example, in making his argument that radical ideas had little support among rioters, Fine writes, "Although some juvenile arrestees mouthed Black Power slogans, Martin Luther King was their most admired leader."[33] In another example, citing a 1968 survey among blacks in fifteen cities, Fine points out that "91.5 percent of the Detroit black respondents approved or at least partially approved of Martin Luther King, but only 26 percent were of this view regarding Rap Brown."[34] The inference here is that support for King at this point in his life is equivalent to support of moderate, peaceful, and patient change. However, if King's relative popularity in Detroit in 1968 were measured alongside his call for "restructuring the whole of American society," it might be argued that a massive majority of Detroit blacks believed that the whole of American society should be "restructured."[35] This reinterpretation of data offered by Fine begs the question of exactly how Detroit blacks might go about this "restructuring."

There is another point to make here regarding Fine's interpretations of survey data, which, in this case, overlooks a rather significant fact. His implication above is that the radical H. Rap Brown was unpopular. However, one in four Detroit blacks surveyed at least partially approved of H. Rap Brown; someone who had only recently proclaimed in Detroit that the government was intent upon rounding up blacks and putting them into concentration camps. It must be seen as rather extraordinary that twenty-five percent of blacks had such apprehensions about their own government. It is also significant to point out that the survey cited here did not target blacks in the specific areas that had experienced riots. Regardless, failing to distinguish blacks along class lines obscures an important demographic fact regarding Detroit's black population. In the end, the numbers cited by Fine demonstrate support for Brown and his radical ideas among a significant minority of the black population; notwithstanding wide support for King.[36]

Martin Luther King's evolution paralleled the radicalization of many Black Power advocates whose initial entry into civil rights activism was characterized by the hope that American society was poised to change. Raised in the post-war environment in which America struggled to reconcile its victories over Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan with its own racially caste society, rural and urban blacks began making demands grounded in the principles that drove the war effort; not the least of which is the occasional necessity of violence in achieving noble goals. It should be no surprise, then, that some of those in defense of achieving similarly righteous goals at home concluded that violence had its place. King never advocated violence but he increasingly recognized how others determined it was necessary. His speech in Detroit in 1963 hints at this evolution[37] while

his "Beyond Vietnam" speech in 1967 evokes some of the same disappointment and rage as those who had been ravaging America's cities.[38]

The lines between moderate and radical positions blurred as the sixties wore on. More than half a century since becoming radicalized in Detroit of 1960, Dr. Luke Tripp remains steadfast:

> I feel no sense of loyalty to America as a nation state. My commitments are to humanitarian values, not to political constructions of nation states. My activism can… be understood in terms of my outrage against the destructive forces of racism, capitalism, and militarism.[39]

Many would describe these words as rather radical. However, they echo one of the nation's civil rights heroes who said:

> I speak as a citizen of the world… When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.[40]

Both King and Tripp were concerned about the soul of America; it appears that only King believed it could be saved. As a historian, Tripp's admiration for King is based upon the whole King; not the limited version rolled out for the masses during Black History Month. In *Between the World and Me* (2015), Ta-Nehisi Coates has recently commented on the peculiar nature of these celebrations that ignore the harsher realities of America's racial history:

> Every February my classmates and I were herded into assemblies for a ritual review of the Civil Rights Movement… and it seemed that the month could not pass without a series of films dedicated to the glories of being beaten on camera. The black people in these films seemed to love the worst things in life – love dogs that rent their children apart, the tear gas that clawed at their lungs, firehoses that tore off their clothes and tumbled them into the streets. They seemed to love the men who raped them, the women who cursed them, love the children who spat on them, the terrorists that bombed them. *Why are they showing this to us?*[41]

Coates is all-too-aware of the contradictions of black life in America. He grew up in West Baltimore where violence - the threat of violence, the weight of the threat of violence – was ever-present:

> Why were only our heroes nonviolent? I speak not of the morality of nonviolence, but of the sense that blacks are in especial need of this morality. Back then all I could do was measure these freedom-lovers by what I knew… I judged them against the country I knew, which had acquired the land through murder and tamed it under slavery, against the country whose armies fanned out across the world to extend their dominion. The world, the real one, was civilization secured and ruled by savage means. How could the schools valorize men and women whose values society actively scorned? How could they send us out into the streets of Baltimore, knowing all that they were, and then speak of nonviolence?[42]

The most celebrated is, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Exactly one year to the day after delivering a scathing indictment of American aggression in Vietnam, King was assassinated. As is often the case with martyrs, King's death secured his place in history, not as an anti-war critic of US military interventionism, but as a peaceful exemplar of all that America could be. Modern celebrations of King and King's methods distort historical memory with a narrative that serves to invigorate American virtue. Indeed, to celebrate King is to celebrate the faith that King once had in America's ability to overcome injustice. Never mind that by 1967 that faith had been severely tested; by American foreign policy that essentially defended centuries of imperialism and by the reality of black life so dramatically and violently thrust into America's living rooms. Missing from the popularly remembered King narrative are his intersections with an increasingly radical pursuit of racial justice. Peniel Joseph claims that King's place in history has ignored his "eloquent calls for economic equality, his cosmopolitan worldview, and his stances against war, militarism, and exploitation."[43] These ignored aspects of King's life align with Black Power ideals espoused by activists – and many

rioters for that matter - who demanded social and economic justice with more ferocity than a decade earlier. When considered alongside King's evolution, the broader conceptions of Black Power, as revealed by modern Black Power historians, urge a reconsideration of the entire scope and complexity of the post-World War II struggle for civil rights justice; not to mention the meaning of America's celebrations.

And, just as the predominant characters in Black Power history often began their demands for social justice without the fiery rhetoric and without the threatening behavior, so too did the local figures emboldened by their ideas. Detroit's radical environment emerged as a logical reaction to the failure of traditional civil rights activity. Among a militant, yet diverse, community of black radicals, Albert Cleage, Luke Tripp, and General Gordon Baker are telling examples of ideologically motivated and Black Power-oriented leaders. Their evolution as activists provides insight into understanding the entirety of Detroit's radical atmosphere in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The Reverend Albert Cleage is cast throughout *Violence in the Model City* as a radical with little influence.[44] Missing from Fine's analysis is the central role Cleage played in articulating a uniquely independent black consciousness in Detroit; a racial portrait painted with a Black Power brush. He sermonized a newly imagined black American existence. He hosted black cultural conventions that brought together the diverse community of Detroit's radicals and the national figures who gave dimension to a broader conception of Black Power. His black nationalist message transcended the political realm by imagining a black nation founded upon black culture, black history, and black heroes. Grounded in the very principles that guided America's founders, he

gave structure to a black nation that might be fashioned by those who had lost faith in their own government.[45]

Cleage challenged the black leadership in Detroit whom he believed had abandoned the poor and working class blacks of the inner city.[46] He called for black control of black schools, businesses, and entire communities. When Cleage preached about racial pride he introduced an idea that contradicted centuries of white propaganda. His sermons and his activism were directed at blacks who were inspired to imagine themselves beyond white society's expectations and limitations. Cleage nurtured an essential element of a black nation; rich with black social institutions and steeped in African cultural traditions that had been torn asunder through centuries of slavery and Jim Crow.[47]

Fine's treatment of Luke Tripp and General Baker mirrors his treatment of Williams, Malcolm X, and Carmichael. Tripp and Baker can be seen as representing the front lines of Detroit's radical activism. Fine's references to the two are slight; most egregious, however, is that he portrays the activism they represented as largely insignificant, too. Favoring a middle-class black perspective, Fine wrote that organizations like the NAACP were "committed to the ideal of a racially integrated society and sought to work with the city's leadership to achieve that goal."[48] Men like Tripp and Baker, on the other hand, were directly involved in improving the lives of poor and working class blacks. They saw much of the black middle-class leadership as Uncle Toms; a view also held by those who shouted down the Uncle Toms on Twelfth Street in the first hours of the rebellion. Dismissing the militants, Sidney Fine claimed that "GOAL, UHURU, SNCC, and RAM were flyspecks in terms of posing a threat to the

black leadership position occupied in Detroit by the NAACP." Tripp's and Baker's organizations did not have thousands of members but their messages percolated through the areas of Detroit they argued had been neglected by organizations like the NAACP.[49]

Luke Tripp was inspired to action by the Southern lunch counter sit-in protests of the early 1960s. His organization adopted similar direct action protests against local injustice. He directly challenged the institutions that practiced discrimination; white owned businesses that refused to hire blacks, police that instilled fear rather than respect among Detroit's blacks, and a criminal justice system that all-too-often served as a tool to disrupt black lives. His protests were not against the legal origins of Jim Crow, they were a reaction to the micro-aggressions he experienced every day of his Detroit life.[50]

Like Tripp, General Gordon Baker's interpretations of the Detroit Rebellion are grounded in first hand experiences with local racist institutions. Segregated neighborhoods and schools limited his opportunities but, they also fueled his courage to speak out even as white police patrolled the streets. He risked his livelihood to challenge both his employer and the union which claimed to represent his interests. Blacks held the lowest paying jobs, they were the first to be laid off, and speaking out meant trouble.[51] Like Cleage and Tripp, Baker was inspired by national Black Power figures like Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams as they interacted with Detroit's radical community.[52]

As radical black activists, Cleage, Tripp, and Baker exemplify the organizations and personalities that contributed to the development of a revolutionary consciousness in Detroit. Perhaps most important to consider when assessing the broader impact of Detroit's radical environment is that while Cleage, Tripp, and Baker are certainly extreme examples, their day to day existence was shared by hundreds of thousands of black

Detroiters. In the end, the Black Power ideologies put forth by groups like Cleage's GOAL, Tripp's Uhuru, Baker's RAM, and many others gave voice to what black people were experiencing. This broader conception of Black Power's ideological reach, as Historian Russell Rickford has recently written, influenced "legions of rank-and-file black Americans [who] appropriated nationalist discourse while rethinking the nature of citizenship and freedom."[53] And, while many blacks in Detroit may have been unable to articulate the comprehensive expressions of black nationalism, the proliferation of the variety of Black Power ideas meant that "aspects of nationalist thought proved relevant to everyday strivings of African Americans."[54]

In many respects, the "everyday strivings" of a large number of American blacks today include some of the same challenges of fifty years ago. In a recent *Atlantic* article, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers evidence that many of the conditions that gave rise to a revolutionary consciousness in the 1960s persist in America's inner cities. Over twenty-six percent of blacks in this country live in poverty compared with 10.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites.[55] Whether poor or not, sixty-six percent of all blacks in the United States live in "high poverty neighborhoods" where over twenty percent of those in the neighborhood are considered poor. Only six percent of white Americans live in such neighborhoods. And the differences between white and black poverty go well beyond the numbers. Indeed, it is concentrated poverty, then and now, which characterizes the ghetto itself. "Whereas individual poverty deprives one of the ability to furnish basic needs," Coates writes, "concentrated poverty extends out from the wallet out to the surrounding institutions—the schools, the street, the community center, the policing." These

concentrations of poverty affect a majority of American blacks, just as Daniel Patrick Moynihan observed in 1965.[56]

In 2016, housing segregation continues to feed education segregation. In a 2015 article in U.S. News and World Report, Data Editor Lindsey Cook offers hard evidence that backs up her title, "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal." Over two million black students attend schools that are ninety percent non-white. Disparities are evident among two year-olds: blacks are less likely to be read to, told a story, taught letters, or to visit a library. Black students are nearly three times more likely than whites to be held back a grade from Kindergarten through high school. Black Americans are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students, the first steps on the "school to prison pipeline." As Cook writes, "Black Children are far more likely to live in households that are low-income, extremely poor, food-insecure, or receiving longterm welfare support." Nearly twenty-five percent of black parents report that their children live in unsafe neighborhoods, a monumental obstacle to learning reported by only seven percent of white parents. Black children are more likely to be victims of violent crimes. Blacks have lower math and reading achievement, more behavioral problems, a higher incidence of obesity, risky sexual behavior, and a greater risk of illness.[57] Eleven percent of black children in this country have an incarcerated parent.[58] Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" is thriving.

These are not the black friends of white people; they are the black undercaste that has been concentrated in America's ghettos and her prisons – both environments that encage black people. More than fifty years ago, Moynihan wrote about black life in the ghetto and the white perceptions of it. He warned that "the emergence and increasing

visibility of a Negro middle-class family may beguile the nation into supposing that the circumstances of the remainder of the Negro community are equally prosperous, whereas just the opposite is true at present, and is likely to continue so."[59] And it has continued so. The beguilement of the nation has been bolstered by the increasing visibility of prosperous blacks – on television if not in the neighborhood. "In the current era," as Michelle Alexander has recently written, "white Americans are often eager to embrace token or exceptional African Americans, particularly when they go out of their way not to talk about race or racial inequality."[60] Celebrations of the first blacks to hold positions of authority and power – including president of the United States - obscure the realities of black life in this country. These are certainly great accomplishments but they do not evidence the end of racism, segregation, and discrimination. Alexander assigns a rather sinister motive to token integration in what she describes as "the carefully engineered appearance of great racial progress"[61] Affirmative Action programs have reinforced these misperceptions of black life in America. Alexander writes:

> Affirmative action… masks the severity of racial inequality in America, leading to greatly exaggerated claims of racial progress and overly optimistic assessments of the future for African Americans… Although some African Americans are doing very well – enrolling in universities and graduate schools thanks to affirmative action – as a group, in many respects African Americans are doing no better than they were when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and riots swept inner cities across America.[62]

In an earlier time, the recommendation was made to introduce "a massive educational effort directed toward the white communities of this nation to bring home to them the realities of Negro life. The gap of ignorance that stands between white perceptions of reality and what the real situation is among Negroes is phenomenal."[63] *The Harvest of American Racism* recommendation of nearly a half-century ago seems to

apply very well to today's situation. If Malcolm X were alive, he would likely comment that many of the house slaves had made it, while many of the field slaves had simply been left behind. Progress has certainly been made since the civil rights era, yet, the American ghetto as plantation is not a fully inaccurate analogy.

Recent news reports from the inner cities are once again reminding middle-class Americans that there is another America. Unfortunately, many of these stories echo the tensions of black neighborhoods being patrolled by police forces whose whiteness is obscured by increased numbers of black cops. Once again, however, the gun and the badge continue to trump skin color. As protests emerge against police brutality, images from the streets eerily resemble those from the 1960s. The scale of violence does not yet equal that of Detroit, or Newark, or Watts, but the angry rhetoric and behavior has the nationalistic feel of Black Power. This should come as no surprise. In America, the oppressed minority has been taught well the lesson that violence is often necessary just to get the majority's attention. Within a nation that has historically delivered justice with a whip, and then with a tree and a rope, and then with a militarized police force, justice for the minority continues to be largely dependent upon the majority's capacity for change. There should be no surprise, then, at the oppressed minority's occasional attempt to check in on the progress the majority is making; and no shock at the means they embrace to do it.

In the end, the riots of the mid-1960s have been defined by the white officials whose limited capacity for change more explained what the riots might accomplish than the political passion with which the rioters delivered their destructive force. After all, only one side in this fight had an army. Yet, the strength of the establishment does not

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NOTES

CHAPTER I

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