

Southern New Hampshire University

“We Just Came Apart”

How the Nonviolent Actions of the Civil Rights Movement Led to the “Revolutionary Violence”
of Black Power

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial
Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

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Abstract

“‘We Just Came Apart’: How the Nonviolent Actions of the Civil Rights Movement Led to the ‘Revolutionary Violence’ of Black Power” is devoted to uncovering the relationship between the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in order to identify how the shortcomings of the Civil Rights Movement led to the armed self-defense activism associated with Black Power. Both movements had a similar ideological basis that promoted equality for all Americans, yet the tactics that were pursued to achieve their respective goals were vastly different. In the historiography of the Civil Rights Era, Black Power has continually been vilified in the available literature and displayed historically as being ineffective when compared to Civil Rights. This project challenges that assumption and provides evidence for how successful Black Power activism actually was. In the primary sources of Black Power activities, such as the various newspaper articles from the *Los Angeles Times* that were reviewed, the media denounced the efficacy of the activists and their protests which led to this trend being shown in the early historical literature written on the topic. Secondary sources were used in the development of this project that both strengthened and challenged key conclusions, and primary sources were provided to support the conclusions found here when they conflicted with what other historians have previously found. “‘We Just Came Apart’” is devoted to reinterpreting how Black Power has been viewed in historical literature, as well as to link how the deficiencies of the Civil Rights Movement allowed Black Power to burgeon.

Dedication

For mom, who always prioritized my scholarly pursuits and nurtured my academic mind. Thank you for everything, always.

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Preface

Please note that as you are reading this capstone project, the terms “African American,” “Black,” “Negro,” and “Person/People of Color” may be used interchangeably in order to provide historical context or continuity to the era in which the subject of this work is about. No derogatory terms shall be used to describe any minority individual outside of a quotation from the Civil Rights era that provides necessary context to the topic of this project. The terms that will be used are in no way intended to take away from the sacred right of naming after generations of that right being taken away from the individual and changed at the slaveowner's discretion prior to the abolition of slavery.

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Thank you to Dr. Seth Bartee who pushed me to strive for academic excellence while ensuring I had realistic scholarly goals. Dr. Bartee's feedback was invaluable in the creation of this project, and in many of the other courses I participated in while at SNHU. Thank you!

List of Abbreviations

BLM – Black Lives Matter

CORE – Congress of Racial Equality

CRM – Civil Rights Movement

BPM – Black Power Movement

BPP – Black Panther Party

DDJ – Deacons of Defense and Justice

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

ILBPP – Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party

KKK – Ku Klux Klan

LAPD - Los Angeles Police Department

LCFO – Lowndes County Freedom Organization

LOC – Library of Congress

MIA – Montgomery Improvement Association

NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NMAAHC – National Museum of African American History and Culture

SCLC – Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SNCC – Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Introduction

In 1955 Mississippi, a young boy named Emmett Till was brutally murdered by a white man. This man was acquitted of the lynching against this young Black boy, which sent waves of shock, discontent, and unrest throughout the African American community. African Americans knew that they could no longer suffer torturous fates at the hands of white members of their communities, who faced no or minimal repercussions for their actions against Blacks. From the murder of this fourteen-year-old boy, and the acquittal of his murderer, sprang the Civil Rights era that has become most associated with the 1960s. The murder of Till was the defining moment and catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), as it impacted both current Civil Rights and future Black Power leaders. The Civil Rights Movement gained traction for years, and is revered as one of the most powerful social movements in, at least, American history. What is less highly regarded, however, is the Black Power Movement (BPM). Black Power became known as a symbol of aggression, militarization, and, from the perspective of many, masculinity. Civil Rights activists took a nonviolent approach to their cause, where the supporters of Black Power broke the traditional role of passive resistance. Forming from disgruntled members of the Civil Rights Movement, members of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and other armed groups that fell into the Black Power category wanted nothing more than to protect themselves and their fellow Blacks from law enforcement officers who were too quick to arrest, beat, or persecute Black individuals of all ages and genders. Although both groups, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, were fighting for the creation of a shared American picture where there truly was “liberty and justice for all,” the Black Power Movement became vilified in the contemporary media. The Civil Rights Movement, and organizations associated with it such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), has continuously been respected by

historians for their peaceful protests and religious leaders at the helm of the cause. The Black Power Movement was not represented quite as often in the media due to their violent actions and the desire to not give their movement any fuel to the proverbial, and sometimes literal, fire. The major division came when the Selma marches occurred and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted by Martin Luther King Jr. Once equal voting had been achieved, the Civil Rights Movement almost became obsolete. All of the other injustices that American Blacks faced, such as economic inequalities and police brutality, allowed Black Power to ferment around the nation. When CRM leaders tried to move their organizations and programs northward, it was already too late to stop the spread of armed resistance. Due to the limited scope of inequalities and lack of direct action that CRM pursued change for, Black Power was born.

Peniel E. Joseph, author of *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* argues that “the racial uprisings, self defense movements, and cultural pride celebrations subsequently associated with black power era radicalism were far from a decisive break from a more hopeful era. Rather, they were the direct result of a troubled, but no less heroic, past that has been left largely unchronicled.”¹ By not representing the actions of Black Power activists and demonstrations, historians have often concluded that this movement was less successful than its nonviolent counterpart. Many historians even feel as though once physical violence is achieved in a movement that it discredits the desires of the people. That is not completely accurate, however, especially when considering how the Civil Rights Movement largely fizzled out in the mid-1960s, yet Black Power continued to gain support into the late 1970s. This capstone project intends to argue that the Black Power Movement, including groups

¹ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2006): XI.

such as the Black Panther Party, was developed in retaliation to the shortcomings of the nonviolent Civil Rights protests that were initiated in 1955 after the death of Emmett Till. Although these groups had their own initiatives and actions that were independent of each other, many parallels can be drawn between the two groups, such as the use of individual leaders to promote their agenda, an ideology that advocated for equality for all individuals regardless of race, and the use of media coverage to promote their events and beliefs. Lastly, I seek to accomplish a reinterpretation of historical evidence that has led many historians of all backgrounds to believe that the Black Power Movement was not as successful as it actually was, due to their lack of media representation or even previous historical works vilifying the cause. Black Power was just as successful as the Civil Rights Movement, if not more; it simply does not garner the respect it deserves in the historiography of the Civil Rights era because its supporters practiced armed self-defense.

Why now?

The study of the Black Power Movement in relation to the Civil Rights Movement deserves to be studied at this juncture in time as it is completely relevant to modern social and political changes. A modern event that can be compared to the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement is the Los Angeles Riots. The LA Riots, as they were often called, were a series of looting raids and burnings of physical properties that credited the acquittal of multiple police officers who beat a man named Rodney King, in which all of the 56 blows to his body were caught on video tape, as its cause.² The riots that began after the acquittal verdict was reached echoed to many a similar tone as the Watts Riot. The Watts Riot, occurring some 27

² Darnell M. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles 'Riots': Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 1-2.

years prior to the LA Riots during the height of the Civil Rights era, also occurred in Los Angeles, and was the direct result of a young Black man who reportedly resisted arrest while being accused of drunk driving, which he was then beaten for.³ The riots that broke out lasted for days, and are considered by some historians the “big bang” that caused the Black Power Movement to begin. Seemingly, all of the major movements surrounding African American civil rights are directly related to police brutality, with no care for era or circumstance; African Americans are still being treated unfairly by officers of the law, and they push back against this with both non-violent and armed acts of rebellion. The question that must be answered in this case really is simple: how does each group choose to respond to events such as riots? Both groups wished to end the brutality caused by police that African Americans have been forced to suffer for generations; the Civil Rights Movement chose to answer the call for aggression with peaceful resistance, and argued that looting was not the answer to their prayers. The Black Power Movement supporters, on the other hand, participated in the raids, or at the least supported them.

Hopefully, the contents of this project will add to the available information on Civil Rights that modern activists, and others interested in Civil Rights as a whole, can turn to. Where these issues are so divisive in our society, the product created here could have some societal or political implications in the short term. Not everyone, historians and the general public alike, is willing to accept that the Black Power Movement was a successful and respectable organization for the simple fact that these individuals took up arms in defense of their lives. What many people overlook is that militarized groups like the Black Panther Party armed themselves for defense against the police and agitated whites, who were seen a countless number of times beating and attacking unarmed and defenseless Civil Rights Movement supporters. The Black

³ Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising And The 1960s* (New York: Hachette Books, 1997): 56.

Power Movement utilized the same tactics as law enforcement and other white suppressors, yet were treated like criminals and miscreants for acting in the same fashion. Their history, as it is so often misrepresented and underappreciated, deserves to be studied.

The Sources Used

To prove that this thesis is as accurate as possible, many primary sources are needed. One of the greatest primary source databases that was utilized in this project is the Smithsonian Open Access catalogue, particularly the “Civil Rights” and “Activism” collections which are both housed in the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). Many of the documents are available online, which made the writing process much simpler during a pandemic when it is difficult to travel to and access sensitive documents. The New York Public Library has an exhibition devoted to the Black Power Movement (called “Black Power!”), which has had a physical and digital exhibition associated with it. The “Black Power!” digital exhibition offers a variety of primary sources that can be reviewed online as well. The Library of Congress (LOC) and the National Archives database offer millions of primary source documents, and have become wonderful sources for both cultural and political document discovery.

Although primary sources are very impactful on this capstone project, even more secondary sources from noteworthy historians helped to prove the claims written here. I will begin by reviewing works about some of the influential figures, organizations, and locations associated with both the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. Many of these works will add context to these arguments, as well as provide the basis for the introductory paragraphs or define the events and figures that a reader of the capstone project would expect to see. At the forefront of literature with a focus on the African American Civil Rights era is Taylor Branch’s Trilogy: *America in the King Years*. These works, *Parting the Waters: America in the King*

Years 1954-63, Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965, and At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68, detail what the African American experience was like from 1954 when Brown V. Board of Education declared segregated school unconstitutional, through the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. These years are what are most commonly associated with the Civil Rights era, and focus more on the nonviolent Civil Rights movement. Branch is considered the authority on the historiography of the Civil Rights era, and has even been awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Parting the Waters*. This was rightfully earned due to his inclusion of individuals of all stations in American society, from those at the forefront of the Civil Rights era, such as King himself, and the every-day individual simply trying to live their best lives in a time when oppression ran rampant. Women, Blacks, whites, children, adults, and all others are included in this extensive novel in order to accurately detail the impact that the Civil Rights Movement had on individuals, as well as the impact that individuals had on the Civil Rights Movement. The structure that Branch employs is that of “narrative biographical history” to not only capture the reader's attention, but also give them a sense of what it was truly like to live in the era and immerse them into the years of Dr. King.⁴

The literary tactic of displaying one or more central figures at the heart of the Civil Rights struggle is not uncommon in the historiography of the Civil Rights era. Tomiko Brown-Nagin, author of *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement*, analyzes the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta through their most influential figures, such as Thurgood Marshall and A. T. Walden. Although Walden does not have the same type of household name that Marshall does, he truly helped to shape the Civil Rights Movement and civil rights themselves through his law practice and work with the National Association for the

⁴ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 2.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Brown-Nagin works to advance the field of the legal history of the Civil Rights era by decentering the supreme courts as the major player of the movement, and instead starting from the ground up to identify the entirety of the community that fought for Civil Rights in Atlanta. Atlanta, a hotbed for racially-based concerns in the Civil Rights era, acts as a microcosm for 1960s-1970s America. All African American communities were fighting for equality in one way or another: this is simply the story of Atlanta's community struggle. The second part of *Courage to Dissent* “identifies points of conflict between the more pragmatic and the more orthodox approaches to civil rights.”⁵ Both the Black Power Movement and the Civil Rights Movement are identified in this section of Brown-Nagin's work in order to compare their influences and strategies. This section of the text was utilized to uncover how other historians of the two movements compare, as well as how both the non-violent and armed resistance movements operated simultaneously in Atlanta. Because of this, Brown-Nagin is able to offer the reader a variety of information, making the work complex, detailed, and interesting.

Over the course of this project, there are some crucial Civil Rights organizations that will be discussed. One of the most influential organizations of the non-violent movement was the SNCC, or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Some pieces of literature that were used in the creation of this project included *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* by Clayborne Carson and *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's*. The later book tells the tale of the student activists and the community response to their work at the height of the African American Civil Rights Movement. Morgan and Davies “examine... selected aspects of this movement to cast light on its complex substance,

⁵ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 13.

development, and significance,” while primarily analyzing the witness testimony of those who experienced the 1960s.⁶ The contributors of the work focus on the events of the movement that the living participants found most significant, and rely on witness accounts to write their chapters. Morgan and Davies actually do not include a bibliography with published or archival sources themselves, and instead include a list of contributors, which include Civil Rights era student witnesses, as well as university and college professors. Morgan and Davies book is intended to give a platform to those who experienced the events rather than to write the chronology of it, and where witnesses tend to be inaccurate when telling their selected memories, each author shared upwards of fifty endnotes per chapter. By supporting the witness testimony with archival documents or secondary literature, the work becomes more reliable in nature. Another interesting aspect of Morgan and Davies' work is that they target scholars of American History who live in the United Kingdom. This is an unusual demographic where the majority of American history historians live within the bounds of the United States, but novels as emotional in nature as this can transcend borders. Where many of the professor contributors were from the United States of America, it is hard to know if this work had a large following in the United Kingdom. More works that can add context to this capstone project that related to the various Civil Rights Movement organizations are *Reconciliation to Revolution: The Student Interracial Ministry, Liberal Christianity, & the Civil Rights Movement* by David P. Kline, and *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* by David J. Garrow. Seeing the specific actions of non-violent organizations can introduce great insight into how each movement carried out its desired agenda.

⁶ Iwan Morgan, and Philip Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012): vii-viii.

Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt by Hasan

Kwame Jeffries reaches the heart of the thesis statement of this capstone project: how the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements compare. Jeffries focuses on a small but influential area of America in terms of the Civil Rights era. The deep south was an intrinsic location associated with keeping African Americans racially oppressed, and where many of the protests throughout the era were held. Jeffries' work illustrates the chronological narrative of the LCFO, or the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. This group formed in conjunction with the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Commission) to abolish the hate against African Americans in their small southern town. Lowndes was composed primarily of the descendants of the enslaved, which made racial oppression a particularly hot issue there. Jeffries argues that Lowndes County was a microcosm for the greater Civil Rights issues in America, as "the freedom struggle in the county was emblematic of local struggles throughout the region."⁷ What is most admirable about Jeffries' work is that he conducted tens of interviews himself. To support the memories of those involved with the movement, he used manuscripts from the era, film, newspaper articles, published and unpublished scholarly works, and other archival resources. It provides a resource on how individual communities were affected by the Civil Rights era in unimaginable ways. This book was utilized to highlight how self-defense and nonviolent movements existed in the same small communities and how they may have worked together or opposed one another.

Although nonviolent organizations were where the movement began, self-defense organizations were needed to attain complete racial equality (although that has still not been fully achieved). Cobb goes against the grain of the expected interpretation of the Black Power

⁷ Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 3.

Movement, and analyzes the structure of the organizations of this era in a new light. Cobb states that “these organized groups, of course, are hierarchical in structure, so it is easy to fall into the trap of defining them by using the top-down analysis that has dominated so much scholarship of the Freedom Movement. This analysis emphasizes prominent, visible leaders, seeing them as the key to understanding events.”⁸ Cobb acknowledges that his position is not typical in the historiography of armed resistance, so he gives an ample amount of evidence to support his claims, including that from major groups like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). His most compelling argument, however, may be how CORE, a nonviolent organization, partnered with the Deacons for Defense and Justice (DDJ), a militant group, in order to achieve racial equality. Both organizations had to set their principles aside to work together towards a shared goal. Their working hand-in-hand to promote racial equality shows that Black Power and Civil Rights did not form independent of each other, but rather Black Power was a result of the Civil Rights Movement as it could not complete its intended job alone.

Many pieces of literature were located that related to the Black Power Movement, but they were most often associated with the Black Panther Party (BPP). Some of these works include *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* by Bobby Seale himself, and *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* by Judson L. Jeffries. Two more works, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black*

⁸ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014): 11.

Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago by Jakobi Williams and *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* Matthew Countryman, are case studies of specific locations in America that were affected by the Black Power Movement. Countryman takes a deep dive into how Black Power and Civil Rights were used as tools to fight racial oppression in Philadelphia which goes against the grain of the expected narrative that became ingrained in history after the Civil War; this being that the northern states did not practice racism like they did in the South.

A book that is not explicitly linked to the BPP includes *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*. Charles E. Cobb argues that “although nonviolence was crucial to the gains made by the freedom struggle of the 1950s and ’60s, those gains could not have been achieved without the complementary and still underappreciated practice of armed self-defense.”⁹ In this work alone, it becomes increasingly apparent that violence did not denigrate or collapse the Civil Rights era, as many historians often argue. Cobb is one of the first to articulate that violence and self-defense were necessary means of achieving any form of racial progress, somewhat counterintuitively including the political tactic of nonviolence. Cobb first gives context to the title of his book by explaining how passive resistance led to African Americans being brutally beaten by angry mobs of white individuals and attacks from clubs at the hands of the police. By not defending themselves, Black people were much more likely to be injured or fatally wounded than if they were armed. This made armed resistance a completely necessary tool of the Civil Rights era. Cobb wishes to dispel any

⁹ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014): 1.

false perceptions of the armed resistance of the Civil Rights era, and shed light on the power that it brought in backing racial equality.

Oftentimes, both armed and nonviolent protest would end in jailtime for the African Americans engaged in them. Zoe Colley in her influential book, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement*, works to include a missing piece in the historiography of the Civil Rights era: the jail experience of Black men and women imprisoned for revolutionary acts of protest. In the introduction, Colley recognizes that Civil Rights historians “often refer to incidences of arrest, trial, and imprisonment, but they tend to reduce civil rights prisoners to mere numbers while also failing to venture past the jailhouse door.”¹⁰ Colley aims to include examples of Civil Rights activists, such as Dr. William Anderson or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who were jailed for their actions in the fight for racial equality. Not only does Colley work to bridge this gap, but she also argues that the “development of a protest ideology that embraced imprisonment as a mark of honor within the nonviolent movement was most important because it facilitated overcoming those shared memories of almost a century of injustice.”¹¹ Where the African American community was and often is still afraid of the backlash of, particularly white, legal officials, showcasing how the mindset of Black men and women changed to embrace an incident such as imprisonment for the advancement of their race shows how they would not allow systematic racism to affect them any longer. This project plans to discover how the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement used imprisonment as a weapon against systemic racism in their quest for racial equality. As both groups eventually

¹⁰ Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012): 3.

¹¹ Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 3.

were not afraid of being jailed and even found pride in that experience, it will be argued that the Black Power Movement gained this portion of their ideology from Civil Rights.

Leilah Danielson wrote her article, “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism,” in 2004, allowing much time to pass between the perceived end of the Black Power Movement and the time of her writing. Danielson describes how the stereotype of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements formed early on in the historiography of the topic do not allow a fluid interpretation of those who did not fit the mold of the described stereotype. Danielson writes that:

“the first phase of the movement emphasized nonviolent direct action and particularly was effective at raising white Americans’ awareness of racial segregation and disenfranchisement in the South. Yet... the political mobilization of African Americans also became a source of pride and led to a search for black identity and history. In the process, activists began to question the tenets of nonviolence and interracialism.”¹²

Danielson writes of how the militarization of the Civil Rights era was only the next step towards equality for Blacks in America. Danielson, similarly to Branch and Brown-Nagin, only describes one Civil Rights leader (James Farmer), which makes her work only a case study for a larger issue in the historiography of this topic.

To conclude the articles that add context of the Civil Rights era to this project, Leonard N. Moore offers up his work, *The Defeat of Black Power: Civil Rights and the National Black Political Convention of 1972*. There is not a clear consensus on when, exactly, the Black Power Movement ended, and many historians believe that there was more of a steady decline than an overt conclusion. By giving a decisive ending to the Black Power Movement, Moore may have a groundbreaking conclusion. Moore argues that in 1972 when the National Black Political

¹² Leilah Danielson, “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism,” *Peace & Change* 29, no. 3/4 (2004): 448.

Convention was held, it was imperative for Civil Rights and Black Power Movement individuals to come together and create a shared vision for Blacks in the United States. Divides between the groups grew after the death of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the political climate was not getting any easier for African Americans to participate in. This conference hoped to bring people, with differing tactics to fight for equality, together in an “attempt to develop a national black agenda that would merge these competing ideologies under the theme of ‘unity without uniformity.’”¹³ Moving forward, African Americans would be united against a common struggle. This work addresses the impact of this conference well, but more research may be needed to discover if this truly did bring an end to the Black Power Movement, or if BPM activities continued after this conference in their own way that was separate from the uniform mission.

One interesting caveat of the Black Power Movement is how gender deeply affected the movement coming to fruition. Simon Wendt’s text, “‘They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men’: Violence, Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” not only applies the lens of race to the topic of the Civil Rights era, but gender as well. Andrew Young, an activist who worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., recalled that he could not position himself near women during non-violent protests because he could not trust himself to not try to protect the women if harm were to befall them at the hands of a white oppressor.¹⁴ This highlights the intricacies between violence and non-violence in a way previously misinterpreted, and Wendt describes how “Young’s understanding of what it meant to be a man challenged the movement’s non-violent orthodoxy and implied an obligation to defend black women against

¹³ Leonard N. Moore, *The Defeat of Black Power: Civil Rights and the National Black Political Convention of 1972* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2018): 2.

¹⁴ Simon Wendt, “‘They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men’: Violence, Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” *Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 543.

racist attacks.”¹⁵ It was for this reason that many individuals, particularly men, decided to leave the non-violent movement in favor of a militarized one; Black men felt the need to protect Black women, and, by extension, the rest of their community that was being maltreated. Wendt focuses only on the male role in the Black community and why they may have moved towards a notion like Black Power and militarization, rather than studying gender relations in the movement as a whole. Women are still being underrepresented in the history of the Civil Rights era, in both Black Power and nonviolent demonstrations.

Fortunately, influential women are becoming much more represented in the historiography of this topic, even though the movement became synonymous with masculinity. Two works that address the topic of the feminine influence in the Black Power Movement are *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* by Vincent P. Franklin, and *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* by Komozi Woodward, Jeanne Theoharis, and Dayo F. Gore. The former text’s primary focus is comparing how women operated in the Black Power Movement to that of the non-violent movements. *Want to Start a Revolution?*, however, primarily focuses on the Black Power Movement and how women assisted the fight for African American civil rights. In *Sisters in the Struggle*, Franklin suggests that his work “demonstrates a coming of age of African American women’s history” by giving a variety of Black women from the Civil Rights era voices in the forefront of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements.¹⁶ Both movements featured strong Black women at the helm of their cause, yet they have seldom been heard about; that is, until

¹⁵ Simon Wendt, “‘They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men’: Violence, Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” *Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 543.

¹⁶ Vincent P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2001): 6.

now. Proving Franklin's conclusion correct that Black women will be included in the historiography of the Civil Rights era more often now, *Want to Start a Revolution?* happens to be a work that comes a few years after Franklin's. This text offers the perspective of a variety of different women from across the United States who, in their own way, impacted the Civil Rights era. The compilers of this work want to show that "just as the work of these radical women in the political arena changed the complexion of black political culture, the examination of women's activism... will reorient studies of black radicalism by expanding its boundaries beyond self-defense and separatism and by articulating its roots in labor, civil rights, and early autonomous black feminist politics that came to flower in the post war era."¹⁷ Taking the focus off of the masculine rhetoric surrounding the Black Power Movement will create a more inclusive image of how it operated, as well as allow for women to share in the accolades that go along with helping to organize movements during the Civil Rights era.

A work that is less explicitly related to gender at the surface level, but truly is a study of gender, is *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s* by Traci Parker. Parker published this text only two years ago to explain how the popular department stores of previous generations, as they are not so popular now, were actually "Jim Crow institutions designed to satisfy the needs and desires of middle-class whites" while excluding African Americans from consumerism while profiting off of their labor.¹⁸ While white women and their families were welcomed into stores and openly accepted by the shopkeepers and clerks, "African American customers were welcome to shop, but were

¹⁷ Komozi Woodward, Jeanne Theoharis, and Dayo F. Gore, *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 3.

¹⁸ Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019): 4.

provided uneven, unequal service and found their movements in the usual shopping ‘experience’ severely constrained.”¹⁹ Department stores became another sector in which African Americans were fighting for equality, and movement leaders of the Civil Rights era seemingly understood that Black Americans were fighting for the right to use more public spaces, like busses and shops, freely. They also demanded fair wages and opportunities in the workplace, as their white counterparts were able to advance in their positions much more quickly. Where gender comes into play is that women were typically the frequent fliers of department stores, as well as the ones to hold positions in these stores as they were able to work hours that allowed them to still raise children and support a domestic life. Men, of course, accessed these institutions, but on a much lesser scale. This made the Black Power Movement, which had a dominant masculine energy, have less of a focus on department stores, as they were a center for domestic life. The economic lens of history is also applied here, as it became apparent in the research conducted for this project that the poor financial status of many African Americans and their inability to participate in consumeristic opportunities was a contributing factor in moving away from CRM and towards BPM.

Protests from all sides of the Civil Rights era were subject to extensive media coverage, sometimes positively described, but more often than not, Civil Right motivations were negatively portrayed. *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party* is quite unique in its approach to understanding how the media portrayed the BPP (Black Panther Party). Christian Davenport heavily acknowledges the Rashomon Effect in his work, which states, simply put, that witnesses are unreliable. Clearly, this theory is used much more widely in the

¹⁹ Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019): 4

field of law, rather than in the study of history. What is peculiar about Davenport's work in relation to most other historians is that, "differing from conventional wisdom, [his] contention is that it is necessary to examine the variation in accounts of conflict behavior when we investigate contentious activity."²⁰ For this reason, Davenport has chosen the media as his primary medium for reviewing how the Black Panther Party was portrayed during the Civil Rights era. Davenport uses conflicting sources to create a complete picture of the movement; in essence, not everyone was in support of the BPP, while others heavily supported its message and tactics. Davenport describes how, in the media, the non-militarized actions of the BPP were "less visible."²¹ The media, mostly in favor of law agencies, did not want the particular message that the BPP was doing more than engaging in violent activities to spread. Davenport, although creating a compelling argument, only reviews five total newspapers from the era of the Black Power Movement. *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression* addresses how the media did not portray the BPP as fondly or as often as the non-violent Civil Rights Movement and repressed their image. This thus caused historians to undervalue the actions of the Black Power Movement for generations. Tom Adam Davies also gives his perspective on how the Black Power Movement was portrayed in the media in *Mainstreaming Black Power*. Davies does, however, offer modern comparisons to the Black Lives Matter movement, and how both events are/were viewed in a negative light. The comparison between BLM and the Civil Rights era is yet to be unpacked, as BLM is an ongoing racial battle and not enough time has passed for serious historical literature of its aims and efficacy to be evaluated and compared to past movements.

²⁰ Christian Davenport, *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 3.

²¹ Christian Davenport, *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party*, 9.

Another underrepresented area of this topic is how the international stage viewed the Civil Rights era. Brenda Gayle Plummer, author of *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974*, describes the evolution of the African American Civil Rights Movement from the global perspective, with an emphasis on how the American movement influenced global decolonization. This perspective argues that government officials were more likely to allow desegregation and other such policies to occur in order to prevent the spread of Communism at the conclusion of World War II. Plummer stated that “in order to sell their vision to developing countries and discredit a competing communist prototype, elites had to make both substantive and rhetorical adjustments in order to maintain their own authority and the power of the state. Major innovations were the abandonment of racial segregation and the admission of African Americans to a form of citizenship.”²² Even with the preliminary support from the federal government, African Americans still had to aggressively protest and fight for their rights. The progression of the civil rights that Black people acquired from 1956-1974 advanced relatively quickly, which gave hope to the revolutionaries of other nations also seeking equality from, primarily European, colonizers. Presidents, such as John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, felt pressure from the global community to end segregation and other racist policies if they wanted to stop the spread of communism in Third World countries. Where newly forming African nations were largely made up of Black people, the various administrations needed to show that African Americans were as free as their decolonized counterparts. Much of the legislation that was passed in conjunction with CRM pressure was really a political tactic to

²² Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 21-22.

make the United States seem more appealing globally to countries that could potentially feel the domino effect of communism.

In the modern era, many historians have been devoted to reconsidering the Civil Rights era, and the Black Power Movement in particular. Yohuru Williams, author of *Rethinking the Black Power Movement*, is a key proponent of reevaluating the successes and conceptions of the Black Power Movement. Williams would argue against this thesis that the Black Power Movement was derivative of the failing Civil Rights Movement, and argues instead that there is a “need to consider a much longer view of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1950s and 1960s.”²³ Rather than the Civil Rights era kicking off between 1954 and 1955, depending on your interpretation of when it began, Williams believes that this important era in American history started much earlier, and even had roots in World War II. This source goes against the grain of the accepted timeline of Civil Rights history, but could add to the new developments that include Cold War ideology as a reason to grant African Americans more rights at the federal level.

Project Chapters

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter One will emphasize the beginnings of both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. The purpose of this is to discover the similarities and differences between how the two movements began, as well as showcase how Black Power stemmed from Civil Rights. Chapter Two will consider the structure of the organizations and describe how BPM did not follow the exact same formatting as CRM in order to tackle the inadequacies of the nonviolent movement. There will be a deeper examination of the lives and

²³ Yohuru Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, (Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2015): x.

assassination of key leaders of both BPM and CRM to articulate the similarities between the two organizations in terms of how these leaders were used to promote a specific agenda and how they were viewed politically based on the organizations that they were associated with. Chapter Three is devoted to representation of both groups in the media which is intended to describe how the Black Power Movement was vilified or purposefully not covered by local and national news sources to preemptively end support for the movement. This thus caused the Black Power Movement to be seen as ineffective, when it was actually more effective and longer lasting than the Civil Rights Movement. Chapter Four will be devoted to analyzing other historians' viewpoints on this topic, and wrestling with the historiography that does not necessarily agree with the thesis of this essay. Chapter Five will look beyond the Civil Rights Era to consider other historical events that may have some relation to the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. This chapter is largely devoted to an analysis of the Los Angeles Riots and how they can be compared to Watts less than thirty years prior. An examination of how nonviolent and self-defense activists responded to both riots will also be compared. The Conclusion to this essay is tasked with identifying gaps in the current historiography of this top that must be analyzed by future historians to generate a more complete picture of the Civil Rights era, as well as summarizing the key findings of this capstone project.

Chapter One: Beginnings

In a precursory Google search of the cause of the Black Power Movement, the assassination of Malcolm X is almost exclusively noted as the primary origin of the movement. The perception of the general public, then, must be that the untimely death of Malcolm X was the root cause of BPM. There are some discrepancies regarding the definitive cause of the historical narrative that has been developed by a variety of historians in the historiography of the Black Power Movement, but similar findings have often been noted. The death of Malcolm X was certainly a contributing factor to the beginning of Black Power as his growing discontent towards and dissatisfaction with the Civil Rights Movement and nonviolent leader Martin Luther King Jr. fueled his teachings regarding armed self-defense. When the Watts Riots occurred shortly after the assassination of Malcolm X, rioters began to arm themselves with these teachings and promoted physical violence as a way to end racial inequality. A chronological retelling of some of the major events associated with the Black Power Movement is necessary in order to define its actual cause, as well as to analyze the origins of the Civil Rights Movement in an analysis of the progression of the separate but connected movements.

Key Terminology

Before delving into the history of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, defining the key terms that will arise throughout the course of this work is necessary. In *Civil Rights in America: A History* by Christopher W. Schmidt, the author wishes to define the term “civil rights” in more appropriate terms, as the modern world (up until 2020 in this case) has expanded on its classic definition. Schmidt argues that “civil rights, historically, has been something different: a term that could translate aspiration into legal change. By recovering the history of the term civil rights, [he] also hope[s] to make the case for the value of a conception of civil rights

that is flawed, modest, and limited – but, under the right circumstances, transformative.”²⁴

Schmidt finds that by keeping the term “civil rights” in relation to race, rather than modifying it to include things like sexuality and the right to abortion, it remains powerful for the community of minorities that it was originally intended for, even if it may be harmful to other groups to exclude them from the use of this term. By using the term “civil rights” in only the most necessary circumstance, Schmidt argues, it retains its power. Not too many years prior to Schmidt, G. Edward White, author of “The Origins of Civil Rights in America,” argues that Civil Rights must be understood in its intended legal definition, rather than “as a ubiquitous category, encompassing a variety of freedoms and entitlements associated with being an American.”²⁵ In the recent historiography of the Civil Rights era, there has been a movement to shift the definition of Civil Rights in order to make it more impactful in its intended setting. It seems that White began the movement towards meeting the legal definition of the term, while Schmidt intended to clarify how it is used in the legal context. Closer to the Civil Rights era itself, John Rechy authored “Civil and Rights” in the *Civil Rights Digest* to grapple with a contemporary understanding of the term. Rechy nods to the constitutional definition of the term, acknowledging the 13th and 14th amendments, but wants to expand on that definition to be more inclusive of the struggle that has recently gone dormant. Rechy states that by looking at the individual definitions of “civil” and “rights,” a more correct definition of the term can be located. “To ‘civilize’,” he begins, “is to refine by enlightening: through education, to lead the way from the savage and the barbaric. The result – civilization – is a state marked by high standards of moral and cultural development and human concern. My expanded definition of ‘civil rights’

²⁴ Christopher W. Schmidt, *Civil Rights in America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 10.

²⁵ G. Edward White, “The Origins of Civil Rights in America,” *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 64, no. 4 (2014): 757.

which would be one which emphasize the components of honor, respect, and uphold what is humanly correct - 'right' - in an enlightened, decent – that is, *civilized* – society.”²⁶ The legal definition prevailed before the Civil Rights era; a departure was taken during CRM and BPM to be more meaningful to minority individuals.

Although often understood to be a creation of the 1960s, the term “black power” actually originated with Frederick Douglass in 1855 in his work “The Doom of Black Power.” Douglass opens his work by stating that “the days of black power are numbered,” so it was fortunate that this term in the pre-Civil War era did not take on the same context as it did in the Civil Rights era.²⁷ When Douglass wrote of Black Power, he intended its meaning to equate to that of the slave labor that helped American society to function at a fundamental level. Black Power was not yet the revolution against police brutality and other issues concerning equality for all individuals; it meant the forced physical effort that was exerted by the African American population in the production of necessary resources, and other related or unrelated tasks, that benefited the slave owner.

Others attribute the coinage of the term “Black Power,” in its modern context at least, to Richard Wright’s famous work, “Black Power.” This book speaks of the strength and determination that Black Africans show in their home continent, and particularly in the country of Ashanti.²⁸ On the other hand, A. P. MacDonald, Jr., author of “Black Power” in 1975, writes that “the term ‘Black Power’ reflects a psychological giant step forward for Blacks.”²⁹ In this statement alone, MacDonald shows that the old means of peaceful resistance in the Civil Rights

²⁶ John Rechy, “Civil and Rights,” *Civil Rights Digest. The Civil Rights Quarterly: Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (1982): 29.

²⁷ Frederick Douglass, *The Portable Frederick Douglass* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2016): 441.

²⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2010): Introduction.

²⁹ A.P. MacDonald, Jr., “Black Power,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 4 (1975): 547.

movement were not working for African Americans anymore, thus a change was needed. This mental shift for the African American community “is reflected in the term ‘Black Power.’ ‘Black Power’ refers to the black man’s power of control over himself, not (as some believe) his control over the white man - especially not in the sense of physical force.”³⁰ What is interesting about MacDonald’s inclusion of “physical force” is that most modern historians associate the militarization of the Civil Rights era with Black Power. This is a stereotype that must be consistently pushed back against as the term “Black Power” does not innately describe physical force, as MacDonald articulates. Even though this stereotype is incorrect, it still permeates the American consciousness in history and otherwise. Black Power, although utilized in American society before CRM, became the movement as it is known today after the Civil Rights Movement began to fail the African American community.

The true meaning of the term in the context of this essay is the one derived from an African American activist in the SNCC. In Alabama, members of the SNCC had been exclaiming “Black Power for Black people” for some time as a means of promoting the African American community gaining legislative victories.³¹ Stokely Carmichael, an SNCC leader, condensed this phrase to create the new slogan for the oncoming movement: “Black Power.” On June 16th of 1966, Carmichael took this opportunity to share the phrase “Black Power” with a Leflore County, Mississippi audience of protestors.³² These activists grasped onto the phrase immediately, and anytime “Black Power” was said on stage the audience responded with the same, but spoken even more heartily, phrase back.³³ These two simple words went on to gain

³⁰ A.P. MacDonald, Jr., “Black Power,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 4 (1975): 547.

³¹ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 209.

³² Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 209.

³³ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 209.

even more notoriety for the SNCC as they transitioned from a Civil Rights to Black Power organization. Not all African Americans supported the phrase, such as Martin Luther “King [Jr.], who saw the slogan as ‘an unfortunate choice of words’ that would weaken public support for the civil rights movement.”³⁴ Carmichael did not begin to develop the ideological basis of this term until after the SNCC, and some others in the Black Community, began to overwhelmingly support Black Power. The term “Black Power” gained “an increasingly positive response” the more that it was used, and “Afro-Americans in every section of the nation indicated their determination to use hard-won human rights to improve their lives in ways befitting their own cultural values.”³⁵ No longer were African Americans going to assimilate to white practices; Blacks were going to assert their own ideologies and practices into American society.

Another term that often arises when discussing the Black Power Movement, as well as the Civil Rights era, is “Black Nationalism.” I have located two works that delve into this term, and its meaning to the Civil Rights era. Alphonso Pinkney, author of *Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States*, written from the era of Black Power, and Dean E. Robinson, author of *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, published in the 21st century, both describe the impact of Black Nationalism in the United States. Pinkney, where he is writing from the era of the Black Power Movement, is aware that his work may not be the most credible, or even tell the complete story of Black Nationalism. He states early on in the text that “it is not the intent of the present work to be exhaustive. Readers will find many omissions and inadequacies.”³⁶ Although, as a historian, inadequacies are not the most pleasant thing to be

³⁴ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 210.

³⁵ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 215.

³⁶ Alphonso Pinkney, *Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): xi.

presented with, it makes the author's work feel as though it has a higher level of integrity and, especially, honesty. Where the Black Power Movement had not ceased to exist at this time, Pinkney knew that he did not have all of the available information to generate a solid thesis. Robinson, writing a few decades later but from the same publisher, would be able to fill in some of those “omissions and inadequacies.”³⁷ According to Pinkney, “the contemporary black nationalist movement in the United States... appears to focus its major thrust on cultural self-determination, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of political self-determination.”³⁸ On the other hand, Robinson speaks to a form of “Black nationalism [that] grew out of the context of white American Nationalism.”³⁹ African Americans essentially wanted to garner the same level of citizenship that their white counterparts had by achieving a strong national identity as an equal American. These definitions of the term Black Nationalism, similarly to Black Power, also do not innately equate to or even reference violence. A similarity between this movement and the Civil Rights Movement can be found in how their goals and aims are defined, showcasing a direct link between the two movements. BPM kept the intrinsic belief of equality for all, socially and politically, that CRM had engrained in the budding movement when it was conceived in 1955.

The Emmett Till Murder

As previously discussed in the introduction of this work, Emmett Till was lynched in 1955, in what would become the spark that ignited the Civil Rights Movement. This event was not characterized so highly by many until the PBS documentary, “The Murder of Emmett Till,” aired

³⁷ Alphonso Pinkney, *Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): xi.

³⁸ Alphonso Pinkney, *Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States*, 3.

³⁹ Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 9.

in 2003, catapulting it into the spotlight of the Civil Rights Movement historiography once again. Till, at only the age of fourteen, was visiting his extended family in Mississippi in the summer of 1955.⁴⁰ Three days prior to his death, Till visited a local grocery store, accompanied by his friends and some cousins, and were greeted by a woman, owner Carolyn Bryant, who was working alone.⁴¹ Till reportedly, although this was later recanted by Carolyn, made a suggestive comment directed towards Mrs. Bryant as he walked out of the small, family-owned grocery store.⁴² The unassuming Emmett Till returned to the home that he was staying in for days before his lynching would occur. Roy Bryant, Mrs. Bryant's husband, and J. W. Milam, half-brother to Roy, knocked on the door of Moses Wright's house to procure the boy who had wolf-whistled at the white man's wife days prior.⁴³ Wright and the two white men engaged in a verbal altercation until Wright handed Till over to the armed men, expecting only a beating would occur. That was the last time that Till was seen alive by his family and friends, until his body was located in the Tallahatchie River almost a week after the initial incident had occurred.⁴⁴ The young boy had been mutilated to the point of not being able to be recognized by even his closest family and friends, and was instead identified by a ring that he had inherited from his father.⁴⁵ Although Till's name is not as commonly known today, speaking just his name in 1955 inspired protests across the nation in the coming days, weeks, and even years.

⁴⁰ Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films* (Jefferson: McFarland., 2014): 44.

⁴¹ Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films*, 45.

⁴² Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films*, 45.

⁴³ Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films*, 45.

⁴⁴ Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films*, 45.

⁴⁵ Novotny Lawrence. *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films*, 45.

More than 50,000 people visited the body of Emmett Till in the days surrounding his funeral. Mamie Till chose to keep his casket open to the public to show the horror of the attacks against her son. This tactic was utilized by others, both nonviolent and self-defense activists, throughout the Civil Rights struggle as it was noted as being highly effective in gaining sympathy and support for their cause. In the trial against Bryant and Milam, both accused of murder and kidnapping, eyewitness testimony and other identifications were given that definitively declared the two men murderers. Unfortunately, the jury was exclusively male, and, most importantly, white.⁴⁶ Milam and Bryant went on later to make a full confession of the murder to Emmett Till in *Look* magazine and exhibited no remorse for the heinous event. In the issue of *Look* that the true telling of Till's murder was featured in less than a year after his death, Bryant and Milam paint themselves as "somewhat like white traders in portions of Africa today; and they are determined to resist the revolt of colored men against white rule."⁴⁷ Of the incident, Milam stated that "when a nigger gets close to mentioning sex with a white woman, he's tired o' livin'. I'm likely to kill him. ... I stood there in that shed and listened to that nigger throw that poison at me, and I just made up my mind. ... I said, ... 'Goddam you, I'm going to make an example of you -- just so everybody can know how me and my folks stand.'" Those are not the words of a remorseful murderer; those are the sentiments of a man that would not refrain from committing kidnapping or murder again, were the situation to present itself. As was later testified to by Carolyn, Till never offered any suggestion towards her. We only have the record of Milam and Bryant that displays Till's comments of a sexual nature regarding women of another race in the moments before he would take this last breath.

⁴⁶ Novotny Lawrence, *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films* (Jefferson: McFarland., 2014): 45.

⁴⁷ William Bradford Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," *Jet* (January, 1956).

The actions of Bryant and Milam on that hot August day in Mississippi, as well as their acquittal of murder and subsequent confessions, sent shockwaves through the African American community and amounted to the beginning of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. It would take years before the armed resistance known as Black Power to begin, but a movement nonetheless that was ignited from a murder. Around the same time that the *Jet* article appeared, Ella Baker, Stanley Levison, Bayard Rustin, and various other political, religious, and labor groups “formed an emergency organization called In Friendship, which raised money to support the victims of segregationist vigilantes, mostly in Mississippi.”⁴⁸ This plan for rehabilitation of the victims of events such as lynchings was much more passive than what would be seen during the Black Power Movement; the primary failing here, from the perspective of Black Power activists later on, was that only the symptom was mended rather than the root cause of the racial crisis. Till’s name continued to be used as a call for protesting through the next decade and into the conception of Black Power.

The Assassination of Malcolm X

The cause of the Black Power Movement is often disputed, but 1965, a full decade after the Civil Rights Movement took shape, was when the perfect storm was created to form the movement. This essay will run on the assumption that the assassination of Malcolm X on February 21st of the aforementioned year was the opening chapter to the Black Power Movement. Malcolm X, known for his revolutionary ideas regarding black self-defense, racism against oppressive whites, and a proclivity towards Black Power, once stated that “I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first

⁴⁸ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 209.

and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.”⁴⁹ No matter how illuminating this belief is, Malcolm X was vilified in the, predominately white, media for using the term “white devil” to explain all of those that belonged to the race not his own. In his search for racial equality, Malcom X promoted the Black community taking up arms in defense of their lives, which would be vilified in the media. Malcom X, similarly to Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., was a religious man who promoted equality by way of his religion. After leaving the Nation of Islam in favor of Sunni Islam, Malcolm X was shot at the Audobon Ballroom by what was originally thought to be three men who were from the Nation of Islam: Mujahid Abdul Halim, Muhammad A. Aziz, and Khalil Islam. In a 2021 re-trial, following new FBI information that had been previously unreleased, Aziz and Islam were exonerated of the murder of Malcolm X.⁵⁰ Halim had taken full credit for the assassination of Malcolm X in the original 1966 trial, but due to racism against the Islamic community and withholding of documents by the FBI, the men were still sentenced to 20 years to life in prison for the assassination of Malcolm X.

In the wake of the assassination of Malcolm X, there was a great deal of attention paid to this incident at both the national and international level. The All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF) released a statement in the days following the death of Malcolm X that “accused American Imperialists of the assassination of Malcolm X.”⁵¹ The statement also went on to say that “delegates of nine African nationalist parties in a joint statement signed in Cairo condemned

⁴⁹ Alice Camille, “The Prophet from Elsewhere: Truth Is Truth No Matter Who Says It, According to Malcolm X,” *U.S. Catholic* 85, no. 10 (2020): 47.

⁵⁰ “LIVE: Exoneration hearing for two men convicted of killing Malcolm X in 1965,” *Reuters*, November 18th, 2021.

⁵¹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Malcom X Assassination Protests,” Freedom of Information Act, General CIA Records, February 25th, 1965.

the brutal assassination of the American Negro leader Malcolm X by the U.S. Imperialists.”⁵²

This showcases that, although some of the information that these nationalist groups have may have been incorrect to the events that occurred and were uncovered in a trial, there was a strong inclination towards action that sprung from the death of Malcolm X. The new Johnson Administration could not risk the African Nationalist groups rejecting American democracy and potentially falling to communism, so a key piece of legislation, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, was enacted later in the year that coincided with Kennedy’s earlier Civil Rights Act of 1964. Even some major advancements made by the Civil Rights Movement had roots that related to Black Power. Without the assassination of Malcolm X, the Voting Rights Act may not have been activated. With the Watts Riot occurring only months after this assassination as well, the Black Power Movement that had been ignited with the death of Macolm X would be set ablaze with the impending riots.

Emmett Till and Malcolm X’s death, although tragic, were not in vain. Both of these individuals sparked a revolution in the fight for minority civil rights. In “Malcolm X Warned Blacks in the 1960’s,” by Alton H. Maddox Jr., the author’s opinion is that “once a pattern of Black brilliance and resistance has been established genetically, the male sperm is hunted down and extirpated.”⁵³ In the story of Till, he was murdered for resisting giving into the demands of two white men regarding his views towards whites of the opposite sex. Although Malcolm X was not exterminated by white oppressors, he was consistently sought out by the FBI and condemned for speaking openly of armed self-resistance. In both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, resistance was the key to its beginning. In the year following the Till murder,

⁵² Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Malcom X Assassination Protests,” Freedom of Information Act, General CIA Records, February 25th, 1965.

⁵³ Alton H. Maddox, Jr., “Malcolm X Warned Blacks in the 1960’s,” *New York Amsterdam News* (2007): 12.

several organizations began to form in support of the Civil Rights movements, while southern Senators and Congressmen signed the “Southern Manifesto” that was intended to push back against the movements for racial equality. Although the Black Power Movement was birthed from the Civil Rights Movement, the true test of which sect was the most actionary would come with a major event shortly after the assassination of Malcolm X: The Watts Riots.

The Watts Riots

The Watts Riots, often called the Watts Rebellion or the Watts Uprising, began in the summer of 1965. Lasting for many warm Los Angeles days in August, the African American community pushed back against the violence that they suffered at the hands of the law enforcement with violence and fire. The armed resistance had begun. This event started with Marquette Frye being pulled over in a relatively routine traffic stop that resulted in a sobriety test. When Frye did not pass the officer's test, he was arrested on the spot and a physical altercation ensued between the two men. Ronald Frye, Marquette's brother who was also involved in this altercation, had been in the vehicle at the time of the traffic stop. Marquette was finally arrested and placed into the officer's vehicle by the time that his mother, Rena, arrived at the scene of the riotous beginning. Crowds of both law enforcement officers and enraged onlookers began to form around the Watts neighborhood, at which time the officers began to engage with the hundreds of soon-to-be rioters in the crowd. Guns and batons were used to keep the crowd from escalating, but the number of people in the mob would be far too great for the police to contain. How the officers treated the onlookers, who were spitting on them and otherwise trying to engage in a fight, became the subject of the protestors' rage. When a woman who was believed to be pregnant was dragged away from the rebellious scene for reportedly spitting on an officer, the mob grew more violent towards more than just law enforcement. This

became a rage against the discrimination and policing of Black bodies by law enforcement, as well as to make a statement about the state of systematic racism in education, housing, and employment. In the following week, rioters took to the streets to protest all of these things happening in their local community by means of looting, assault, arson, and other forms of property and physical damage. What would truly show the difference between the established nonviolent movement and the budding armed self-defense activities would be their response to the Watts Rebellion.

Although thoroughly warned against it by his colleague Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King Jr. felt as though he needed to arrive in Los Angeles in response to the protests.⁵⁴ Upon his arrival, King addressed news reporters to condemn the violence that the Black community was participating in; almost immediately, King began to lose support for the Civil Rights Movement with his comments. The armed resistance was now beginning to be labeled by Chief Parker as being caused by “an Islamic sect of Negroes,” and accused them of “fomenting generational insurrection from a spark of disorder.”⁵⁵ President Johnson, along with King, did not support the violent actions of these rioters in Watts although they did support their beliefs, and Johnson “anticipated that his once shocking embrace of movement purpose would be lost beneath harsh front-page headlines” the following day.⁵⁶ King and Johnson began to lose favor in the eyes of the Civil Rights protestors for not going far enough in their pursuit of equality. Black Power had cemented itself into the era now, and “revolutionary violence” would ensue.⁵⁷ King knew that

⁵⁴ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 294.

⁵⁵ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68*: 295.

⁵⁶ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68*, 307.

⁵⁷ Alfredo Rostgaard, “Black Power – Retaliation to Crime: Revolutionary Violence” Poster published by the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1968, Black Power (Black Pride), National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.

“Negroes were turning violent since Watts.”⁵⁸ These individuals grasped onto the teachings of the late Malcolm X and finally put them into widespread use. Without his teachings in the years leading up to the Watts Riots, it is unclear if the Black Power Movement would have been formulated in the way it was.

Key Legislation

The first major legislative success of the Civil Rights Movement is generally believed to be the Civil Rights Act of 1964. From 1955, the start of the Civil Rights Movement, through 1964, when this act was put into effect, many noteworthy CRM activities happened that pressured the American government into creating laws that would benefit the African American community. Kennedy kicked off the creation of this legislation but was assassinated before its completion, leaving Lyndon B. Johnson to finish Kennedy’s half-formulated plans. Although a variety of events were addressed in this initial Civil Rights Act, the sit-ins by the SNCC and other organizations were particularly conveyed in Title II, known as the “Injunctive Relief Against Discrimination in Places of Public Accommodation.”⁵⁹ Section 201 of this act explains that “all persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation... without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.”⁶⁰ There is a direct relation to the sit-ins that the SNCC promoted to end segregation of public businesses such as lunch counters, as well as the Montgomery bus boycotts of the previous decade led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. Without these crucial CRM movements, this act would have, at the least, been structured differently to target alternative

⁵⁸ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 319.

⁵⁹ “Transcript of Civil Rights Act (1964),” Our Documents, The Avalon Project.

⁶⁰ “Transcript of Civil Rights Act (1964).”

issues. Even though the Civil Rights Movement led to the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the way that it was, Kennedy and Johnson did not solely enact this piece of legislation due to governmental pressure from CRM. Although “King himself remained convinced that his Birmingham campaign had forced a deeply reluctant Kennedy administration to introduce legislation,” the United States faced a greater pressure to end segregation on the world stage during the Cold War.⁶¹ From the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, the president showcased a “mistrust of ardent civil rights advocates” and even “prompted the appointment of more dispassionate legal experts to the [newly] expanded Civil Rights Division.”⁶² From the beginning of his presidency, Kennedy had no strong desire to end the suffering of Black Americans until it became necessary from a geopolitical standpoint. Robert Kennedy, known to be heavily “devoted to his brother’s success,” found that Kennedy’s reluctance to pursue Civil Rights legislation in America in the months leading up to his death might affect JFK’s political career. Robert “did not want unreasonable civil rights leaders to jeopardize Jack’s reelection and other policy objectives, notably victory in the cold war,” so the Kennedy brothers were forced to pursue legislative victories for CRM.⁶³ All the while, Cold War victories were the triumphs that the Kennedy Administration was after.

Not long after the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became necessary. The issue of voting (particularly in regards to poll taxes, poll tests, and other such devices that discouraged the African American community from voting) which the SCLC had been battling for almost a decade came to a

⁶¹ Peter J. Ling, “What a difference a death makes: JFK, LBJ, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2015): 134.

⁶² Peter J. Ling, “What a difference a death makes: JFK, LBJ, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” 123.

⁶³ Peter J. Ling, “What a difference a death makes: JFK, LBJ, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” 124.

pivotal juncture. Although the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution had been enacted approximately one hundred years prior to the Voting Rights Act, equal voting was not guaranteed to all citizens, especially those who were Black. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference tirelessly challenged how the American government allowed the unequal treatment of voters to continue through peaceful protests and demonstrations designed to foster African American interest in the political process, as well as to register them to vote. Although more and more Blacks became eligible to vote through these programs, no new legislative victories were achieved until 1965. The SCLC, led by Martin Luther King Jr., peacefully protested voting rights in Selma, Alabama in, arguably, the last major influential demonstration of the Civil Rights Movement. In March of that year, CRM activists marched from Selma to Montgomery over a period of weeks, demanding real change in regards to voting.⁶⁴ A primary goal of “the 54-mile march was... to draw attention to the violent resistance to black voter registration efforts that had, after several years, added only 335 new voters (of 30,000 eligible) in Dallas County, where Selma is located.”⁶⁵ Over the prior decade, activists were beaten, bombed, jailed, and otherwise tormented for pressuring the local and federal governments to allow Black citizens the true right to vote, and their programs were largely unsuccessful for the hardships they endured during their protests. Selma was their final plea to the United States to make voting equitable for all Americans. President Johnson immediately addressed the activists, who eventually ceased their protest as voting rights legislation worked its way through the sluggish legal system. On August

⁶⁴ “History of the Voting Rights Act: From a March in Selma, Alabama, to the Halls of Congress,” *Congressional Digest* 101, no. 1 (2022): 3.

⁶⁵ “History of the Voting Rights Act: From a March in Selma, Alabama, to the Halls of Congress,” 3.

6th of 1965, less than half a year after the Selma protests, LBJ signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law with Martin Luther King Jr., among others, pridefully looking over his shoulder.⁶⁶

The Voting Rights Act is also extensive in length, but its purpose is clear: to make it so that all Americans are free to vote in elections as they please. In Section Two, the act states that “no voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”⁶⁷ The intention here is to remove poll tests so that all citizens, no matter their educational status, may vote freely. African Americans, especially prior to desegregation, were not subject to the same quality education that whites were, leaving them disadvantaged on poll tests where the voter was expected to display their academic skills. The act also covers poll taxes, and explains that:

“the requirement of the payment of a poll tax as a precondition to voting (i) precludes persons of limited means from voting or imposes unreasonable financial hardship upon such persons as a precondition to their exercise of the franchise, (ii) does not bear a reasonable relationship to any legitimate State interest in the conduct of elections, and (iii) in some areas has the purpose or effect of denying persons the right to vote because of race or color. Upon the basis of these findings, Congress declares that the constitutional right of citizens to vote is denied or abridged in some areas by the requirement of the payment of a poll tax as a precondition to voting.”⁶⁸

Poll taxes disproportionately affected African Americans, as many were forced to live in urban ghettos and other lower-income areas due to redlining and other practices with discriminatory aims. Selma did put pressure on the Johnson Administration to change their legislative practices, but this did not go without backlash. A citizen, George Neu, wrote to Congress to articulate how

⁶⁶ “History of the Voting Rights Act: From a March in Selma, Alabama, to the Halls of Congress,” *Congressional Digest* 101, no. 1 (2022): 4.

⁶⁷ “The Voting Rights Act of 1965,” August 6th, 1965, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives.

⁶⁸ “The Voting Rights Act of 1965,” Records of the U.S. House of Representatives.

fool-hearty this legislation was, arguing that the Voting Rights Act was “the product of political expediency. It is politically motivated by an Administration which is willing to sacrifice the Constitution for the unquestionable allegiance of a highly vocal minority, aided and abetted by the racial judiciary and a large segment of the unquestioning press.”⁶⁹ Neu does not recognize that this act took months to formulate, and was also based upon prior constitutional amendments. The Voting Rights Act did allow a large portion of the African American community to register to vote, but the law itself was not new; it was an extension of a prior congressional act, simply ensuring that the Fifteenth Amendment was upheld. A congressman, John Conyers Jr., does speak to the political expediency of the act, however, when he explains in a speech that “unless we pass a voting rights bill this year which will quickly and finally secure the vote to all Americans regardless of race, I fear the increased feelings of discontent may reach epidemic proportions.”⁷⁰ Congress did have to recognize how serious the protests were becoming, and the tensions between whites and Blacks were increasing as the Black Power Movement began to grow after the death of Malcolm X in the month prior to Selma.

As the Black Power Movement took hold in the African American community, even more legislation was needed. BPM activities were geared more towards helping citizens of all races to meet their most basic needs than they were towards achieving legislative victories, but the Civil Rights Act of 1968, a counterpart to the similarly named Civil Rights Act of 1964, was still achieved. Lyndon Johnson had one year left in his presidency, and was more concerned with promoting the Civil Rights agenda than the president before him. Johnson and his team noted

⁶⁹ George Neu, “Letter from Mr. George Neu Against Voting Rights, March 26, 1965,” March 26th, 1965, Records of the U.S. House of Representative, National Archives.

⁷⁰ John Conyers, Jr., “Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr. on H.R. 6400, April 1, 1965,” Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives.

that “overpopulation, poverty, segregated housing, poor schools, and unemployment coalesced into a northern nightmare of intractable inner-city realities. Such dire social needs seemed to require a holistic and far-reaching public policy.”⁷¹ The calls for equality from the economically disadvantaged urban cities were finally being heard in the government. Johnson’s Civil Rights Act even covered “Indian rights,” which helped another minority group that was underrepresented and suppressed by the majority-white government.⁷² In Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act, the “Fair Housing Act” came to fruition. This act described that “it shall be unlawful... To refuse to sell or rent after the making of a bona fide offer, or to refuse to negotiate for the sale or rental of, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, a dwelling to any person because of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin.”⁷³ The impact that BPM had on this piece of legislation is clear, as BPM was concerned with equitable rights for all citizens, not just African Americans. In the aforementioned acts, only race was a factor specifically noted as a characteristic that had been discriminated against, causing the legislation to be necessary. This time, gender, religion, race, and other characteristics were noteworthy factors that had caused discrimination. Black Power activists were notoriously accepting of the Women’s Liberation movement, supporters of LGBTQIA+ protests, and recognized that even whites were disadvantaged due to their economic status sometimes. Black Power was not specifically aiming for legislative change as was a primary goal of CRM, but, due to their growing influence in America, this change occurred anyways. BPM also lasted many years after this triumph for their

⁷¹ Steven R. Goldzwig, “LBJ, the Rhetoric of Transcendence, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2003): 26.

⁷² “Civil Rights Act of 1968,” U.S. Government Publishing Office, March 23, 2021.

⁷³ “Civil Rights Act of 1968,” U.S. Government Publishing Office.

cause, while the Civil Rights Movement was largely ineffective after the legislation passed in 1965.

Chapter Two: Not That Dissimilar

The primary goal of this chapter is to identify the similarities and differences that can be found between the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. This comparison will be used to describe how BPM chose to use self-defense as a weapon in the battle for African American rights, as well as how these activists intended to strengthen CRM ideology and tactics to further the Black Freedom Movement. The Civil Rights Movement did make some necessary gains that allowed African Americans to feel powerful enough to further challenge their societal status, but the legal accomplishment of CRM did not affect a large swath of northern, western, and urban Blacks. The Black Power Movement devoted itself to uplifting the Black community in ways that the Civil Rights Movement had no desire to, making it the ultimately more effective program.

The Structure of the Movements

Both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were driven by the people and essentially for the same ideological purpose but were largely organized by various organizations with either nonviolent beliefs, or those of armed self-defense. This section of Chapter Two is devoted to identifying some of these important organizations of both movements that were developed during the Civil Rights era. These organizations include: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party (BPP), and the Deacons of Defense and Justice (DDJ). Other important organizations are left out of this discussion, such as the NAACP or CORE, as they were developed prior to the Civil Rights era. The first of these organizations to form was the SCLC.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was developed in the mind of Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison first, who introduced the idea to a young and charismatic Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The two men wanted to capitalize on the momentum that had been generated by the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 as a way to spread the growing Civil Rights Movement throughout the Southern United States.⁷⁴ As the group of men formed the SCLC, a clear structure of four primary tenants began to emerge. Julian Bond writes that the SCLC had the following beliefs: “(1) the church is the base for a protest movement; (2) nonviolent action will be necessary; (3) an organized mass force must supplement the legal approach of the NAACP; and (4) Black clergymen and the masses must make up the movement.”⁷⁵ Nonviolence was a foundational principle of the movement, although it would later come out that not all of the SCLC members and supporters, such as Rosa Parks, were actually in favor of militant non-violence. Although the SCLC made great strides towards equality since their inception in 1957 (and are still an organization today and devoted to assisting disadvantaged minority groups unlike many of the other Civil Rights-based organizations that were developed during this era), members of the movement, such as Ella Jo Baker, noted that “it was clear that after two and a half years, the SCLC had little program beyond the personality and pronouncements of its leader, Dr. King.”⁷⁶ As the Civil Rights Movement entered into the 1960s, the African American community grew discontented with the inaction of organizations like the SCLC, ultimately leading to the birth of Black Power.

⁷⁴ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021): 112.

⁷⁵ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 113.

⁷⁶ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 117.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an offshoot of the SCLC, began after Black students began to engage in various sit-ins at local restaurants and shopping establishments to promote desegregation of public resources. Essentially, these students wanted to access the same resources as their white peers who they went to college with. Ella Jo Baker, Executive Secretary and co-founder of the SCLC, recognized the power of the student-led protests and their tactics of direct action that could be harnessed to address more than local desegregation. Baker organized an event at Shaw University in April of 1960 to address these students, who were by now garnering national attention, as well as to guide the student activists into forming their personal ideological beliefs.⁷⁷ The result of this event was the SNCC. Marion Barry, a leader of the SNCC, not long after addressed the platform committees of the Democratic and Republican Conventions and told “platform writers to ‘stop playing political football with the civil rights of eighteen million Negro Americans’ and to take immediate action to integrate public schools, expand job opportunities for blacks in the Federal government, and give home rule to Washington D.C.”⁷⁸ This statement showed to the entire country that these college and university students were no longer interested in tackling desegregation at small lunch counters by their campuses. Instead, they were “equal to other civil rights groups, capable of competing with them for the allegiance of the Black public, concerned about issues beyond those traditionally identified as ‘civil rights.’”⁷⁹ They had formed their own organization led by and for students, with the hopes of global equality in mind. Although nonviolence was also an essential pillar of their belief structure at the conception of the organization, the students of the SNCC began to lose faith in their nonviolent but direct actions when they were not seeing many results. When

⁷⁷ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021): 127.

⁷⁸ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 132.

⁷⁹ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 133.

Stokely Carmichael began to talk of a new concept, “Black Power,” students began to reform their ideology to accommodate an armed resistance. Clayborne Carson, in his book *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, found that, “disillusioned by their previous attempts to achieve change through nonviolent tactic and interracial alliances, ... outspoken militants in SNCC were no longer restrained by concern for the sensibilities of white people.”⁸⁰ Carmichael and other leaders at the time felt as though young Black people were not given the outlet to release their anger and frustration with their status in life due to systematic inequality and oppressive whites, so an armed resistance was a logical next step in the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement.⁸¹ If CRM had been more accepting of self-defense strategies or more willing to take direct action throughout the Civil Rights era, there may not have been the Black Power Movement at all.

In the wake of the growing discontent that Blacks, youths in particular, had with the existing Civil Rights Movement, as well as major events like the assassination of Malcolm X and the Watts Riot, the Black Panther Party formed in 1966 to push the existing ideology of CRM forward and make even more advances to generate new opportunities for People of Color. The Panthers, similarly in this way to the SNCC, was developed by college students who felt as though there needed to be more opportunities for African Americans to feel comfortable protecting themselves against racial discrimination, particularly by law enforcement agencies. When trying to recruit new members, “Hampton explained to the audience that to join the Party, one had to endure a six-week process of mastering certain political ideological literature (the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung...*, and *Guerrilla Warfare*

⁸⁰ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 216.

⁸¹ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 219.

by Che Guevara were listed as examples) and completing physical self-defense training.”⁸² Hampton went on to articulate that the Panthers were “aimed to protect the black community against racist police,” while he also “emphasized that the group was the only police force the black community had ever had.”⁸³ Just as is the same expectation for the police, other tactics needed to be used before the Panthers were to resort to violence; self-defense would only be used in extreme and necessary circumstances. The success of the Party was relatively immediate as this organization was a response to influential events of the Civil Rights era and encompassed how Blacks were feeling on a widespread level: they needed to do more to ensure their rights and protect themselves. Jakobi Williams, author of *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago*, noted that “the BPP was popular not only as a result of its defiance toward law enforcement but also because its socialist ideology resonated with African American youth.”⁸⁴ The socialist principals of the BPP would come under attack by law enforcement, who by this point was engaged in the Vietnam War, making communism and any related ideologies exceptionally unpopular with the government and in the eyes of many Americans. Within a few short years of the establishment of the Black Panther Party, Hampton would die at the hands of the Federal Bureau of Investigation while sleeping next to his pregnant girlfriend.

Although many of the principals of the Black Panther Party were unpopular at the national level, there is an ideological shift in the BPP at this time that CRM and other similar movements did not have on a widespread level. The Panthers openly spoke out against how there

⁸² Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013): 77.

⁸³ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago*, 77.

⁸⁴ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago*, 61.

would be an inclusion of more marginalized groups besides Blacks, such as women and the LGBTQIA+ community, as they were all believed to be essentially fighting the same struggle. On the other hand, King adamantly wished for the SCLC's administration to have been made up completely of male executives and was personally not in support of Ella Baker taking on the role of Chief Secretary in the organization. It was one thing for Rosa Parks to spark a bus boycott, but entirely another for Baker to be tied so closely to the organization that would help CRM to gain major legislative victories for minority groups. Fred Hampton was notoriously accepting of underrepresented peoples, and openly "agreed that a movement encompassing all the poor, regardless of race, would be revolutionary and would be effective in addressing concerns he held" with the state of America and civil rights.⁸⁵ Any individual who had experienced hardships or faced discrimination was welcomed.

Another militant self-defense organization that formed around the time that Black Power began to gain traction: the Deacons of Defense and Justice. Although arguably less powerful and widespread than the BPP, the group formed to provide police-like protection to the Black community against racist attacks, such as those perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan.⁸⁶ It could be argued that they even paved the way for a group like the Black Panther Party to form. Although the organization was established in 1964, their influence was relatively minimal until the death of Malcolm X in February of 1965 when they decided to become a public force for self-defense and establish a national presence.⁸⁷ It was not until a structured organization, like the DDJ, was developed that self-defense became a viable option for the African American community to

⁸⁵ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013): 62.

⁸⁶ Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 2.

⁸⁷ Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement*, 2.

pursue. Before that, Blacks in the Civil Rights era did not practice widespread armed resistance “in part because they feared retaliation and in part because they wanted to maintain the illusion of nonviolence in the movement.”⁸⁸ King and the Civil Rights Movement as a whole were publicly opposed to Black self-defense, so to gain any sort of support from the most influential organizations of the Civil Rights Movement meant nonviolence. As much as it was hard to admit, whites also needed to support the movement to make those early legislative advances, and armed resistance was not favorable, and often even feared, by whites. The men who helped to shape the Black Power Movement, such as Stokely Carmichael and Fred Hampton, feared that the continuation of nonviolence would only harm Blacks who were being slaughtered by law enforcement and the KKK.

Key Leaders & Their Assassinations

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is the most well-known Civil Rights leader of the entire Civil Rights era, and is arguably one of the most influential figures of all time. King was not always certain that he would be any sort of religious leader, but after pursuing a Doctoral degree in Theology, he was quickly accepted by the Dexter Avenue Baptist church in Montgomery Alabama one short year before the Till murder.⁸⁹ It did not take long for King to get involved in the upcoming Civil Rights Movement, and he openly participated in the Montgomery bus boycotting, giving him his start in protesting. On December 1st of 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the segregated bus where “colored” people were expected to ride. Parks was imprisoned, and King joined her and others in the creation of a new organization to help local Blacks gain equal rights in Montgomery, Alabama; this was titled the Montgomery Improvement

⁸⁸ Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 2.

⁸⁹ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 1 (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992): 131.

Association (MIA), which was headed by King.⁹⁰ The Montgomery bus boycotts lasted for 382 days, “while white officials from the city and the busline resisted their modest demands: courtesy towards black riders, a first-come-first-serve approach to seating, and black drivers for some routes.”⁹¹ These demands would expand when King became involved as a founding member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. Although initially successful in their endeavors, King spent the first few years as an executive of the group by “consolidating the organization’s position as a social force in the region and establishing himself as its leader.”⁹² This strategy would ultimately come to be scrutinized by organization members and critics of the Civil Rights Movement, as they felt that King was not making any direct actions to end voter discrimination, segregation, and other important issues of the early movement. Around this time, King made a strategic career move to join the Ebenezer Baptists Church of Atlanta, Georgia as a co-pastor with his father as way to gain more flexibility in his career to better work directly with CRM.⁹³ Having King become a local, national, and even international icon of the Civil Rights struggle was important to the development of the Civil Rights Movement, and the largest demonstration for Civil Rights happened at the March on Washington when King broke away from his original script to deliver his infamous “I Have a Dream” speech.⁹⁴ Within a year of the March on Washington, King would make the greatest accomplishment of the Civil Rights Movement happen when he engaged Blacks and whites alike to lead marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. These marches were in favor of equal voting rights and resulted in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 being signed into law.⁹⁵ The actual efficacy of Selma is disputable as

⁹⁰Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 1 (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992): 131.

⁹¹ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 131.

⁹²Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 132.

⁹³ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 132.

⁹⁴ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 133.

⁹⁵ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 134.

Johnson suffered international pressure earlier in the same year from the Malcolm X assassination and was needing to make the United States seem more equitable for all Americans if they wanted to prevent African nations from seeing communism as a viable political option. The pressure from King's faction swayed Johnson to not want any further "bad press" about American inequality making it to the global stage. This was the last time that King would be able to influence any significant change in the Black Freedom Struggle before his assassination in 1968.

King's focus throughout the Civil Rights Movement had been on the southern United States which was more blatantly racist as compared to the North which engaged in a more subtle form of racial discrimination that had been built long ago into the political and economic system. Finally realizing that he had not been reaching the North in the same way that he had the South, King went onto address urban discrimination and poverty in the northern United States but "the campaign was unable to score the same kind of success that it had in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma."⁹⁶ The death of Malcolm X had occurred shortly before this, in the Northern state of New York, and the tides were turning towards armed resistance. Also, "Chicago's black population was more divided, with some elements very much more prone to violence."⁹⁷ One of these individuals who was "prone" to violence by 1965 was revolutionary leader Fred Hampton. To address Hampton's past in relation to this narrative, historian Jakobi Williams points out that the murder of Emmett Till caused Fred Hampton to feel a calling towards the Civil Rights Movement along with "much of black America."⁹⁸ Hampton got involved with CRM at an early

⁹⁶ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 1, (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992): 134.

⁹⁷ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 134.

⁹⁸ Jakobi Williams, "'You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can't Kill the Revolution': A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton's Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination," *Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal* 35 (2019): 78.

age, and even led the NAACP Youth Branch for a time before becoming a leader of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (ILBPP). With the NAACP, Hampton was an immediate success, and “under Hampton’s leadership, the NAACP Youth Branch intensified organizing around civil rights issues, such as support for civil rights workers in the South, the development of local recreational facilities, equal opportunities in education and employment, and open housing.”⁹⁹ From the start of his political activism, Hampton was incredibly successful and made substantial gains towards racial equality. Hampton truly was inspired by Rev. King and worked closely alongside him when King moved the CRM focus into the Chicago area. It is also noted that around this time, “almost all of Hampton’s most famous quotes, ‘You can kill a revolutionary, but you can’t kill revolution’ for example, were plagiarized from Dr. King speeches and sermons but adapted for the fiery young audience in which Hampton targeted.”¹⁰⁰ In essence, Hampton updated the preaching’s of King to appeal to an armed crowd of Black Power supporters. The ideological background of both movements were essentially the same, it was just that self-defense needed to be added into the equation to appeal to the younger, agitated audience. Shortly before his assassination by the FBI, Hampton also formed a new organization titled the Rainbow Coalition. By some accounts, this new organization was the cause of Hampton’s impending death; “according to sealed secret Chicago police records, the Red Squad files, Hampton was dubbed as being a greater threat than Dr. King and Malcolm X because of the original Rainbow Coalition,” Jakobi Williams began. He continued to state that “Fred Hampton eclipsed one of Dr. King’s accomplishments by forging coalitions with a segment of

⁹⁹ Jakobi Williams, “‘You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can’t Kill the Revolution’”: A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton’s Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination,” *Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal* 35 (2019): 78.

¹⁰⁰ Jakobi Williams, “‘You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can’t Kill the Revolution’”: A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton’s Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination,” 80.

society (Confederate flag wearing southern whites) that was antithetical to the civil rights movement.”¹⁰¹ Hampton, likely more than any other Civil Rights leader during this era, was willing to accept any member of society into his heart and organizations that needed assistance. The idea that the white majority in the United States was beginning to come around to the idea of racial equality *and* socialist ideology was terrifying to the federal government who was on a global crusade to end communism. None of the other leaders appealed to all audiences like Hampton, so his life was taken from him by the FBI. The Black Panther Party as a whole was singled out by the FBI because it was considered “‘the greatest threat to the internal security of the nation’ – more than any other leftist organization during the period because the BPP’s anti-capitalist survival programs were being adopted across race and class lines throughout the United States.”¹⁰² For the United States, this meant that there could potentially be socialist ideology permeating the American consciousness, which was of course not accepted during the heat of the Cold War, and also because the movement was moving away from being strictly in minority communities and into the masses. Because of this, “Hampton was assassinated via the joint effort of the FBI and the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office at 4:00 a.m. on December 4, 1969 as he lay asleep (he was drugged by an FBI informant) in his bed. This aim of this joint effort was to end the movement by terminating its leadership.”¹⁰³ But as we know, “you can kill the revolutionary, but you can’t kill the revolution.”

¹⁰¹ Jakobi Williams, “‘You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can’t Kill the Revolution’: A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton’s Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination,” *Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal* 35 (2019): 80.

¹⁰² Jakobi Williams, “‘You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can’t Kill the Revolution’: A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton’s Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination,” 81.

¹⁰³ Jakobi Williams, “‘You Can Kill the Revolutionary, but You Can’t Kill the Revolution’: A Reflection on Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton’s Life and Legacy 50 Years After His Assassination,” 82.

Malcolm X is a key example of a revolution heightening in the wake of his assassination. Malcolm X was unlike Fred Hampton and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for one simple reason: he was a typical American who did not make any great achievements in his early life. Before igniting the Black self-defense movement, Malcolm X had many run-ins with the law that resulted in years of prison sentences. Of course, once King and Hampton became involved with the movement, they did serve at least some time in prison, but neither were criminals outside of that. Malcolm X's humble beginnings appealed to the Black community as he was like many of them. Malcolm X did hail from a religious family, just as King had, and his father was even a social activist for the improvement of African American rights.¹⁰⁴ Malcolm X suffered many hate crimes in his early life, including his family home being burnt down to the ground by the Ku Klux Klan. His father, a Baptist minister, physically abused his mother and siblings, causing Malcolm X to begin believing that his father was "a victim of brainwashing by white people, who infected blacks with self-hatred."¹⁰⁵ This belief would stay with Malcolm X throughout his entire life, and directly influenced his activist beliefs. Upon his move to Boston, Massachusetts, Malcolm X began to sell illegal drugs and bootlegged liquor, as well as burglarizing properties. Malcolm X ended up serving ten years in prison on burglary-related charges, which made him relatable to certain members of the Black community. As he became more and more famous, "many journalists would emphasize Malcolm X's 'shady' past... [and] in some cases, these references were an attempt to damage Malcolm X's credibility, but economically disadvantaged people have found his early years to be a point of commonality."¹⁰⁶ As the Black community could relate to Malcolm X on many levels, he was able to gain popularity and spread his beliefs

¹⁰⁴ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor., *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 1, (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992): 246.

¹⁰⁵ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 247.

¹⁰⁶ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 247.

wider than some other Civil Rights leaders. While in prison, Malcolm X was introduced to Elijah Muhammad (his eventual assassin) and the Nation of Islam.¹⁰⁷ When he left prison, Malcolm X immediately began his involvement with Muhammad and began to preach the words of “Black Islam” to anyone who would listen. Malcolm X’s resentment towards whites was also part of his sermons, specifically those that were used to inform Blacks of their community struggles. Even in his religious teachings, Malcolm X appealed to the sensibilities of the Black population because “while Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was teaching blacks to fight racism with love, Malcolm X was telling blacks to understand their exploitation, to fight back when attacked, and seize self-determination ‘by any means necessary.’”¹⁰⁸ Malcolm X’s ideas were so revolutionary that many were not willing to accept them and preferred King’s nonviolent path towards equality. Malcolm X may, very well, have just been ahead of his time; Fred Hampton, taking prominence in the activism scene around the time of Malcolm X’s death, was accepted in the Black community relatively easily, and especially by youth. The world was ready for an (armed) change by the time of Malcolm X’s assassination in 1965, and through his posthumously published autobiography, many Black Power activists gained ideological enlightenment. Hampton taught his ILBPP members about Malcolm X, the man who “gave African Americans something no one else ever had – a sense that the race has the right to feel anger and express the power of it, to challenge white domination, and to actively demand change.”¹⁰⁹

Gender

As alluded to in the opening section of this chapter, gender played a key role in the development of both of these influential movements. For as long as slavery existed legally in

¹⁰⁷ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 1, (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992): 248.

¹⁰⁸ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 249.

¹⁰⁹ Michael L. LaBlanc, editor. *Contemporary Black Biography*, 255.

America, men and women alike were forced to watch their partners endure injury, sexual assault, and a variety of other forms of torment at the behest of their masters. When slavery was abolished and the Civil War concluded, racial discrimination did not end with it. An example of this was in 1919 when a senator from Mississippi (John Sharp Williams) spoke to the senate and “endorsed lynching, and particularly if a black man was accused of raping a white woman. ‘Race is greater than law now and then,’ he asserted, ‘and protection of women transcends all law, human and divine.’”¹¹⁰ Williams was not an exception to any sort of rule; he was simply a white man in power so there are records of what he said. White men around the country were afraid that if Blacks were given too much autonomy (such as freedom, citizenship, and maybe even voting rights) they would abuse their “power” and begin to attack white women. On the other hand, white men had a long history of tormenting Black women, and the “regular abuse of black women by white men had been stoking anger in black communities for centuries.”¹¹¹ During the Civil Rights era, Black men on a larger scale felt it necessary to fight for and protect Black women.

One Civil Rights activist, Andrew Young, details how he distanced himself from women during non-violent protests as he knew they were likely to be physically abused in some way and it would have been impossible for him to witness this without doing anything to stop it. Simon Wendt, author of “They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men,” explained that “Young’s memories hint at the intricate relationship between violence, non-violence and manhood in the African American freedom struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. Young’s understanding of what it meant to be a man challenged the movement’s non-violent orthodoxy and implied an obligation

¹¹⁰ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014): 47.

¹¹¹ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, 112.

to defend black women against racist attacks.”¹¹² These notions became harder for Black men to ignore as the centuries of mistreatment that their women had endured bubbled up towards the surface of the movement until, finally, self-defense became the only idea worth pursuing for many Blacks. As the Civil Rights Movement lost many of its human resources due to ideological differences, “the Black Power Movement’s affirmative message countered traditional stereotypes of black male powerlessness and instilled a positive black identity into many activists.”¹¹³ Rather than needing to seem submissive to white cultural values, Black men were in pursuit of their own distinct identity, which heavily involved protecting women within the community.

The gender dynamic that was seen in the Civil Rights Movement allowed women to freely take part in the protests that would likely lead to their injury, which is what pained Young so much. In the Black Power Movement, there was a clear motivation to protect Black women from the abuse that they had suffered for years, so they were often kept from the front lines. Women were not as marginalized in leadership roles in BPM as they were in CRM, however, and female liberation was seen by many Black Power leaders as just as important as Black liberation. This hyper-masculine ideology began to form with Malcolm X and his call for Black Power. When he was assassinated, Ossie Davis eulogized Malcolm X as being a “real” man. Davis states about the state of Masculinity in America that as “black men we have been the most systematically emasculated people on the face of the Earth. And we have learned, unfortunately, to accept and live with our emasculation as if this is the definition of what we are. Malcolm said, ‘No, you are a man. I will make you see that you are a man.’ He insisted on ripping the lies from

¹¹² Simon Wendt, “‘They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men’: Violence, Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” *Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 544.

¹¹³ Simon Wendt, “‘They Finally Found Out That We Really Are Men’: Violence, Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” 544.

our face, our middle-class smugness. He talked to all of us.”¹¹⁴ As Davis eulogized, Malcolm X became the symbolism of what any man, not just a Black man or a white man, should be like in America. Men felt called to stand up for their community by Malcolm X’s resistance to non-violence in favor of fighting, physically or otherwise, and in the wake of his assassination, Davis urged men to face their emasculation once again and believe themselves “real” men capable of protecting their community. A few short months later, the armed resistance would truly begin and give men, specifically, an outlet to rattle the bars of the prison called emasculation.

In opposition to how women were viewed in the Black Power Movement is the Civil Rights Movement, where women were often seen as taking on a substantial role in the movement rather than being protectorates. An example of this is how “Ella Baker is perhaps best known for her role as a supporting actor in the Civil Rights Movement drama of the 1950s and 1960s,” even though she was one of the most influential members of the entire nonviolent movement, and arguably the Freedom Struggle as a whole.¹¹⁵ When Baker entered into the SCLC, “all executive officers were men,” and many founders of the organization were resistant to female leadership in the organization.¹¹⁶ Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. especially was one of them, and Baker knew from the outset that “King had preferred a preacher for the job and had objected to hiring a woman.”¹¹⁷ Baker’s not being a preacher worked against her as well, but she still grew to be a foundational member of the Civil Rights Movement. Baker was also known for having an incredible impact on other major Civil Rights groups such as In Friendship, a civil rights organization aimed at funding grassroots operations and individuals in search of desegregation,

¹¹⁴ Ossie Davis, “Ossie Davis Delivering the Eulogy for Malcolm X at the Faith Temple Church of God,” February 27, 1965, Pacifica Radio Archive.

¹¹⁵ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond’s Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021): 42.

¹¹⁶ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond’s Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 113.

¹¹⁷ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond’s Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*, 116.

as well as the SNCC. In the book *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, Vincent P. Franklin finds that, “although many people can claim credit for the political impact SNCC had on the larger Civil Rights Movement and the nation, Ella Baker was probably the single most influential individual within the organization.”¹¹⁸ Ella Baker is not as well-known as some of the female Black Power supporters, such as Angela Davis, because she was less accepted as a lead female of the Civil Rights Movement than women were in Black Power. In the mind of many Black and white men, revolutionary ideas were not meant to be created by women, and “this sentiment – that a black woman would be a commanding presence, indeed the ‘go-to’ person, for revolution – sits at odds with popular perceptions of the black freedom struggle.”¹¹⁹ So, not only were youths more interested in the growing BPM, but now so were women.

¹¹⁸ Julian Bond, *Julian Bond's Time to Teach: A History of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021): 42.

¹¹⁹ Komozi Woodward, Jeanne Theoharis, and Dayo F. Gore, *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 2.

Chapter Three: The Media

The media and coverage that the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements respectively received is an often-underreported aspect of the historiography of the Civil Rights era. However, how these movements were covered in both print and television media shows exactly how BPM was intentionally left out of being covered as the practice of armed resistance was not sanctioned by those who reported on it, as well as being vilified in the coverage that they did receive to prevent any further support for the movement. This chapter will be based primarily on primary source evidence, with some secondary source literature to help give context to the findings of this section.

Media Literature

The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff offers an in-depth look into the articles that were never published and footage that never aired during the heat of the American race crisis. Roberts and Klibanoff feel as though “the [Civil Rights] movement grew to be the most dynamic American news story of the last half of the twentieth century” which makes it a necessary task to parse out how the media surrounding the movement was developed.¹²⁰ The book at first focuses on the first half of the twentieth century to give context to the rest of the chapters, as well as to provide context to the establishment of many relevant Negro newspapers. As the chapters progress, the two authors begin to address major events that were represented in the media from both the Black and white perspectives, such as the Emmett Till murder. In the early twentieth century, the African American voice that was developing in response to the hardships they faced was often

¹²⁰ Gene Roberts, and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008): 7.

shaped by Black-run newspapers. These newspapers pushed back against not only the mainstream media that Blacks were largely left out of, but they also began to protest the inequities that they struggled to rectify daily. Roberts and Kilbanoff noted that:

"if the protest were to succeed, the mainstream press – the white press – would have to discover racial discrimination and write about it so candidly and so repeatedly that white Americans outside of the South could no longer look the other way. Then they would see segregation, white supremacy, and black disenfranchisement as being at odds with the American conscience... and demand change."¹²¹

The awakening of America's inner voice was not able to be accomplished over night; as much as the Black community wished that their newspapers were enough to promote national public interest and engagement in the racial crisis, there was a strong believe that the Black press was for Blacks, and mainstream media was for whites.

In *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party*, authored by Christian Davenport, there is an examination of both major and local Newsmedia and how the Black Panther Party was represented on all accounts. The most interesting finding from Davenport's work, that actually conflicts with the thesis of this project, is that "the [*New York Times*] reduced the sheer number of [BPP] activities that it covered and in turn devoted more time, money, and space to the ones it selected."¹²² Although this looks like the *Times* was intentionally leaving out BPP activities, they were actually being conscious enough of the struggle to devote the resources necessary to the events that mattered most. There was not so much a lack of coverage, but rather an intentional emphasis on specific events due to an over saturation of BPP-related activities. According to Davenport, there were so many BPP events

¹²¹ Gene Roberts, and Hank Kilbanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008): 7.

¹²² Christian Davenport, *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 116.

that “there was simply little time and space for anything else” if the *Times* tried to cover each of the Black Panther Party’s events.¹²³ This is especially true where the *New York Times* had a geographical focus that represented major cities around the globe. Where the *Times* was an internationally appreciated newspaper, it actually showcased how important the Black Freedom Movement was on a larger scale than may have been portrayed in local news. During the Civil Rights era, there was a relatively clear formula that was followed in terms of how newspapers reached a certain audience, and the *Times* strayed away from this format during the 1960s and 1970s. Oftentimes, “larger, daily, metropolitan newspapers... covered ‘at some length and in some depth not only local, regional and state news, but also news of the world’... By contrast, weeklies, which were affiliated with a variety of categories (e.g., student, grassroots, and ethnic), tended to concentrate on a smaller audience and focused more exclusively on local events.”¹²⁴ The *Times* was willing to engage in news related to the Civil Rights era which did not always fit into the regional category. It is also of note, in contrast to that of the information from the *New York Times*, that at the time of the conception of the Civil Rights Movement, there was not a single major news publication taking up residency in the southern United States.¹²⁵ This made mass coverage of the events related to the Civil Rights Movement seem like more of a southern problem as compared to a national, or even global, issue.

“The best hope for Negroes,” Kilbanoff and Roberts believe, “was to attract national attention.”¹²⁶ This tactic of purposeful and explicit representation in Newsmedia was employed

¹²³ Christian Davenport, *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 116.

¹²⁴ Christian Davenport, *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression*, 114.

¹²⁵ Gene Roberts, and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008): 10.

¹²⁶ Gene Roberts, and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, 98.

by both the Black Power and Civil Rights Movement. The end of CRM was even attributed to as the lack of drive for media attention by leaders of the movement according to SNCC chairman John Lewis; “thirty-three years later, John Lewis... would look back on the voting rights victory and say that it had been Selma, and the later efforts to keep voting rights in the news, that had held the movement together so long. ‘After that,’ Lewis said, ‘we just came apart.’”¹²⁷ National and local press promoted the Civil Rights era to become what it was. This was incredibly important to the BPP who generated their own newspaper titled, of course, *The Black Panther*. This news bulletin lasted almost from the immediate conception of the BPP into the 1980s. Even if only the Black community read the paper, they were still attracting support for their movement. This was a failure that would cause the supporters of Black Power to cease involvement with Civil Rights: they were unable to continuously attract media attention after major gains were made for the community in 1964 and 1965. Once certain legislative achievements were reached, CRM seemed almost unnecessary. Black Power had revitalized, and in some ways refined, techniques to fight racial inequality, which included a strong media presence.

The last book that will be discussed in any detail is *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967 – 1980* by David Hilliard. Hilliard himself was a Black Panther and has devoted much of his body of writing to expressing the tales of the BPP. He devotes an entire book to cataloguing important articles and whole newspapers from *The Black Panther*, along with other related historical essays, because “the BPINA published the Party’s various political positions, providing historical documentation of its ideology and philosophy, its stances on

¹²⁷ Gene Roberts, and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008): 394.

contemporaneous issues, and its internal and external activities.”¹²⁸ Without this information, how the party viewed themselves and the world around them might have been lost to history. Unlike many other local magazines that were only published for the benefit of viewers in the area, “the BPINS was distributed worldwide every week for 13 years, sold in small stores in black communities, through subscriptions, and, mostly, on the streets of the United States by dedicated Party members.”¹²⁹ Although the BPP spawned in Oakland, California, which was the hotbed for many of the activities administered by the Panthers, the BPP managed to take their local newspaper which focused very much on American issues to an international level. This was a feat for the BPP, as “party members and others were assaulted, arrested, and even killed in connection with distribution of the Party’s newspaper.”¹³⁰ Much of this information is verified by Hilliard himself from personal experience, as well as the primary source documentation that he provides.

Media Coverage of Urban Riots

In this case, the term “Urban Riots” is used to reference race-related riots that occurred throughout the 1960s and 1970s due to racial discrimination. The Watts Riots will be discussed first, as well as the general response that was given to other riots from both the white and Black perspective. On the day that the Watts Riots began, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his stance on the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as the Marquette Frye incident that sparked the riots, received the same amount of attention in the *Los Angeles Times*. King was allowed to openly state criticism for the “enforcement of the new voting rights law as ‘cautious’ and ‘severely

¹²⁸ David Hilliard, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980* (New York: Atria Books, 2008): ix.

¹²⁹ David Hilliard, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980*, ix.

¹³⁰ David Hilliard, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980*, ix.

restricted.”¹³¹ Where King was not taking a violent approach to the gaining of civil rights, he was afforded more opportunities for the condemnation of authorities. When the Watts Riots showed that Blacks were both willing to and going to utilize armed self-defense tactics to protect themselves as the Civil Rights Movement began to wane, they were showcased as murderous and violent. Frye being detained by officers was declared both “minor” and “routine” by the *Los Angeles Times*, which would not be the same way that the rioters would have described the events.¹³² We only hear from the Deputy on these events, however, and never the rioters and/or witnesses of the initial event. In another article from the *Los Angeles Times*, it was said that “two Negroes died in Oak Park Community Hospital... as Negroes rioted outside. A hospital official said one of them might have been saved if the rioters hadn’t prevented an anesthesiologist from reaching the hospital.”¹³³ Although this author is reporting what the official from Oak Park Community Hospital had stated, Berman’s article comes off as accusing the Black rioters of the death of the men in the hospital, almost as if to say this would not have happened if they had not initiated the riots. Just like in the nonviolent portion of the Civil Rights Movement, protestors were hurt due to the actions of others around them. There was no way to stop the violence perpetrated by whites, but considering that the Black Power community was constantly the victim of it they decided to fight back. As the riots raged on, it was also stated that “the guerrilla war of south Los Angeles claim[ed] its 25th victim Saturday night as a band of armed Negro looters took to the streets and snipers defied the efforts of 21,000 national

¹³¹ “1,000 Riot in L.A. Police and Motorists Attacked: Routine Arrest of 3 Sparks Watts Melle; 8 Blocks Sealed Off,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12th, 1965, 126.

¹³² “1,000 Riot in L.A. Police and Motorists Attacked: Routine Arrest of 3 Sparks Watts Melle; 8 Blocks Sealed Off.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12th, 1965, 126.

¹³³ “Eight Men Slain; Guards Move in,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14th, 1965, 64.

guardsmen and law officers to bring peace to the area.”¹³⁴ By Berman using the term “peace,” he makes it clear that law enforcement officers are the ones who want the destruction to end and that the People of Color engaging in these riots are doing so senselessly. This sentiment would be repeated less than thirty years later in the Los Angeles Riots. In the last article from the *Los Angeles Times* published at the time of the events, Governor Brown “declared the five-day riot was over,” although he added: “we must and will continue to deal forcefully with the terrorists until Los Angeles is safe again.”¹³⁵ By Brown equating the riotous group to terrorists, he is making a very strong and deliberate statement that the African America community standing up for their rights and beliefs is something to be condemned, in the court of law and otherwise. The same messages were not usually conveyed regarding the Civil Rights Movement, but both CRM and BPM received much negative media attention.

In response to the urban riots, Dr. King stated the following in an Oakland-area news broadcast: “there is a great deal of frustration and bitterness in the Negro community and often this frustration leads to action that is suicidal. People who are voiceless and who are neglected often end up saying unconsciously ‘I would rather be dead than ignored’. And we see this suicidal tendency in many of our riots.”¹³⁶ King equated the riots to suicide in his 1967 statement, which lost much of the favor that he had from those in the Black Power Movement. With the creation of the Black Panther Party and other militant organizations the year prior to this speech, King’s power was beginning to fade due to his condemnation of armed resistance in any form, even though he was understanding of the ideology of Black Power. This dynamic is depicted in the

¹³⁴ Art Berman, “Negro Riots Rage On; Death Toll 25: 21,000 Troops, Police Wage Guerilla War; 8 p.m. Curfew Invoked,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15th, 1965, 394.

¹³⁵ Bob Jackson, and Art Berman, “Brown Declares: Riot is Over,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17th, 1965, 76.

¹³⁶ “Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Urban Riots,” KTVU News, 1967.

1965 political cartoon, “...Yes, it hurts... especially this one!,” that was developed by Clifford H. Baldowski for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In the cartoon, Dr. King is depicted as sweating nervously while speaking to a white man holding a “Los Angeles” newspaper.¹³⁷ King is finely dressed showing some level of respect towards the Civil Rights leader, while he is also being stabbed in the front of his abdomen with white knives stating “Mayor Yorty,” the “White House,” and “Gov. Brown.”¹³⁸ In his back, a black knife protrudes labeled “the mob.”¹³⁹ King is using a hand outstretched behind his back to point towards the black knife, obviously explaining that that is the one that “especially” hurts. Due to King’s distaste for the armed resistance growing across the country, Baldowski is depicting how worrisome the rioting is to King and the consequences that it may have on the Civil Rights Movement. King is also wearing a “non-violent” embroidered coat, and due to the man questioning the actions of the mob in the newspaper, it is clear that the author is calling out King’s promises for a nonviolent end to racial discrimination.¹⁴⁰ King, of course, did not want violence and advocated for peace continuously throughout the Civil Rights era and until his death. King was not part of the Watts Riots, but as the leader of the Civil Rights Movements, his credibility was tarnished in the eyes of white onlookers, as well as to those who supported the developing Black Power Movement. King’s influence was not strong enough to solicit Black or white attention much longer, thus giving way for a new generation of leaders, like Hampton, to step in.

Media Coverage of Assassinations

¹³⁷ Clifford H. Baldowski, “...Yes, it hurts... especially this one!,” Clifford H. Baldowski Editorial Cartoon Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, (Athens: University of Georgia Libraries, August 21st, 1965).

¹³⁸ Clifford H. Baldowski, “...Yes, it hurts... especially this one!,” August 21st, 1965.

¹³⁹ Clifford H. Baldowski, “...Yes, it hurts... especially this one!,” August 21st, 1965.

¹⁴⁰ Clifford H. Baldowski, “...Yes, it hurts... especially this one!,” August 21st, 1965.

As previously covered, the MLK Jr. assassination took place in April of 1968. Immediately following both his death and his funeral, political and social leaders were quick to comment on the loss that the country, and especially the Black community, faced. President Lyndon B. Johnson may have been the first to comment publicly on the assassination of Dr. King. He began his speech at the White House by mourning the loss of King and sending his sympathies to his wife, Coretta. LBJ went on to reference the Black Power groups indirectly in his speech by explaining that the United States “can achieve nothing by lawlessness and divisiveness among the American people. It is only by joining together and only by working together that we can continue to move toward equality and fulfillment for all of our people.”¹⁴¹ This address was, of course, nationally printed in newspapers and televised. The Black Panther Party hit back against this stance after the funeral that was held for Dr. King to explain that being united was not working, and that violence was absolutely necessary. When a reporter asked Bobby Seale “why do you think San Francisco and Oakland have been relatively quiet since Dr. King's assassination [in Memphis, TN]?” Seale replied “Because the Black Panther Party told them to be quiet! Exactly! Because the Black Panther Party told them to be quiet!”¹⁴² In contrast to King’s speech, the BPP leader’s interview was published by a local San Francisco Bay Area broadcasting station, KTVU, that primarily covered the Oakland area known to be a hotbed for Panther action. There were clear inequities in how violence versus nonviolence were promoted. In the wake King’s death, America was no closer to being united in the sphere of racial equality. Whites, such as Johnson, wanted Blacks to end the armed resistance in pursuit of racial equality; Blacks just wanted whites to end disenfranchisement of People of Color and the heightened

¹⁴¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President on the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley,” The American Presidency Project.

¹⁴² “Bobby Seale on the killing of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” KTVU News, April, 1968.

policing of Black bodies as compared to that of their white counterparts. Without further legislation and other action to generate equality for the Black community, the armed resistance would not end anytime soon. The Black Power Movement continued to gain support throughout the 1960s and 1970s when the Civil Rights Movement failed to promote any new interest. BPM kept advertising themselves to new audiences, while CRM did not after losing their central leadership figure.

A few years before MLK Jr. was assassinated in 1968, Malcom X was assassinated in 1965 by a follower of the Islamic faith. KRON-TV, a news broadcasting station that serves the San Francisco Bay area, essentially equated Malcolm X to a reformed Black Muslims after his murder in their four-part documentary series “Black Muslims.” Rather than covering how heinous it was for Malcom X to have been assassinated at all or describing the achievements that he made over the course of his life as an activist, there was a greater focus on how he engaged in the Black Muslim community, thus leading to his eventual demise. If it were not for his involvement in the Muslim community, maybe Malcom X would not have been the focus of this documentary at all. The documentary team also makes sure to leave the viewer with this piece of information about Malcolm X: “Malcom continued to talk about Black Nationalism [after leaving the Muslim faith], but slowly his views seemed to change. He spoke less of violence and bloodbaths, and more of cooperation, integration, and brotherhood. He showed interest in joining the mainstream of the Civil Rights Movement... he said he no longer believed whites were devils and among them were some sincere men of good will.”¹⁴³ If Malcom X had continued to stay on his path of armed resistance versus that of nonviolence, it is easy to wonder if this documentary

¹⁴³ Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc., “Assignment Four - Black Muslims,” KRON-TV, 1965.

would have been made at all, or maybe that it would not have given Malcom X any credit for his assistance in helping to end the inequalities of Black men and women.

There was no presidential address broadcasted or nationally distributed news bulletins regarding the assassination of Malcolm X as there was with Dr. King. Malcom X's legacy, although he was just as influential to the Black Power community as King was to the "mainstream" Civil Rights Movement, was boiled down to his faith that had been "misplaced" in the Islamic religion.¹⁴⁴ Local stations were more likely to cover the assassination of this key Black Nationalist leader than national media, but it is of note that Malcolm X's assassination was covered by local news stations nationally. Malcolm X, also being from midwestern Nebraska and being assassinated in Manhattan, showed that Civil Rights issues were not just a Southern problem - they were absolutely national. This effect is also seen in the death of Fred Hampton, who was both a national and local leader of the Black Panther Party. Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, was so excited by the death of Hampton that he "approved an incentive award for [Roy Martin Mitchell] in the amount of \$200.00 for [his] outstanding services in the matter of considerable interest to the FBI in the racial field."¹⁴⁵ Hoover went on to tell Mitchell that "I want you to know my appreciation for your exemplary efforts."¹⁴⁶ There was not a national briefing on the murder of Hampton, but State Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan responded to the crimes that had occurred in December of 1969. In a recent telling of the events and activities of the BPP from the book *Freedom! The Story of the Black Panther Party*, the authors explain that "in his statement to the press Hanrahan said, 'The

¹⁴⁴ Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc., "Assignment Four - Black Muslims," KRON-TV, 1965.

¹⁴⁵ J. Edgar Hoover, "Letter to Mr. Roy Martin Mitchell regarding the Assassination of Fred Hampton," December 10th, 1969.

¹⁴⁶ J. Edgar Hoover, "Letter to Mr. Roy Martin Mitchell regarding the Assassination of Fred Hampton," 1969.

immediate, violent, criminal reaction of the occupants in shooting at announced police officers emphasizes the extreme viciousness of the Black Panther Party.”¹⁴⁷ In all media, the BPP was criticized for their violence, even when provoked first and unknowingly. The Civil Rights Movement was more often respected for their nonviolent approach than Black Power ever was, even though Black Power did more to improve the living conditions of Black Americans.

¹⁴⁷ Jetta Grace Martin, Waldo E. Martin Jr., and Joshua Bloom, *Freedom! The Story of the Black Panther Party* (Hoboken: Levine Querido, 2022): 233.

Chapter Four: The Literature, Examined

This chapter is devoted to further understanding the historiography of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, as well as to evaluate how well the historical narrative that has been developed since the 1960s supports the thesis of this project. Many of the key works that were used to develop this project will be examined, as well as others that may not be in alignment with the arguments presented here. Overall, it will be seen that, in general, the available scholarship identifies that the Civil Rights Movement was in its final stages by 1965 when the Black Power Movement reinvigorated the call for racial equality in America as an attempt to make gains that the Civil Rights Movement could not.

Authors of the Civil Rights Era

To begin examining authors that both support and challenge the claims of this project, there will be an evaluation of the works that relate to the entire Civil Rights era first, before delving into those that relate to BPM or CRM specifically. The first text that will be reviewed is *Civil Rights in America: A History*, authored by Christopher W. Schmidt. Schmidt's focus is primarily based on how the term "civil rights" has been used, and often misappropriated, since the Civil War. Schmidt's thesis assesses the legal impact of the Civil Rights Movement which is not as deeply explored in "We Just Came Apart." Schmidt argues that in defining the term "civil rights" for the Civil Rights era, "grassroots organizers worried that the civil rights approach was too legalistic, too dependent on lawyers and courts. An array of voices on the political left argued that while civil rights reforms might do the necessary work of uprooting discriminatory behavior, they failed to engage the larger economic and structural issues that entrenched patterns of racial

inequality.”¹⁴⁸ The Civil Rights Movement, then, focused on the wrong issues for too long from the perspective of many African Americans, ultimately leading them to become BPM activists and supporters around 1965. The legal emphasis, such as the creation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that was the last notable breakthrough of CRM, that King and others placed on the movement was not effective in solving a vast majority of the systemic problems that Blacks faced on a daily basis. Voting was, of course, important, but so was poverty, poor educational facilities, and housing issues to a large majority of Americans (Black and white); all of these concerns the Black Power Movement actively worked to improve. Schmidt goes on to express that “the real struggle... was not for just civil rights, it was for social rights and human rights, for black power and black liberation.”¹⁴⁹ BPM activists were aware that the issue was much larger than reclaiming and guaranteeing civil rights in the legal sense of the term; it was about people, the identity that they create and pride they take in that identity, and guaranteeing that all humans are well enough to even access their rights. Because of this, the Black Power Movement was born from the limited scope of the Civil Rights Movement cause.

Two of the lesser impactful, but still informative, pieces of literature that will be discussed in this paragraph are “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism” by Leilah Danielson and *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* and Hasan Kwame Jeffries. Both of these works have their place in the historiography of the Civil Rights era but were less significant in the creation of this project. Danielson, in relation to this capstone project, states that “Black Power radicalism was not the ‘evil twin’ that wrecked civil rights but was instead the ‘direct outgrowth of the creative,

¹⁴⁸ Christopher W. Schmidt, *Civil Rights in America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 6.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher W. Schmidt, *Civil Rights in America: A History*, 6.

ideological, and political tensions during the first phase of civil rights.”¹⁵⁰ Black Power ushered in the next phase of the Civil Rights era, showing that the two movements were inextricably linked. Similarly, Jeffries articulates that “civil rights and Black Power activism were interrelated yet distinct forms of protest” that shared the same ideological basis, but different protest strategies affected their development.¹⁵¹ As the Black Power Movement grew closer to its inception, Danielson argues that members of CORE and other nonviolent organizations “criticized the moral thrust of nonviolence and its tendency to focus outward to the conscience of white Americans rather than inward to the black community.”¹⁵² Although the focus on movements that would appeal to the white population had their own successes, it ultimately birthed the Black Power Movement as the African American community searched for a Black identity that could be represented in American culture.

Another significant work in the historiography of the Civil Rights era is *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* in which author, Matthew Countryman, argues that the geographical location of CRM activities caused northern activists to feel underrepresented in the Civil Rights struggle, causing them to turn to Black Power. Around the same time as other significant Black Power locations, such as California and Illinois, “many within the Philadelphia movement had begun to question the efficacy of Civil Rights protest and the desegregation agenda.”¹⁵³ After the movement developed, it was clear to Countryman that “Black Power activists constructed a vital and effective social movement that remade the political and cultural

¹⁵⁰ Leilah Danielson, “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism,” *Peace & Change* 29, no. 3/4 (2004): 448.

¹⁵¹ Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 5.

¹⁵² Leilah Danielson, “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism,” *Peace & Change* 29, no. 3/4 (2004): 448.

¹⁵³ Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2007): 2.

landscape in American cities during the late 1960s and 1970s in ways that the postwar liberalism [CRM] could and did not accomplish.”¹⁵⁴ Once again it is seen that because of the failures of the Civil Rights Movement, the right conditions developed for BPM to take charge. Countryman’s work also relates to the argument of this project in how he discusses gender, particularly when he explains that “Black Power ideology was deeply patriarchal. Much of its critique of American racism focused on its denial of the fundamental prerogatives of manhood to African American men.”¹⁵⁵ After the continual abuses that African American women suffered at the hands of a physically and systematically oppressive system, Black men largely could not sit by and watch their women purposefully be hurt in the nonviolent movement.

Authors of the Civil Rights Movement

Clayborne Carson, author of *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, describes the role of one of the most influential Civil Rights-Black Power organizations of the Civil Rights era. Although most associated with their nonviolent beliefs, the SNCC changed to accommodate Black Power in their final stage of life. Although the SNCC paid great attention and respect to the actions of Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, and others of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “SNCC veterans of the lunch counter sit-ins and freedom rides more resolutely tested the limits of nonviolent protest strategy. Willing to provoke perilous confrontations with southern segregationists, they had little sympathy for liberal leaders who refused to take political risks on behalf of civil rights reform.”¹⁵⁶ What is noteworthy here is that Blacks who had fruitlessly tried nonviolence were pushing the boundaries of what it could

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2007): 9.

¹⁵⁵ Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 304.

actually accomplish and were willing to engage in new endeavors to make their desired improvements to African American life become a reality. Because of this alone, SNCC members new and old were “searching for alternatives to the interracialism and non-violent tactics of the civil rights movement, [and] some SNCC workers adopted black nationalist ideas with blind enthusiasm.”¹⁵⁷ Not knowing this would cause the eventual dismantling of the organization, the SNCC was feverish to take on new challenges in the Black Freedom Movement. Although this appears to discredit the thesis of this project, as it represents how Civil Rights groups failed to maintain their power after self-defense strategies were activated, it is only one organization. Leaders of the group were also divided on if BPM was the correct course of action to pursue, causing there to be less clear leadership and direction in the program. If the SNCC offered a united front on the issue of self-defense, their fate may have been different.

Similarly to *In Struggle, Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement*, by Tomiko Brown-Nagin, offers a slightly varied interpretation of the usefulness of the Black Power Movement. Brown-Nagin explains that when the SNCC turned to embrace Black Power in the mid-1960s, “this turn of events further divided the interracial organization, already less cohesive than it had been in its early days. The law and the organizing movement... took a back seat amid the ideological conflagration, interpersonal conflict, external scrutiny, and state surveillance and harassment that accompanied SNCC’s black power phase.”¹⁵⁸ Unlike in the thesis of “We Just Came Apart,” Brown-Nagin finds fault with the Black Power Movement in relation to the SNCC. Assuredly, Stokely Carmichael had to focus

¹⁵⁷ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 305.

¹⁵⁸ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 272.

much of his efforts on explaining the terminology of Black Power rather than actually helping disadvantaged citizens achieve equality. This was the same problematic entanglement that Martin Luther King Jr. fell into, as both men were attempting to establish themselves rather than spreading their ideologies in their respective movements. Although the SNCC would quickly dismantle under the pressure of this new phase in its programming, it was not a total failure. The SNCC showcases how Black youth were unhappy with the trajectory of the nonviolent movement and were seeking new ways to combat racial inequities. Just because the SNCC barely made it into the 1970s does not mean that it was ineffective. Carmichael helped to launch the ideologies of Black Power organizations nationwide through the platform of the well-established SNCC. The SNCC was over, and new programs were due to begin.

In *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement*, by Zoe A. Colley, finds that “one of the strongest messages from recent research on this subject is that resistance rarely succeeded in bringing about any meaningful systemic change.”¹⁵⁹ In short, historians are now finding that nonviolent resistance did not work to change much for Blacks in the 1950s and 1960s, as is evident by the limited progress made by the Civil Rights Movement as compared to that of the Black Power Movement. The movement itself “depended upon black communities challenging the same police, judges, and prison guards who had beaten suspects, jailed innocent victims, and even murdered those around them.”¹⁶⁰ Both CRM and BPM grew in part from police brutality, but the ideologies that each organization was shaped from changed to accommodate the level of violence they were willing to employ in their protests. Colley goes on to support the argument of “‘We Just Came Apart’” when analyzing her gender research. Colley

¹⁵⁹ Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012): 5.

¹⁶⁰ Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 9.

points out that “women were exposed to the jail cell less often than men. This was presumably a product of the tendency to consign women to less dangerous tasks such as teaching and administrative work, which were also viewed as most appropriate for women.”¹⁶¹ This demonstrates the turn that can be found in the Civil Rights Movement around the time of the development of BPM as a way to protect women from further challenging and demeaning experiences. Although earlier on in the movement women were more accepted on the front lines of protests and marches, stereotypical gender roles began to set in as a way to keep women from further abuses and showcase Black manliness and power. This led more men to being jailed than women, especially as the Black Power phase of the Civil Rights era commenced.

Men were also more prone to asserting physical violence than women. Charles E. Cobb, author of *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, articulates just how effective nonviolence actually was for pushing the Civil Rights Movement forward. Cobb states that “nonviolence... was not passive, that it provided an effective means of directly challenging white supremacy with more than just rhetoric. Acts of nonviolent resistance contributed mightily to ending the mental paralysis that had long kept many black people trapped in fear and subservient to white supremacy.”¹⁶² He also goes on to explain that “the principled, militant dignity of nonviolent resistance also won nationwide sympathy for the idea of extending civil rights to black people.”¹⁶³ As was known by nearly every CRM leader, nonviolence was a political strategy to win public favor for the Black community and subsequently earn their long-deserved rights; there is no disputing that. What can

¹⁶¹ Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012): 6.

¹⁶² Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*. (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014): 3.

¹⁶³ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, 3.

be disputed, however, is that CRM was largely effective, as it really only impacted the South and voting rights. Black Power went on to tackle systemic inequality based on not only race but economic status as well, which the Civil Rights Movement did not attempt. By Cobbs own admission, “Black Christians... readily embraced the Old Testament, with all its furies and violence.”¹⁶⁴ Even though there was great support for CRM, there was a large sector of the Black community that was willing to test out self-defense and armed resistance strategies to combat racial injustices. Even Martin Luther King Jr., famed nonviolent Civil Rights leader, was known to have weaponry in his own home for protection purposes, and “indeed, there were few black leaders who did not seek and receive armed protection from within the black community. They needed it because both local enforcement and the federal government refused to provide it.”¹⁶⁵ If non-violence was truly an effective strategy, King and others would not have taken up arms themselves in defense of their lives. Instead, they preached it to others willing to listen to their nonviolent lessons, causing many deaths and other injuries for members of the Black community. Self-defense became undoubtedly necessary to advance the Civil Rights Movement because “without it, terrorists would have killed far more people in the movement.”¹⁶⁶

Authors of the Black Power Movement

The first work to be examined in this section of Chapter Four is *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* by Peniel E. Joseph. This book is recognized by many authors, some even included in this chapter, as having a transformative property in how the Black Power Movement was viewed by historians. Joseph’s work and

¹⁶⁴ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*. (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014): 3.

¹⁶⁵ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, 5.

¹⁶⁶ Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, 4.

dedication to studies of BPM are acknowledged as shifting the view away from the movement being vilified in the available scholarship and now highlighting how CRM failed many African Americans. Joseph does note that “BPM can be conveniently blamed for the demise of the Civil Rights Movement, rather than being viewed as an alternative to the ineffectiveness of the civil rights demands in critical areas of American life.”¹⁶⁷ Joseph does not want Black Power to be seen as an unfortunate end to the Civil Rights Movement, because CRM continued for some time after BPM began. Instead, he hopes to demonstrate that Black Power was born from the same root cause as Civil Rights; there were simply different strategies to achieve success where nonviolence had not proven effective for many members of the Black community. Similar again to the thesis of “‘We Just Came Apart,’” Joseph identified that “civil rights and Black Power, while occupying distinct branches, share roots in the same historical family tree.”¹⁶⁸ African Americans nationally were in search of ending the same hardships that their forefathers had struggled with, but different generations chose to attack the problem in a myriad of ways. Joseph attempts to pull the Black Power Movement up from the depths of historical underappreciation where Black Power was once seen as holding “virtually no redeeming qualities, except perhaps for its promotion of black pride. In the process, the movement’s rich political history is forgotten, its intellectual insights buried, contemporary relevance abandoned, and grassroots activists dishonored.”¹⁶⁹ Where the movement was vilified in the media and then by historians of the generation first developing scholarship about the movement, there was not an acknowledgement of the advances that they made for Black communities nationally, as well as a preservation of their beliefs. When the term “Black Power” is heard, there is an immediate notion of weaponry

¹⁶⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2006): 3.

¹⁶⁸ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, 10.

and violence, but this idea discredits that their ideology only promoted self-defense and was by no means participating in an unprovoked fight, as well as that it forgets all of the help that they provided to local communities of disadvantaged and economically depressed individuals that were both Black and white.

The next Black Power-related book that will be discussed in this section is *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin. The authors focus more on the ideology and representation of the Black Panther Party itself, so there are fewer connections to be made between this project's thesis and *Black Against Empire*. They do say that "for many blacks, the Civil Rights Movement's victories proved limited, even illusory. Especially for young urban blacks in the North and West, little improved."¹⁷⁰ As the Civil Rights Movement was often painted as a Southern problem and much of the aid and protests that CRM organizations funded was for and in the southern United States, northern Blacks, such as those in Chicago who would develop the ILBPP, felt little effect of the campaigning that the Civil Rights Movement had pursued for the last decade. This led them to pursue other, armed, strategies in pursuit of equality. Because CRM did not provide northern and western Blacks with much noticeable relief, pressure built up in these communities. Bloom and Martin point out that "without the success of the insurgent Civil Rights Movement, and without its limitations, the Black Power ferment from which the Black Panther Party emerged would not have existed."¹⁷¹ In short, if the Civil Rights Movement had not been largely ineffective, the

¹⁷⁰ Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 12.

¹⁷¹ Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, 13.

culture for Black Power would not have developed. For this reason alone, it is clear that BPM was a product of CRM.

Bloom and Martin also detail how the successes of the BPP and BPM were highly undervalued in the historiography of the Black Power Movement quite well. The authors argue that:

“commentators reduce the Party to its community service programs or to armed confrontation with the police. ... They say the Party’s power came from organizing young blacks from the urban ghettos or that its influence stemmed from its ability to draw broad support from a range of allies. To some people, the Party was a locus of cutting-edge debate on gender politics,... to others, it was sexist and patriarchal.”¹⁷²

This kind of duality is not particularly showcased through this project, but in comparison to Peniel Joseph’s work, it does explain a key development in the historiography of the Civil Rights era. In the decade between the books being published, there has been more discussion of BPM, with a particular emphasis on making its history more complete and more visible. Because of this, at the time of *Black Against Empire* being published, there were two distinct versions of the Black Power movement that the authors had to wrestle with to create the most appropriate and accurate piece of literature. A similar dilemma was noticed in the creation of “‘We Just Came Apart,’” as there is still not a fully developed examination of how CRM led to BPM, which this work hopes to contribute to this gap in the historiography of the Civil Rights era. Bloom and Martin go on to acknowledge that “the federal government and local police forces across the nation responded to the Panthers with an unparalleled campaign of repression and vilification. They fed defamatory stories to the press.”¹⁷³ “‘We Just Came Apart’” aligns with this belief as well, especially when discussing the death of Fred Hampton, who was unfortunate enough to be

¹⁷² Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 4.

¹⁷³ Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, 5.

seen as a political threat by the FBI, and the Watts Riots, where interviews for the press were largely only conducted with city officials and law enforcement personnel.

Chapter Five: Thirty Years Apart: The Los Angeles Riots

There are often comparisons made between the Watts Riots and the Los Angeles Riots due to their general location and desire to improve the economic and political rights of citizens. This chapter will examine how the Los Angeles Riots can be compared to Watts Riots for historical purposes, and to see how both the self-defense and nonviolent activists responded to the 1992 event. There are major comparisons to be made in how the mass media portrayed both of the riots as well, which will take up much of the analysis in this section. Of course, we must begin with recounting the tale of the Los Angeles Riots to provide context for such comparisons.

The Los Angeles Riots: A History

The Los Angeles Riots, sometimes called the Los Angeles Uprisings, on the surface occurred because of the acquittal of four police officers who were charged with both excessive use of force and assault with a deadly weapon in regards to the attack on the now infamous Rodney King. However, there is a much deeper root of the cause of this uprising, just as there was in the Watts Riots. The story that the media would portray can be generally recounted in the following way. On March 3rd of 1991, a white man named George Holiday filmed the beating of a Black man, Rodney King, by four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) police officers from a window in his apartment.¹⁷⁴ This event occurred shortly before midnight, but early on the following day Holiday surrendered the footage to a local television station, KTLA.¹⁷⁵ By March 5th, CNN had acquired the same footage, giving millions of Americans access to view the beatings that King had suffered.¹⁷⁶ This beating was a result of two California Highway Patrol

¹⁷⁴ Louise I. Gerdes, *Perspectives on Modern World History: The 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2014): 4.

¹⁷⁵ Louise I. Gerdes, *Perspectives on Modern World History: The 1992 Los Angeles Riots*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Louise I. Gerdes, *Perspectives on Modern World History: The 1992 Los Angeles Riots*, 4.

officers that noticed a white vehicle accelerated above the speed limit. On the highway, Rodney King was driving up to one hundred-ten mph, and up to eighty-five miles per hour in residential areas.¹⁷⁷ The patrol officers followed King in pursuit of stopping him for speeding for just under eight miles until King finally stopped in a Los Angeles neighborhood.¹⁷⁸ When prompted, two occupants of the vehicle exited, but King did not move.¹⁷⁹ Eventually, Rodney King exited the vehicle and got to the ground as was the expectation; this is when the beating began. Guns were drawn and tasers were used to subdue King, but when that was not effective (according to the police), batons were used to stop King from getting up from the ground.¹⁸⁰ Over the course of eighty-one filmed seconds, two officers used their batons at least fifty-six times in addition to numerous kicks that King sustained.¹⁸¹ For the next year after Holiday's footage was released, there were no noteworthy racially charged uprisings in Los Angeles relating to the Rodney king event, as a trial against the four law enforcement officers, all white, was being pursued. The dawn of April 29th, 1992 brought an acquittal not dissimilar to ones that the African American community had been seeing for the entirety of African America history.¹⁸² White individuals were not held responsible, especially those in law enforcement, for the cruelty that they had inflicted upon Blacks. What was different this time was that the media displayed the tape of obvious police brutality, and the entire nation could see the effect that racism had on the criminal justice system.

News Media

¹⁷⁷ Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots* (North Mankato: Abdo Publishing, 2014): 7.

¹⁷⁸ Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots*, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots*, 12.

¹⁸¹ Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots*, 13.

¹⁸² Louise I. Gerdes, *Perspectives on Modern World History: The 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2014): 4.

The riots resulting from the beating of Rodney King lasted for approximately three days, in which much violence and destruction was caused. About halfway into the riots, the *Los Angeles Times* showed a picture of some of the destruction that occurred in the city in which a shopping mall was set ablaze.¹⁸³ The upright, but smoldering, portion of the building on display in the photograph had the phrase “LOOK WHAT YOU CREATED” written on it in, assumably, black spray paint.¹⁸⁴ Malls and shops were likely targets of the rioters due to their undying frustration with their economically disadvantaged state. This riot, just as in the Watts Riots, was more than an expression of racial injustice as class-related issues were involved as well. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “Los Angeles awoke Saturday morning from a horrific three-day nightmare with sunny skies replacing plumes of smoke and expressions of hope – even optimism – finally surfacing in its riot torn streets.”¹⁸⁵ This author’s perspective of the riots showcased little respect of the hardships that Blacks faced at the hands of law enforcement, as well as how there was little hope for Americans in times of racial crisis. Another author, also writing for the *Times*, wrote differently of the riotous behavior that had happened in Los Angeles and wrote that “the country now faces a historic decision, whether Americans want to stop ignoring the anger and despair and local disintegration that many see as the root cause of the urban and racial strife and instead resume the effort begun in the late 1960s to find solutions.”¹⁸⁶ In this newspaper author’s eyes, there were two simple options in the wake of the Los Angeles Riots; they either had to ignore the problem

¹⁸³ Kirk McKoy, “Shopping mall goes up in flames at the intersection of La Brea and Pico, where someone with a spray can left a statement about the violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2nd, 1992, 102.

¹⁸⁴ Kirk McKoy, “Shopping mall goes up in flames at the intersection of La Brea and Pico, where someone with a spray can left a statement about the violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2nd, 1992, 102.

¹⁸⁵ Louis Sahagun, and Carla Rivera, “Jittery L.A. Sees Rays of Hope: Few Crimes of Major Incidents Are Reported,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3rd, 1992.

¹⁸⁶ David Lauter and Sam Fulwood III, “U.S. Racial Slumber Ends in Jolt,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3rd, 1992.

and continue on as if they had not been significant and try to rebuild the decimated city, or rekindle the glowing ember of the Civil Rights era and ensure racial and class equality around the country.

Overall, “the media [during the Los Angeles riots] played an integral role in shaping America’s view of the situation via their portrayal of the riots on television. Viewers were exposed to terrible, violent, and chaotic shots of the streets.”¹⁸⁷ The venomous racism that was portrayed in the Watts Riots had unfortunately not subsided by the time of the LA Riots, but these more modern riots did receive more positive press coverage. The authors of “Remote Control: How News Media Delegitimized Rioting as Social Protest” go on to explain that “it might be argued that after watching the footage, they turned to the print media to make sense of what they had seen. Unfortunately, print media took full advantage of the opportunity to insist that such rioting had no legitimate function as a political statement.”¹⁸⁸ Even though some news sources were able to give credence to the role of riotous behaviors in society by showing the actual footage of the events and letting the viewer make their own assumption about the riots, many were not willing to legitimize the horrors seen on screen. What is even more horrific is that “mediated narratives that framed the riots as a racial (and therefore Black) issue... invited mainstream readers and viewers to perceive the riots as a futile, even ridiculous response to social unrest.”¹⁸⁹ Where many members of the (white) public viewed the riots as a “Black issue,” they did not see the need for the riots to be happening on such a large scale at all. Repeatedly throughout history, African Americans standing up for their beliefs was seen as futile and was underappreciated by the general American population. Amitava Kumar authored an opinion

¹⁸⁷ Shannon Campbell, Phil Chidester, Jamel Bell, and Jason Royer, “Remote Control: How Mass Media Delegitimize Rioting as Social Protest,” *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 1 (2004): 173.

¹⁸⁸ Shannon Campbell, Phil Chidester, Jamel Bell, and Jason Royer, “Remote Control: How Mass Media Delegitimize Rioting as Social Protest,” 173.

¹⁸⁹ Shannon Campbell, Phil Chidester, Jamel Bell, and Jason Royer, “Remote Control: How Mass Media Delegitimize Rioting as Social Protest,” 163.

piece for *Economic and Political Weekly* that described this effort by the white media. He personally felt as though “the rhetoric of rising black protest during the past few weeks has been an attempt to tell a singular story of unrelenting white-on-black violence and abuse. Black leaders insist that this is the picture we should be getting on screens, and everything else is, quite literally, white noise.”¹⁹⁰ Kumar discredited the ongoing riots in his own way by arguing that Black leaders were not willing to accept any other view of the Rodney King incident than racism. What Kumar does not fully comprehend is that racism has systematically persisted and trapped African Americans into financially and politically disenfranchised situations and this is a legitimate way to make their perspectives noticed where other, nonviolent, tactics had not worked prior. During the Civil Rights era, Watts was the result of nonviolence not working for all African Americans, such as those in increasingly urban areas. The same goes for the Los Angeles Riots when LBJ’s War on Poverty did not actually help the impoverished.

The Rodney King verdict not only sent shockwaves through the mass media, but minority-owned media felt the effects of the oncoming riots as well. Minority media and the mainstream, predominantly white, media covered the riotous events incredibly differently. The minority newspapers “are often aligned with the leading economic, cultural and social institutions in their own communities, and as such, perform vital ideological work within their communities by representing the interests of their communities’ leading classes.”¹⁹¹ For many papers, this meant speaking to the disadvantaged African American community (economically and politically), rather than the minority upper classes. Because of this, the African American-owned *Los Angeles*

¹⁹⁰ Amitava Kumar, “Los Angeles Riots and Television,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 26 (1992): 1311.

¹⁹¹ Jane L. Twomey, “Newspaper Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising: Race, Place, and the Story of the ‘Riot’: Racial Ideology in African American and Korean American Newspapers.” *Race, Gender & Class* 8, no. 4 (2001): 149.

Sentinel painted Rodney King in the form of a “martyr and a symbol of moral temperance who rises ‘above his own personal anger, disappointment and fear of being a public figure to make an appeal for reason and calm.’”¹⁹² This is reminiscent of how Martin Luther King Jr. was portrayed as both men were seen for wanting nonviolence. The story of Rodney King was expressed repeatedly in the media, and, “in journalists’ telling, King suffered brutality unimaginable so that (white) audiences across the United States could see what African Americans had claimed was institutionalized for centuries: racism.”¹⁹³ This way of sharing King’s story gave credence to the African American community’s claims of police brutality that had been happening for centuries and was built into the American criminal justice system. Similar instances of sharing the brutality that was inflicted upon the African American community was noticed in the Civil Rights era, such as showing photographs of Emmett Till in his casket in print media so that the entire world, or at least America, could see the horrors that African Americans faced at the hands of whites. Change now had to happen within law enforcement.

Public Policy

American public policy in the discussion of Civil Rights has often been questioned in term of its efficacy. The policies that result from riots are important to discuss as “riots are political acts in which participants engage in violence to express grievances and attempt to spur policy change.”¹⁹⁴ The authors of “Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the Aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot” found that “a riot can help build support for

¹⁹² Jane L. Twomey, “Newspaper Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising: Race, Place, and the Story of the ‘Riot’: Racial Ideology in African American and Korean American Newspapers,” 145.

¹⁹³ Nicole Maurantonio, “Remembering Rodney King: Myth, Racial Reconciliation, and Civil Rights History,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2014): 745.

¹⁹⁴ Ryan D. Enos, Aaron R. Kaufman, and Melissa L. Sands, “Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the Aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot,” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4 (2019): 1012.

policy or symbolic goals by mobilizing supporters or building sympathy among others... [and] that white and African American voters were mobilized to register [to vote], that new registrants tended to affiliate as Democrats, and that voters shifted their policy support towards public schools.”¹⁹⁵ All phases of Civil Rights activism engage in some form of push to give minorities the right to vote and engage in their political system; this was naturally the main goal of the SCLC in the 1960s. Just as during the Civil Rights era as well, there was a thrust to integrate public schools so that all children would have access to an equal education. Black school notoriously lacked in the resources that they were able to provide to their students, which unfortunately did not change after integration. Funding in the urban areas of the country, such as much of Los Angeles, did not have an exorbitant amount of school funding coming in through property taxes. Where African American disproportionately live in low-income areas, their schools are inherently less well-funded and African American students suffer academically because of it. After the Los Angeles Riots, there was an increase in voters who were willing to fund public schools, which may be related to the increase in new, Black voters.

In The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles commissioned by the LAPD, they describe all of the key concerns that the community of Los Angeles faced around racial segregation. In response to “the fundamental problems of our society as a whole,” they note that “these [racial issues] are terribly important problems to solve, but this is not the job of our police departments. These problems are the responsibility of our elected national, state and local governments to

¹⁹⁵Ryan D. Enos, Aaron R. Kaufman, and Melissa L. Sands, “Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the Aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot,” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4 (2019): 1026.

solve.”¹⁹⁶ The LAPD completely removes any law enforcement responsibility at the helm of the cause of the riots, and instead places the blame on public officials. The pamphlet goes on to propose five new policies for the LAPD, including that they “should implement a training program to increase the level of understanding with regard to the special concerns of the many diverse communities and cultures that now populate Los Angeles, and to ensure that LAPD police officers treat all individuals in the city with equal dignity and respect.”¹⁹⁷ Although education is one of the most important ways to reduce racism and cultural misunderstandings, this is a policy that should have been instituted in the primarily white LAPD earlier, where they police such a diverse location.

From both the Watts Riots and the Los Angeles Riots came little actual political change, but Watts had at least helped to make Johnson’s War on Poverty stronger, even though it had only started the year prior with the Economic Opportunity Act.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, violence did not have the impact that the rioters had hoped because, “though these eruptions had their roots in poverty and racism, inadequate housing, poor schools, and lack of jobs, many Americans came to associate the violence with the poverty programs that had been created to offer the poor a way out.”¹⁹⁹ White people especially who did not live in disadvantaged areas did not have eye-witness experiences of the ghettos and other low-income locations to base their opinions on; all they were aware of was that, yes, there was an issue of poverty, but also that the Johnson

¹⁹⁶ William H. Webster, and Hubert Williams, “The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles,” Office of the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners City of Los Angeles, 1992, 175.

¹⁹⁷ William H. Webster, and Hubert Williams, “The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles,” 177.

¹⁹⁸ Annelise Orleck, “Introduction: The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” In *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011): 14.

¹⁹⁹ Annelise Orleck, “Introduction: The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” In *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, 14.

Administration and the administrations after his had been working towards achieving economic equality for these individuals through the War on Poverty. The Black community looked unappreciative, from the perspective of whites, for not accepting the new anti-poverty programs with open hearts and as suitable restitution for the past wrongs that had been committed against them. Johnson was attacked on all sides regarding his War on Poverty, ultimately making it so that little progress was actually made. No other significant policies were the result of the Watts Riots, just as there were not many political gains as an outcome of the Los Angeles Riots. This fact does not disprove the inefficacy of the Black Power Movement because the goal of BPM was not to enact legislative actions or political change; their primary goal was to relieve the burden of real people suffering from poverty and other hardships, which they did accomplish with their various social programs.

Leaders

There is much comparison to be made between the Watts Riots of 1965 and the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. One comparison that is often made is that there were leaders who spoke out about the riots while they were going on. Emmitt Till, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. come to mind for comparison. Nicole Maurantonio writes that “Rodney King was not unlike other icons of the civil rights movement, such as Emmett Till, the 14-year-old African American boy killed by two white men in Money, Mississippi, in 1955, whose story found itself repeated in journalistic meditations on Rodney King’s life.”²⁰⁰ Emmitt Till and Rodney King’s name were both used as an emotive tactic in the media to gain more support for their respective protests/riots and promote social and political change. King and Till were both the subjects of circumstance,

²⁰⁰ Nicole Maurantonio, “Remembering Rodney King: Myth, Racial Reconciliation, and Civil Rights History,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2014): 745.

which is often how they were portrayed in the media. Rodney King did not go searching to be brutalized by the police as a political statement in 1991 just as Till had not put himself into the position to be murdered wrongfully by a white man. All of these incidents were unfortunate, unlucky circumstances that were a regular part of African American life. On the other hand, there were Civil Rights figures that King had been compared to in the media that were less justifiable, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. For example, “not only was Rosa Parks a very deliberate icon, an activist who carefully strategized her place within the civil rights movement, but also, Rodney King’s beating was not simply the product of ‘bad luck.’”²⁰¹ In this case, King was beaten for the color of his skin, just as Rosa Parks was removed from her seat on the bus for the color of hers. Parks deliberately sat on the bus in an act of protest that day, while King was targeted by the LAPD without provocation. Due to Rodney King’s infamous speech relating to ending the riots, asking if we could “all just get along,” he was also compared to Martin Luther King Jr. Maurantonio writes that “the comparison between Rodney King and Martin Luther King Jr. suggests their collective goal of advancing the Civil Rights Movement and significance in catalyzing change. However, Rodney King’s question bore none of the markers of polish and rehearsal that defined Martin Luther King’s oratory.”²⁰² Rodney and Martin both did promote racial equality, but they did not share the same characteristics and pedigree of leadership. Martin Luther King Jr., similarly to Rosa Parks, was trained for non-violence with various strategies to help him successfully communicate with Black and white audiences. Rodney did not have the time to become trained in leadership skills as he was thrust into the media so abruptly. Ella Jo Baker would have been a great asset to Rodney King after

²⁰¹ Nicole Maurantonio, “Remembering Rodney King: Myth, Racial Reconciliation, and Civil Rights History,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2014): 745.

²⁰² Nicole Maurantonio, “Remembering Rodney King: Myth, Racial Reconciliation, and Civil Rights History,” 746.

having prepared the SNCC youth for the media frenzy that followed their political activities in the 1960s.

Conclusion

The Civil Rights Movement largely failed to speak to African Americans outside of the American South who lived in decaying urban cities, or those who might not have faced segregation at lunch counters or on busses on a daily basis. Blacks around the United States, especially urban Blacks who were the primary demographic of Black Power activists, suffered from economic disenfranchisement, a lack of political representation, minimal school funding, and other hardships that were not targeted by the Civil Rights Movement. The gains, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, made by CRM were necessary for Blacks nation-wide to feel as though they had any sort of political power. When no real motivations to help the urban People of Color by CRM activists were noticed by, primarily, Black youth, the Black Power Movement began to show its aggressive nature and tackle the problems with “revolutionary violence.”²⁰³ 1965 was a major turning point for African Americans as not only was Malcolm X assassinated, but the Watts Riots introduced rioting as a legitimate form of protest and other urban riots followed. Self-defense became a clear way to combat the beatings that the African American community had emotionally and physically suffered for centuries. Both movements hoped to end racial discrimination, but used their own tactics (namely nonviolence and self-defense) to ensure gains were made towards equality.

Although the Civil Rights Movement is already respected in the historical community, the Black Power Movement is often left out of the Civil Rights era narrative as having any sort of measurable impact on the fight for racial equality. What many historians fail to recognize is that CRM emphasized legal wins as necessary advancements towards a more equitable society,

²⁰³ Alfredo Rostgaard, “Black Power – Retaliation to Crime: Revolutionary Violence” poster published by the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. 1968. Black Power (Black Pride). National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.

where BPM tasked itself with protecting the Black community as well as nourishing their bellies and souls, with or without favorable political practices that would garner national attention. The Panthers in particular offered a variety of aid programs to urban Americans that CRM had no desire to implement when the Black community needed them most. Some of these programs are as follows:

“starting with the Party’s celebrated Free Breakfast for Children Program, the BPINS informed readers of the existence, meaning, and availability of these programs operating under the slogan ‘Survival Pending Revolution.’ Thus, there is a record that thousands upon thousands of people without medical could and did benefit from the Party’s Free Clinics, as the hungry benefited from the Party’s Free Food Programs, as still others were assisted by the Party’s Free Shoe, Free Legal Aid, Free Busing to Prisons, Free Pest Control Programs, and more than 30 other Survival Programs the Party proffered the people over the years, including its model elementary school, the Oakland Community Learning Center.”²⁰⁴

The Black Power Movement assisted people where they needed it most, whether it be for a fair education, medical care, law enforcement related issues, or a vast number of other concerns. BPM accomplished what CRM was unable to do, and what caused many nonviolent supporters, such as Ella Baker and Stokely Carmichael, to consider alternatives to the Civil Rights Movement.

The lack of overall media attention that was given to the Black Power Movement, as well as the negative attention they received for enacting riots or other violent tactics, downplayed the efficacy of BPM. Where CRM had helped to enact legislation, their cause was seen as being more legitimate even though the ideological basis for both movements was essentially the same. BPM chronicled its own political and social activities fortunately, through avenues such as the *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, which allows us now to see the wide scope of their labor. Although these documents of course present their own bias, it does not discredit the overt

²⁰⁴ David Hilliard, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980* (New York: Atria Books, 2008): ix-x.

racism the mass media portrayed when discussing riots and other actions of self-defense. Programs like “Survival Pending Revolution” were not often discussed in the mass (essentially white) media, so there was little knowledge of the advances made by Black Power activists to support impoverished communities. What is interesting as well is that BPM supported poor whites (as well as the LGBTQIA+ community, women of all racial background in their pursuit of equality, and other disadvantaged groups), yet there was little information published in the 1960s and 1970s regarding the aid that they provided to others. Many whites were critical of CRM and felt it might be a way for Blacks to become more powerful than whites, yet when a movement comes along that clearly stands for equality of more than just themselves, the media was not willing to represent them, and their primary leader was assassinated. Unlike in the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power continued to grow and find new supporters in the Black community even when one of its primary leaders had been assassinated.

Future Directions

The field of African American history has been underdeveloped and underappreciated for much of American history, so there are large gaps that can be noticed in the historiography of any topic related to the Black community. In many cases, historians are not even able to agree on what definitively caused the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, for example. A few key gaps will be discussed here that would give future historians a potential direction to point their research in the direction of. One major gap, that is sometimes mentioned in many works of literature, but never fully explained, is the effect that the Cold War had on both of the Civil Rights era movements. The Civil Rights era coincided with the Cold War era, yet are rarely discussed in relation to each other, as if foreign and domestic issues have no impact on one another. Martin Luther King Jr. was accused of being a communist consistently throughout his

time as a CRM leader because he was critical of the exorbitant military funding being funneled into the Vietnam War when he simply wanted the American government to take care of its own citizens before medaling in another country's political ideology. Many African Americans were either not in support of the war or were similarly critical of it when they examined the ill effects that capitalism was having on the Black community domestically. A.T. Callinicos, author of the "Meaning of Los Angeles Riots," expressed that "the links drew between a racist power structure at home and an imperialist war in Asia was summed up by Muhammed Ali's explanation for his refusal of the military draft: 'No Vietnamese ever called me nigger.'"²⁰⁵ It is not surprising that many African Americans, celebrities or otherwise, felt that the Vietnam War, a direct product of the Cold War, was not in their best interest to pursue; the Vietnamese had never wronged them like the white man had.

Presidents such as John F. Kennedy also noticed the effects that ending segregation and other similar policies had on the relationship the United States was attempting to nurture with other countries that were believed to be liable to embrace communism. Kennedy was willing to accept desegregation so that the United States would appear to have more equality on the surface as a political strategy to spread their influence to nations around the world. This idea can be best described when Robert Dallek, author of "John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Quandary," articulates how Kennedy "saw an end to racial strife in the South as essential to America's international standing in its competition with Moscow for influence in Third World countries."²⁰⁶ This is the only line in the entire article that pins international diplomatic relations to the Civil Rights policies that the United States enacted at the height of the Civil Rights Movements influence.

²⁰⁵ A.T. Callinicos, "Meaning of Los Angeles Riots," *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 30 (1992): 1603.

²⁰⁶ Robert Dallek, "John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Quandary," *American History* 38, no. 3 (2003): 36.

This is incredibly important to note as it can further disprove the perceived success of CRM. If more evidence was available to articulate just how important the Cold War was to the Kennedy Administration agreeing to reform and create Civil Rights legislation, it can prove that the global community, not so much CRM itself, was actually responsible for the political changes. This, coupled with the assassination of great BPM activists, can showcase how the Black Power Movement was actually much more influential and powerful than the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, the Kennedy Administration found that “the highly visible fight for racial reform... was documented by American media, and widely broadcasted around the world, adversely affecting the United States’ international standing.”²⁰⁷ If the movement had less international media attention, it is difficult to determine what political actions would have taken place with only the pressure of the Civil Rights Movement.

Another historiological gap that was noticed, which can also be related to Cold War relations, in the available literature was the lack of representation regarding how the global community responded to both BPM and CRM. *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service* was distributed in countries as far away as China, yet the response that this country and others had to the Black Power newspaper is not often reported. Furthermore, figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. traveled internationally to garner attention and support for the Black Freedom Movement in America. The international community suffered a great loss with the death of Malcolm X, as was seen in the discussion of “Malcolm X Assassination Protests” by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. As the Kennedy Administration was also seeking

²⁰⁷ Ofra Friesel, “Changing the American Race Narrative, 1962-1965: Transparency as a Guiding Rule in American Cold War Diplomacy,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (2015): 169.

international respect regarding their domestic Civil Rights policies, there is no reason why this gap should go unanswered for long.

In recent years, the Civil Rights era historiography has been moving away from viewing Civil Rights issues as a solely racial issue, and are now further discussing economic and class divisions as a root cause of the Black Power Movement. BPM tended to have a greater focus on extending equality to all persons in disadvantaged states, while CRM was ultimately a program that affected southern Blacks. For example, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were “ultimately believing class oppression, not racial discrimination, to be at root of the people’s suffering.”²⁰⁸ The two leaders “situated the Party’s food programs and later community service work as necessary measures to ensure the physical survival of poor communities... Such efforts afforded the Party a vital means of heightening the consciousness of the hungry poor and working classes to the various forms of their oppression.”²⁰⁹ BPM started a trend that continues into the contemporary world where more than one population of disenfranchised people can work together to fight injustice; in this case being the poor and Blacks, unfortunately often falling in the same category. Many Civil Rights leaders, on the other hand, felt that racism was truly the root cause of African American oppression and that career status had nothing to do with Blacks being disenfranchised. Amitava Kumar, author of “Los Angeles Riots and Television,” pointed out that “a black minister from the Southern Christiann Leadership Conference, speaking at a protest said: ‘They’ll tell you the problem is not racism, but unemployment. Oh no! During the days of slavery, everyone had unemployment and that didn’t help us one bit.’”²¹⁰ Even the most

²⁰⁸ Mary Potorti, “‘Feeding the Revolution’: The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival,” *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017): 86.

²⁰⁹ Mary Potorti, “‘Feeding the Revolution’: The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival,” 86.

²¹⁰ Amitava Kumar, “Los Angeles Riots and Television,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 26 (1992): 1311.

influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement did not feel as though economic or career status had anything to do with the racial oppression felt by the Black community; racism is racism, in short. More investigation into how the Civil Rights era turned from an issue of racism to class division and attacks of capitalism would be a great addition to the current historiography of this topic to determine further reasoning for the Black Power Movement seceding from the Civil Rights Movement.

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