

THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING IN URBAN  
PARKS IN CLEVELAND, OHIO, 1945-1977

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

African American residents of Cleveland, Ohio made significant contributions to their city's public recreation landscape during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Public parks were important urban spaces—serving as central gathering spots for surrounding neighborhoods and unifying symbols of community identity. When access to these spaces was denied or limited along lines of race, gender, sexuality, or class, parks became tangible locations of exclusion, physical manifestations of the often invisible but understood fault lines of power that fractured, and continues to fracture, urban landscapes. In Cleveland, black activists challenged these fault lines through organizing protests, developing alternative community-run recreation spaces, and demanding more parks and playgrounds in their neighborhoods.

This dissertation considers five recreation spaces in Cleveland—a neighborhood park, a swimming pool, a cultural garden, a playground, and a community-run recreation center—in order to make three important interventions into the scholarship on black urban Midwest communities and postwar African American freedom struggles. First, this dissertation takes up spatial analysis of black activism for improved public recreation opportunities, and argues this activism was an important, if often understudied, component of broader Black Freedom Movement campaigns in the urban north. In particular, focusing on recreational spaces allows for a deeper consideration of how young people and children factored into Black Freedom Movement campaigns. Second this dissertation looks at the role of parks and playgrounds in black urban life, arguing that these spaces facilitated intra-racial class production and became significant sites for black participation in the urban public sphere. Finally, Cleveland is understudied in both post-War Black Freedom Movement studies and black urban studies, and this dissertation argues that the events that unfolded in Cleveland were important to understanding these broader national histories.

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## INTRODUCTION

In August 1976 the *Call and Post*, the weekly black newspaper for the city of Cleveland, Ohio, ran a photograph of a smiling African American boy of about four or five years of age, happily playing on a swing set outside an apartment building. The story accompanying the photo explained that this cheerful image was only made possible because of a more than fifteen-month rent strike led by the tenants of the Rainbow Terrace Apartments to improve conditions at the facility.<sup>1</sup> The federally subsidized 486-unit complex had first been constructed between 1957 and 1961, and was located in the Kinsman neighborhood, an area in the south-central part of the city with a predominantly black population. In the decade and a half that followed construction, the complex was allowed to fall into ruin by the property managers and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The lone recreational apparatus at the site had been reduced to a “rusty structure where there used to be a hoop and swings.” Only about 250 units remained occupied, as many of the first-floor apartments and two whole buildings in the complex stood empty of tenants and filled with trash. Rats and roaches plagued the residences, a lack of security lights made the tenants feel unsafe, and electrical and water services stopped intermittently. When in 1974 the management company sought to increase rents without addressing any of these problems, many of the tenants declared a rent strike.<sup>2</sup>

Led by tenant association president Marcella McIntyre, the strikers collected the rents of participating tenants and held them in a special fund until management answered demands for facility improvements. At the peak of the strike, more than 100 tenants participated, although the numbers fell below 90 as some left the facility to find other housing or tired of the protracted

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<sup>1</sup> “Rent Strike Brings Results To Rainbow Terrace,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 28, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Baade, “Lucas Routs Rainbow Terrace,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 7, 1976.

battle. As the strike wore on for months, the strikers attempted various tactics to resolve their grievances. In September 1974, McIntyre arranged for a walk-through of the facility with the local Federal Housing Authority Director, Charles Lucas and African American U.S. Representative, Louis Stokes. While the two men were appalled at the conditions they saw, action was slow in coming. Undeterred, McIntyre led a rally of about 100 tenants and their supporters and organized a trip to Washington D.C. so that some of the tenants could talk directly with HUD administrators. Finally, after more than a year of organized protests and negotiations, the tenants reached an agreement with HUD that called for \$1.5 million dollars in improvements to the housing complex, including the construction of ten new playground areas and basketball courts.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, by 1976 the *Call and Post* could run the smiling picture of the African American child playing on one of the new swing sets at Rainbow Terrace. Throughout the urban Midwest during the second half of the twentieth century many photographs of black children enjoying recreation facilities shared similar back stories. While rarely codified into law or statute as it was in the U.S. South, *de facto* recreational apartheid and unequal services shaped the urban landscape of the industrialized North. It was only through the sustained struggle and organizing efforts of multiple black urban residents that this landscape of unequal recreation was challenged and changed. Often these struggles over recreation services intersected with black activists' campaigns over work, schooling or housing, as was the case at Rainbow Terrace in Cleveland. Fair use of recreational facilities became key sites in larger campaigns for black

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Baade, "Lucas Tours Rainbow Terrace," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 7, 1974; "Rent Strikers Rally," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 19, 1975; "Rainbow Terrace Tenant Strike Near Accord," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 28, 1975; Carol Dumas, "Judges Reversal Brings Ninety Day Peace To Rainbow Terrace," October 4, 1975; and, "Rent Strike Brings Results to Rainbow Terrace," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 28, 1976.



access and a right to the city in the post-World War II period. Examining these recreational struggles can provide insight into the aims, tactics and legacies of the Black Freedom Movement in the urban North, and allow for a fuller understanding of how black residents shaped the vernacular urban landscapes that they called home.

This dissertation takes up part of this work by examining how Civil Rights and Black Power activists challenged *de facto* recreation apartheid in Cleveland and changed the urban cultural landscape in the process. I start from the premise that public parks were important spaces—serving as central gathering spots for surrounding neighborhoods and unifying symbols of community identity. When access to these spaces was denied or limited along lines of race, gender, sexuality, or class, parks became tangible locations of exclusion, physical manifestations of the often invisible but understood fault lines of power that fractured, and continues to fracture, urban landscapes. In Cleveland, black activists challenged these fault lines through organizing protests, developing alternative community-run recreation spaces, and demanding more parks and playgrounds in their neighborhoods. Recreation spaces were not footnotes to other Black Freedom Movement struggles, but were rather pivotal sites for the development of race relations in the city.

My study of Cleveland makes three important interventions into the scholarship on black urban Midwest communities and postwar African American freedom struggles. First, my work takes up a spatial analysis of black activism for improved public recreation opportunities, and argues this activism was an important, if often understudied, component of broader Black Freedom Movement campaigns in the urban north. In particular, focusing on recreational spaces allows for a deeper consideration of how young people and children factored into Black Freedom Movement campaigns. Second my work looks at the role of parks and playgrounds in black

urban life, arguing that these spaces facilitated intra-racial class production and became significant sites for black participation in the urban public sphere. Finally, Cleveland is understudied in both post-War Black Freedom Movement studies and black urban studies, and I argue that the events that unfolded in Cleveland were important to understanding these broader national histories. An examination of black activism over sites of public recreation will help begin to uncover the role of Clevelanders in these broader histories.

### **The Importance of Public Recreation Space to the Black Freedom Movement**

Recreation spaces were significant sites of organizing in the Black Freedom Movement in urban northern cities. I use the term “Black Freedom Movement” to describe time period of 1945-1975, encompassing three phases—the post-World War II activism that was a precursor to the Civil Rights Movement; the Civil Rights Movement; and the Black Power Movement. I approach these three phases as distinct but overlapping in terms of tactics and ideology, but also collectively forming a Black Freedom Movement that unfolded over three decades.<sup>4</sup> I argue that struggles to access recreation spaces were very important throughout the Black Freedom Movement in Cleveland, and in particular during the initial postwar phase and during Black Power.

Recent scholarship has begun to more fully consider struggles over public recreation accommodations, especially in the urban North. Some of the most notable scholarship includes Jeff Wilste’s 2007 book *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Thomas Sugrue’s 2009 book, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in*

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of much of the significant scholarship concerning the periodization of the Black Freedom Movement, see Cha-Jua Keita Sundiata and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Spring 2007).

*the North*, and Victoria Wolcott's 2012 book, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*. Collectively, these works provide a general overview of the campaigns to desegregate northern urban public recreation spaces, especially beaches, pools and amusement parks in the immediate postwar years. While these works do provide a well-researched national picture of these struggles, as overviews they do not delve deeply into the particulars of the local events and activists that shaped any one campaign.

I take up such a local analysis to uncover the reasons for the significance of recreation space to the Black Freedom Movement. Much scholarly work has been done to theorize the origins, development, tactics and impacts of the Black Freedom Movement. One of the most important contributions is Aldon D. Morris's groundbreaking 1984 work, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, which presents an indigenous model of "resource mobilization theory" to explain the origins and efficacy of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>5</sup> In his conclusion, Morris explains: "The resource mobilization theory emphasizes the resources necessary for the initiation and development of movements." These resources include "formal and informal organizations, leaders, money, people and communication networks." This is an excellent rubric by which to study the origins of Civil Rights activism. My project utilizes and adds to this theoretical framework—by insisting that the role of public space, and in particular public parks, are resources that must be counted as important to the Black Freedom Movement's development and successes.

In making this argument, my work joins Black Freedom Movement scholarship with works in cultural geography, which have argued persuasively for a more robust consideration of

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the Resource Mobilization Theory, see Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973); and William Gamson, *The Study of Social Protest* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1975).

the role of public space in social movements. French theorist Henri Lefebvre's writings, including 1974's *The Production of Space*, made the case for the importance of public space and a consideration of spatial relationships to social movements. Lefebvre insisted that "a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential."<sup>6</sup> Claiming and producing public spaces that reflect the demands and desires of participants are what allow social movements to be seen, heard, and materialized on urban landscapes. Lefebvre's theoretical work became a starting point for scholars seeking to understand how public space contributed to, and was also produced by, social movements, including most notably the work of Marxist geographer David Harvey. Cultural geographer Don Mitchell's work also intentionally echoes Lefebvre, especially in his assertion: "Revolutions entail a taking to the streets and taking of public space."<sup>7</sup> Yet one limit to Lefebvre's theoretical contributions was, as geographer Eugene McCann has argued, a "glaring omission of any explicit discussion of the role of racial identities."<sup>8</sup> Subsequent scholars have sought to bring race into the conversation of public space and social movements, and my work is part of that effort.

Notable among these scholars is George Lipsitz, who has argued: "African American battles for resources, rights, and recognition have not only *taken place* in the figurative term that historians use to describe how events happen, but they also require blacks literally to *take*

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Lefebvre, translated by David Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell Publishing: Malden, Massachusetts, original 1974, 1991 edition), 54.

<sup>7</sup> Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, New York, 2003), 149.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene J. McCann, "'Race, Protest and Public Space,' Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City," *Antipode*, 31:2, 164.

*places.*”<sup>9</sup> Parks and public recreation venues such as swimming pools and beaches were often some of the first targets of desegregation efforts in northern urban centers during the initial postwar phase of the Black Freedom Movement—as was the case in Cleveland. Black activists sought to *take* these places, through staging protests, waging rhetorical campaigns in the local press, and simply showing up at segregated recreation spots and demanding service.

I argue that claiming public recreation space was for black activists a symbolic claim to full citizenship and what Lefebvre, David Harvey and Don Mitchell have described as a demand for a “right to the city.” As Victoria Wolcott has noted in her study of the Congress of Racial Equality’s (CORE) efforts to desegregate public recreation accommodations in the urban north in the 1940s, these campaigns were central to CORE’s strategies in these cities.<sup>10</sup> Wolcott explained: “[T]he struggle for desegregated public accommodations was never fully distinct from the struggle for equal access to housing and employment. A local swimming pool or playground was an extension of the neighborhood, and as the racial composition of neighborhoods changed, urban dwellers contested these spaces.”<sup>11</sup> Challenging recreation discrimination was one way the Black Freedom Movement confronted a broader landscape of urban oppression.

Further, focusing on campaigns over recreation spaces allows for a fuller accounting of youth in the Black Freedom Movement in the urban north. Black adult activists framed many of the campaigns over parks and swimming pools as efforts on *behalf* of youth. At the same time

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<sup>9</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race; Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Journal*, 26:1, 2007, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters*, 4.

these campaigns were also shaped *by* youth—and not always in the ways that adults hoped for or expected. I argue that considering age or generational differences, along with class and gender differences, within urban black communities is important to understanding how Black Freedom campaigns developed, and where possible I seek to uncover the voices of youth engaged in and impacted by these struggles.

A spatial-approach allows my work to consider the intersections of race, class, gender and age in shaping the urban landscape. For as critical geographer Edward Soja has insisted, geography is “stubbornly simultaneous”; or in the words of another critical geographer, Doreen Massey, using a spatial framework allows for the “existence of multiplicity” to be seen.<sup>12</sup> The vernacular spatial meanings of recreation space in Cleveland were never singular; they were always multiple, as were the meanings of vernacular landscapes throughout the urban North. These meanings were constructed through the intentions and expectations brought to these spaces by civic and community leaders, and voices from the pages of local newspapers, and they were also constructed by the actions of those who visited the sites themselves. Historian Kathy Oberdeck has argued that the 1930s and 1950s workers strikes in the company town of Kohler, Wisconsin were waged in part “over the arrangement of space, the meaning of place, and their implications for intertwined constructions of class and gender.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, black political activism around access to public recreation amenities in Cleveland emerged from, and contributed to “intertwined constructions” of race, age, generation, gender and class.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 2; and, Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Kathy Oberdeck, “Class Place and Gender: Contested Industrial and Domestic Space in Kohler, Wisconsin, USA, 1920-1960,” in *Gender and History*, 13:1, 2001, 98.

In *Production of Space*, Lefebvre argued that space is a social product. He theorized that there were three phases in this process of producing space. The first level was through what he called the *representations of space*, or the abstract or planned usages of spaces conceived by city planners. The second was through *spatial practices*, or the daily lived experiences and navigations through a given space by those who used it. Finally, the third level was *representational spaces*, or the perceived representations of a given space presented in forums such as a newspaper stories or editorial cartoons. I examine all three levels of the production of Cleveland's black public recreation spaces, looking at the perspective of City Hall, the park users themselves, and the representations of these spaces in the city's newspapers.

Especially at the level of representations in newspapers, my analysis considers how Black Freedom Movement activists and their opponents used spatial rhetoric in shaping their claims on public recreation. For example, throughout the urban north white residents often described potential black homeowners as 'outsiders' or 'invaders' into their territory, employing a spatial metaphor to explain their racism. Considering these types of spatial rhetoric and broader socio-spatial relationships is important if scholars are to understand how the Black Freedom Movement challenged the structures of power that shape urban settings.

### **The Importance of Public Recreation Space to Black Urban History**

The second argument driving my analysis of Cleveland parks is that recreation sites, and in particular parks, were significant spaces in U.S. black urban histories. The eminent scholar W. E. B. Du Bois argued for the importance of recreation and leisure spaces to the black urban experience in his groundbreaking 1899 study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, which was the first significant scholarship published on African American urban life. Du Bois points out that while

“[t]here is always a strong tendency on the part of the community to consider the Negroes as composing one practically homogeneous mass,” this is not an accurate perspective. Sound black urban scholarship must consider intra-racial class differences, and according to DuBois sites of recreation and leisure marked some of the most important locations for the construction and practice of such black class-based identities.<sup>14</sup>

For over more than a century much significant scholarship has built on this premise elaborated in *The Philadelphia Negro*. This scholarship has demonstrated that consideration of recreation and leisure is particularly important to understanding urban black class development. For as historian Clarence Lang has argued in his study of St. Louis: “As a racially oppressed and unassimilated people within the U.S. polity, African Americans historically have lacked a fully formed class structure.”<sup>15</sup> Since oppression has curtailed black access to many forms of employment and procurement of capital, activities such as church attendance, social club membership or where one chose to spend his or her leisure hours became important indicators of class status within black urban populations. Kimberley L. Phillips recognized the importance of social spaces, particularly churches, in black urban class production during the early twentieth century in her study of Cleveland, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-45*.<sup>16</sup> I take up a similar understanding of class-consciousness as rooted not solely in employment or property but as also constructed through social leisure practices.

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<sup>14</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, rev. ed. (1899, rep., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, original 1996), 309.

<sup>15</sup> Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-1975* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Kimberley Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-45* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999), see especially Chapter 5.



Other scholars have also taken up Du Bois's charge to reject the homogenization of the black urban life and have considered the importance of recreation, leisure and sport in the constructions of black class identities. Such scholarship is rich and varied. Some of the works that I have drawn from include Robin D.G. Kelley's 1999 book, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, which has as part of its project a rejection of the "kind of subtle essentialism that treats African American culture in the singular."<sup>17</sup> Kelley instead argues for the recognition of a robust black working-class politics, and he locates the sites for production of this class consciousness not only in places of employment but also in the daily navigation of multiple social spaces. Likewise, Davarian Baldwin's 2007 book, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration and Black Urban Life*, locates "classed" black community production at sites of cultural consumption, including what he terms the "sporting life," which has greatly influenced my thinking on sites of sport.<sup>18</sup> In his dissertation on Chicago, Will Cooley, described how members of the "emerging black middle class," displayed their class status through newspaper reports of "parties, weddings and golf outings."<sup>19</sup> My own master's thesis on Indianapolis likewise argues that the golf course was an important site of black middle-class production.<sup>20</sup> Kevin Mumford, in *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* and Tera Hunter, in *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black*

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<sup>17</sup> Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: First Free Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes, Modernity, the Great Migration & Black Urban Life*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), "The Sporting Life: Recreation, Self-Reliance and Competing Visions of Race Manhood."

<sup>19</sup> Will Cooley, "Moving Up, Moving Out: Race and Social Mobility in Chicago, 1914-1972," (dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 1999), 312.

<sup>20</sup> Stephanie Seawell, "Douglass Park: Indianapolis' First Black Park," (master's thesis, Indiana-University, Purdue-University, Indianapolis, 2005), 38-39.

*Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, turn among other places to the dance floor as a site of urban class-race production.<sup>21</sup> One aim of this dissertation is to establish parks as additionally important urban leisure sites where race and class were produced in relationship with one another.

Recent works in the field of black environmental history have also recognized the importance of recreation space to the black urban life. In *African American Environmental Thought*, Kimberly K. Smith argues:

Thus one impact of segregation, often noted by blacks (if not by white environmentalists), was to deny or at least make difficult blacks' access to urban parks. More subtly, however, this racial apartheid connected the social control of blacks to control of the landscape, which in turn connected the meaning of the landscape to racial identity.<sup>22</sup>

The mapping of race onto the urban landscape was articulated in part by who could or could not access particular public recreation spaces. The importance of such access to urban natural resources was also pointed out by Colin Fisher, who wrote about the 1919 Chicago Race Riot, insisting the event was “not simply a story about politics, labor, and housing,” but was “importantly also a story about nature.”<sup>23</sup> Black urbanites cared about their ability to access and enjoy natural resources, and they organized to open such opportunities for themselves and their children.

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<sup>21</sup> Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and, Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 102.

<sup>23</sup> Colin Fisher, “Outdoor Recreation and the Chicago Race Riot,” *To Love the Wind and Rain* (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, 2006, 72.

Black planning and activism around urban parks and recreation helped to shape the city's vernacular landscape. Several recent works have demonstrated the contributions of black planning visions to the production of urban spaces, including Steven Gregory's 1998 book about two black neighborhoods in Queens, New York, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*, and Robert O. Self's 2003 book, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*.<sup>24</sup> Both consider how civic planning decisions and cultural-spatial arrangements affected the lives of black urbanites, and at the same time examine how black voices and actions shaped their respective urban landscapes. The most influential work of this body of scholarship to my approach to Cleveland is Charles Connerly's 2007 book, "*The Most Segregated City in America*": *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980*, which argues that the majority of urban histories has elided what he terms the "African American planning tradition" in the United States.<sup>25</sup> While fully acknowledging the very real inequities in power that determined postwar urban landscapes, Connerly demands the recognition of black visions for their cities. I start from that point of recognition, and work to uncover Cleveland's black planning tradition, arguing that some of the locations where this tradition can perhaps be most readily seen are urban parks.

### **The Importance of Cleveland to Black Freedom Movement and Black Urban History**

One recurring theme among these works of black urban history is a close attention to how local politics, economies, social institutions and community life intersected with black activism.

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<sup>24</sup> Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); and, Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Charles Connerly, "*The Most Segregated City in America*," *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2005),

This attention to political economy stems from the recognition that while Black Freedom Movement campaigns are interconnected on a national level, local events and local actors matter considerably to the black urban experience. What happened in Cleveland or Detroit might have been similar to what happened in Birmingham or Los Angeles, but it was never exactly the same. My final intervention is to take up a close analysis of black activism and community planning in Cleveland, Ohio, a city that is understudied in literatures of the black urban and Black Freedom Movement studies.

A growing body of scholarship has begun to chronicle movement efforts to desegregate schools, open housing markets, create more equitable employment opportunities and challenge racially constructed power structures in major metropolitan areas in the North.<sup>26</sup> These studies have done important work in re-centering a scholarly field that had previously focused much of its attention on the Civil Rights struggle in the Deep South. These studies of Civil Rights in the South examine how black activists dismantled *de jure* apartheid, a system of racial oppression codified by specific laws, sanctioned by the state; whereas, much of the scholarship about the movement in the north examines black activists' challenge of *de facto* apartheid, a system of racial oppression informally enforced by practice or custom. In studying Cleveland, I examine how black residents challenged *de facto* apartheid in their city, with the hope of uncovering the importance of this city's activists to larger narratives of the Black Freedom Movement. While the focus of my project is recreation, it also seeks to provide a general overview of the postwar Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in the city.

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<sup>26</sup> See for example Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway*; Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

In many ways, the history of Cleveland was typical of the black urban industrial experience in what has been called the Midwest or rustbelt region. The postwar campaigns and actions in Cleveland echoed similar efforts in Chicago, Detroit and across the region. Yet, there were also differences. Perhaps the factor that most sets Cleveland apart is that it was a city with some of the highest levels of municipal black political representation in the post-World War II period. The election of a black City Council representative in 1910 marked the first such election in a major U.S. city in the post-Reconstruction period, and thereafter Cleveland consistently elected some of the highest numbers of black representatives among U.S. cities.<sup>27</sup> By 1967, there were 29 African American City Councilors elected in the ten biggest cities across the United States, and a more than a third of them, a total of twelve, held office in Cleveland.<sup>28</sup> That same year, Cleveland became the first major U.S. city to elect an African American mayor.<sup>29</sup> Yet, this political representation was only made possible by the sharp residential apartheid in the city that concentrated black residents in several ward-level political blocs. Despite this relative political inclusion, discrimination and unequal services to black neighborhoods shaped almost every sector of daily life in Cleveland. Thus, I examine black grassroots organizing in the context of a city that had black political representation but yet was still marked by entrenched racial oppression. In addition, this activism occurred in a city where

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<sup>27</sup> Ryan Nissam-Sabat, "Panthers Set Up Shot in Cleveland," in *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Newmann and Susanne Schilling, staff paper "Political Structure and Civil Disorders" November 9, 1967 NACCD/Box 2 Johnson Presidential Library, 13, in Ashley Howard, "Prairie Fires," (dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 2012), 76.

<sup>29</sup> For information about Stokes and his election see, James Haskins, *A Piece of the Power: Four Black Mayors* (New York: The Dial Press, 1972, Chapter 1; Leonard N. Moore "Carl Stokes: Mayor of Cleveland," in David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler, eds., *African American Mayors: Race, Politics and the American City* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001), Chapter 3; Carl Stokes, *Promises of Power: A Political Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); and, Estelle Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland: The Rhetoric of Confrontation During the Stokes Years* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Western Reserve University Press, 1972).

white, and often black, political and community leadership were self-congratulatory and deeply invested in the assessment of their own liberalism.

For example, after World War II, Clevelanders formed a Community Relations Board to deal with questions of race relations.<sup>30</sup> This was a development heralded by the black weekly newspaper, the *Call and Post*:

Cleveland, long known as the most liberal metropolis in the country, intends to keep ahead of any competitors. Last Monday evening, City Council overwhelmingly passed by a margin of 31-1 an ordinance to establish a public relations board for handling interracial problems, marking the first time in the history of the nation that a city has legally attempted to solve its racial difficulties.<sup>31</sup>

This declaration by the *Call and Post* was a bit of an overstatement, as other cities had established similar councils before Cleveland's came into being. Due to such claims of progressive race relations, which were not always quite based in reality, Cleveland civic-leaders gave the city the nickname "the most Democratic city in the United States."

Yet, the founding of the Community Relations Board also signaled that Cleveland was a city that needed a means to address significant problems connected to race relations, particularly employment discrimination. While the black residents of the city stood at just under 8,500 by 1910, accounting for less than two percent of the total population, from 1910 until 1920 this population more than quadrupled as black migrants—particularly from North Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky, and increasingly after World War I, from Alabama and Mississippi—moved to Cleveland in search of employment in the city's industrial economy. By 1940, Cleveland was the sixth largest city in the nation, and its black residents exceeded 85,000, accounting for

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<sup>30</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 154.

<sup>31</sup> "Ordinance Passage Projects City As Nation's "Most Liberal"" *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 10, 1946.

roughly ten percent of the city's population. As the black population grew, so too did discrimination in schooling, housing, employment, and public accommodations. Thus, the founding of the Community Relations Board (CRB) was heralded as a sign of progressive-minded city leadership, but the practice of those leaders, as well as the responses and compliance of the city's general population to the edicts of the CRB, fell far short of stated progressive ideals.

As is evidenced by the quote published in the *Call and Post*, some members of the city's black population had a degree of investment in the myth-making around Cleveland's liberalism. Writing about the history of black Clevelanders during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, historian David Gerber has argued that the black political class in the city was often slow to respond to increasing instances of discrimination in the 1910s. He argues: "The Old Guard's failure in northern Ohio was reinforced by a particularly intense longing for a uniquely tolerant and rapidly disappearing racial milieu."<sup>32</sup> In other words, many politically connected black Clevelanders held onto the idea of a liberal and inclusive city, even as their lived experiences moved farther away from that ideal. As the twentieth century wore on, and discrimination and segregation sharpened, this conception of a liberal Cleveland became a harder pill for many black Clevelanders to swallow. While members of the local black political class recognized this discrimination and used their political capital to work against it, there remained a level of black political investment in Cleveland's liberal reputation. Consequently, working-class black activists often had to not only confront the white political superstructure of the city, but they also had to navigate relationships with the black leadership class.

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<sup>32</sup> David A. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 472.

Yet, as the existence of this tension suggests, the presence of a black political class in Cleveland was accompanied by a robust black working-class activism tradition in the city. In *AlabamaNorth*, Phillips examined the development of the city's working-class culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. Phillips described this working-class culture as one that "would rest on the sacred and secular vernacular culture that had been formed out of southern black experiences."<sup>33</sup> In particular, the 1935 founding of a local black working-class organization, the Future Outlook League (FOL), signaled a vibrant grassroots black upsurge. During the decade leading up to World War II, the FOL led a series of successful "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns, and members organized around other issues important to its largely working-class constituency.

Not enough scholarly work has been done to examine how this tradition of black grassroots working-class organizing continued after World War II to inform the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in Cleveland. One notable exception is Nishani Frazier's dissertation on the city's CORE chapter, which examines connections between CORE's organizational leadership and tactics to earlier working-class activism in the city.<sup>34</sup> My dissertation also takes up an investigation of post-War working-class activism, and argues that recreation sites became important locations on the city landscape for such efforts.

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<sup>33</sup>Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 2.

<sup>34</sup>Nishani Frazier, "Harambee Nation: Cleveland CORE Community Organization and the Rise of Black Power," (dissertation, Columbia University, 2008).



## A Further Consideration of Urban Park Spaces

Struggles over urban parks were part of a larger struggle for right and access to the city. Yet, while I approach park spaces in their broader urban context, I also argue that these spaces deserve particular attention by urban scholars. We have very little scholarship on urban parks, and less still on race and urban parks. This can be explained in part by the editors of the book, *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, who argued: “The word ‘nature’ usually calls to mind open spaces, perhaps with a few trees, wild animals or bodies of water. We often forget that these gifts from Mother Nature are also found in the midst of cities.”<sup>35</sup> Given this popular conception of nature, an “urban park” reads like an oxymoron, and thus relegates urban parks to the margins of much environmental scholarship. But recently, historians such as William Cronon have led a charge to redefine the field of environmental history. In an edited book, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, Cronon asserts: “[W]e could choose to think about nature differently, and it is sure worth pondering what would happen if we did.”<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps thinking about nature differently will lead to urban parks receiving more attention by environmental scholars in the future. In arguably the most complete book written about the history of urban parks, *The Politics of Park Design*, Galen Cranz argues that parks matter because of their role in “creating social, psychological, and political order, of planning and controlling land use, and of shaping civic form and beauty.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, urban parks were never established as merely sites for fun and games; their purpose was far more serious

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Bennet and David W. Teague, eds., *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments* (Tucson, Arizona: Arizona University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>36</sup> William Cronan, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Rethinking Nature* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 34.

<sup>37</sup> Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design; A History of Urban Parks in America* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982), xii.

than that. Parks served as spaces for the Americanization of a white, ethnic urban working class through shared recreation activities. Parks were calculated municipal investments in carefully manicured urban landscapes designed to boost the reputations of the cities where they were located.

Most historians mark the founding of Central Park in New York City in 1857 by landscape architect Frank Law Olmsted as the beginning of the urban parks movement in the United States.<sup>38</sup> In the years that followed, other cities scrambled to establish parks of their own. As the United States emerged as a world power at the turn of the century, many leaders of the young nation looked to the example of Europe as a model for the urban landscapes they wished to duplicate on their side of the Atlantic.<sup>39</sup> In the early twentieth century, some reformers in what has been referred to as the Progressive Era came to embrace a philosophy they termed the City Beautiful. City Beautiful was just what it sounded like—an effort to cleanup and beautify urban spaces. Establishing new parks was a key part of that effort.

City Beautiful attracted supporters in municipalities across the nation. Much scholarship on this era focuses on the white, middle and upper class businessmen and professionals such as attorneys and physicians, as well as the local Commercial Clubs and other organizations to which they belonged, that were at the forefront of the various urban beautification programs associated with the movement.<sup>40</sup> These individuals and organizations embraced the establishment of new parks for a variety of reasons. Some became involved because they believed that cleanup efforts could improve the real estate values of their urban properties while

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<sup>38</sup>Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 11.

<sup>39</sup> Kurt Culbertson, “George Edward Kessler Architect of the American Renaissance” in *Midwestern Landscape Architecture*, William H. Tishler, ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 101.

<sup>40</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 75.

making their city more attractive as a place to live or visit. In correspondence, public addresses and newspaper interviews, movement leaders consistently identified the economic benefit of beautification as a motivation for their activities. City leaders also saw public recreation spaces as sites for an ethnically diverse urban working class to spend its leisure time, preferable to taverns or dance halls. Parks were conceived as spaces for the Americanization of this ethnic labor force.<sup>41</sup>

Yet city elites' planning visions were not the only forces shaping urban parks. In *The Park and the People* Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar examined how everyday people used and help make New York's Central Park.<sup>42</sup> The premise of the *The Park and the People* was that much of the meaning and importance of Central Park came not from those who planned the iconic landscape, but instead from those who visited the park. Through their usage, these visitors often challenged the visions of the park planners. For example, park users insisted on playing baseball at the park despite the fact that the game did not fit into the original designed landscapes conceived by the park's founders. Working-class leisure preferences shaped the form and function of the park, suggested by the complex of baseball fields that still stands as a popular feature of the Central Park landscape. Likewise, Robin F. Bachin's *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919*, looks at how elites, middle-class reformers, especially women, along with working-class residents organized to build parks and playgrounds in Chicago. Bachin argues, convincingly, that park activism was an important space

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<sup>41</sup>For more on this era of urban planning see: Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978); Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*.

<sup>42</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992).

for women to enter the public sphere.<sup>43</sup> Don Mitchell's 2003 book, *Right to the City*, examines homeless use of park spaces in California. Robert Garcia and Erica S. Flores have written about more recent grassroots efforts by communities of color in Los Angeles to build and protect urban parks as a matter of environmental justice.<sup>44</sup> These works have greatly broadened the scope of urban parks scholarship, but to date we still have no comprehensive written work examining black use of urban park spaces. The best work on the subject, a 1995 documentary by Austin Allen entitled "Claiming Open Spaces," looks at black use of urban parks in Birmingham, Columbus, Detroit, New Orleans, and Oakland.<sup>45</sup> In examining these sites, Allen explores black resistance to official city planning visions for these spaces. What Allen's work demonstrates is that there is a local black planning vision for these parks and for their cities. I engage a similar analysis of Cleveland, Ohio, looking at five locations that were significant to black public recreation in the city.

## Chapter Outline

As illustrated by figure 1, instead of progressing chronologically through time, my chapters are organized spatially, with each chapter considering a different recreation space on Cleveland's landscape. Using the rich archival sources of city maps, newspaper photographs and other historical images, and visits to the parks themselves, these chapters approach the landscape and visual representations of that landscape as sources for historical analysis. All of the sites

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<sup>43</sup> Robin E. Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 138-167.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Garcia and Erica S. Flores, "Anatomy of the Urban Parks Movement; Equal Justice, Democracy and Livability in Los Angeles," in Robert D. Bullard, ed., *The Quest for Environmental Justice* (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 2005). 145-167.

<sup>45</sup> Austin Allen, "Claiming Open Spaces" video (Urban Garden Films, 1995).

chosen stand on Cleveland's east side, as this was the location for the vast majority of the city's black population in the postwar period.

The first chapter provides an overview of the history of Cleveland. The second chapter considers the development of the Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center (PORC). PORC served the city's oldest black enclave, the Central neighborhood. Founded in 1932 during the height of the Great Depression, this park remains an important black recreation space some nine decades later. This chapter argues that the local park became a cornerstone of neighborhood life and a space for the formation of black community identity, especially as a site for black employment and the celebration of youth sporting achievements and black masculinity. It further examines how this park was shaped by other local black institutions, and in turn contributed to the vernacular meanings of these other locations on the black landscape. Only by considering PORC in the context of this broader network of black institutions does the importance of the space truly emerge. Finally, this chapter traces how the destructive forces of urban renewal wreaked havoc on the Central neighborhood. Throughout this upheaval, PORC remained a remarkably unchanged location in the midst of change, and this stability further contributed to the significance of this park space to the local community.

If Chapter Two considers the role of park space in the heart of black Cleveland, Chapter Three turns to the periphery of the city to examine how racism affected black public recreation. This chapter conducts a close examination of both the black and white print press coverage of a desegregation campaign started by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1944 to open access to the swimming pool at suburban Garfield Park. This chapter explores how activists used citizenship-based rhetoric to challenge entrenched *de facto* discrimination. I argue that considering the suburban location of this campaign is crucial to making sense of both activists'

tactics and white responses during this decade-long desegregation effort. The structural organization of suburb and city undergirded much of the racial relations and formations in Cleveland and throughout the urban North. Finally, this chapter looks at how this activism, while opening opportunities for black use of a traditionally ethnic white public space, also precipitated a white flight from such public recreation. This increased atomization and privatization of leisure helped to usher in a sharp disinvestment in public recreation and a decline in the physical upkeep of parks throughout the city. In examining the structural organization of city and suburb, as well how the rhetoric of white responses affected this desegregation campaign and its aftermath, this chapter seeks to uncover what historian Sundiata Cha-Jua has described as “a system of oppression in which the *structural* and *ideological* components are *intertwined*.”<sup>46</sup> Considering both aspects of racism is essential to making sense of what occurred at Garfield, as well as the spaces discussed in the four subsequent chapters.

The suburbs were not the only area of Cleveland where access to public space was racially contested. Chapter Four returns to the city’s eastside, for it was there that the expanding black population encountered established white ethnic enclaves, resulting in sharp contestations over parks and other public spaces. This chapter looks at the Cultural Gardens at Rockefeller Park, a unique, elaborate garden project founded to celebrate the diverse ethnic population of Cleveland. It examines the founding of the gardens and subsequent black efforts to gain a garden space. I make the argument that in the early 1960s, as increasing numbers of white Clevelanders headed to the suburbs, black politicians jockeyed for power. Leading the effort to establish a black cultural garden became a means used by one prominent black politician as part

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<sup>46</sup> Cha-Jua, “The Changing Same: Black Racial Formation and Transformation as a Theory of the African American Experience,” in Theodore Koditzchek, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, and Helen A. Neville eds., *Race Struggles* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009).13.

of his effort to consolidate his political position. Challenges to his scheme by other black politicians demonstrate that the ability to control land use development became an important component in the exercise of local black political power.

Chapter Five considers Sowinski Playground, a small recreation space at the edge of the Rockefeller Park complex. It focuses on the summer of 1963, when six black youth were accused of raping a white female and beating her and her male companion in a small playground located on the border between one of Cleveland's largest Polish and black neighborhoods. In the aftermath of the attack, the popular press fanned city-wide hysteria. During the investigation and what came to be the longest juvenile trial in Cleveland history up to that time, local newspapers portrayed parks as dangerous landscapes, and urban park spaces became coded as black racialized, criminalized spaces. This shift in the popular perception of urban parks had material consequences on the lives of Cleveland's African American youth, especially young black men. Parks and playgrounds consequently became heavily policed spaces, and the rate of black juvenile incarceration began to increase in the city. The Sowinski case reverberated far beyond Cleveland, and was part of a nationwide trend in the popular press to characterize urban parks as dangerous landscapes.

Chapter Six examines one response from the black community to this changing urban park vernacular: the 1964 founding of the Jomo "Freedom" Kenyatta (J"F"K) House as a grassroots black working-class recreation space. It argues that J"F"K was an important site on the Cleveland landscape for the development of a Black Power politics and an African Diasporic framework for black liberation. This chapter also explores how responses from City Hall to this radical black space led to the recreation center being blamed for the 1966 Hough rebellion, leading to the center's permanent closing.

Continuing the analysis of recreation against the backdrop of urban rebellion, the final chapter returns to Rockefeller Park and its Cultural Gardens and the connections between this space and the 1968 Glenville Rebellion. For decades African Americans did not have a garden plot, evidencing that city elites lacked appreciation of the contributions of black culture to the city and nation. During the Black Power Movement, the Gardens became a symbolic battleground located in the heart of the city's Glenville black enclave. During this time, conflict emerged between different constituencies of the black community of Cleveland over what form the struggle to access this park should take. One group advocated placing a statue of Booker T. Washington in the "American" section of the park, while others pushed for the development of a separate African American garden. In the end both projects were implemented, and in 1977 the African-American Garden was finally opened at a ceremony replete with Black Power symbolism that included dignitaries from several African nations. In examining this history, I argue that there was never a singular black urban planning vision. Rather, multiple black planning visions were articulated on the Cleveland landscape.

## **Conclusion**

One of those planning visions was that of the black mothers of Rainbow Terrace Apartments, whose efforts led to the construction of ten new playgrounds. My project uncovers some of the other moments of black recreation activism that preceded this rent strike, and argues that these improvements to the recreational infrastructure of Cleveland are significant legacies of the Black Freedom Movement. Struggles over recreation space were symbolic of and connected to broader fights for a right to the city by black residents. At the same time these struggles were more than just symbolic, they were also indicative of a profound commitment by many black



urban residents for their children to grow up in a safe, healthy urban environment with access to nature and recreation opportunities. More Black Freedom Movement and black urban scholarship should visit these sites of urban recreation built through the efforts of black residents. It is at these sites that we may uncover how black women, youth, and working-class people helped shape the cities that they call home.

## CHAPTER ONE: “THE BEST LOCATION IN THE NATION”? A NARRATIVE OF CLEVELAND’S DEVELOPMENT

In order to understand black activism around sites of urban recreation in post-World War II Cleveland, it would be helpful to consider a brief overview of the city’s economic and governmental structures and history of urban planning, and the impact of these structures and planning on park spaces in Cleveland. By World War I, Cleveland enjoyed a reputation as one of the most “progressive and attractive” cities in the nation.<sup>47</sup> Part of this reputation rested on the achievements of Democratic Mayor Tom L. Johnson, who was widely considered a successful progressive leader serving Cleveland from 1901 to 1909. Johnson was a strong supporter of civic planning and public parks. Prior to his administration, most of the 1,200 acres of Cleveland park property consisted of large parks located at the edges of town, and there was not much attention paid to serving central city neighborhoods. Johnson emphasized the construction of playgrounds in congested areas as well as the construction of five free bathhouses, and park acreage doubled during his term as mayor. Along with supporting the city-run system, Johnson appointed William A. Stinchcomb as City Engineer in 1902. Stinchcomb conceived of a large ring of parks to encompass the suburbs surrounding Cleveland proper. Under his vision there developed an “Emerald Necklace” of park properties, referred to locally as “reservations.” Stinchcomb also helped shepherd through state legislation that allowed for the funding and operation of these new parks. Known as the Cleveland MetroParks, these green spaces were part of a state-wide system of regional park districts that raised funds through direct levies, similar to funding for library districts. This arrangement gave the state another level of parks somewhere between city parks and state parks, and it helped Cleveland live up to its nickname of the “Forest

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<sup>47</sup>Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1997), 114.

City.” The MetroParks system that had its own local management structure, separate from the city parks managed from Cleveland’s City Hall. The large MetroParks also meant that Cleveland suburbs became recreation destinations for many living within city limits, and the parks also drew visitors from the region’s growing suburban population. Since African Americans were almost wholly excluded from suburban residency during the first half of the twentieth century, they had more limited access to these large parks. This meant that in-city recreation opportunities became all the more important to black Clevelanders.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson advocated for public control of utilities and especially local rail transportation, a position that often put him in acrimonious opposition to many local businessmen. Under Mayor Johnson the city began to implement what came to be known as the “Group Plan,” a comprehensive downtown scheme for the landscaping of the city’s public green or mall and the construction of seven grandiose public buildings, including the Cuyahoga County Court House, City Hall, and the public library. Renowned landscape architect Daniel Burnham, who had risen to fame for his work at the Chicago World’s Fair, served as lead designer for the plan. Considered perhaps the most completely articulated urban civic plan in the nation outside Washington, D.C., the buildings that comprised the 1903 Group Plan continue to serve Clevelanders to this day.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, edited by David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996) s.vv. “Cleveland MetroParks,” “Parks,” and, Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick C. Howe, “A Ten Years War,” in *Cleveland a Metropolitan Reader*, eds. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz and David C. Perry, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995) 89-96; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 106; Philip O. Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City on a Seesaw* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1976) 55; and, Kenneth Kolson and Mary B. Stavish, “Government” in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 6.

While these early twentieth-century Cleveland planning efforts were considered national examples of successful public municipal planning, urbanist David C. Perry has made the case that Cleveland is also perhaps the archetype of a city whose development is entangled with privatism. He argues that Cleveland is a prime example of what urbanist Sam Bass Warner had in mind when he coined the term “private city.” This “private city” had deep historic roots in Cleveland, which entered the United States as part of a territorial holding of Connecticut’s Western Reserve. Starting from the colonial era, private companies controlled large tracts of land of what eventually became Cleveland. The city remained ensnared in privatism as it grew, and business and industrial interests consistently played prominent roles in decisions over city development and land use. Perry argued that “property rights” stood “at the center of urban life and politics” in Cleveland.”<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on the interests of private capital as a focus of urban life and politics is especially important for anyone studying the city’s African American population. Underrepresented as holders of property and capital, the city’s black actors were effectively excluded from the trajectory of private-public entanglement and, thus, many powerful positions within city leadership. African Americans might hold seats on the City Council, but the real power was located in the boardrooms and offices of the city’s major industries.

The property rights that assumed precedence in the city were the concerns of heavy industry, which drove Cleveland’s development. Starting in the Civil War era, Cleveland became a major manufacturer of iron. Later in the nineteenth century, steel became important, and by 1880 iron and steel production accounted for 20 percent of all manufacturing output for the municipality. Clevelander John D. Rockefeller made the city a leader in oil refinery by the

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<sup>50</sup>David C. Perry, “Cleveland: Journey to Maturity,” in *Cleveland a Metropolitan Reader*, eds. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz and David C. Perry (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), 12-13.

1870s, a position that has had long-lasting reverberations in the city's industrial economy. Other petro-chemical manufactures became important side industries to the refining process. In the 1870s, the Sherwin-Williams Company put Cleveland on the map in terms of paint and enamel production. Rockefeller also contributed to the city's cultural landscape, his philanthropy providing funds for several local cultural institutions. This included the 1897 donation of the 200-acre Rockefeller Park, which became the flagship of the city park system.<sup>51</sup>

Cleveland historians Carol Poh Miller and Robert Wheeler have argued that the city was “ruled” by industrial elites such as Rockefeller during this period. Take for example Liberty Emery Holden. Holden made his fortune mining iron in Lake Superior and silver in Utah during the final decades of the 1800s, and by investing in real estate and a successful hotel in Cleveland. In 1885, he took over the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which remains the most significant newspaper in the city to the present day. He was the president of the committee that oversaw the development of the Cleveland Art Museum and Rockefeller Park. He also served as the president of the Union Club of Cleveland, a prominent social club for the city's elite businessmen and industrialists. Finally, he was elected mayor of one of Cleveland's many suburbs. Holden was one example of how industrialists wielded power in Cleveland—from holding property and owning media outlets, to directing civic infrastructure improvements, participating in politics and forming mutually beneficial social relationships with other industrialist leaders.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 78. Darwin H. Stapleton, “Industry,” in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s .v. “Rockefeller Park.”

<sup>52</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 78, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, “Holden, Liberty Elementary,” accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

As the twentieth century began, Cleveland remained a growing industrial city, and European immigrants and African American migrants from the U.S. South were drawn by the prospect of work in the city's many factories and plants. This immigration would become the single most influential force in organizing the neighborhoods of Cleveland. During the early first half of the nineteenth century, Irish and Germans constituted the largest groups of immigrants. These two groups, especially Germans, continued to move to the city throughout the post-bellum period. They were joined by Italian, Polish and Eastern European, including Jewish, immigrant workers toward the end of the nineteenth century. Yet since Cleveland's industrial economy developed slightly behind Detroit and Chicago, "it received its infusion of "new immigrants" somewhat later than those cities," although Slovenian and Slovakian immigrants came to Cleveland in numbers that outpaced other U.S. cities.<sup>53</sup> By 1920, foreign born white residents comprised 30 percent of the total city population.<sup>54</sup>

By 1940, foreign-born Bohemian, German, Hungarian, Italian, and Yugoslavian immigrants each constituted approximately two percent of the total population of Cleveland, while the Polish immigrants accounted for nearly three percent.<sup>55</sup> Upon arriving in Cleveland, these immigrant settled into ethnic enclaves, from the Polish, Italian and Slavic "villages" on the city's east side, to the German, Polish and Irish neighborhoods west of the Cuyahoga River—Cleveland was, as one historian noted "no 'melting pot.'"<sup>56</sup> Each of these enclaves founded churches, fraternal orders, bakeries and butchers. One newspaperman in his memoir on

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<sup>53</sup> John Grabowski, "Immigration and Migration," in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 559.

<sup>54</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 135.

<sup>55</sup> John Grabowski, "Immigration and Migration," in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 557-563; Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," 19-21;

<sup>56</sup> Perry, 19.

Cleveland speculated that no city had more ethnic presses and newspapers than did Cleveland in the early twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Local politics were often organized around ethnic affiliations, especially at the City Council ward level. Cleveland's industrial job market also drew African American workers to the city. During the twentieth century this growing black population spread east from the original black enclave of Central, into the various traditionally ethnic-European enclaves. This often led to conflict especially around issues of housing and schools. Many ethnic-Europeans opted to move to the suburbs, and gradually Cleveland became a predominantly African American city.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, and accelerating during and after World War I, the majority of African Americans who migrated to Cleveland came from the Deep South. They settled along the Central Avenue corridor, most living in the eastern and central portion of the Central neighborhood.<sup>58</sup> The area's total white and black population climbed to 78,000, and by the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Central had become the most populated sector in the city.<sup>59</sup> For new black migrant laborers shut out of housing options in many other neighborhoods by *de facto* discrimination, Central became the concentrated core of African American community life in Cleveland.<sup>60</sup> Starting in the 1920s, Cleveland's total black

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<sup>57</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> [www.clevelandpromiseneighborhood.org](http://www.clevelandpromiseneighborhood.org), accessed October 14, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Olivia J. Martin, "Our Times: A History of the Cleveland Central Area, 1930-1950," pamphlet, Western Reserve Historical Society, 1982, WRHS.

population grew rapidly, reaching 85,000 or roughly ten percent of the city by 1940.<sup>61</sup> Many of these new black migrant workers came from Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>62</sup>

These new arrivals came to Cleveland in part because of the area's reputation as a relatively progressive city in terms of race relations.<sup>63</sup> More fundamentally, they came for jobs. One historian of Cleveland has argued that "[b]y 1900, Cleveland was one of the world's preeminent manufacturing centers."<sup>64</sup> The city's reputation for industrial employment grew, making the city the fifth largest in the country by World War I, when Cleveland factories received an even greater boost due to wartime industrial demands. While there were opportunities for black workers in this burgeoning industrial economy, especially with a tightening of Eastern European immigration during the war years, black labor was often restricted to the most menial jobs, and even these opportunities quickly declined as the war effort ended. By 1920, 90 percent of black men in Cleveland worked in domestic labor or unskilled industrial jobs, and 75 percent of all black women in the workforce were domestics.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Walker, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996, Second Edition* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western University, 1997), 133.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the networks of family and labor networks that helped facilitate this migration see Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 337-338; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 40, 114; Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," 2; Silver Reuben, "A History of the Karamu Theater of Karamu House, 1915-1960," (dissertation, Ohio State University, 1961), 36; and, Christopher Wye, "Black Civil Rights," in *Cleveland a Metropolitan Reader*, eds. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz and David C. Perry (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), 119. In her dissertation Nishani Frazier does caution against this trope of Cleveland liberalism and what she calls "a hazy generalization of the nature of race relations in Cleveland," Frazier, "Harambee Nation." While during the time of Great Migration Cleveland did offer integrated schools, allowed blacks to serve on juries, and vote, African Americans were largely relegated to menial industrial and domestic labor, and were disproportionately incarcerated in the city, and had a lower life expectancy due to poor health care accommodations.

<sup>64</sup> Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Wheeler, "Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of an American City," 40.

<sup>65</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 60-76, 102.



Black Clevelanders founded several organizations whose aim was to address employment and other modes of discrimination. The most notable of these emerged in 1912 when several local black businessmen and professionals, and their white allies, founded the Cleveland branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The organization grew slowly, but by 1922 established a headquarters with office space. Early NAACP efforts focused on integrating housing and schools, and its leadership worked with the existing white political establishment to advocate for the changes they sought. Led by mostly established, upper-middle-class African Americans, NAACP membership was, nevertheless, largely working class.<sup>66</sup> A second organization founded in 1918, the Cleveland chapter of the National Urban League (NUL), focused primarily on matters of black employment while also working with white business and civic leaders for black job placement.<sup>67</sup>

One of the barriers to black economic mobility was African American's exclusion from many unions, and especially their under-representation in labor leadership positions. By 1900, there were 100 labor unions in Cleveland, including 62 affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). During this time most union membership existed in the trades and craft unions. When they arrived in Cleveland, black workers often found they could not access many of these skilled union positions, with notable exceptions in carpentry, brick and plaster work. The Cleveland AFL was noted for its discrimination, both in the workplace and in union social spaces, and discrimination persisted in some unionized sectors well into the 1960s. Despite this exclusion, during the great 1919 steel strike black workers employed at the Cleveland mills

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<sup>66</sup> Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 17-26; Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 45-46; and, Wye, "Black Civil Rights," 123.

<sup>67</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 54-55; and, Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 45.

largely participated in the action, and were they not locally considered strikebreakers, but this did not result in better employment opportunities or entry into union leadership. Steel and other mass production firms were violently resistant to unionism, especially for unskilled labor. In the 1930s a series of sit-down strikes won recognition for workers in steel and other manufacturing plants, paving the way for organized labor to become a significant political force in Cleveland.<sup>68</sup>

Automobile manufacturing became an important industry, with Cleveland standing behind only Detroit in this regard. Yet as economic and urban scholar Edward Hill has noted, while automobile manufacturing came to Cleveland, the decision makers in this industry did not. Management was located elsewhere, especially in Detroit, and the decisions about this important industrial sector largely stood outside the direct influence of Clevelanders.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, while automobile production was important to Cleveland, the city's most significant manufacturing staple became heavy equipment such as machine tools and production equipment. Cleveland's share of national industrial output peaked by 1930. Cyrus Eaton, a Cleveland industrialist who got his start with the help of John D. Rockefeller and made his fortune in natural gas, saw most of his \$100 million fortune wiped out by the Great Depression.<sup>70</sup> He later would argue that the Depression "hurt Cleveland more than any other city."<sup>71</sup> While millionaires lost their fortunes, the Great Depression had a devastating impact on the city's working class. One hundred thousand people in a city of 900,000 were out of work by January of 1931. The city received a

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<sup>68</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 60-76; Dennis I Harrison, "Labor" *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

<sup>69</sup> Edward W. Hill, "The Cleveland Economy: A Case Study of Economic Restructuring," in *Cleveland: A Metropolitan Reader*, eds. W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholtz and David C. Perry (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 57-59.

<sup>70</sup> Eaton eventually rebuilt his fortune. *The Encyclopedia Cleveland of History*, s. v. "Eaton, Cyrus Stephen," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>71</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 148.

total of \$200 million in federal work relief funding during the Depression, and federal programs put 9,000 people to work building new infrastructure including roads, bridges, trails, and picnic shelters in the area's public parks. The city park system and the Cleveland MetroParks saw the construction of many lasting new facilities due to this federal work relief program.<sup>72</sup>

The Depression era also witnessed an increase in working class and labor activism in the city, including among black residents who bore the brunt of the economic downward spiral. By 1934, 80 percent of all black Clevelanders were on "either direct or indirect relief."<sup>73</sup> In the face of these employment troubles, a new group of black leaders emerged to challenge the more accommodationist approaches of institutions such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and other established race leaders in the city. This new generation of black leaders took several tactics to mobilize black workers. One approach was to join the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), and a small but vocal black Communist organizing effort grew in the city. In 1935, a second approach emerged with the founding of the Cleveland chapter of the National Negro Congress (NNC) which focused its energies on increased black involvement in local unionism.<sup>74</sup> A third approach emphasized a local, black-organized direct action approach to solve the jobs crisis. Such autonomous, black-led organizations had tradition in the city, including the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which had actively called for race pride and autonomy in Cleveland during the previous decade, peaking in 1923 with approximately 15,000 predominantly working-class members. In the 1930s, this autonomous approach was embodied

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<sup>72</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 136, 138; Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 197; Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, Chapter 5, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. vv. "The Terrible Thirties" and "Parks."

<sup>73</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 197.

<sup>74</sup> Wye, "Black Civil Rights," 124. For more on the formation of the National Negro Congress see Erik Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

by John O. Holly, a migrant from Alabama whose personal talking style “rooted in the southern black vernacular” and whose confrontational organizing strategies made many of the city’s black older leadership class uneasy.<sup>75</sup> Holly founded the Future Outlook League (FOL) in 1935. The organization’s leadership consisted of newer arrivals to the city, the lower-middle class and children of upper middle-class black Clevelanders, and it drew a predominantly working-class membership. The group used pickets, boycotts and other direct actions, and launched successful “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns.<sup>76</sup> The efforts of the FOL were successful in part because the growing black population represented a large enough consumer bloc to make local Cleveland businesses pay attention to black boycotts or pickets.<sup>77</sup>

As the Great Depression had shown, the city’s reliance on heavy industry made Cleveland particularly susceptible to national economic fluctuations and downturns. In periods when firms across the country did not invest in new heavy equipment, the factories in Cleveland that produced such equipment languished. World War II industrial requirements brought resurgence to the local economy, but the city never fully regained the solid footing it had lost during the tumultuous Depression years. During the Second World War, Cleveland manufacturing plants produced “tanks, trucks, jeeps, artillery and small arms, bombs, binoculars and telescopes.”<sup>78</sup> In 1942, the National Committee for Aeronautics, Aircraft Engine Research Laboratory, which later became the NASA Lewis Research Center, opened, bringing aeronautic

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<sup>75</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> For a thorough discussion of the formation of the Future Outlook League, see Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, Chapter 6. See also, Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 19; “Harambee Nation,” 54-55; Olivia J. Martin, “Our Times: A History of the Cleveland Central Area, 1930-1950,” pamphlet, Western Reserve Historical Society, 1982; and, Wye, “Black Civil Rights,” 124-125.

<sup>77</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 136.

<sup>78</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 148.

manufactures to Cleveland. Workers migrated to Cleveland to fill these wartime jobs including an influx of Appalachian whites and Puerto Ricans, most of whom settled on the west side, and southern blacks, most of whom took up residence east of the Cuyahoga River. The new arrivals strained an already tight housing market, exacerbated further by a shortage of building materials due to the war—resulting in many single family homes becoming divided to accommodate more residents and a decline in the housing stock in many of Cleveland’s working-class neighborhoods.<sup>79</sup>

Despite such challenges, in 1944 the Cleveland Illuminating Company coined the slogan “The Best Location in the Nation” to promote business and industrial investment in the city. The slogan touted the fact that Cleveland stood within 500 miles of half of the population of the United States and Canada, was located at the intersection of several major shipping and rail lines, and had a large working-class labor force. The city’s Chamber of Commerce soon picked up the slogan, as well.<sup>80</sup> While the World War II industrial boom gave credence to such boosterism, when the war ended Cleveland experienced a long period of slow and steady economic decline. For three decades after World War II, 60 percent of all industrial employment in Cleveland was in the fields of transportation equipment, machinery, iron and steel making, and electrical machinery. As these industries moved overseas and to the U.S. South, the Cleveland economy was hit particularly hard, a downturn from which the city never recovered. As industry declined, so too did the city’s population. Peaking at just above 914,000 in 1950, the population had fallen to 750,000 by 1970, with suburban white flight driving this population downturn. With the loss

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<sup>79</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 147-150.

<sup>80</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 149, 157.

of industry and population came a declining tax base. The city's infrastructure, including its once proud park system, suffered neglect and significant decline.<sup>81</sup>

From 1924 to 1931, Cleveland experimented with a city-manager style of government, a system that was supposed to curtail corruption in City Hall. However, citizens quickly returned to a preference for a mayoral system. During and after World War II, Cleveland had a strong-mayor system of government, and from 1942 until 1971 the Democrats consistently held the office. These Democrats did not always rely on party machine politics to win election. Such was the case with Democrat Frank Lausche, who was voted into office in 1942 and served until he became Governor of Ohio in 1945. The son of Slovenian immigrants, Lausche became the first mayor of Eastern European descent in Cleveland. Backed by the local newspapers, he remained popular with white ethnic Clevelanders despite his sometimes testy relationship with Cleveland Democratic Party leaders. Although Lausche left Cleveland, he did not abandon the local political scene. His law director, Thomas Burke took over the mayoral office and kept it until 1954 when Governor Lausche appointed him to fill a vacant State Senate seat. From 1954 to 1967, two European-born Clevelanders held the mayor's office, reflecting the ethnic-white constituency that made up the majority of Cleveland's voting population during these years. In 1954, Italian-born Anthony Celebrezze came to office backed by the powerful *Cleveland Press*, beating out the candidate supported by the local Democratic Party chair. He held the seat for five terms until leaving for a cabinet post in the John F. Kennedy presidential administration. Very popular with his constituents, Celebrezze continued to receive endorsements from the mainstream press throughout his tenure as mayor. He was succeeded by his law director,

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<sup>81</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, Chapter 12 "Exodus and Decline"; Miller and Wheeler, "Cleveland: The Making of an American City," 44; and, Darwin H. Stapleton, "Industry," in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

Romanian-born Ralph Locher, who was elected to office twice more after completing Celebrezze's final term. The Mayor's office remained remarkably steady during these years. One party ruled, and after Lausche each mayor served an average of more than seven years, leaving office only for another political appointment until Locher lost his primary bid to African American candidate Carl Stokes (in large part due to Locher's inability to control the growing inter-racial conflicts in the city).<sup>82</sup>

Local newspapers played an important role in city politics and public opinion making more generally. The *Cleveland Press*, which helped put both mayors Lausche and Celebrezze in office, was the most influential local paper in the two decades immediately following World War II. The paper's power was due in large part to Louis Seltzer, who started as editor in 1924 and served in that capacity for thirty-eight years. Dubbed "Mr. Cleveland," Seltzer was an important figure in shaping local Cleveland politics. An afternoon paper, the *Press* had a reputation for publishing neighborhood news, and although it was influential in local Democratic mayoral races, it remained politically independent. The *Press*'s main rival was the *Plain Dealer*. A morning paper, the *Plain Dealer* started as a Democratic paper during the Civil War when Republicans dominated the region. In 1940, the *Plain Dealer* supported a Republican for president for the first time, and since that time tended to lean Republican in presidential politics. However, the paper is also politically independent, frequently endorsing Democrats for local elections, especially since the 1960s. In 1968, the *Plain Dealer* eclipsed the *Press* in circulation. In addition to these two mainstream papers, the weekly *Cleveland Call and Post* was a major opinion-maker among the city's African American population. Owner and editor William O.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s, vv. "Government," "The Mayoral Administration of Anthony J. Celebrezze," "The Mayoral Administration of Ralph S. Locher,," Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 177-179; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 15.

Walker built the paper from the merger of two smaller publications in 1927, and within a decade had increased its circulation from a mere 300 to 10,000 each week. The power of Walker's editorial voice in Cleveland's black enclaves mirrored that of Seltzer's in the white ethnic neighborhoods of the city.<sup>83</sup>

These newspapers often reported on the fractious City Council. Much of politics and planning in Cleveland was shaped at the ward level in the city's thirty council districts, which were often representative of ethnic enclaves. Even as suburban flight drained much of the ethnic white populations away from the central city in the postwar years, neighborhood-level ethnic political loyalties persisted, and districts were gerrymandered to keep ethnic voting blocs cohesive. Yet, slowly shifting urban demographics brought more council seats under black control. In 1955, four African Americans served on the Cleveland City Council, and by the 1967 election that number had tripled to twelve. Prior to World War II, the black councilors were almost wholly Republican, but that began to change after the war. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the Democrats took over all of the black council seats, except for District 18 held by John Kellogg, a staunch Republican who served on the council from 1952 to 1971. In the late 1960s, three more Republican councilors joined Kellogg, making one-third of the black-controlled seats held by the Republican Party. Separated by party affiliation, these black councilors often did not vote along racial lines. In 1967, Carrie Cain became the first black female elected to the council.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. vv. "The Cleveland Call and Post," "Cleveland Press," "Plain Dealer," Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, Chapter 11, "Mr. Cleveland."

<sup>84</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," unnumbered appendix including Table 8-1; and, Moore, "Carl Stokes," 80-81.



Writing in his memoir, Mayor Carl Stokes recalled: “No other major city in the country has such an unwieldy legislative body. Unwieldy isn’t the word, it is corruptive, it is crippling.”<sup>85</sup> Public services and infrastructure, including new parks and public recreation amenities, were often provided in the districts of those councilors who could best work the political system to bring the investments to their neighborhoods. Black struggles to gain access to public recreation often met with fierce resistance from ethnic white enclaves and their political representatives, who were determined to keep city resources flowing to their neighborhoods.

Perhaps this fractious city-planning model had no greater consequence than the disastrous implementation of the city’s urban renewal program. Cleveland urban renewal initiatives consumed 6,000 acres, making it the largest program of any city in the United States. Highway construction through portions of the central city alone displaced an estimated 19,000 people by 1975. The city’s urban renewal planning model relied on private capital as part of the equation to build new public housing for those displaced by construction projects, and when that money was slow to materialize many of the projects stagnated. City councilors often fought ferociously to keep subsidized housing out of their districts. Despite African American activists and politicians organizing against these so-called “slum removal” projects, the impact of urban renewal on quality housing available to working-class and poor communities of color was devastating.<sup>86</sup>

One urban renewal effort that received substantial private investment was the Erieview project, a 1960s 163-acre, mixed-use office, hotel and apartment development on the near

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<sup>85</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 132.

<sup>86</sup> Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Wheeler, “Cleveland: the Making and Remaking of an American City: 1796-1993,” in *Cleveland a Metropolitan Reader*, eds. W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholtz and David C. Perry (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press), 43.

northeast portion of downtown. Designed by renowned architect I. M. Pei, by 1972 a total of \$220 million in local, federal and private construction monies had been committed to the project. Erieview construction continued into the 1980s.<sup>87</sup> While the Erieview project consumed the attention and dollars of the city's leaders, neighborhoods outside the core business district stood "neglected."<sup>88</sup> Historians Carol Poh Miller and Robert Wheeler have argued that this singular focus on Erieview at the expense of neighborhood investment directly led to the "conflagration in Hough" that occurred in 1966.<sup>89</sup>

Throughout the United States, other cities made similar planning choices that focused on the development of downtown central business districts to the detriment of the neighborhoods of working-class, poor, and residents of color. Thomas Sugrue described a similar process in postwar Detroit in his 1996 book *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race, Inequality and Rebellion in Post-War Detroit*, as did Mike Davis writing on Los Angeles in his 1990 book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*.<sup>90</sup> Although these broad planning decisions weighed heavily on black Clevelanders, and others living in neglected neighborhoods, these residents were not passive while city resources went to business district projects. Instead, they mobilized around issues important to their communities, including recreation. This organizing helped to

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<sup>87</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland, a Concise History*, 163-164. Miller and Wheeler, "Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of an American City," 43; *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Erieview."

<sup>88</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland, a Concise History*, 164.

<sup>89</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland, a Concise History*. This analysis was supported by long-time *Plain Dealer* newspaper man, Philip O. Porter, who also drew a direct connection between Erieview and Hough, Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 237.

<sup>90</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; and, Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990).

shape the city's vernacular landscape in meaningful ways. The next chapters explore some of those organizing efforts.

## CHAPTER TWO: RACE, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING: PORTLAND-OUTHWAITE

In May 1938, after the celebrations surrounding his success at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, track star Jesse Owens returned to the Central Neighborhood of Cleveland where he had grown up. He returned for a job. The winner of four gold medals, Owens had not yet completed his college coursework at Ohio State when family obligations led him to leave school to find work. He landed a position at the city's Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center (PORC) as a playground attendant with an annual salary of just over \$1,500.<sup>91</sup> PORC stood just across the street from East Technical High School, where Owens had risen to fame as a track standout. Unsatisfied with "watching kids on the swings," Owens did not stay at the recreation center long before moving on from Cleveland.

Owens was not the only prominent black Clevelander to pass through the Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center. Jack Wilson, the lightweight boxer who took silver in those same Berlin Olympics, learned the sweet science at PORC in his youth. So too did Cleveland's first black mayor, Carl Stokes. John Morgan, whose brother Garrett had patented the traffic light in 1923, worked there. Reverend L. J. VanPelt, who had been a leader in Cleveland's chapter of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), spent a brief time as superintendent of the park. Members of the popular East Technical High School boys' basketball team, one of the premier high school clubs in all of Ohio from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, spent their evenings playing pickup games on the outdoor courts at Portland-Outhwaite. And dozens of other youth got their names in the local newspapers for their

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<sup>91</sup> Jesse Owens, with Paul G. Neimark, *Blackthink: My Life as a Black Man and White Man*. (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970), 47.

achievements in the boxing ring and swimming pool, and on the volleyball and basketball courts of PORC.

This chapter argues that Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center was an important space on the Cleveland landscape for the articulation of black racial consciousness in Cleveland's Central neighborhood, which became the city's primary black enclave in the aftermath of the Great Migration. Historian Davarian Baldwin has written in his study of 1920s black Chicago, "[B]lack participation in and production of both amateur and commercial recreation events have simultaneously been appeals for racial integration while also 'playing out' moments of race pride and distinction."<sup>92</sup> As a source of black employment and a place for community members to gather and make connections, Portland-Outhwaite was a space for the production of, to use Baldwin's words, "race pride and distinction." The most significant way that this occurred was through newspaper coverage of young men's sporting prowess at the park, which constructed a discourse of black masculinity challenging white stereotypes and racism.

At the same time that PORC was a place for the "playing moments of race pride," it was also a platform from which local black community leaders laid claims to full rights as citizens in Cleveland. The sporting fields, ball courts, boxing rings, and swimming pool at PORC were more than spaces for fun and games; the sporting life at PORC was imbued with local political meaning. From PORC came calls for integration into other spheres of civic life, and similar calls rang forth from other parks in black neighborhoods throughout the industrialized urban North.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 194.

<sup>93</sup> In addition to Baldwin's *Chicago's New Negroes*, for more on the politics of local black sports see: Richard B. Pierce, "More Than A Game: The Political Meaning of High School Basketball in Indianapolis," *The Journal of Urban History*, 2000.

To understand these cultural productions and the political stakes involved with Portland-Outhwaite, this chapter argues that PORC must be considered part of a broader black urban landscape and in the context of local municipal planning decisions. PORC was shaped by other local black institutions, and in turn it contributed to the vernacular meanings of these locations on the black landscape. Specifically, this chapter traces how Portland-Outhwaite's connections to the local black weekly newspaper, nearby high school and junior high, and an adjacent public housing complex informed the significance of this space to black community life in the Central neighborhood. The role of the park was also shaped by municipal planning decisions. Approaching PORC at this intersection of black planning visions and City Hall initiatives is necessary to uncover how this space helped construct a local, gendered call for race pride and became a site where sport helped to make the case for integration.

### **The Central Neighborhood**

Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center stood at the heart of what became the most significant black enclave in Cleveland during the Great Migration, the Central neighborhood. The area that Cleveland planners and residents refer to as Central lies just east of the city's downtown business district and is bounded by East 18<sup>th</sup> Street to the west, East 105<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, Euclid Avenue to the north, and Woodland Avenue to the South. Central is such a large area that for municipal planning purposes it is often divided into east and west Central, and sometimes even a third category of 'central' Central is added.<sup>94</sup> The area first attracted German immigrants in the mid-1800s, workers interested in the "heavy industry

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<sup>94</sup> Pranrab Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities: Organizational and Electoral Developments in Cleveland in the Nineteen Sixties" (Case Western Reserve University: Commerce Copy Company, 1975), 7.

forming to its west and south.”<sup>95</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the neighborhood included 60 percent of the city’s small African American population. Italian, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, and Jewish immigrants also moved to the area, most working in the city’s industrial economy, particularly its steel mills.

Excluded from many white social spaces, black workers who came from the South formed a vibrant black social landscape in Cleveland, with many prominent local black institutions located in Central. One pamphlet describing the neighborhood argued that the “history of the Central Area between the years 1930 and 1950, is the history of blacks in Cleveland during that period. All of the institutions of that era, created by and for blacks were created in this area.”<sup>96</sup> While this might be a bit of an overstatement, the description of the importance of Central for black Clevelanders is not far off the mark. Historian Kimberley L. Phillips has detailed the process of black community formation in Cleveland, describing the intersection of 55<sup>th</sup> and Central as the “heart of Southern culture” transplanted to Cleveland.<sup>97</sup> Phillips argues that new arrivals to Cleveland brought southern cultural traditions with them and built community institutions imbued with a rich working-class culture, creating a uniquely Cleveland black urban community landscape. Sometimes this black working-class culture created a measure of unease among more affluent African Americans established in Cleveland before the World War I influx of southern migrants.

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<sup>95</sup> “Central Village: Neighborhood Profile: A Resource for Community Change,” Michelle Nario-Redmond and Jill S. Norton Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, no page numbers, CPL-PA.

<sup>96</sup> Olivia J. Martin, “Our Times: A History of the Cleveland Central Area, 1930-1950,” pamphlet, Western Reserve Historical Society, 1982; see also, Frasier, 34.

<sup>97</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 162.

Churches played an important role in defining this intra-racial class distinction. During the early twentieth century, a handful of established churches served largely middle-class black residents. Many new arrivals opted not to attend these middle-class churches, and instead formed their own spaces of worship, often storefront congregations that engaged in “ecstatic worship” practices.<sup>98</sup> For long-time black Clevelanders, these more emotional and vocal worship services were just one sign of what they considered a breakdown of proper public comportment by the new arrivals. As racial discrimination in the city grew in the 1920s, concerns over the impact of these new arrivals grew as well. The 1920s were a period of sharpened residential segregation and discrimination, especially in places of public accommodation.<sup>99</sup> According to Phillips, “[m]any more economically solvent longtime residents blamed what they considered the culturally, socially, and economically impoverished migrant population for the new forms of institutional and informal segregation that emerged.”<sup>100</sup> Some of those more “economically solvent” blacks chose to move out of Central northeast to the Glenville neighborhood, establishing a second, more affluent black enclave in the city. Another change wrought by these concerns was the development of several institutions whose aim was to help meet the needs of, and culturally assimilate, the migrants.

One of the most notable of these organizations was the Phillis Wheatley Association (PWA), a settlement house started by Jane Edna Hunter. Hunter, herself newly arrived to

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<sup>98</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 168-170, quote 170.

<sup>99</sup> Larry Cuban, “A Strategy for Racial Peace: Negro Leadership in Cleveland, 1900-1919,” *Phylon*, 28:3, 1967, 309; Russel H. Davis, “Civil Rights in Cleveland 1912-1961: An Account of the Cleveland Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” (Cleveland, 1973), 60; WRHS, Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 195; Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 34; and, Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, quote, 123; and, Wye, “Black Civil Rights,” 121, 123.

<sup>100</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 160.



Cleveland in 1905 from South Carolina, trained at the Hampton Institute. Hampton, perhaps best known for its most famous alum, Booker T. Washington, was a training school that emphasized black self-improvement and the development of employable skill sets. Hunter brought this training to Cleveland, and in 1911 established her association to spread the Hampton model and assist young black women workers in Cleveland in finding domestic jobs. Programs included classes for preschool children, and arts, crafts, cooking, sewing and typing as well as domestic job placement services for young black women. Criticized by some black Clevelanders as an institution that promoted “Jane Crow,” the PWA nevertheless became an important site on Central’s black landscape, well known to the local community.<sup>101</sup>

The Karamu House was another local institution that aimed to serve the area’s growing black population. Part settlement house, part theater, Karamu first opened its doors in Central in 1915, becoming a lasting space for the development of local black community and culture. One of Central’s most celebrated residents, Langston Hughes, premiered five plays there in the 1930s.<sup>102</sup> Karamu also functioned as a settlement house providing services for the local population, including helping new arrivals from the South find employment opportunities.<sup>103</sup> Karamu House often extended its programming into local playgrounds. Women often took the lead in developing settlement house playground activities as well as organizing for improved and expanded playground spaces. In 1937, the Mother’s Club of Karamu “visited City Hall in an effort to improve conditions on neighborhood playgrounds.”<sup>104</sup> In another example, young

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<sup>101</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 92. See also, Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 53-54; Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 38; and, Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 110-111.

<sup>102</sup> Reuben, “A History of the Karamu Theater,” 3-5, 25-26, 194, 229-235.

<sup>103</sup> Reuben, “A History of the Karamu Theater,” 47.

<sup>104</sup> “The Mother’s Club of Playhouse Settlement,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 4, 1937.

women affiliated with the Hiram Settlement House, located on the eastern edge of the Central Neighborhood, formed a Young Gardeners club. The Young Gardeners cleaned up the park located across the street from the settlement house and made plans to plant flowers.<sup>105</sup> Such activism was an important way in which women entered the public sphere and participated in urban planning.<sup>106</sup>

These women made significant changes to the local park landscape. With the increase in black residents, changes to the local political landscape also occurred. In the late 1920s, black leaders engaged in a struggle to take over ward-level control of the Republican Party in the heart of Central. Led by black lawyer Harold Gassaway and the politically savvy L.L. Yancy, black leaders successfully assumed leadership of the Ward 18 Republican Club.<sup>107</sup> By 1930, this black political organization paid off when three black men, Leroy Bundy, Clayborne George, and Lawrence O. Payne, won seats on the City Council, representing portions of the Central district. Known as the “black triumvirate,” these three councilors regularly advocated for political patronage from the Republican Party in the form of municipal employment for their constituents, as well as public infrastructure improvements for their wards.<sup>108</sup> In addition to these men, William O. Walker emerged as another prominent local black political figure. Born in Alabama, Walker came to Ohio to attend Wilberforce University and Oberlin Business College. He moved to Cleveland in 1932, becoming the managing editor and then owner, along with Payne, of the city’s black weekly, the *Call and Post*. Under his editorial control, the paper became a strong

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<sup>105</sup> “Among the Clubs: Hiram House News,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 1, 1939.

<sup>106</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 143; Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 203-206.

<sup>107</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. vv. “Bundy, Leroy N.,” “Gassaway, Harold T.,” “George, Clayborne,” “Payne, Lawrence O.” accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>108</sup> Olivia J. Martin, “Our Times: A History of the Cleveland Central Area, 1930-1950,” pamphlet, 1982, WRHS.

voice for black Republicanism in the city, and in 1940 Walker ran successfully on the Republican ticket himself for a council seat. While on the council and as the *Call and Post's* owner-editor, Walker became one of the city's most respected black public opinion-makers and an active advocate for African American rights, significantly throwing his support behind John O. Holly and the Future Outlook League.<sup>109</sup>

### **Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center**

One of the chief concerns among these local black political figures was the poor health conditions in the Central area. For example, Councilman Leroy Bundy led an effort to address the spread of tuberculosis and clean up junkyard areas in his 17<sup>th</sup> Ward.<sup>110</sup> Another priority of local black leaders became creating safe places for neighborhood youth to gather and play. By 1930, roughly 23 percent of Cleveland's black population was below the age of 15, and most of these youth lived in Central. Such concerns about youth health and safety were coupled with anxieties about what many of the more established black residents considered the rowdy behavior and "juvenile delinquency" of the working-class children of the new black migrant workforce that had settled in Central.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Walker, William Otis," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>; and, Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 41. When the local black population switched their political loyalty to the Democratic party, Charles Carr, a Democrat, succeeded Walker's seat on the City Council as the representative for Central. Carr would become one of the most influential black Councilmen in Cleveland during his tenure, and in 1959 became the Democratic Majority Leader for the Council, a post he held for 13 years, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Carr, Charles," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>110</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Bundy, Leroy," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>111</sup> "Extensive Boy's Program Discussed at Meeting: Good Citizenship and Recreation is Club's Aim," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 5, 1937; "Central Community Council to Battle Delinquency," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 18, 1944; "Plan Permanent Committee To Aid in Handling Juvenile Delinquency," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 1, 1944.

Starting in the late 1920s, city leaders began to make plans for a new park to serve Central youth. The existing Central Recreation center, located at 25<sup>th</sup> and Central, could not keep up with the recreation demands of local young people. In order to obtain the land needed for the development of this new recreation space, the City Council in 1930 approved the allocation of \$113,700 for the purchase of 17 properties and announced plans to secure an additional 26 identified parcels of land. Over the next three years, the Portland-Outhwaite project would be one of the most significant park-land acquisition initiatives before the council, which would hear and approve more than twenty resolutions, ordinances and reports on the matter.<sup>112</sup> In all, land acquisition for the new park displaced 125 families, many of them poor, and 50 of the families received “a small amount of money to negotiate for homes outside the district” from the city’s Associated Charities.<sup>113</sup> Funded by a municipal bond issue, the city spent more than \$650,000 on purchasing the land and building a recreation center and pool. This expenditure is all the more significant when one considers that it took place during some of the worst years of the Great Depression in the city. The *Cleveland Press* explained the reasoning for the large endeavor, noting: “No part of the city needs a well-equipped recreation center more than one where this project is to be located....No part of the city is more congested. It is a district occupied by many people who do not have the means of providing themselves with

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<sup>112</sup> “The City Record” September 3, 1930, File Number 92180, pages 915-916; September 3, 1930, File Number 92181, pages 917-918; Resolutions and Ordinances Index, 1930, Resolution 92926 and Ordinance 93254, page 73; Resolutions and Ordinances Index, 1931, Resolutions 93407, 93408, 92974, 93762, 93972, 94707, 94895, and 96582 and Ordinances 93254, 92926, 94060, 94437, 95121, 95958, page 85; June 17, 1931, Reports, File Number 95141, page 727; September 20, 1933, File Numbers 100430 and 100431, and pages 1010-1011, CPL. Final parcels of land were added to the park even after the facility formally opened for business in 1932. While this project marked one of the most time-consuming park property and acquisition effort before the local City Council, it is important to note that the federal WPA and CCC were actively engaged in multiple public park infrastructure projects throughout Cleveland and much of northeast Ohio, and indeed throughout the urban north. The 1930s thus marked perhaps the most significant period of urban park development in US History.

<sup>113</sup> “Vacate site of City Play Spot,” *Cleveland Press*, April 15, 1931.

otherwise healthy recreation.”<sup>114</sup> As evidenced by this article, the park and recreation center had the support of one of the most powerful public-opinion making organs in the Cleveland area, the *Press*. The Great Depression sharpened concerns over idle youth, and despite scant resources, resulted in a rapid growth in urban park infrastructure in many industrialized cities. Building park facilities also put people to work. In Cleveland, Central was the most “congested,” and therefore potentially the most volatile area of the city, and therefore it received park investment.

In an event attended by Democratic Mayor Raymond Miller, the parks director, and local political figures and ministers, the center opened on August 3, 1932 with an evening diving and swimming ceremony. Named for the local streets that intersected at the park, Portland and Outhwaite, the new center boasted some of the finest public recreation facilities in the city. A local band played for the occasion, and the politicians in attendance used the moment to give speeches about their dedication to the city’s youth. In his address to the crowd, Mayor Miller announced: “I hope the boys and girls, especially, of this community will use this center to build strong bodies and active minds that they might be good citizens.”<sup>115</sup> From the outset, the official rhetoric from the city framed Portland-Outhwaite as space for the production of youth health and positive citizenship. It was this type of rhetoric about the purpose of public parks that black community leaders would seize upon to make claims to their rights as full citizens.

The funding and construction of the new recreation center demonstrated that the residents of Central had the ability to advocate for and receive municipal investment in their neighborhood, even if only through capitalizing on fears of potential unrest in the district.

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<sup>114</sup> “The Sooner the Better, *Cleveland Press*, April 1, 1931.

<sup>115</sup> “Dedicate New Pool,” *Cleveland Press*, August 3, 1932 and “10,000 See New Center Dedicated,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 4, 1932.

However, since the recreation center and its pool were city-funded and city-managed, there were limits to the local community's autonomy in using and planning for the space. Local politics shaped the direction of the center, and this became immediately apparent. Prior to its opening, local residents organized for the hiring a black superintendent for the new center, but city officials did not meet this demand. That prominent black political figures, and the local black voting bloc, were almost wholly Republican in the early 1930s certainly did not incentivize the Democratic administration to appoint an African American as PORC superintendent. Instead, the parks director named a white man with a background in private sector athletics to the post. Black workers did receive eight of twelve additional positions at PORC, including the first black lifeguards hired by the city, but they would not acquire the top spot until a few years later when the Mayor's Office changed parties.<sup>116</sup>

Another area that local residents could not control was admission price, which was set by city officials. In recognition of the financial difficulties wrought by the Depression, the city offered admission discounts at Portland-Outhwaite pool.<sup>117</sup> Yet, despite these price reductions, many local residents could not afford to enter the pool, and attendance failed to meet the city administration's expectations. In its first month of operation, the new pool brought in less than \$400, while its operations, including staff, cost upwards of \$2,000. The new recreation center and pool were state-of-the art, but many local residents were left outside the fence looking in at

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<sup>116</sup> "Outhwaite-E. 46<sup>th</sup> Pool Open Today," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 1, 1932; Gene Ray, "Rev. VanPelt Gets Bathhouse Office," newspaper not identified, February 3, 1934, SC-MSLCSU.

<sup>117</sup> "Raises 'Free Gate' at Outhwaite Pool" *Cleveland Press*, August 2, 1932.

the new facility, unable to pay even the minimal admission fees.<sup>118</sup> Hiring and pricing decisions made by city management in part dictated local access and use of the public recreation space.

### **PORC and the Local Black Urban Landscape**

It is important to consider both the role of city planning and black community initiative in the history of the development of black public spaces; for while hiring and pricing at the PORC remained out of their hands, local black residents did affect the direction of the center in many other ways. As illustrated by figure 3, location of the PORC and its proximity to several significant places of black cultural life significantly shaped the role of this public park in the local black community. Across the street to the west of the park was Kennard Junior High School, which developed a local reputation for its athletic programs. Just to the northeast of the recreation center was East Technical High School. Opened in 1908, East Tech was one of the first four technical training high schools in the United States, reflecting Cleveland's position as one of the nation's premier urban-industrial centers. During its first two decades of operation, the high school student body consisted predominantly of the children of European immigrants, but in the wake of World War I, East Tech gradually included black students. While the surrounding neighborhood became almost entirely African American, East Tech as the city's premier vocational training school continued to attract white students bussed from across the city. Many of the school's most famous athletes, however, were black youth from the surrounding neighborhood—including the high school's most famous alum, Jesse Owens. Owens dominated state high school track competitions before winning four gold medals at the 1936

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<sup>118</sup> "Pool Receipts Fall," *Cleveland Press*, September 9, 1932. While the city sold only 6,888 admissions to PORC pool in August, 10,168 attended the pool during the six weekly free hours—meaning the pool at least for those time-periods was crowded.

Berlin Olympics. Owens and several other local athletes at PORC, Kennard, and East Tech put the Central neighborhood on the map as a sports juggernaut in the state of Ohio. Both the park and the schools played a role in the popular perception that this area produced top-tier young black athletes.<sup>119</sup>

The newspaper offices of William O. Walker's *Call and Post* were located just a few blocks west of PORC. The black weekly reported regularly on the sporting events and other programs at the park, representing the space to the larger African American community across Cleveland. The paper framed its coverage of the athletic prowess of the young sportsmen and women coming from Central as a source of race pride, and its coverage helped to elevate these young people to the status of local celebrities. The newspaper thus played an important role in constructing the local social-cultural meanings of the recreation center.

Finally, perhaps no other local space was as closely associated with the PORC as the public housing complex that shared its name. Indeed the park, recreation center, and adjacent public housing development were all created at the same time as part of the city's efforts to revitalize the Central neighborhood. The municipal planners in City Hall clearly intended that the park, nestled against the property line of the housing complex, serve the youth living in the apartments overlooking the playground and recreation center. From its inception, PORC inextricably linked local municipal planning decisions concerning housing and public recreation. When examining sites of urban recreation, considering how these facilities fit into broader landscapes of residential, work, and educational land-uses is essential to making sense of the form and function of these interconnected spaces.

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<sup>119</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "East Technical High School."



The provision of safe, affordable, adequate housing had become one of the Central area's most acute problems during the Great Depression, and it remained an issue that plagued the neighborhood for decades. According to a recent assessment of the area, "[t]he Great Depression...struck a blow from which the Central area has never really fully recovered."<sup>120</sup> In an effort to address the housing crisis, Cleveland City Councilman Ernest Bohn in 1933 established the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), the first major urban center public housing entity in the country. In the years that followed, the Central area of Cleveland became the site of some of the first federal housing projects in the United States, including the massive Outhwaite Homes project, constructed in the 1930s to address the deterioration of housing stock in the area. The city developed the project on land seized by slum clearance, as was the case with the adjacent park.<sup>121</sup>

City officials envisioned Outhwaite Homes, from its inception, as a black space and also as part of a broader urban public landscape. Donald Gray, the landscape architect who developed the initial landscape and planting plan for Outhwaite, made this plain in his correspondence about the project, describing his efforts "to prepare a plan for colored housing."<sup>122</sup> Gray trained as a landscape architect with the renowned east coast Olmsted brothers firm and completed post-graduate work at Harvard Landscape School. He was one of the most prolific public landscape designers in Cleveland in the 1920s and 1930s. Beginning in 1931, Gray wrote a daily column in the influential *Cleveland Press* newspaper about "some phase of town planning, public parks or individual home improvement." He also developed the

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<sup>120</sup> "Central Village: Neighborhood Profile: A Resource for Community Change," CPL-PA.

<sup>121</sup> <http://clevelandpromiseneighborhood.org>, accessed September 23, 2013.

<sup>122</sup> A. Donald Gray to Colonel Horatio B. Hackett, Director of Housing, March 22, 1935, Container 21, Folder 278, Manuscript Collection 3470, A. Donald Gray, WHRS.

site landscape plans for Cleveland's City Hall and Public Auditorium.<sup>123</sup> In 1936, Gray was invited to serve on the city's Advisory Committee of Landscape Architects, an organization meant to provide professional advice to the Department of Parks and Public Property on the subject of park development.<sup>124</sup> Gray made major contributions to the formation of a multi-site, civic landscape for Cleveland. His work on Outhwaite Homes was part of this project, which positioned the housing complex as one component in a broader city-wide effort toward comprehensive urban planning and the beautification of public spaces.<sup>125</sup>

From its opening, the Outhwaite Homes public housing project was closely associated with the nearby recreation center. Carl Stokes, who decades later would become Cleveland's first African American mayor, was a member of one of the first families to move into the new Outhwaite complex. In his memoir he reminisced about the park:

For me, the most important advantage of the projects was the Portland-Outhwaite recreation center only a block away. The swimming pool, ping-pong tables, boxing ring, art classes -- these things gave us a structure for our time we'd never had before. The center was where I first learned to box, and I got good enough at ping-pong to be a member of the city championship team.<sup>126</sup>

Stokes counted access to PORC and its programs as one of the advantages of moving into public housing, and at the park he found the "structure" that adult planners hoped the space would offer. Many other Outhwaite housing youth also would find a place to play at PORC.

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<sup>123</sup> A. Donald Gray to Maier and Walsh, architects, March 22, 1935, Container 21, Folder 278, Manuscript Collection 3470, A. Donald Gray, WRHS.

<sup>124</sup> Varga, Director of Parks and Public Property to A. Donald Gray, April 25, 1936, Container 21, Folder 280, Manuscript Collection 3470, A. Donald Gray, WRHS.

<sup>125</sup> While Gray spent two years developing the landscape architecture plan for the space, he was not ultimately retained as the landscape architect for the project because he was already retained for another housing initiative. Although he did not oversee the implementation, it was Gray's plan that was used to develop the site.

<sup>126</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 25.

The connection between the housing complex and the park became even more cemented in 1937, when Gordon Simpson, the director of Outhwaite Homes, secured \$4,000 in funding to build a playground to serve the youth living in his units. The playground included two basketball courts, two volleyball courts, four concrete ping-pong tables, and four horseshoe courts along with night lighting. According to the *Call and Post*, “[t]he layout is adjacent to the Portland-Outhwaite recreational center, and will be immediately accessible to the youths living in the Outhwaite homes and those in the vicinity.” At the site of this playground, public housing and public park melted one into the other; the boundaries between each space overlapped.<sup>127</sup>

Together, the founding of the Outhwaite Homes and Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center profoundly changed the local landscape of this portion of the Central neighborhood, creating two new spaces in the neighborhood—public housing and public park—that would remain linked and remarkably unchanged over the next 75 years, even as much of the surrounding neighborhood underwent multiple urban planning upheavals. Located across the street from one of the most renowned sports high schools in Ohio and a few blocks from the most powerful voice in local black news, PORC stood poised to become an important location for local black cultural production.

### **PORC as a Site of Black Employment**

The park’s prominence in the local community meant it became a desired location for black employment and political patronage appointment. While an African American superintendent had not materialized when PORC initially opened, a year later when mayoral

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<sup>127</sup> “Site of Outhwaite Playground,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 16, 1937

candidate Harry L. Davis successfully won the city administration back for Republicans, more middle-tier municipal employment opportunities opened for black appointees.

The Reverend L.J. VanPelt, a prominent local black community figure, benefited from this political shift in 1934 when he was briefly named superintendent of PORC. Born in Tennessee, VanPelt worked in several southern states—including as a teacher in Arkansas—before moving to Ohio, where he became active in the state’s Republican Party, and pastor first at St. John’s A.M.E. Church and then Shiloh Baptist Church. He was affiliated with the Phillis Wheatley Association, and the East End Political Club, a political organization that advanced an independent black political agenda in Cleveland. Moreover, he was very involved with the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), serving in leadership roles in the organization in both Ohio and Michigan.<sup>128</sup> The appointment of this prominent local pastor and political figure as superintendent raised the local profile of PORC and helped cement its local reputation as a black space. By the time of VanPelt’s hire only one of the recreation workers at the site was white. The hiring of VanPelt to this public recreation spot, notwithstanding his previous involvement in UNIA, also demonstrates that local black politicians had a degree of latitude in distributing political patronage jobs. The UNIA and its outspoken leader Marcus Garvey were often the objects of controversy across the urban North, but any unease the white establishment might have had with a former UNIA activist did not preclude VanPelt from taking the helm at Portland-Outhwaite.

Van Pelt was not the only employee at PORC affiliated with the Republican Party. Several members of his staff in 1934 would go on to contribute to local Republican politics throughout the next decade. For example, the assistant superintendent of PORC, Reverend B. J.

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<sup>128</sup> Gene Ray, “Rev. VanPelt Gets Bathhouse Office,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 3, 1934.

Glover, served as pastor of several black Cleveland Baptist churches, and he was the “unofficial precinct leader” of the Republican Party in the 12<sup>th</sup> Ward for thirty-one years.<sup>129</sup> Hired to the role of park matron, Sarah Lamb also played on the very successful PORC women’s volleyball team. Local Republican leaders recognized Lamb as one of the “prominent workers” supporting Republican candidates.<sup>130</sup> Arthur Roulette, an attendant at PORC, was elected in 1936 as a Republican precinct committeeman for the 17th Ward.<sup>131</sup> Alberta Ailer, another attendant, was the wife of the prominent pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church, Dr. Charles Ailer, who threw the popularity of his pulpit behind the candidacy of William O. Walker in his successful Republican council bid.<sup>132</sup>

Many of the employees at PORC were not only politically connected; they also regularly appeared in the *Call and Post* for a variety of activities that marked their social standing in the community. The ministers Van Pelt and Glover appeared in religious columns.<sup>133</sup> Other staff, including Sarah Lamb and William Blackman, also made the society pages.<sup>134</sup> William “Big Bill” Blackman left his job at the park to become a popular club owner in 1944, which made him

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<sup>129</sup> “Conduct Last Rights For Reverend B. G. Glover,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 4, 1953.

<sup>130</sup> “Induction Completes Burton-Gassaway Club,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 3, 1937. See also “LL Yancey Gives Dinner for 18<sup>th</sup> Ward,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 16, 1937 and “New Councilman Entertained,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 13, 1934, for more on Lamb’s Republican Party connections.

<sup>131</sup> “Precinct Comm. Slates Victorious,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 14, 1936.

<sup>132</sup> “Walker’s Candidacy Finds Support Among All Citizens,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 8, 1939 and “Letter to the Editor, Dr. Charles Ailer,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 21, 1939.

<sup>133</sup> For example for Van Pelt: “Shiloh Baptist Church,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 7, 1937; and “Shiloh Baptist Church,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 10, 1938. For example for Glover: “Reverend BG Glover Pastor: King Solomon Bapt Ch,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 3, 1934; “King Solomon Baptist Church,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 2, 1938; “King Solomon Baptist Church,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 2, 1939; and, “King Solomon Baptist Celebrates 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 24, 1939.

<sup>134</sup> For Lamb: “Pathfinders Social Club,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 13, 1935; For William Blackman, “Social Whirl” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 22 1943; Ardelia Dixon “Social Lights,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 1, 1949; Ardelia Dixon, “Social Lights,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1949.

a fixture in the *Call and Post* gossip columns.<sup>135</sup> When John Morgan was named to run the boys' athletic programs at PORC in 1934, the *Call and Post* ran a short story about the hiring along with a profile photograph. A decade later, the social columns covered the wedding of Morgan, whose brother Garret had become nationally famous for patenting the traffic light in the 1920s.<sup>136</sup> The presence of these well-known community members at PORC contributed to the perception of the recreation center as an important community space. It also meant that the workforce at PORC was by and large middle class, while the intended youth clientele for the center were nearby working-class and poor youth.

Employment at PORC gave these workers a job at one of the established black spaces on the Cleveland landscape. For some, it also represented a relatively good source of steady income in a time period when black employment prospects in Cleveland were tenuous at best in during the Depression. PORC, and public recreation more broadly, became sites for the production of the city's black middle class. For example, by 1940 Sarah Lamb, a migrant from Alabama with an eighth-grade education, reported \$858 in annual income. This was \$100 more than her husband, a paper hanger, brought home that year.<sup>137</sup> Lamb, John Morgan and Arthur Roulette would work for the City Recreation in the Central neighborhood for at least twenty years.<sup>138</sup> In an even greater example of longevity, Ellsworth Gamblee succeeded Van Pelt as director of

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<sup>135</sup> For a sampling of coverage of Blackman and his club the El Morocco, see Bob Williams, "Bobbing Along," *Cleveland Call and Press*, March 13, 1943; December 9, 1944; September 8, 1945, March 27, 1947; and May 1, 1965.

<sup>136</sup> "Athletic Director," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 20, 1934; Ardelia Bradley, "Social Lights," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1944; and, "Home Wedding Unites Sgt. John Morgan and Mrs. Geraldine Ferris on June 8<sup>th</sup>," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1944.

<sup>137</sup> 1940 Census, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio; Roll: T627\_3221; Page: 6B; Enumeration District: 92-459.

<sup>138</sup> Photo, "Recreation Workers Honored," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 23, 1954.

Portland-Outhwaite, and held the position for almost three decades.<sup>139</sup> Gamblee became one of the system's recreation supervisors with the greatest longevity.<sup>140</sup> The 1964 notice of Gamblee's death described him as "Mr. Gamblee, affectionately known as 'Els' by thousands that met him during his long supervision of Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center."<sup>141</sup> Gamblee's continued presence as director contributed to this space's function as a community institution, as more than one generation of local residents attended programs under the oversight of the popular park leader.

Perhaps no PORC employee better demonstrated that public recreation could lead to a long and prestigious career than did Florence Bundy Fairfax. She started working for the City in 1929 at the Central Recreation Center's bathhouse. She then moved up to the job of Girl's Physical Director at PORC. By 1940, Fairfax earned \$1,600 annually for her work in public recreation.<sup>142</sup> A graduate of Western Reserve University, Fairfax was promoted in 1944 as the first female "Superintendent of Recreation." She established herself as one of the most respected voices in matters of public recreation in the city—regularly interviewed in local newspapers, asked to serve on public panels concerning recreation and youth, and lauded later in her career by the Cleveland City Council as being "known on a national level as one of the truly great names in recreation and social services."<sup>143</sup> Dubbed "Mrs. Recreation," (including in the title of

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<sup>139</sup> Russell H. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland, George Peake, the First Black Settler to Carl Stokes, the First Black Mayor* (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in cooperation with the Western Reserve Historical Society), 282.

<sup>140</sup> "Local Playgrounds Best in the Nation," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 14, 1958.

<sup>141</sup> "Albert E. Gamblee Last Rites Held," *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 3, 1964.

<sup>142</sup> 1940 Census, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio; Roll: T627\_3234; Page: 2B; Enumeration District: 92-783.

<sup>143</sup> Ordinance No. 2117-57, CCA.

her portrait in figure 4), Fairfax eventually rose to third-in-command of public recreation in Cleveland. She would use her position to call for the integration of Cleveland's public recreation spaces and programs.

Yet Fairfax's experience in many ways was unique, for there could only be one "Mrs. Recreation" in the city. PORC offered employment for a handful of young black Clevelanders, but it was not always their first career choice. While the wages were relatively good for some workers, this was not a career path that would result in wealth. A closer look at Jesse Owens's brief employment at PORC illustrates these points. In his memoir, Owens recalled the circumstances that led to his taking the job as playground supervisor:

Fifteen hundred and sixty dollars a year was enough to support a small family, but it wasn't enough to put me back in college. Negroes hadn't offered me anything better because they didn't have anything better to offer, and the white men who wanted me to travel at their expense to their homes all over the country and drink with their sons and chat with their daughters didn't seem to have any openings in their firms except for delivery boys or bathroom attendants.<sup>144</sup>

He went on to remember: "I worked at the playground and came home every night and thought of what I'd had and went off in a corner of our two-room apartment where I hoped Ruth [his wife] couldn't hear me and put some week-old newspapers in front of my face to try to hide my sadness." He despaired that "the best I could do was make \$130 a month watching kids on the swings."<sup>145</sup> For an elite athlete who had experienced the international fame and success of the Olympics, PORC did not represent a career of choice, and Owens soon moved on to other endeavors outside Cleveland. A decade later, playground supervisor pay remained an issue, and in 1946 the Central Areas Community Council passed a resolution requesting that the city

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<sup>144</sup> Owens, *Blackthink*, 47.

<sup>145</sup> Owens, *Blackthink*, 47-48.



increase the salaries of playground workers. The resolution stemmed from concerns over “the quality and continuity of leadership on city-operated playgrounds.”<sup>146</sup> In thinking about recreation as a field of employment for black urbanites, it is important to keep these struggles over pay in mind. Employment at PORC opened a few spaces for middle-class employment and a degree of economic mobility for a handful of black workers; but many of the recreation jobs paid minimal salaries and offered limited space for advancement.

### **Boxing and Black Pride at Portland-Outhwaite**

Employment opportunities made PORC an important space on the local black landscape, but it was the young athletes and especially the young boxers at the park who made PORC a source of local black pride prior to World War II. The most notable boxer to come out of PORC was Jack Wilson, who took home a silver medal from Berlin. Wilson’s boxing career had begun in the ring at Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center, making him one of several young black men who made names for themselves by boxing at PORC. After the Olympics, Wilson took a job at Kennard High School and volunteered at the park, helping to connect these two youth athletic spaces.

Since the 1920s and the fame of Jack Johnson, boxing had become the sport that contributed the most to national discourses presenting the “gendered metaphors of physical virility and athletic aggression” of black male athletes.<sup>147</sup> Boxing was widely popular with young black and white youth in Cleveland, a favorite of sport fans throughout Cleveland, and strongly

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<sup>146</sup> “Health, Recreation Are Discussed at Central Areas Meet,” *Call and Post*, July 6, 1946.

<sup>147</sup> Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 195-204, quote, 195. African American’s were not the only urban demographic to take collective pride in boxing achievements. For example, Irish boxers also fostered ethnic pride, a point noted by historian Jim Barrett in *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), page 27-29.

supported by the City's Director of Recreation, John Nagy.<sup>148</sup> Multiple area recreation centers and settlement houses hosted boxing programs, and Golden Glove tournaments drew crowds in the thousands throughout the city. Perhaps no other space gave the boxing crowds as much to cheer about as Portland-Outhwaite. This was in large part due to the trainer of the PORC boxing program, Wilfred "Whiz-Bang" Carter. Carter boxed in the 1920s before settling into a career as a mail carrier in Cleveland. But it was his training of amateur boxers in PORC that earned him a local and even national reputation. Jack Wilson's Silver Medal was perhaps the most noteworthy success of the boxers from PORC, but it was certainly not the only accomplishment. From 1932 to 1941, at least one of Carter's boxers won a title in the annual Cleveland Golden Gloves tournament in every year but one.<sup>149</sup>

In 1936, Carter began training another black youth who would go on to great boxing success. Carter first noticed Jimmy Bivins "hanging around" PORC with his older brother-in-law who boxed there. Bivins was born in rural Georgia before relocating to Cleveland with his family in 1922. He was part of the growing number of new black migrants coming to the city—the very demographic group that PORC was built to serve. By 1937, Bivins had won the Novice Championship for Cleveland, following that up the next year by winning the local amateur welterweight title before turning professional in 1939. He later went 86 for 112 matches as a light-heavyweight boxer in a career that saw him headline a bout at Madison Square Garden.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Nagy, inducted into the Ohio State Hall Sports Hall of Fame for his own collegiate boxing career, also served as Director of the area's Golden Gloves Association and enthusiastically supported the sport at city-run sites.

<sup>149</sup> "Passing in Review," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 6, 1936; "Carter's Rep As Trainer Rises," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 21, 1942; *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Carter, Wilfred Carlyle," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>150</sup> "Carter's Rep as a Trainer Rises," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 21, 1942; Bud Douglass, "The Saga of Jimmy Bivins," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 28, 1942.

Perhaps the most famous black Clevelander to pass through Carter's gym became best known not for his success in the boxing ring but for his impact in local politics. Carl Stokes boxed Golden Gloves under the tutelage of Carter, who recalled the young Stokes was "better than alright" in the ring.<sup>151</sup> In his memoir, Stokes recalled using the boxing skills he learned at the park to fight white youth at East Tech where he went to high school. Stokes remembered: "I had been boxing at the Portland-Outhwaite recreation center and was developing a fair reputation; maybe I just saw those white boys as a chance to get in some training."<sup>152</sup> The time spent at PORC shaped how Stokes navigated East Tech. The two spaces were connected through Stokes and other, less famous, youth who passed through the halls of each facility.

The *Call and Post* tracked the boxing matches of these PORC youth, and helped spread the word when the center held benefit boxing shows to aid in purchasing equipment for the program.<sup>153</sup> The newspaper also attempted to frame the meaning of local black prowess in the sport of boxing as a source of race pride. In one 1936 column, a *Call and Post* reporter noted: "[W]e have reached the stage that nearly two hundred white lads just hope that a crown or two will be won by whites." Black boxing success was a site for the active construction of a positive black masculinity. Stokes's description of beating up white youth at his high school reflected a similar masculinist discourse. PORC was a space for the development of what was often a very gendered race consciousness.

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<sup>151</sup> "'Whiz Bang' Carter Resigns Post as Boxing Secretary," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 12, 1971; see also Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 7; "Whiz Bang Carter Friends Sponsor Reeves Benefit," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 18, 1967; and, "Stokes Appoints Fighter to Boxing Comm.," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 27, 1968. In 1968 Stokes appointed Carter as Secretary of Boxing and Wrestling Commission of Cleveland, a post Carter held for three years before retiring for health reasons.

<sup>152</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 26.

<sup>153</sup> "POC and Central to Stage Boxing Program at Elks," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 16, 1939; "POC Amateurs to Sponsor Boxing Show Fri. Night," *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 14, 1940.

Boxing was also a way to differentiate the experience of living in Cleveland from that of race relations in the South. In the same article the reporter noted:

With tragic happenings like the Scottsboro case and other events occurring too regularly in the Bourbon Belt we are seeing the false notion of “getting along” down there blasted. Where but in the North could our boys get a chance in open competition with everybody? This in the end means the only real competition. For where athletic opportunities are segregated the caliber of performance is bound to suffer.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, the paper argued “real competition” where black and whites could oppose each other in the ring was possible in Cleveland, unlike in the South where segregation curtailed such bouts. The profound racism of the South was thus not only revealed through the horror of the Scottsboro case, but also in the lack of integrated sporting competitions. The losers in this equation were southerners who, by excluding black athletes from the arena of sport, had to sit through competitions with a lesser “caliber of performance.” Black success in the boxing ring in Cleveland carried with it a powerful social message on equality that the *Call and Post* used as evidence in support of the case for full integration.

### **Portland-Outhwaite After World War II**

Efforts to frame black sporting success at PORC as a motivation for integration grew more pronounced after World War II, even as black struggles over housing and employment in Central continued. The Central housing crisis was exacerbated further by a new influx of black migrant labor during World War II and a local housing market that could not keep up with wartime demands. According to one study conducted in 1946, “[t]he deterioration of the area has been contributed to by the exploitation of property by absentee landlords,” as well as by the

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<sup>154</sup> “Passing in Review,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 6, 1936.

increased encroachment of industry into residential areas of the neighborhood, lack of building code and zoning regulations, and deficiency of building materials for needed repairs due to the war effort.<sup>155</sup> Historian Todd Michney, whose work examines race and housing in the Cleveland area, explained the impact of World War II on the Central neighborhood:

In Cedar-Central, housing stock deteriorated dramatically over the course of the war. In a government-sanctioned, racially-segregated housing market where the conversion of properties to multi-family occupancy was actually promoted by local and federal housing officials, landlords had every incentive to maximize their profits through exploitative rental practices and keep their maintenance expenditures to a minimum. Forced to bear the full brunt of the wartime African-American population influx, Cedar-Central became increasingly overcrowded until, after the war, its bounds literally burst. By that point, however, much of the district's housing stock had been inalterably transformed and irretrievably worn down by the masses of humanity it had been made to shelter.<sup>156</sup>

Michney's analysis captures the devastating impact that World War II housing practices had on the Central area. For decades after the end of the war, Central's substandard housing stock far exceeded the city average, and it was well above that of other black enclaves in the city.<sup>157</sup>

Numerous poorly managed urban renewal and slum clearance projects initiated by the city only served to make the situation worse.

As World War II drew to a close, adults in Central began to worry more and more about juvenile delinquency in the area and they stepped up the recreation program at the park as a result. Popular activities included basketball, swimming, a model airplane group, a drama club for high school seniors, tennis instruction, and a teen canteen each Friday night. Girl and Boy

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<sup>155</sup> Mettie Baskin, Jean Lampe, Charlotte Williams, "High School Youth at Play," master's thesis Applied School of Science, Science in Social Administration, Western Reserve University, 1946, 3-4.

<sup>156</sup> Todd Michney, "Constrained Communities: Black Cleveland's Experience with World War II Public Housing," *Journal of Social History*, 40:4, Summer 2007, 948.

<sup>157</sup> "Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 9.

Scout troops also met at the park.<sup>158</sup> In the winter of 1945, PORC provided youth basketball, swimming, tennis, and badminton programs, as well as two weekly adult basketball nights.<sup>159</sup> In 1946, a police officer volunteered his time to organize a boys' softball team so that youth living in the Outhwaite Housing project and another nearby public housing facility could play in the local playground league.<sup>160</sup> That year, the black newspaper regularly followed the Outhwaite Falcons softball team and other sporting events at the park, publishing stories and photos about PORC for twelve weeks, or in slightly more than 20 percent of that year's issues. This made Portland-Outhwaite one of the *Call and Post's* most covered recreation venues in the city, and helped vernacularly situate the space for the celebration of black youth achievement through sport.<sup>161</sup> PORC's boxing success dipped after the war as "Whiz Bang" Carter focused his attention on managing Jimmy Bivens.<sup>162</sup> On occasion, boxers from the center still were able to

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<sup>158</sup> Baskin, 9-10. In addition to Portland-Outhwaite, the municipally managed Central Recreation Center, and the privately managed Karamu House, Phillis Wheatley and Friendly Inn Settlement Houses also provided a full slate of youth programs.

<sup>159</sup> "Muny Recreation Program for All," *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 22, 1945.

<sup>160</sup> Outhwaite Falcons Pace "D" Loup," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1946.

<sup>161</sup> This coverage of Portland-Outhwaite made it one of the best covered public recreation spots in the *Call and Post*—only the swimming anti-discrimination campaigns at public swimming areas of Garfield Park and Euclid Beach (for more information see Chapter 3 of this dissertation) and the Senneca Golf Course received more attention in the paper. The Central Recreation Center, another community center located in Central, also received coverage in the pages of the paper. PORC coverage included: "Class 'F' League in High Gear at POC," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 2, 1946; "Learn to Swim: February 18 to April 23," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 23, 1946; Photo, "Five Husky Reasons," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 3, 1946; "Senators Work Out at POC Ball Field," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 6, 1946; "City Playgrounds Open Monday, June 17," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 15, 1946; Cleveland Jackson, "Headline Action," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 13, 1946; "Negro Swimmers Point For Cleveland's Winter Carnival; First Annual Mid-West Swim Show; Portland-Outhwaite Center, July 27," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1946; "Outhwaite Falcons Pace 'D' Loop," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July, ? 1946; "Central Recreation News," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July ?, 1946; "Negro Swimmers Compete At POC Saturday, July 27; Detroit Favored," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 27, 1946; "Detroit Aquatic Stars Sweep Midwestern Tank Laurels; Brewster Center Cops 4 Midwestern Swim Titles; POC Four Beat Champs," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 3, 1946; "Open Playgrounds For Fall Program," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 7, 1946.

<sup>162</sup> "Willard Earl Become Third Negro to Join Amateur Boxers Trainers Association," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1946.

get their names in the paper.<sup>163</sup> Although these boxers enjoyed less renown, the sport continued in popularity and in 1952 PORC hosted Golden Gloves training five days a week.<sup>164</sup>

While PORC boxing appeared less in the pages of the *Call and Post*, youth basketball received considerable attention. This news coverage often framed basketball as part of the claim for full rights of citizenship for black Clevelanders. In the postwar period, associations between sport and black citizenship became connected to black military service—and Portland-Outhwaite was a key site in the city for the construction of these claims to full inclusion. There were two points of connections between parks and black servicemen. First, local youth teams often took on the names of black war heroes. Second, parks came to be seen as spaces of recuperation for returning black veterans.

At PORC, in the aftermath of World War II, the communal admiration of black athletic prowess was tied closely to a celebration of returning black veterans from the war. This intersection between black male war heroes and young black youth basketball players made Portland-Outhwaite a space for the public affirmation of a black masculinity rooted in claims of full citizenship through military participation. This connection could be seen readily in the names of Portland-Outhwaite teams participating in the city-wide youth “Class F” Basketball League. Team names included the Dorrie Millers, named after the naval cook who was the first African American to be awarded the Naval Cross for his actions during the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Hugh Mulzac, another black naval hero and former seaman who had served on Marcus Garvey’s short-lived Black Star Line freighter company, also had a team named in his honor. Yet another

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<sup>163</sup> John E. Fuster, “Brooks and Bagley Win Top Awards of Tourney,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 17, 1951, William Cherry and Albert Phillips from PORC took their class in the novice category; William “Sheep” Jackson, “Clevelanders Snag Five Open Division Prospects,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 13, 1960.

<sup>164</sup> “They Yearn for Golden Gloves,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 12, 1952.

basketball squad drew inspiration from the air instead of the sea and took the name Ben Davis after the famous Commander of the Tuskegee Airmen. A fourth team, the Charles Loeb Travelers, looked closer to home for its name. Loeb was a black World War II correspondent in the Pacific Theater, who when stateside served as the *Call and Post's* city editor and earned the nickname “dean of black newsmen” during his thirty-five years with the paper.<sup>165</sup> The naming of this team was another tie that connected the black newspaper and PORC. As these team names were displayed on scoreboards in PORC and various public gyms, and reports of team wins were published in both the *Call and Post* and other local daily newspapers, the names of these black war heroes circulated repeatedly throughout the city.

Portland-Outhwaite and other Cleveland parks were expected to do more than help circulate the names of black war heroes and serve as a model of integration. City officials and community leaders also hoped parks could play a role in helping veterans readjust to civilian life in the city. In a 1946 *Call and Post* column, one reporter described the city’s recreation program thus: “The perspective is broad and the opportunities are unlimited for those who seek to get away from the monotony of the city’s hum-drum life. Recreation and relaxation in sports can help to heal many mental and physical wounds caused by the war.” Public parks, consequently, were seen as palliatives to the city’s hustle-and-bustle, landscapes of reprieve needed all the more after the war. This perspective applied to Portland-Outhwaite, which had “an excellent

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<sup>165</sup> “Class ‘F’ League in High Gear at POC,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February, 2, 1946; In addition to these World War II names, one team took the name the Renaissance Jrs. after the all-black New York professional basketball team and another went by Wee Willie Smith after Renaissance’s popular star; A third team took the name the Capt. Lawrence Sports, after the white general who reportedly declared, “Tell the men to fire faster! Don’t give up the ship!” from the deck of the *Chesapeake* in the War of 1812’s Battle of Lake Erie, a naval story familiar to any child coming up through the Ohio public school system. For more information about the honored WWII vets, see: Asante, Molefi Kete, *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2002) “Benjamin O. Davis,” 100-102, “Dorrie Miller, 227-229; Hugh Mulzac, *A Star To Steer By* (New York: New York International Publishers, 1963).



swimming pool for the crowded Central area.”<sup>166</sup> At this pool, and at the city’s public golf courses, picnic greens, and ball fields, it was hoped that black veterans could ease their minds and battered bodies. Of course, at some recreation spaces, such as Garfield Park and Pool (discussed in the next chapter), veterans would have to engage in a prolonged civil rights battle to access these supposedly public spaces of healing. The palliative cure of parks for black veterans remained unevenly prescribed throughout Cleveland.

Black community celebration of youth basketball at Portland-Outhwaite was not limited to the park’s young male males, though they did garner the bulk of local black media attention. In 1942, the Portland-Outhwaite girl’s playground basketball team, made up of young women from nearby Kennard Junior High, built a local reputation for their winning record over other squads. However, the team struggled to find a “backer,” and the team’s adult leader tried to make the case in the newspaper for “a little cash plus the will to help these girls in their effort to find themselves through character building organization and recreation.”<sup>167</sup> As this struggle to find funding indicates, young women’s athletic programs sometimes took a back seat to the boys’ squads. The emphasis of black male achievements meant that sometimes girls’ programs received less material investment.

Young women’s teams also did not typically bear the names of prominent local or national citizens as young men’s teams did. Into the 1950s, PORC girls’ basketball teams included names like the “Babes,” reflecting a gendered, and also, either an infantilizing or sexualizing of these young athletes.<sup>168</sup> The lack of more specific naming meant the girls’ team

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<sup>166</sup> Cleveland Jackson, “Headline Action,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 13, 1946.

<sup>167</sup> “Wanted! A Backer, P.O.C. Girl’s Team,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 6, 1942.

<sup>168</sup> “POC Girl Cager Cup Championship,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 4, 1959.

victories, which there were plenty of, did not contribute to a black citizenship discourse in the same way as boys' teams were allowed to do.

Despite these limits placed on young women's teams both the young men and young ladies of PORC were able to demonstrate their basketball prowess versus white teams and players, and they thus served as a source for race pride. Youth basketball also became a site for making the case for integration. In 1949, a "Report on Intercultural and Interracial Activities in Recreation" issued by the city described the Municipal League for youth basketball, which included all black teams, all white teams, and "many teams of Negro and White players." John Nagy, the Recreation Director, explained the stakes of this type of recreational integration:

We feel through the union of different racial and cultural groups in recreation experiences, there will develop a finer and more broad minded citizen who will be prepared to answer those social problems that arise in the future. It is only through understanding one another that we can appreciate the role of each person in society. This mutual appreciation of one another will manifest itself in political, social, and cultural developments unprecedented before in history. America is growing up. These inter-cultural and inter-racial recreation experiences will help accelerate our development so that we will be able hold our heads up proudly as a mature and progressive nation.<sup>169</sup>

These lofty goals of spurring "political, social and cultural developments unprecedented before in history" might have been too much weight for a youth basketball program to bear, and certainly basketball never led to a "mature and progressive nation." Yet, the fact that youth sport was discussed in such terms illustrates that the perceived importance of these programs went far beyond leisure-time activity. This emphasis also suggests that the municipal aim of promoting Cleveland's reputation as a "democratic" city extended to the urban recreation landscape.

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<sup>169</sup> John Nagy, "Report on Inter-Cultural and Inter-racial Activities in Recreation," December 9, 1949, pages 7-8, Subject File: "Recreation 1940-1949." CPL-PA.

Such framing of the basketball court as a political space was not a trope limited to Cleveland, Ohio. Historian Richard Pierce has examined how local black leaders in Indianapolis, Indiana used the success of the black men's basketball team of Crispus Attucks High School to make demands for integration and increased political representation of the city's black residents. In Indianapolis, similar to Cleveland, these political claims based on basketball had somewhat limited ability to generate significant change in the lived experiences of black residents.<sup>170</sup> Yet, youth sporting achievements served as a platform from which to make political claims in multiple cities throughout the urban north.

No other sport served as more of a platform for African American demands for equality than did baseball. As baseball historian Adrian Burgos argued: [T]he national pastime was a forum in which the inconsistencies in American discourses on racial equality, and the lived reality of race riots and segregation, would become glaringly obvious."<sup>171</sup> Baseball was very popular in Cleveland in the 1940s, and "more than 1,100 baseball teams were in action on Cleveland hard ball and soft ball fields," including at Portland-Outhwaite, during the summer of 1948. That year these sandlot games were estimated to have drawn 2.25 million spectators, more than the city's professional team, the Cleveland Indians could boast.<sup>172</sup> Plenty of fans also went to see professional baseball as the 1940s marked the era of greatest success for Cleveland teams, in large part because of the excellence of black ball players. The success started with the Cleveland Buckeyes, the city's Negro League team from 1943 to 1948, which played at League

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<sup>170</sup> Pierce, "More Than A Game," 3-23.

<sup>171</sup> Adrian Burgos, *Playing Americas Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (University of California Press: Berkeley, California, 2007), 184.

<sup>172</sup> "Organized Athletics," in "Recreation in Cleveland," 1949, "Recreation File, 1940-1949, CPL-PAL.

Park located less than one-and-a-half miles northeast of PORC. The Buckeyes won the Negro American League pennant in 1945 and 1947, and the Negro League Series in 1945.<sup>173</sup>

The *Call and Post* reported regularly on the Buckeyes' success, but also ran stories pushing for integration of professional baseball. William O. Walker, the editor of the paper, who served as the president of the Negro Newspaper Association in 1942, used his position to call on black newspapers throughout the nation to advocate for baseball integration. Over the next few years the *Call and Post* continued to support the winning Buckeyes, while at the same time decrying segregated baseball. Finally in 1947, Larry Doby joined the Cleveland Indians, becoming the first black baseball player to break the color line in the American League. There was much to celebrate for those following Doby's career. The year after he broke into the majors, Doby was joined by the very popular pitcher Satchel Paige. That year the Indians won the World Series, and Doby became the first black player to hit a home run in both the All Star game and the World Series in the same year.<sup>174</sup> With the success of Doby, the *Call and Post* reported less and less on the Buckeyes, and more on the Indians, and the Buckeyes and the Negro Leagues became casualties of the success of integration.<sup>175</sup> As sports historian Stephanie Liscio has explained, the achievements of these professional players "on the ball diamond and the behavior of baseball players in the public realm had the potential to help break additional barriers in the worlds of business, government, and education."<sup>176</sup> For the *Call and Post* and its

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<sup>173</sup> Stephanie M. Liscio, *Integrating Cleveland Baseball: Media Activism, the Integration of the Indians, and the Demise of the Negro League Buckeyes* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010), Chapters 4 and 5. Dave O'Karma, "The Forgotten Championship," *Cleveland Magazine*, May 2006.

<sup>174</sup> Dave O'Karma, "The Forgotten Championship," *Cleveland Magazine*, May 2006.

<sup>175</sup> For more about the impact of baseball integration on the Negro Leagues, see Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 191-192.

<sup>176</sup> Liscio, *Integrating Cleveland Baseball*, 129.

readership, the stakes of integrated baseball was much higher than cheering the home team on to the pennant. Achievement in baseball, basketball and other sports were opportunities for black residents to both celebrate their racial identity, while also claiming their identity and rights as Americans.

In 1954, the Cleveland Indians entered into a specific relationship with Portland-Outhwaite Park, holding an annual baseball school at PORC. The *Cleveland Call and Post* sponsored the all-day baseball clinic and promoted the event in the sports pages of the paper, yet another connection between the newspaper and park. The program was offered to boys fourteen to eighteen years of age, and although held in the Central neighborhood, boys from across the city were encouraged to attend.<sup>177</sup> In 1957 David Pope, an African American outfielder for the Indians, joined the clinic as it expanded to nine days and multiple sites along with Portland-Outhwaite.<sup>178</sup>

In the years after World War II, the ball diamond at PORC kept busy, as did the swimming pool. In 1946, the *Call and Post* ran a photo of the PORC's head lifeguard, John Morgan, standing in front of a line of five other head lifeguards from other east side area swimming pools. Morgan stood in his swimming trunks uniform, arms folded and biceps flexed. The tagline for the photo read: "Five Husky Reasons why the Learn to Swim Program has been so successful especially among the fair sex." The lifeguards behind Morgan in the photograph appeared to be white; this picture thus placed Morgan as an object of sex appeal along with, indeed even positioned slightly in front of, his white counterparts. An accompanying photo of

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<sup>177</sup> "C & P Baseball School for Portland Outhwaite," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 16, 1955; "C & P Sports," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 23, 1955; "C & P, Recreation Division Baseball Clinic Friday," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 6, 1955.

<sup>178</sup> "Pope, Indian Scouts Aid Baseball Clinic," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 12, 1957.

female lifeguards standing in their swimsuits included the caption: “Four Shapely reasons Clevelanders are flocking to municipal pools...” Included in the photo was an African American swim instructor from the Central Pool, Geneva Jackson, alongside three apparently white young women.<sup>179</sup> The *Call and Post*’s positive portrayal of black swimmers at the public poolside contrasted sharply with the anxious tone of the mainstream press’s characterizations of the potentially sexualized presence of African Americans at swimming spots that undergirded much conflict and violence at many city pools during this time.<sup>180</sup>

Lifeguards were not the only poolside attractions that landed Portland-Outhwaite in the *Call and Post* sports pages. In July 1946, the recreation center held its first ever Midwestern Aquatic Association swimming meet—“the first all Negro aquatic show ever scheduled for Cleveland.” Several local black-owned businesses contributed funding to buy trophies for the event. Black youth swimming teams from across the state of Ohio, including Akron, Dayton, Cincinnati, Columbus, Springfield and Toledo were scheduled to compete. South Bend, Indiana and Detroit, Michigan also sent teams to the regional event. The *Call and Post* explained the impetus for these teams to make the trip to Cleveland: “Negroes may look with pride upon the work and plans of the Midwestern Swimming Association. Their pioneer work in the new field is worth the support of the entire section of the country.”<sup>181</sup> The youth swimming competition

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<sup>179</sup> “Learn to Swim: February 18 to April 23,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 23, 1946; Photo, “Five Husky Reasons,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March, 3, 1946.

<sup>180</sup> “In the Swim,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, June 24, 1939; July 18, 1939. Such construction of black sex-appeal at urban swimming pools through the pages of black newspapers was not unique to Cleveland. For example, in 1939 the black-owned *Indianapolis Recorder* ran a weekly “In the Swim” column that reported activities at the pool in Indianapolis’s black recreation space, Douglass Park. “In the Swim” regularly highlighted the appearance of both lifeguards and swimming patrons, including a story that one “sturdily built” lifeguard inspired female swimmers to fake drowning in order to gain his attention.

<sup>181</sup> Cleveland Jackson, “First Annual Mid-West Swim Show; Portland-Outhwaite Center, July 27,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1946.

placed PORC in a Midwest network of black recreational spaces, and made the pool a place for a celebration of black sporting achievement that reached far beyond the Central neighborhood.

Local black youth with athletic talent could make a name for themselves at Portland-Outhwaite pool. Yet, while some boys could swim their way into the headlines of local newspapers, other young men did not feel as welcome at the center's pool. In a 1946 study of Central high school-aged youth recreation patterns, one unnamed boy explained in an interview, "I would like to go swimming at the [PORC] but the boys are too rough there—Don't write that down though because somebody might read this and think I'm a cream puff. I can be just as tough as they are if I have to be." This quote indicates that boys who did not identify with the type of masculinity produced at PORC might not feel welcome at the pool. The boy's concerns that the other youth might peg him as a "cream puff" indicated that a certain type of athletic acumen was expected for full inclusion in the park's programs. A girl also confirmed this reputation of PORC as a space for tough boys, noting: "[PORC] is not desirable. My mother doesn't let me attend."<sup>182</sup> The gendered-racial meanings constructed at PORC through boxing, basketball, swimming and the like, did not equally include all youth who lived near the park.

The concerns articulated by the interviewed girl further indicated that some young women, or at least their mothers, were not always certain of the safety of the park. Perhaps some of this concern stemmed from a 1943 report of an attempted rape of a neighborhood girl at the PORC pool. That same year, three female workers at the recreation center were attacked while leaving the park by what the newspaper called "a gang of youthful female hoodlums."<sup>183</sup> Such incidents of violence did not fit into the narrative of race pride the *Call and Post* typically

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<sup>182</sup> Bevens, 35.

<sup>183</sup> "Outhwaite Center Employees Victims of Vicious Attacks," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 4, 1943.

assigned to PORC, and the paper declared the attacks “shameful.” The park sometimes fell short of the wholesome landscape of citizenship production that local community leaders envisioned.

Further, PORC was not always attractive for local working-class youth because of its structured programs overseen by middle-class adults. Many youth preferred to eschew the park programs and instead gathered for unsupervised recreation elsewhere, a fact that troubled many local black adults greatly. This preference was one impetus for the report mentioned above. The report, sponsored by the Western Reserve University and entitled “High School Youth at Play,” included interviews of local teens in order to gauge which recreation spaces they preferred. The report attempted to discover why youth often frequented house party dances, stood on street corners, and participated in other activities deemed destructive by the study’s authors, instead of visiting city-sanctioned recreation programs. City recreation leader Florence Fairfax also lamented the recreation patterns of local youth, and in the pages of the *Call and Post* she urged that youth be included in the planning of recreation programs. It was hoped that more youth participation in developing programs would result in increased attendance at the programs themselves. Otherwise, she was worried, young people would continue to succumb to the “dance craze” instead of attending the sports and other activities offered by city recreation programs.<sup>184</sup>

Such concerns over dancing and delinquency were not unique to Cleveland, and similar sentiments echoed among black urban community leaders as far back as the years immediately following the Civil War. As Tera Hunter explained in her work on antebellum Atlanta, *To ‘Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, the “black elite” of that city tried to regulate dancing, especially by young black women, as part of their effort “to impose its own value and standards on the masses, to obliterate plebian cultural expressions that,

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<sup>184</sup> “Young Adults Give Hand to Juveniles,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March, 29, 1963.



in its view, prolonged the degradation of the race.”<sup>185</sup> Such debates over the proper function of recreation carried classed undertones. In Cleveland, one of the intended purposes of parks and city-funded recreation programs was to discipline the behavior of youth, an issue that was seen as more and more pressing with the rising number of young people due to the postwar baby boom and the continuing influx of new black southern migrants. Yet, many young people simply rejected the public recreation options represented by PORC and other parks.

Despite these limits in reaching all local youth, the boxing, basketball, baseball and swimming programs at Portland-Outhwaite were well-attended and regular fixtures on the pages of the *Call and Post*. Likewise, the park, adjacent to the Outhwaite Homes complex, had become a fixture on the local black landscape—a space for the public construction of a positive black masculinity, which while somewhat limited in its inclusivity gained wide circulation in the post-War era. While these programs grew in their popularity, PORC stood in the midst of an area very underserved by municipal recreation facilities. The Central neighborhood’s recreation amenities fell far below the levels recommended by local and national municipal planning standards. The 1945 “General Plan of Central Cleveland” described these deficiencies:

Central Cleveland at present offers services shockingly below the adopted standards. Lack of enough play areas properly maintained and supervised is not only a factor in high juvenile delinquency and child traffic accidents, but also a major reason for the flight of many families into outer areas, leaving behind blight, falling property values and reduced tax returns. It is essential to the broad program of revitalizing Central Cleveland that recreation facilities be brought up to this standard just as rapidly as the community can make it possible.<sup>186</sup>

The stakes of the underdeveloped recreation landscape in Central could be dire, according to this planning assessment. Juvenile delinquency, loss of population, erosion of the tax base, blight and

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<sup>185</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 186.

<sup>186</sup> “A General Plan of Central Cleveland,” Cleveland Planning Commission, October 1945, 10. CPL-PA.

general decay of the fabric of the community all threatened if the problem was not addressed. According to the plan, the Central area had 68 playgrounds, but in order to meet demand required 67 more along with the expansion of 39 existing facilities. In addition, the plan called for the construction of eleven new playfields. However, the city's 1946-1951 capital improvement budget only provided funding for 24 of the recommended 106 playground projects and eight of the eleven playfields.<sup>187</sup> Since Central was bisected by several busy thoroughfares and train tracks, the lack of a nearby park or playground meant that children on the wrong side of a busy street could not safely access the already overburdened facilities that existed.

Youth in these underserved pockets of Central were well aware of the lack of park recreation facilities near their homes. In 1947, one local teacher asked her students to write an essay about how they would like to see their communities improve. One boy named Sylvester wrote as part of his essay:

I wish we had a park to sit in when we have summer vacation. I like the green grass and the pretty trees. We learn about trees in school. People live too close together here. I am going to live on a farm when I grow big.<sup>188</sup>

For young Sylvester, the lack of a nearby park affected his summer plans and led him to dream about leaving the city. Youth throughout Central and in other black enclaves in Cleveland would have had similar experiences with a lack of facilities.

Many of the parents of these youth did not sit idly by and wait for the city to address the problem. They instead organized for new and improved parks and playgrounds in their neighborhoods. In 1945, parents in the increasingly integrated enclave of Glenville successfully

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<sup>187</sup> "A General Plan of Central Cleveland," 10. CPL-PA. Planning standards adopted by the City in 1944 called for 1 acre of playground for every 1,000 elementary school children, 1 and ¼ acres of playfield for per 1,000 high school age and adults, and 1 acre of neighborhood park per 1,000 of all age groups.

<sup>188</sup> "Out of the Mouths of Babes come Suggestions for Better Community," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 1, 1947.

worked with city officials to develop a playground for their children, and then 30 of these parents received training to volunteer as supervisors at the site.<sup>189</sup> Such grassroots efforts to increase recreation space were consistently organized on a neighborhood level, and during the postwar period were often led by umbrella neighborhood organizations. Such was the case in 1948 when the newly formed inter-racial neighborhood group the Kinsman's Citizens League (KCL), began to lobby City Hall for a playground. The KCL was founded to coordinate the efforts of existing neighborhood-level organizations in the Kinsman area, and was led by men and women elected by other members of the organization and "well known for their work in the community."<sup>190</sup> These neighborhood indigenous leaders, and not large city-wide organizations such as the NAACP or Urban League, were most often at the forefront of recreation planning initiatives. The Kinsman neighborhood, which included a growing black population, only had one half of the recreation acreage recommended by the city. The playground project was spearheaded by John Jones, an African American man from the neighborhood who was employed by the Cleveland Welfare Federation. Another leader of the playground initiative was the white principal of the local junior high, and the group enlisted the support of black Councilman Charles Carr along with several area ministers. Jones and his team of neighborhood leaders held public meetings to get feedback from area residents about the project, and they sent representatives to city meetings such as the Joint Recreation Board and the City Planning Advisory Committee to advocate for the project. Eventually, twenty-two local organizations joined the campaign, and the city committed to building a new playground adjacent to the local school.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> "Parents Being Cedar Playground: Hold Opening Tuesday," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 23, 1963.

<sup>190</sup> "Kinsman Citizen's League Will Organize Groups in Kinsman Area," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 13, 1948.

<sup>191</sup> "Kinsman Area Starting Drive for Recreation, *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 24, 1948; "Kinsman Area Citizens Insist on Better Playground Facilities," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 14, 1948; "Kinsman Area Gets

In 1949, the Central area saw one of the most ambitious community-driven recreation efforts. On the eastern edge of the Central neighborhood, more than 700 young people were forced to crowd into two tiny rooms at the local library for recreation programs due to a lack of facilities. The Central Area Community Council (CACC) began to organize to find better recreation space and alleviate the overcrowding. The CACC was founded in 1945, and much like the KCL it was an effort to coordinate the efforts of existing neighborhood organizations. Some of the most prominent citizens of the Central area played leadership roles in the CACC, including the group's first President, Perry B. Jackson, who would later become the first black judge in Ohio. John Holly, the leader of the Future Outlook League, also served on the original CACC. These prominent leaders were careful to recognize the work that came before the CACC, assuring that the new organization wanted to build on the "groundwork [that] was laid by the people of the community."<sup>192</sup> One of the CAAC's initiatives was the development of a new recreation center for the area. After a year of "a lot of promises and the general run-around" by city officials, the concerned residents found an ally in black City Councilor Harold Gassaway, who strongly supported the project and helped secure city funding for a million-dollar new facility.<sup>193</sup> Moving its way through city bureaucracy, this large project took a decade to complete. But when the Fairfax Recreation Center, named after Mrs. Florence Fairfax, opened in 1959, it was one the largest and best appointed public recreation facilities in the city.<sup>194</sup>

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Playground; Citizens Praise Mayor Burke, *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 20, 1948; and, "Kinsman Citizens League Reviews Year's Effort,; Lauds Jas. Lister," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 19, 1949.

<sup>192</sup> "Community Council Planning Clean Up for May," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 15, 1944.

<sup>193</sup> Simeon Booker, Jr. "700 Youngsters Forced to Play in Two Tiny Rooms," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 29, 1949; "All Talk of Juvenile Delinquency But Recreation Spots are Lacking," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 26, 1949 (quote); and, "Million Dollar Playground for Central Areas," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 5, 1949.

<sup>194</sup> "1,500 attend Opening of Million-Dollar Center," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 2, 1959.

Each of these three projects significantly altered the local landscape, and in the last example created a large park and recreation facility that continues to serve residents today. These projects started with the concerns and energies of local black residents, and women often played prominent roles in these community organizing campaigns. These projects represented a black planning vision for Cleveland, one that prioritized the needs of local youth and relied on a model of coalition building and collective group planning.

### **Portland-Outhwaite as an Island in the Sea of Urban Renewal**

One of the reasons that the Fairfax Recreation Center took so long to develop was that the project required the removal of 1,700 residents who occupied the land selected for the new park.<sup>195</sup> This type of displacement was controversial because there was already not enough housing in the Central area. The 1930s city planning impetus that had led to the founding of Outhwaite Homes had by no means solved the Central housing shortage. World War II housing pressures had rapidly intensified the problem. A later report by the Cleveland City Planning Commission described a stark contrast between the Outhwaite Homes and its surrounding neighborhood: “On the east stood the trim, ordered, low-rise apartments of Outhwaite Homes. On the west lay acre upon acre of our crowded and dingy ‘Central Area’ slums.”<sup>196</sup> This endemic housing problem helped make the Central neighborhood the target of one of the most extensive urban renewal initiatives in the United States.

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<sup>195</sup> “Million Dollar Playground for Central Areas,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 5, 1949.

<sup>196</sup> “Planning in Cleveland,” Cleveland City Planning Commission, 1963, Subject File “City Planning in Cleveland, 1960-1969.” CPL-PA.

The guiding document for this response was the 1949 General Plan of Cleveland. Supported by the Federal Housing Act that passed that same year, slum-clearance urban renewal became *the* planning drumbeat of the city for the next decade. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of private money from local firms, coupled with local and federal funding, drove the projects. In 1953, Clevelanders approved a \$7-million bond to fund the General Plan's urban renewal vision. In 1954, more than 100 local corporations pooled their resources to form the Cleveland Development Foundation, establishing a \$2.1 million revolving fund to provide seed money to encourage further private investment in urban renewal projects. Much of the plan and its money targeted Central.<sup>197</sup>

By the early 1950s, city planning maps showed Outhwaite Homes and Portland-Outhwaite Park surrounded by areas targeted for the slum clearance. Located just west of the park stood "Project B," or the "Longwood Project," one of Cleveland's earliest slum-clearance programs that was supposed to see the development of new housing for 966 Cleveland families. In addition to Project B, city planners labeled each of their subsequent proposed renewal projects alphabetically, and a veritable alphabet soup of proposed slum clearance plans surrounded the Portland-Outhwaite streets. Proposed projects A through G accounted for most of the blocks to the west and north of the park, and projects H through O almost completely surrounded the park to the east and south.<sup>198</sup>

The articulated goals for this alphabet planning were to improve the housing conditions and comprehensively revitalize each targeted area. This vision was not to be realized. By 1960,

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<sup>197</sup> "Report on Urban Renewal in Cleveland," September, 1955, 2-3, 10, Subject File: "Urban Renewal, 1950-1959, Folder #2."; and, "Planning in Cleveland," 4, Subject File: "City Planning Cleveland, 1960-1969" CPL-PA.

<sup>198</sup> "Report on Urban Renewal in Cleveland," September, 1955, 2-3, 10, Subject File: "Urban Renewal, 1950-1959, Folder #2, CPL-PA.

it was estimated that nearly 60 percent of the housing stock in Central was “substandard.”<sup>199</sup> A 2003 assessment of the city’s urban renewal program concluded: “While well-intended urban renewal efforts only made matters worse.”<sup>200</sup> Slum clearance did not result in the construction of new homes at the rate of those torn down. Some of the cleared land was used for several freeway and road projects that crisscrossed the Central district. These transportation projects not only fragmented the Central landscape, but they also permanently displaced those who had lived on the land to other neighborhoods in Cleveland, exacerbating housing shortages elsewhere in the city. Yet, the freeways did not account for the full failure of urban renewal to revitalize Central. The development of “Project B,” or the Longwood Project, was indicative of problems ahead, as noted by a later city review of the initiative: “The creation of Longwood, from its first scratch on paper to its completion and occupancy took nine years.” Plagued by financial difficulties, the completed project fell 20 percent below the original projection of 966 family units, with only 770 units in the completed new housing.<sup>201</sup> The long delays and frustrations of Longwood steered local private investment away from similar public housing projects. Throughout Central, land was cleared but projects stalled when adequate private investment did not materialize. Directly adjacent to the west of Longwood, authorities cleared 114 acres for urban renewal, but the land stood undeveloped for five years. Finally, unable to secure investment for low-income housing, the city rezoned the land for the construction of civic “institutions.” Several organizations built new facilities at the location during the mid-1960s, including Cuyahoga Community College, the Greater Cleveland Headquarters of the Boy Scouts,

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<sup>199</sup>Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 9.

<sup>200</sup> “Central Village: Neighborhood Profile: A Resource for Community Change,” CPL-PA.

<sup>201</sup> “Planning in Cleveland,” Cleveland City Planning Commission, 1963, 8, Subject File: City Planning Cleveland, 1960-1969,” CPL-PA.

and an expansion of St. Vincent's Charity Hospital. While these institutions provided both services and potential employment opportunities for local residents, new housing remained elusive.<sup>202</sup>

By 1963, urban renewal had resulted in only 1,380 total units of low-income housing. The next five years saw only 180 more, and by 1968 the city's self-assessment of planning in Cleveland noted: "Today, to clear wide acreages of slums, and create new and decent housing for people, is more unattainable than a trip to the moon."<sup>203</sup> For Central, this slum clearance meant that people left and did not come back. From 1950 to 1960, the overall population of Central dropped roughly 24 percent from 62,408 to 47,512. Over the next decade, the population was nearly halved again.<sup>204</sup> Many of these displaced black residents moved to other growing black neighborhoods in Cleveland, including Hough, Glenville, Kinsmen, Lee-Miles and Mt. Pleasant. In all, Cleveland's various urban renewal projects consumed more than 6,000 acres starting in the 1940s, making it the largest such program in the nation. The massive amount of land cleared as part of these programs occurred predominantly in seven areas on Cleveland's east side, and especially in Central, disproportionately displacing poor and lower-income black residents.<sup>205</sup>

Recent scholarship, such as Mindy Thompson Fullilove's *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It*, has traced the devastating

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<sup>202</sup> "Planning in Cleveland," Cleveland City Planning Commission, 1968, 16, "City Planning Cleveland, 1960-1969," CPL-PA.

<sup>203</sup> "Planning in Cleveland," Cleveland City Planning Commission, 1968, 16, "City Planning Cleveland, 1960-1969, CPL-PA.

<sup>204</sup> "City of Cleveland Neighborhood Fact Sheet: Central, Statistical Planning Area (SPA) #3), Subject File: "Neighborhoods: Central," CPL-PA. The population flight continued after the 1970s. By 1990 the population of Central reached its lowest point at 13,788, or a total population loss of 82 percent from 1920-1990. The entire city of Cleveland also saw steady, although not as dramatic population loss during this time, 4.2% (1950 to 1960), 14.3 (1960 to 1970), 23.6% (1970 to 1980), and 11.9% (1980 to 1990).

<sup>205</sup> Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," 43; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 161-162.



impact of urban renewal on black neighborhoods in the mid-twentieth century United States. The course of urban renewal in Cleveland was repeated in cities throughout the country. Fullilove examines how the 1949 Federal Housing Act allowed for the designation of so-called ‘blighted’ areas on the urban landscape, allowing urban planners to level these neighborhoods and designate the cleared land for projects including new convention centers, sports arenas, business districts, and medical complexes. Public housing projects were almost always supposed to accommodate the dislodged residents, but few of these projects ever reached their new unit goals, effectively ejecting thousands of residents of color and the urban poor from their homes and neighborhoods. According to Fullilove, federally backed urban renewal projects have resulted in the destruction of 1,600 black neighborhoods since the initial law’s enactment. She has theorized the result of this displacement as “root shock,” a “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem.”<sup>206</sup> She argues that the dislodging of poor and working-class urban black people from their neighborhoods severs these individuals from established friendship networks and local institutions such as churches, clubs, and social spaces. Further, those displaced residents who find themselves scattered in other neighborhoods have decreased opportunities to learn about employment via word-of-mouth, since they are removed from their social networks. While these displaced residents will form new community networks and spaces, the social fabric of the neighborhoods they have left is irrevocably lost.

In Cleveland’s Central neighborhood, “root shock” reverberated throughout the 1950s as bulldozers rumbled in and battered dilapidated houses to the ground, sending hundreds of families looking for new places to live. The local “emotional ecosystem” of the area was

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<sup>206</sup> Mindy Thompson Fullilove, M.D. *Rootshock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It* (New York: One World, 2005), 11, 20, 58 (quote on page 11).

permanently altered by these planning decisions, as those who were left behind in Central had to remap their local social landscape with each swing of the wrecking ball. Portland-Outhwaite Park and its adjacent public housing complex stood at the very heart of this sea of urban renewal chaos. Although the park endured periods of disinvestment and maintenance decline, by and large PORC remained a steady, practically unchanged space amidst the rubble of destruction. It thus became a space for the maintenance of the emotional ecosystem of the neighborhood. The stability of public recreation spaces, such as PORC, bears more consideration by scholars interested in the impact of planning decisions on black communities in the urban north.<sup>207</sup>

Urban renewal was not the only cause of cultural displacement that occurred throughout the Central neighborhood in the postwar period. Several African American institutions also relocated from Central during this time. After the original Karamu Theater burnt down in 1939, the theater moved to a new location east of Central in 1949.<sup>208</sup> In 1959, the *Call and Post* also packed up its offices and moved further east from Central.<sup>209</sup> These institutions followed the many economically mobile black residents who left Central for more affluent neighborhoods. With these losses, remaining spaces such as PORC became all the more important.

### **Youth Sport at PORC during the 1950s and 1960s**

One of the key ways that the park served as a stable space for community gathering and socializing was through its popular youth sports programs. By the mid-1950s, the municipal basketball leagues had established a steady draw of spectators in gyms across the city. In 1955,

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<sup>207</sup> Seawell, “Douglass: Indianapolis First Black Park” examines a similar stability of Douglass Park for the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood of Indianapolis.

<sup>208</sup> Reuben, “A History of the Karamu Theater,” Chapter 7.

<sup>209</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. “Cleveland Call and Post.”

the Recreation Division of Cleveland reported attendance for the basketball program at more than 84,000, and by the 1958-59 season that number had doubled to nearly 170,000. Boys' leagues accounted for more than 80 percent of that attendance, and the Portland-Outhwaite boys were some of the best teams on the courts.<sup>210</sup>

While rec-league basketball drew large crowds inside the Portland-Outhwaite gym, the games that took place on the park's outdoor courts showcased some of the best young basketball talent in Ohio. Members of the East Tech men's basketball team, whose high school sat just across the street from the park, often practiced on the PORC courts. In 2009, the *Plain Dealer* published a story reminiscing about the East Tech teams: "They grew up together and spent summers playing pick-up ball at the old Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center, often long into the night. The outdoor court had no lights, so they taped flashlights to the backboard."<sup>211</sup> The East Tech Scarabs dominated local high school basketball beginning in the late 1950s. The team would warm up nightly before capacity crowds, running dunking drills to the tunes of the Globe Trotter's "Sweet Georgia Brown" theme song, audibly associating the team with the nationally popular black sports entertainers. The Scarabs won 51 straight games in 1958 and 1959, taking them to consecutive state titles. They reached the state playoffs ten times between 1958 and 1971, taking the title again in 1972.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> "Cleveland Division of Recreation, Annual Report," John Nagy, Commissioner, 1955, 23; "Cleveland Division of Recreation, Annual Report," John Nagy, Commissioner, 1958-59, 42, CPL-PA.

<sup>211</sup> Bill Lubinger, "East Tech Team Gave Central Area 51 Reasons to Cheer 50 Years Ago," *Plain Dealer*, September 25, 2009.

<sup>212</sup> Bill Lubinger, "East Tech Team Gave Central Area 51 Reasons to Cheer 50 Years Ago," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 25, 2009; Bill Lubinger "'Mighty Scarabs' honors East Tech's basketball glory days," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 27, 2012.

The East Tech Scarabs became a matter of local Central community pride—a pride that was constructed at the intersection of multiple institutions on the Central landscape. The team attended East Tech, but due to a lack of facilities at the school its members played pick-up games at the PORC, and hosted their home games at the other high school in the neighborhood—Central High. Players became local celebrities. One 1972 East Tech graduate, Cornell Calhoun, III, remembered: “The team was so revered, if you were part of the East Tech basketball team you were something.” Although Calhoun was a substitution player on the team, when he wore his jacket around town strangers would “approach him and shake his hand.” In 2012, Calhoun wrote a play that debuted in the Cleveland area, entitled the “Mighty Scarabs.” The play commemorated the achievements of the East Tech basketball team, but it also examined life after the glory of the courts faded for the players. Calhoun explained: “As a whole, after that success, everyone was stagnant.” The play poignantly captured the importance of sport for black community formation, but also the limits of sport in providing opportunities for future work for young black men.<sup>213</sup>

In the 1960s, the popularity of youth sport in the Central area was not limited to the boys’ teams. Indeed, the girls’ teams from PORC dominated city-wide recreational play. In 1961, the center’s “Young’uns” team beat out 48 other squads to be named city champions in the Daisy Mae teen girls basketball league. That same year, the Portland-Outhwaite “Babes” took the Pigtail league championship for players under 15 years old against 81 other teams. That spring, the center’s female teams also won both divisions in a newly introduced volleyball

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<sup>213</sup> Bill Lubinger “‘Mighty Scarabs’ honors East Tech’s basketball glory days,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 27, 2012.

tournament.<sup>214</sup> The following year, the Portland-Outhwaite girls' teams defended their titles in both basketball divisions.<sup>215</sup>

These youth, despite their talent, did not always have the best facilities to practice their sports. Indeed, the 1960s marked a time of increased disinvestment in city recreation spaces, including PORC. This lack of maintenance affected the number and type of programs the park could provide—such as in the summer of 1963, when the tennis courts were cracked and nets were not hung, as illustrated in figure 5. That same summer, the *Call and Post* described the outdoor play areas at the park as “ruins like an ancient, neglected Roman Arena.”<sup>216</sup> While Portland-Outhwaite remained a remarkably stable space on Cleveland's rapidly changing urban landscape, disinvestment by the city did affect the possibilities for programming at this location.

## Conclusion

There were other limits besides the lack of an adequate maintenance budget that hurt the programs, rhetoric of race pride, and calls for full black integration into city life emanating from PORC. These limits included a sports culture that might not fully include less sports-minded young men or young women, and that often emphasized male over female athletics. The middle-class ideals that undergirded much of the city's public recreation programming philosophy did not attract all of the area's predominantly working-class youth to the center's doors. The disruptive force of urban renewal sent many of the center's potential youth clientele to live in

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<sup>214</sup> Recreation Annual Report, City of Cleveland, Division of Recreation, John Nagy, Commissioner, 1962, 26-27, CPL-PA.

<sup>215</sup> Recreation Annual Report, City of Cleveland, Division of Recreation, John Nagy, Commissioner, 1963, 20, CPL-PA.

<sup>216</sup> “Once City's Finest Playground, Portland Outhwaite Rec. Center Shows Signs of Disgraceful Neglect,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1963.

other sections of the city. Finally, messages about integration based on feats of black youth sportsmanship could not, on their own, dislodge the entrenched discrimination and racism in Cleveland.

As Calhoun's play expressed, and Jesse Owens' memoir poignantly related, there is only so much that recreation spaces and recreation programs can offer a local community. Achievement on the sporting field does not necessarily translate into steady employment or financial gain. Parks in Cleveland were located within complex, interconnected social landscapes, including spaces of education, housing and work. While recreation officials within the city government espoused a belief in the power of sport to promote integration, black residents of Cleveland met with entrenched racism in many of these other spheres. In his book, *Social Justice and the City*, David Harvey asked: "[S]o what if we help a community win a playground in one summer of work to find that the school deteriorates in the fall?"<sup>217</sup> In the case of Portland-Outhwaite, the question would be better poised as: So what if a community has a neighborhood park if it is ravaged by urban renewal?

Yet, within these very real limits, Portland-Outhwaite and the surrounding black institutions that helped shape the programs and activities at the park contributed in meaningful ways to the city's black urban vernacular landscape. First, PORC actively helped forge and solidify Central's reputation for black sporting achievement and a source of black pride. Second, the park gave a handful of black residents employment and a platform from which to engage the local black public sphere and comment on matters concerning the city's youth. Third, black newspaper coverage of programs at the park helped generate a recreation-based call for full integration, and while this was not fully realized, recreation would become a key site for post-

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<sup>217</sup> David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1973), 145.

World War II civil rights struggles. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while much of the Central community has changed dramatically since 1932, due in large part to multiple failed urban renewal projects, the Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center still stands just where it was first founded. Indeed, urban parks remain some of the most stable spaces in black urban neighborhoods throughout the United States. Considering these spaces—how they were formed, and how they contributed to the local black community life and identity production—has much to offer our understanding of black urban histories.

More focus on how working-class black community members shaped public recreation spaces will help uncover the understudied contributions of black residents to urban planning in the United States. Charles Connerly has called for more focus on what he terms “indigenous” black neighborhood organizations and their contributions to urban development.<sup>218</sup> In the Central neighborhood of Cleveland, the efforts of groups such as the mothers affiliated with various settlement houses or local leaders connected to the Central Area Community Council changed the landscape of their city. There are similar stories in urban centers throughout the United States.

The history of Portland-Outhwaite is the story of public space located in a predominantly black neighborhood, but of course not all urban parks were so situated, and urban historians must also consider how the demographic patterns of racialized housing restrictions and suburbanization impacted the formation and meaning of recreation spaces. For example, in June 1945 the Recreation Club of Outhwaite Homes held its Sunday picnic at Garfield Park, a large park located in a white suburb on the city’s eastern southern edge.<sup>219</sup> These picnickers were part

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<sup>218</sup> Connerly. “*The Most Segregated City in America*,” 217.

<sup>219</sup> “A Glance at the Clubs,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 16, 1945.

of a trend of increasing black patronage at this suburban park. Sharp discrimination often met these black visitors in what was vernacularly read as an ethnic, white space. The next chapter more closely examines what happened when black Clevelanders demanded access to public recreation in the suburbs.



### **CHAPTER THREE: RACE, ETHNICITY AND PUBLIC RECREATION IN THE SUBURBS: GARFIELD POOL**

From 1944 to 1954, black activists in Cleveland engaged in an intermittent campaign to challenge entrenched *de facto* apartheid at one of northeast Ohio's most popular public swimming spots, the Garfield Park Swimming Pool. This effort to open access to the pool in the Cleveland suburb of Garfield Heights was one component of a broader movement that black activists, in coalition with allied whites, waged to increase access to city public amenities and participation in local civic life during the postwar period. Black soldiers returning from World War II played key roles in such campaigns, which rhetorically framed their mobilization around access to recreation facilities as part of a claim to full rights as American citizens. Those challenging discrimination at Garfield had much more at stake than a fun day in the sun. This history of Garfield Pool is an example of the importance of public recreation sites in the early postwar Black Freedom Movement.

This chapter argues that in order to understand the efforts to desegregate Garfield Park it is essential to consider this recreation site's suburban location. Housing discrimination and the spatial organization of city and suburb fundamentally shaped the contours of black access to public amenities in the greater Cleveland area. Jurisdictional battles between different local governmental structures overlapped and informed the fight against discrimination, and white responses to the desegregation efforts. A close study of Garfield opens a window into how black postwar activism attempted to challenge the broader spatial-racial ordering of urban development. The campaign at Garfield Pool demonstrates that more attention needs to be paid to the spatiality of where particular urban-area Black Freedom Movement campaigns took place.

This is especially true in considering white responses to black activism that challenged patterns of discrimination. This chapter examines how some local white residents, supported by the white press, represented the swimming pool desegregation campaign at Garfield as a communist conspiracy, perpetrated by “outsiders” to the community. By raising the specter of communism infiltrating the suburbs, this spatially-articulated response sought to undermine black activism implicitly while jettisoning explicit mentions of race.

This chapter also argues that the story of Garfield Park illuminates how white responses to the Black Freedom Movement precipitated a privatization of urban recreation, particularly in the suburbs. Efforts to desegregate Garfield and other swimming facilities also led to a comprehensive reorganization of the city’s swimming landscape to provide smaller pools that served discrete neighborhoods. Garfield Heights opened its own new pool that catered to a white, suburban clientele and excluded patrons from the city. These two decisions marked a turn to a more local, property-based organization of public recreation—a cityscape on which residents played near the homes where they lived—and a turn from large, collective public recreation spaces. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley has described the acceleration of this process of essentially privatizing so-called “public” recreation in the later decades of the twentieth century, noting: “More recently, we have witnessed a growing number of semipublic/private spaces like “people’s parks” which require a key.”<sup>220</sup> On the east side of Cleveland, this turn toward “semipublic/private spaces” can be traced to responses to Black Freedom Movement campaigns over public accommodations, such as that at Garfield.

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<sup>220</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Beacon Press Books: New York, New York, 1997), 51.

This shift toward a semi-privatization of recreation spaces was also accompanied by a slow but steady disinvestment in many city-managed recreation facilities across Cleveland. At Garfield, black organizing eventually opened the pool to African American use. Yet, these black pool patrons soon found that the facility they had fought so hard to visit became a poorly maintained, decaying mess; the pool closed permanently in 1971. This story was not unique to Garfield, and by the 1970s more than \$50 million worth of public recreation facilities throughout Cleveland closed to visitors.<sup>221</sup> Such disinvestment in urban infrastructure occurred after postwar Civil Rights campaigns throughout the urban north. Collectively these various reactions to the Garfield campaign underscore the importance of considering the broad urban-spatial networks that structured white responses to the Black Freedom Movement, and ultimately limited the material benefits that resulted from some postwar anti-discrimination campaigns.

### **Cleveland Suburbanization**

In order to understand the significance of the campaign to desegregate Garfield Pool, the story must be placed in its context of black urban population growth and processes of suburbanization in Cleveland during the post-World War II era. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the early twentieth century the city's black population rapidly increased, placing more demands on access to public infrastructure and services. By 1940, Cleveland's black population had risen to 84,504, a nearly 19 percent increase over 1930. During the 1940s that population almost doubled to more than 148,000.<sup>222</sup> This growing population resulted in

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<sup>221</sup> Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional*, 50.

<sup>222</sup> Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 56; and Hill "The Cleveland Economy," 127; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 147-148.

increased black political representation, which promoted a degree of black municipal employment and public investment in the city's largest black enclave, the Central neighborhood. While this municipal investment never adequately matched the growth of Central, it did result in public recreation infrastructure development, including Portland-Outhwaite Park and Recreation Center and the Fairfax Community Center, which became vibrant, lasting black community spaces.

Yet, the city's oldest black neighborhood of Central could not hold all of the new arrivals, and as African American workers came to the city from the U.S. South, some among the more established black residents chose to move into other east side neighborhoods such as Glenville, Mount Pleasant and Lee Miles, all neighborhoods located east of the Cuyahoga River. As black Clevelanders and new black migrants to the city moved into what had previously been ethnic white enclaves, racial tensions sharpened in the city. *De facto* discrimination, which had always existed in Cleveland, grew precipitously. Unequal access to quality employment opportunities, uneven access to quality public schools, and discrimination at public accommodations increasingly became the norm for black residents.

As black Clevelanders faced increased discrimination within city limits, they found themselves almost wholly excluded from the mushrooming suburbs that grew around the city proper. According to Cleveland historians Carol Poh Miller and Robert Wheeler, by 1932 Cleveland was "territorially arrested at seventy-six square miles."<sup>223</sup> In this, Cleveland followed a pattern of urban-regional development in the industrialized north described by Kenneth T. Jackson in his work, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Cleveland joined St. Louis, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and San Francisco as municipalities where

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<sup>223</sup> Miller and Wheeler "Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of an American City, 1796-1993," 41.

“city boundaries have not been altered in at least half a century, and the core areas are being strangled by a tight ring of suburbs.”<sup>224</sup> Many factors contributed to this rapid suburbanization around Cleveland. A system of streetcar lines connected outlying areas to the city core, allowing residents to move beyond city limits and still work in the city.<sup>225</sup> Ohio’s “permissive incorporation laws” made it relatively easy for suburbs to gain city status and the state support that accompanied such incorporation. These suburban governments rebuffed annexation by the core city, increasingly setting up local rule as an alternative to what they characterized as the corruption, graft and blight of centralized urban authority. Although many suburbs benefited greatly from electric, water, sewer, and transportation infrastructures heavily subsidized by urban tax bases, their residents managed to stave off annexation and keep their autonomy.

In Cleveland, and in other cities across the United States, this led to markedly different development in urban centers and surrounding suburbs. According to Miller and Wheeler: “By 1930, statistics show there were great differences between the city and its suburbs—differences in race, nativity, literacy, employment and wealth.”<sup>226</sup> By 1931, seven communities surrounding Cleveland filed for city status, including Bedford, Berea, Euclid, Garfield Heights, Maple Heights, Parma, Rocky River, and Shaker Heights. Fifty-two more incorporated as villages. Today there are 38 separate cities in Cuyahoga County, making the county a veritable crazy quilt of municipal jurisdictions, with Cleveland located in the midst of dozens of smaller cities. While

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<sup>224</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, England, 1985), 276.

<sup>225</sup> James Borchert, “Suburbs,” in *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

<sup>226</sup> Miller and Wheeler, “Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of an American City,” 41.

the population of Cuyahoga County grew two-and-a-half times from 1900 to 1930, Cleveland's share of that population decreased from 87 percent to 75 percent.<sup>227</sup>

Deed restrictions excluded African Americans from most of these suburbs. While World War II housing shortages temporarily arrested the move to the suburbs, postwar federal housing policies meant to facilitate home ownership for returning veterans, along with the development of an extensive highway system, accelerated suburbanization across the nation. Historian Dolores Hayden has called this national move to the suburbs in the postwar period "the triple dream" of Americans, equaling "house plus land plus community."<sup>228</sup> In suburbs across the United States, this "triple dream" of the suburbs rested on a practice of racial exclusivity.<sup>229</sup> According to historian Robert O. Self: "[C]ities would occupy a pivotal place in the postwar national debate over the meaning of race" and "[t]hat debate would take place within an urban-suburban system undergoing epochal shifts and facing unprecedented strain."<sup>230</sup> Writing on Los Angeles, Eric Avila echoed this assessment: "Postwar suburbanization sanctioned the formation of a new racial geography that spatialized a starker contrast between white and black."<sup>231</sup> Across the United States, racial meanings were increasingly constructed through the spatial urban-

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<sup>227</sup> James Borchert, "Suburbs, in *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. This article describes the periodization of Cleveland suburbanization as follows: "This suburban history has 5 overlapping periods: 1) the urban ring, 1850-1900; 2) electrified streetcars and the first suburban rings, 1890-1930; 3) urban decentralization and the first automobile suburbs, 1920-1950; 4) automobile suburbs and suburban supremacy, 1950-80; 5) freeway construction and in/out county developments, 1970s-1990s."

<sup>228</sup> Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

<sup>229</sup> Mike Davis *City of Quartz, 153*. Davis helps to specify what this dream meant for Los Angelinos. He writes "Community in Los Angeles means homogeneity of race, class, and especially house values."

<sup>230</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*, 25.

<sup>231</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture and the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

suburban relationship, as urban became equated with people of color and suburban became shorthand for “white.”<sup>232</sup>

Cleveland followed this pattern, and the suburban racial exclusivity was sharp. By 1960, 98 percent of African Americans living in Cuyahoga County lived in the city proper, with only two percent living in the suburbs.<sup>233</sup> One notable exception was the predominantly working-class black suburb of Chagrin Falls Park.<sup>234</sup> Cleveland’s share of the county population fell another ten percent during the 1940s, and this trend continued over the next few decades. In 1940, the suburban population accounted for twenty-eight percent of the county; by 1970, that number had more than doubled to sixty-two percent. As more white, middle-class and working-class residents of Cleveland moved to the suburbs, they took their tax base with them. Businesses and manufacturing often followed or in some cases moved ahead of this population, leaving behind a city government that relied on a continually declining tax revenue stream. The *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* explains the impact of this process on local planning: “The suburban explosion left a fragmented governmental structure in its wake. By 1994 one county, 38 cities, 19 villages, two townships, 31 school districts, thirteen municipal court districts, ten library districts, and regional authorities such as the Cleveland Metroparks governed some aspect of the

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<sup>232</sup> For a sharp analysis of the devastating impact of this suburban-urban segregation on black economic opportunities see Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). For more on the importance of considering both structural and ideological racism see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, “The Changing Same: Black Racial Formation and Transformation as a Theory of the African American Experience.”

<sup>233</sup> Russel Davis, 354-355. Even the two percent of black suburbanites lived in a handful of suburbs including Oakwood, Woodmere, Shaker Heights, East Cleveland, and Chagrin Falls Park.

<sup>234</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own, African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chapter 3. For more on black Clevelanders’ suburban aspirations see Todd Michney, “White Civic Visions Versus Black Suburban Aspirations: Cleveland’s Garden Valley Renewal Project.” *Journal of Planning History*, 4:10, December 2011, 282-309.

area.”<sup>235</sup> This fractured planning structure meant that it was often difficult to generate cooperation between different and overlapping jurisdictions. For black activists who sought to challenge discrimination in housing, schooling, employment and public accommodations, they had to navigate this complex system—and often make their case to multiple agencies and government entities in order to accomplish change.

### **Recreation in a Cleveland Ethnic White Suburb: Garfield Park 1899-1944**

Garfield Park was located in one of these many Cleveland suburbs. City officials in Cleveland founded Garfield Park in 1889 on land located just south of the city’s border. Although located outside the city proper, Cleveland both owned and operated the property as a public recreation space, likely with the idea that one day the boundaries of the city would expand to include the new park. The city spent \$52,446 acquiring parcels of primarily farmland for the project. Formally named Newburgh Park in 1895, it was renamed in 1901 after the assassination of president and Ohioan James A. Garfield. It was one of many large, urban parks founded throughout the industrializing North in the post-Civil War period. American landscape architects responded to the increasingly negative associations of urbanization by celebrating and romanticizing the restorative powers of nature.<sup>236</sup> Located just outside the city limits, Garfield Park afforded Clevelanders a chance to temporarily escape the bustle of urban life and enjoy the outdoors. A history of the area described the importance of the park’s natural setting for the local growing urban population, recalling Garfield as an “ideal place for citizens to take picnic lunches

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<sup>235</sup> James Borchert, “Suburbs, in *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

<sup>236</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 57.



out under trees to ‘get away from it all’ and inhale the wonderful country air.”<sup>237</sup> This conceptualization placed “citizens” as the proper benefactors of the park’s natural bounty. In this, the founding of Garfield followed the pattern of urban park planning across the country that emphasized “large romantic pleasure grounds” whose purpose was to serve as recreational, natural safety-valves, landscaped antidotes to the perceived ills of the city, and spaces that could help produce a shared sense of American citizenship among an increasingly diverse urban ethnic, white population.<sup>238</sup>

Initially farmland surrounded Garfield Park, but soon a village grew around its borders. The village incorporated in 1907 under the name of South Newburgh, one of the city’s first streetcar suburbs. A streetcar line connected the small 6.75 square mile suburb and its park to Cleveland proper, spatially incorporating the park into the city’s transportation-recreation network. South Newburgh grew rapidly in the 1920s, its population multiplying by more than 5 times during the decade to reach nearly 16,000. The suburb officially renamed itself Garfield Heights in 1930, taking its name from the popular park.<sup>239</sup> Nearly all of that population was white. Only one-third of 1 percent of the residents were African-American. During the first part of the twentieth century, residents included many of German descent, but after 1920 large numbers of Poles, Slavs, and Italians moved to the area. While hit hard by the Great Depression, as was the entire Cleveland region, by 1940 the population was solidly working- and middle-class, as 15 percent of the working population held professional, semi-professional or managerial

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<sup>237</sup> August E. Kleinschmidt and Neil E. Bower, “Garfield Heights History,” Prepared for the Bicentennial Committee of Garfield Heights, 2, 32; Dan F. Ostrowski in “The Previous Parkland Owners,” in “Recollections” A Collection of History & Memories of Garfield Heights,” Garfield Heights Historical Society, 2003, 3-4.

<sup>238</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 11.

<sup>239</sup> Kleinschmidt and Bower, “Garfield Heights History,” 2.

employment, 22 percent worked in clerical or sales positions, and 23 percent worked as skilled craftsmen or foremen in the Cleveland area's burgeoning industrial economy. Following the pattern of almost all Cleveland suburbs, Garfield Heights remained a white ethnic enclave. While the population more than doubled between 1930 and 1960, it also remained almost wholly white, with the black population never exceeding one-half of 1 percent during these decades.<sup>240</sup>

The Polish population within Garfield Heights formed a concentrated neighborhood along Turney Road and Garfield Heights Boulevard, as illustrated in figure 6. By 1925, the community was large enough to be granted its own parish. Historian John Grabowski explained that settlement became an enclave for "wealthier Poles" during the 1920s as, "Polish bankers and businessmen" moved to the suburb from Cleveland's central city and built "substantial brick homes" on Garfield Heights Boulevard. Some of these homes enjoyed a view of Garfield Park.<sup>241</sup> Located at the heart of this neighborhood, Garfield Park developed as a space simultaneously revered for its natural setting, enjoyed for its recreational offerings, and prized for its importance as a space for practicing both ethnic identity and American citizenship. In all of these instances, local ethnic white residents participated in the construction of these vernacular meanings in this space, creating a vibrant recreation space for their own enjoyment at the exclusion of black patrons.

The appearance and beauty of Garfield Park became a source of local pride. Perhaps no natural feature of the park was as celebrated as the spring that bubbled to the surface in the midst of a small outcropping of boulders. Convinced of the water's curative properties, nearby

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<sup>240</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. "Garfield Heights;" and U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census.

<sup>241</sup> John J. Grabowski "The Polish Community of Cleveland," in John J. Grabowski, Judith Zielinski-Zak, Alice Boberg, Ralph Wroblewski *Polish Americans and Their Communities in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1976), 169-170.

residents came to the park for decades armed with gallon jugs ready to capture the gift of “Spring 43.” Postcards of the spring, such as the one in figure 7, helped turn the spring a tourist destination. In the early 1940s, one woman drove all the way from Buffalo, New York, and brought her knitting—ready to wait as her multiple containers slowly filled with the “magical” waters. Although scientific tests proved the water held no particularly special properties, people still made the trip to Garfield, causing the long-time foreman of the park to opine that the water’s potency may have come from the fact “that the drinkers mix a lot of imagination with it.”<sup>242</sup> As images such as the postcard in figure 7 depict, most who visited the spring were white patrons.

Park users not only employed their imaginations to construct a mystical local perception of Garfield Park’s natural bounty, but they also enjoyed a wide variety of recreation options at the space as Garfield became one of the most well-developed and popular parks in the Cleveland system. In 1910, a large pool opened at the site. A baseball and softball field, football field and seven tennis courts brought a regular stream of sports enthusiasts to the park, while those who enjoyed fishing could visit the park’s two lakes. The park had also become one of the city’s most popular picnic locales, and Garfield’s thirty-two picnic tables accounted for 33 percent of all picnic tables in the entire Cleveland park system.<sup>243</sup> Garfield became a popular weekend destination for white middle- and working-class Clevelanders, who could take a short streetcar trip or drive to the suburban park. Although located just outside the city limits, the park was a space apart. It was a space of restorative recreation, removed from the pollutants of urban life—and the city’s growing black population. The park became an important recreation spot both for

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<sup>242</sup> “Cleveland’s Last Spring,” Larry Hawkins, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 12, 1949, CSU-SC.

<sup>243</sup> “Facilities in Various City Parks – 1944,” “Park Facilities” CCA; Kleinschmidt and Bower, 2.

local Garfield Heights residents, and also for ethnic white workers throughout Cleveland's east side.

For local residents of Garfield Heights, the park also became a space for the public assertion of ethnic identity. Across the United States, urban recreation sites often functioned as spaces where ethnic national identity was publicly celebrated. In 1896, Chicago Polish immigrants formed the Polish Falcons, which existed to “foster Polish nationalism through athletic activity.” In Cleveland, Nest 41 served as the local branch of the Falcons, sponsoring athletic competitions with other Falcon branches throughout the United States from the 1920s until at least the 1970s.<sup>244</sup> For Polish immigrants invested in their homeland's fight for national sovereignty, the athletic field became a site for the construction of an expatriate national identity. Public park spaces were important sites for this production of national ethnic pride. Such was the case in 1931, when a parade of local children marched to the park as part of a “Polish Celebration.” As illustrated in figure 8, children paraded to Garfield dressed in traditional Polish clothing and waving both Polish and American flags. This march exemplified how parks such as Garfield became important spaces on the urban landscape for the concurrent articulation of both an ethnic *and* a white American identity. Parks throughout urban centers played these dual functions. For example, writing about parks in Chicago, Robin Bachin explained that they provided room for both “celebration of ethnic traditions and Americanization” to occur and were spaces “where these seemingly contradictory processes could be negotiated.”<sup>245</sup>

This opportunity to display American identity alongside ethnic pride was also particularly important for the Cleveland Polish population. In 1895, there had been a “massive and violent”

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<sup>244</sup> Grabowski, “The Polish Communities of Cleveland,” 195.

<sup>245</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 164.

strike at the city's rolling mills, a segment of the steel industry that included a high number of Bohemian and Polish workers. Cleveland newspapers blamed the strike on the Bohemians and Poles, characterizing them as "socialists and troublemakers" and also "drunkards and cowards."<sup>246</sup> Newspapers also referred to the strikers as "foreign devils and "Communitic scoundrels."<sup>247</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, that stigma began to ease, but then in 1901 a self-proclaimed anarchist from Cleveland's oldest Polish settlement assassinated President McKinley in Buffalo, New York. Again, the city's newspapers began to characterize the Polish section of Cleveland as a "hotbed of troublemakers."<sup>248</sup> World War I helped to ease these negative stereotypes of Polish Clevelanders, as Poland's opposition to Germany won the local Polish population more sympathy. Yet also working against the city's Polish residents was their reputation for being insular. A study written in 1942 as part of the Works Progress Administration's Writers Program described the city's largest Polish enclave as "a city within a city."<sup>249</sup> However, increased local political participation improved this population's treatment by the local press. This history of complex relationships between Polish immigrants and their adopted city meant that the chance to demonstrate American citizenship was an important part of Polish parades and cultural celebrations in Cleveland. Historian Dave Roediger has argued that ethnic Eastern-Europeans ability to purchase homes and move to the suburbs, was a marker of their achievement of "whiteness" and the privileges associated with that identity.<sup>250</sup> Local parks

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<sup>246</sup> Grabowski, "The Polish Communities of Cleveland," 178, 223.

<sup>247</sup> Henry B. Leonard, "Ethnic Cleavage and Industrial Conflict in Late 19th century America: The Cleveland Rolling Mill Company Strikes of 1882 and 1885," *Labor History*, 20:4, 1979, 524-548.

<sup>248</sup> Grabowski, "The Polish Communities of Cleveland," 224.

<sup>249</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, Works Projects Administration, 1942, 109.

<sup>250</sup> David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (Basic Books, 2005).

became significant social spaces in such neighborhoods in part because they provided a public forum for such displays of ethnic and white Americanism.

City park administrators embraced this practice of performing both white ethnic identity and American citizenship as an appropriate function of public recreation spaces.<sup>251</sup> Take for example the following excerpt from the 1948 City of Cleveland Division of Recreation Annual Report, concerning the role of parks on the city landscape:

Cleveland is a community of nationalities. Men and women from every part of the world have settled in this city bringing with them a priceless heritage of culture. To lose these cultural traditions would be tragic. They are too closely inter-related with our own native American culture to divorce them from the broad, social recreational program Cleveland sponsors.<sup>252</sup>

In this excerpt, city park staff conceived of parks as places meant to foster a sense of Cleveland “community,” a community consisting of multiple nationalities. For these officials, parks could provide space where local residents might celebrate ethnic traditions in ways that would also bind participants more closely to “our own native American culture.” This “native” Americanism was linked to whiteness, a complete erasure of the indigenous peoples who had in the past likely frequented the natural spring of Garfield Park and lived in the area. This framework conceived of a community of ethnic and native whites forming an interconnected American culture. Children could waive their Polish flags and American flags at the same time, and the park would serve as a space for the construction of a Polish-American identity. According to cultural geographer Susan Ruddick, such “interactions in and *through* public space

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<sup>251</sup> Scholars have written about how park founders conceived of urban parks as important spaces for the democratic formation a American citizenship identity. See for example, Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 184. Cranz writes that the efforts to develop parks such as Garfield during this era were led predominantly by white businessmen who founded parks at least in part as “a place for democracy” where all classes could come together and the lower classes be elevated “paternalistically.”

<sup>252</sup>Annual Report, Division of Recreation, City of Cleveland, John Nagy Commissioner, 1948, 17, CPL-PA.

are crucial to the formation and maintenance of social identities.”<sup>253</sup> Such cultural programs at Garfield made the park a location for the articulation of Polish-Americanism, and these activities reinforced the public imagination of the surrounding suburb that shared the park’s name as a Polish-American neighborhood.

Further opportunities to wave American flags also emerged as local residents came to Garfield to commemorate U.S. militarism—another way in which the space became mapped as a vernacular landscape for the celebration of American identity. A World War I cannon stood guard at one entrance to the park until the demand for metal during World II caused its removal. In 1958, the City of Cleveland gave the Army a portion of the park property to build a Reserve Armory facility. The Armory was dedicated to the “protection of the priceless heritage” represented by the local “Garfield Air Ace,” Captain Albert Schlegel, who died fighting in World War II. More than 500 spectators, including “top military brass from the area,” attended the armory’s opening ceremonies.<sup>254</sup>

Thus, Garfield Park was conceived as a space to celebrate the “priceless heritage” of both white immigrant ethnic identity and America’s veterans. Community celebrations provided a shared spectacle that affirmed the meanings of this space. Yet, not all local residents’ histories were considered quite so “priceless,” and not all nearby veterans could access Garfield Park’s nature, recreation options, or community celebrations equally. While Garfield Heights remained a nearly completely white area, one neighborhood located just northeast of the park and within

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<sup>253</sup> Susan Ruddick, “Constructing Difference in Public Spaces: Race, Class and Gender as Interlocking Systems,” *Urban Geography*, 17:2, 1996, 135.

<sup>254</sup> Kleinschmidt and Bower, 24-25. “Southeast Area Plan Memorial Day Observance,” *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, May 25, 1972. In 1969 a new Veterans Memorial overseen by a committee of local citizens was dedicated in the spot of the old cannon and became the ending point for the annual Memorial Day parade.

Cleveland city limits, Lee-Miles, saw a dramatic increase in its black population. By 1940, the Lee-Miles census tract closest to Garfield Heights included 702 black residents, or more than 56 percent of the area's population. By 1950, that number had increased to more than 80 percent African American. This enclave was the second most affluent black district in the city, with a median income of \$2,830 or roughly 90 percent of the city average income. The neighborhood was predominantly working-class.<sup>255</sup>

During the 1940s, as this black neighborhood near the park grew, local black residents as well as African Americans from throughout Cleveland joined white Clevelanders in traveling to the popular Garfield Park for weekend picnics and other outings, also looking to participate in the types of leisure activities provided by the park. Although no official city policy ever marked Garfield Park as restricted to whites only, the presence of these black patrons at the suburban park spurred unfavorable, sometimes violent responses from white patrons.

The increasingly bifurcated white and black populations near Garfield Park meant that this space became a "fault line," one of many running through the landscape of the city and its surrounding neighborhoods. Historian Kimberly L. Phillips has explained the role of such spaces in Cleveland: "White racial identity, often expressed in racism against African Americans *outside workplaces*, remained a critical fault line for tens of thousands of Eastern European immigrants and black migrants from the south." Phillips goes on to argue that while violence at these "fault lines" in Cleveland never became as acute as in Chicago or Detroit, "when African Americans ventured outside the Central Area for leisure they ran the risk of violent attack."<sup>256</sup> Historian Jim Barrett has similarly argued that public recreation spaces often served as

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<sup>255</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 1950.

<sup>256</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 257, (emphasis mine).



“deadlines” between ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago and New York.<sup>257</sup> Recreation spaces, envisioned by their founders and subsequent city administrators as homogenizing landscapes for (white) urban residents to come together, also became zones of tension and contested borders separating neighborhoods and people. Parks came to be popularly perceived as simultaneously spaces to join and spaces to separate.

Perhaps no recreation space at Garfield Park served to separate individuals by race as much as the swimming pool. In their 1945 study of Chicago, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton argued that black access to various social spaces in the urban North was not a static reality. A “color line” that varied in thickness of enforcement ran throughout cities of this region. The stridency of segregation was proportional to the potential intimacy of contact between white and black bodies moving through these different spaces. In public venues where integrated recreation might result in close personal contact between whites and blacks, the color line was most entrenched. At the far end of the scale as some of the most policed and segregated spaces were urban swimming pools as “primary tension points.”<sup>258</sup>

Recent scholarship has further emphasized the swimming pool as a key site of urban racial tensions. Jeff Wilste’s 2007 book, *Contested Waters*, argued that it was the intersection of both the race and gender of bathers engaged in such potentially intimate recreation contact that

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<sup>257</sup> Jim Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), page 37-38. For a further discussion of how certain parks and streets became urban faultlines, contested along racial or ethnic lines see also, Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 160-161.

<sup>258</sup> St. Clair Drake and Horace A. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 1945) 101-104.

made swimming pools such sharply contested spaces.<sup>259</sup> Whites feared interracial contact between scantily clad men and women bathers, and especially black men interacting with white women. Bodies entering a swimming pool came into contact with water that then touched other bodies in the pool; thus water flowed between and connected bodies in a way that spaces filled with air did not. White responses to black swimmers were therefore some of the most vitriolic and violent encounters African Americans would experience in their attempts to access the urban and suburban recreation landscape. Victoria Wolcott asserted that “[s]wimming pool demonstrations and conflicts in the early 1940s and 1950s demarcated racial boundaries in rapidly changing cities.”<sup>260</sup> Swimming pools across the urban North became sites where simmering racial tensions sometimes bubbled to the surface in acts of violence.

In Cleveland in 1908, for example, a black bather drifted into “white” waters at a Lake Erie Beach. He was “stoned and chased for blocks” before he could escape his attackers.<sup>261</sup> Eleven years later in Chicago, perhaps the most notorious case of such violence occurred. The stoning death of a black youth who accidentally crossed into a white swimming area at a Lake Michigan beach touched off the 1919 race riot in that city. Swimming could be a potentially life-risking activity for black residents who intentionally or inadvertently entered into “white” waters. The 1943 race riot in Detroit started in part due to “rumors of interracial sexual attacks on Detroit’s Belle Isle” beach.<sup>262</sup> The result of such violent enforcement of the color line meant

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<sup>259</sup> Wilste, *Contested Waters*. See also, Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 152-158, and in particular page 156 for a brief account of the CORE campaign at Cleveland’s Garfield Park.

<sup>260</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters*, 72.

<sup>261</sup> Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 259.

<sup>262</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 154-155. For more on both the role of the sharp line of discrimination at sites of recreation in both the Chicago and Detroit riots see Elliot M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 218.

that swimming facilities in Cleveland, including Garfield, were almost wholly segregated in the early twentieth century, as evidenced by the postcard in figure 9.<sup>263</sup> Such postcards of the pool helped to circulate and solidify the vernacular reading of Garfield as a white space.

### **Beginnings of a Black Re-imagination of Garfield Park**

As World War II drew to a close, black community activists began to challenge the local practices that led to the creation of images like the lily-white postcard of Garfield Pool. They did so first by visiting Garfield Park and other recreational spaces throughout the city, challenging discriminatory practices by scheduling picnics and other activities at spaces traditionally unfriendly to black use. This challenge did not go unnoticed by local white residents. In May 1942, mainstream Cleveland newspapers ran reports of increased crime at Garfield, attributing the problems to a “gang that consisted of about 40 colored men”; this resulted in a heightened mounted police presence on the grounds. Juxtaposed with the romanticized tales of the magic spring of Garfield Park, these articles about the alleged black crime threat rhetorically positioned blacks as outside agents coming into the suburban space from the city—potential pollutants to the health of this “natural,” perhaps even supernatural, environment.

Such characterizations of African Americans invading white neighborhoods were not unique to Cleveland. Indeed, they were ideas that echoed through many northern urban neighborhoods in the postwar period. Many urban scholars have examined the processes of racist vernacular city mapping that have marked certain enclaves as threatened by an invading racialized “other.” In his book, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in*

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<sup>263</sup> Russel H. Davis. “Civil Rights in Cleveland 1912-1961, An Account of the Cleveland Branch National Association For the Advancement of Colored People” (published by the NAACP, Cleveland, 1973) 55-60, 72.

*the North*, Thomas Sugrue described how working-class whites often responded violently to what they characterized as a “Negro Invasion” of their neighborhoods.<sup>264</sup> The construction of racial categories in urban settings occurred in part through popular characterization of certain spaces as threatened by a racialized criminal element, by extension coding certain bodies as criminal or dangerous. Such characterizations allowed for the policing of both the spaces and these bodies along racial lines.<sup>265</sup> By representing black people as outsiders to Garfield Park, these newspaper articles attempted to establish a justification for discrimination under the cover of a law-and-order spatial terminology.<sup>266</sup> Recreation sites, such as Garfield Park, were key locations where this racial othering occurred.

While daily newspapers described black usage of Garfield Park in charged, criminalized language and advocated for an increased level of policing, a review of articles published in the *Call and Post* (Cleveland’s black weekly newspaper) during the same period paints a very different picture of African American use of the park. In the 1940s, Garfield became a popular picnic destination for black community organizations from the Union of Churches and the Knights of Pythians to the NAACP. The *Call and Post* described these community picnics as fun, well-organized, family events. For example, the Union of Churches picnic was anticipated to be “one of the grandest interdenominational outings in the history of such events” with

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<sup>264</sup>Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 17.

<sup>265</sup>For an excellent discussion of how African-American urban enclaves became coded as ‘criminal’ see for example: Sudiata Keita Cha-Jua, *America’s First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Yet while there has been scholarship about the process of the vernacular construction of certain urban spaces as both ‘black’ and ‘criminal’ there has not been enough work specifically looking at how urban parks have been included in such discursive representations of the city. One good example of analysis of the intersection of the intersection of bodily and spatial criminalization of certain urban parks along the lines of sexuality can be found in George Chauncy, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>266</sup> See Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, especially Chapter 5, “The Annihilation of Space by Law.” Mitchell provides a robust analysis of the impact of law-and-order rhetoric on policing and access to urban public parks.

planned activities ranging from a “run to mama” to an egg toss and a 40-yard dash to crown the fastest man.<sup>267</sup> During the 1940s, various organs of the local press constructed competing imaginations, presenting very different pictures of increased black patronage at Garfield Park. The black press’s accounts of Sunday school picnics and wholesome family fun stood in stark contrast to the descriptions of “gangs” of black, male criminals described in other newspapers. The changing racial dynamics at Garfield played out both at the park itself and in the pages of the local papers.

In August 1943, the Cleveland NAACP investigated an incident in which white pool patrons harassed black swimmers on a field trip to Garfield sponsored by the Cedar Central Day Camp Nursery. According to one of the black youth involved in the incident, a white lifeguard at the pool had participated in the harassment. NAACP leaders contacted the office of Democratic Mayor Frank Lausche, and in response city recreation staff conducted an internal investigation of the incident. The mayor assigned Florence Fairfax, the top African American staff member in the Cleveland urban recreation system, to investigate. At the conclusion of her inquiry, she wrote a two-page letter summarizing her findings. In the letter, Fairfax denied that a lifeguard participated in the harassment, assuring the NAACP that she had mounted a thorough review because the case had “Democracy at stake.”<sup>268</sup> However, the city’s statements supportive of black claims to access public recreation spaces did not always match municipal practice. Despite

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<sup>267</sup> “Union Picnic Thurs., July 25 at Garfield Park,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1946; “Platt Avenue Council Has Garfield Outing,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 27, 1946; “Business Alliance Will Hold Annual Picnic At Garfield Sunday,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 2, 1947; “E. 135<sup>th</sup> St. Club To Have Picnic,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 23, 1949; and “Pythians to Picnic at Garfield Park,” *Call and Post*, August 13, 1949.

<sup>268</sup> M. L. Coen, Superintendent of Lifeguards to Director, August 4, 1943; Harriet L. Cooley, Garfield Park Discrimination: William (“Billy”) Cooley, Cedar Central Day Camp Nursery, undated; Mayor Lausche to Clarence L. Sharpe, President NAACP, 8-17, 1943; Florence B. Fairfax, Superintendent of Central Recreation to Mr. Julius Kemeny, Commissioner of Recreation, undated; Arthur L. Munson, Director of Public Properties to Clarence L. Sharpe, President, NAACP; NAACP, Cleveland, Ohio, Container 36, Folder 2, WRHS.

Fairfax's assurances of the cooperation of city staff at the pool as well as promised police protection for black bathers, the support of these city officials at Garfield was ambivalent at best. At a park like Portland-Outhwaite (discussed in the previous chapter), where the local neighborhood and clientele were primarily African American, black park staff could help shape the space to serve black residents. In the white suburbs, however, the influence of black park staff was considerably more limited.

Yet the involvement of Fairfax in the investigation of racism at Garfield raises an important point that must be considered. As one of the most prominent figures in the local recreation field, Fairfax was one of a handful of African Americans who served in leadership positions managing Cleveland park programs. In northern cities such as Cleveland, Black Freedom Movement struggles to access public spaces were not always arrayed with black activists on one side and white city leaders on the other. That is, municipal responses to community activism around discrimination were shaped in part by black city workers, who sometimes drafted official missives regarding discrimination. It was most often local white residents, and not city policy, that stridently enforced the color line at public recreation facilities in these cities.

Recreation was a space where black residents entered the urban public sphere. In Cleveland, Florence Fairfax was often featured on community panels and in the pages of the black press giving her opinions about youth and recreation, and how to curb juvenile delinquency. In 1954, she was joined by Bill Willis, a former linebacker for the Cleveland Browns, who was appointed by Mayor Celebrezze as Assistant Recreation Director.<sup>269</sup> Fairfax

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<sup>269</sup> "Bill Willis Named to City Recreation Post," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 20, 1954.

and Willis would become two of the most authoritative voices on matters of public recreation during the next decade.<sup>270</sup>

### **Direct Action at Garfield Park, 1944-1954**

Building on these earlier forays at the park, after World War II, several black community activists launched a concerted direct action campaign to desegregate Garfield Pool. This was one site among many as several black community organizations—some long established in the city, others newly formed—mobilized to address the mounting injustices of racial discrimination in Cleveland. As a precursor to the Civil Rights Movement that would burgeon in the city in the early 1960s, this organizing focused primarily on employment discrimination and unequal access to public and recreational facilities. During this era, the NAACP was the largest black community organization in the city. By 1946, membership had reached a high of 10,879. That year's successful membership drive was due in part to the organization, led predominantly by black professionals, making a more concerted effort to grow its working-class membership base. During the 1940s, the Cleveland NAACP focused its energies on employment, and after World War II its leaders supported the founding of a Community Relations Board (CRB) charged with investigating unequal hiring practices in the city. They also worked to pass a municipal Fair

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<sup>270</sup> Here are some examples of Willis, and especially Fairfax commenting in the local black press and in other forums throughout Cleveland: "Mrs. Fairfax at WRU Institute," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 1949; "Young Adults Give Hand To Juveniles," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 7, 1952; "Panel Turns to Youth Violence," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 29, 1952; "Inter-Group Relations Aided by Correct Recreation: Fairfax," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 18, 1953; "Study Fairfax Plan: Seek Funds to Work With Juvenile Gangs," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 26, 1953; "Juveniles 'Confused'-City Recreation Expert," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 13, 1954; "Willis Gives Prescription for Juvenile Delinquency," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 23, 1955; "Why Teen-Agers Like to be Identified by Names," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 20, 1955; "Police, Courts Wage War to Break Up Youth Gangs," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 25, 1956; "Girls Over Fifteen Need Sports Program," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 31, 1958; "Two Persons Who Act: Recreation Leaders Open Anti-Delinquency Campaign," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 14, 1959; and, "Bill Willis Plugs for the 1.9 Tax Levy," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 5, 1962;.

Employment Practices (FEP) ordinance through the City Council. The campaign garnered results in 1950 when Cleveland passed the first such law in the nation. Although CRB and FEP did not wholly alleviate city-level employment discrimination, especially among most local trade unions, these efforts did at least provide a formal process by which individuals could register complaints. The NAACP also included an active Youth Council whose members tackled issues of recreational discrimination after the war.<sup>271</sup>

The NAACP's concerted effort to better connect with working-class people and their issues was certainly motivated by the emergence of an active black working-class direct action organization in Cleveland in 1935. The Future Outlook League (FOL), started by John O. Holly, enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Cleveland's black weekly newspaper, *The Call and Post*, and launched a highly visible "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns during the late 1930s. At its height, the organization boasted a membership of upwards of 10,000 and helped usher in a spirit of direct action pickets and a more confrontational organizing style to anti-discrimination efforts in the city. Although the FOL's prominence faded during the war years as full employment came closer to a reality, its activity in the city had demonstrated to the NAACP the necessity of including working-class people in order to stay relevant. It also laid the groundwork for future direct action campaigns in Cleveland.<sup>272</sup>

When the FOL's organizational work slowed, direct action campaigns underwent a brief lull during the World War II years as compared to the flurry of activity that had marked the 1930s. But in the spring of 1944, a new organization arrived on the scene. George House, an

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<sup>271</sup>Russel H. Davis, *Civil Rights in Cleveland 1912-1961: An Account of the Cleveland Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Cleveland, 1973), WRHS, 84-138. Hill, 127.

<sup>272</sup> Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, Chapter 6.



organizer from Chicago, came to Cleveland to help establish a local chapter of the new national group, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). Soon, a direct action spirit found new life in Cleveland. In the 1940s, Cleveland CORE was a relatively small, interracial organization with between approximately 50 or 70 members, 20 of them very active people mostly in their early twenties. CORE officially espoused a commitment to non-violent direct action and moral suasion, and much of its early activity centered on confronting discrimination at public accommodations and private spaces of entertainment.<sup>273</sup> In 1944, the entrenched discrimination faced by black swimmers at Garfield caught the attention of CORE, whose members began a series of direct action visits to the site to draw public attention to the problem.

The Garfield actions were part of a larger effort by CORE to address recreation discrimination in the city. Cleveland CORE members concentrated considerable energy during the late 1940s on recreation sites, a strategy in step with the direction of the national office and a decision perhaps reflective of the youth of the local chapter. On a national level, CORE officials recognized the entrenchment of the color line in public recreation spaces and understood the potential for violence that their activists faced in challenging this segregation. At the 1948 national CORE convention, leadership offered the following advice to members taking on recreation projects:

[S]ince some recreational projects involve an aspect of physical intimacy between Negroes and whites, it is felt that while projects are being conducted a rigid form of etiquette and courteous conduct among CORE members be observed as far as possible. This will make for good public acceptance of the group and help to keep it from falling into a categorical stereotype which is applied most readily to most interracial groups.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Frazier, "Harambee Nation," Chapter 2. Frazier points out in her dissertation that the Cleveland Chapter of CORE's commitment to strategies of non-violence were more complicated than a strict philosophical adherence to a Gandhian set of principles, but were also a pragmatic tactic deemed effective by local CORE leadership.

<sup>274</sup> "Recreation" The Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1942-1967, Reel 14, Series 3, 10, 441.

In this missive, CORE's leadership advised activists to tread carefully at the fraught intimacy of the public recreation color line. This idea of managing potentially explosive situations through personal respectability would mark the approach advocated by much of the Black Freedom Movement leadership in Cleveland during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The staff at the black news weekly, the *Cleveland Call and Post*, likewise emphasized the decorum and good standing of movement participants in its coverage of desegregation efforts. Movement leaders and black news reporters attempted to portray activists as respectable, productive citizens. Such framing was an intentional strategy in postwar desegregation campaigns of public recreation venues.

Given the focus on recreation spaces by both national CORE and its Cleveland chapter, the discrimination at Garfield, one of the most popular swimming spots in the city, was an obvious target for the fledgling organization. In 1944, an interracial group from CORE went to the pool to test the city's claims that the site was open to black patrons. Black CORE activists sought to challenge the longstanding practice of discrimination at the pool by publicly arguing that they too were citizens who deserved equal access.

As part of this strategy, CORE activists brought with them Eddie Williams, a black World War II veteran, as a "focal point" of their visit. Arranging for coverage by the *Call and Post* in advance of their trip, and with Williams in their group, the CORE members entered the pool to swim. White swimmers immediately became hostile toward the CORE activists and exited the water. Members of CORE then attempted to engage the white bathers in conversation about why they would not swim with black patrons. According to a *Call and Post* reporter covering the event, one woman told Williams she did not want to swim with him because she thought black swimmers were "diseased and dirty." One of the white members of CORE spoke with one of the most vocal white swimmers, who explained: "They [blacks] have their own

pools. They can swim in Woodhill without any trouble, but people who live in the Garfield community don't want Negroes here. Most of the rest of the park...has been taken over by the Negroes, and we want to keep the pool white." In this statement, this unnamed Garfield Heights resident explained his mental map of the city of Cleveland, a map that included a spatially articulated discrimination. He cast black bathers attempting to swim at Garfield as outsiders invading his community area, and expressed the opinion that black swimmers should be confined to the swimming pool at Woodhill Park, a recreation space located within the city. According to his mental mapping of the area, blacks and whites each had their own recreation spaces based on residential patterns, and he did not want the two to intersect. His comments echoed the type of "black invasion" rhetoric articulated in the earlier newspaper articles that had described an alleged black crime wave in the park. These comments conceptualized black patrons visiting Garfield as the park being "taken over" by outsiders, and they reflected a determination that the "invasion" of the suburb by the city would stop at the gates of the pool. This unnamed resident further stated that in the past black visitors who attempted to swim at the park were "thrown over the fence by a gang of fellows."<sup>275</sup> His casual, anecdotal reference to such violence evidences its pervasiveness in maintaining the color line in this space. Only the presence of police during the CORE action, arranged ahead of time by the local chapter, had ensured such violence did not occur that day. This effort to engage white bathers in conversation is an example of how desegregation efforts at Garfield during the 1940s were based on a tactic of moral suasion, both

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<sup>275</sup> "Interracial Group Test Garfield's "White" Pool, *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 19, 1944 and "Interracial Group Test Garfield's "White" Swim Pool, August 26, 1944 from CORE Papers, Reel 9. My grandmother, who was a girl in Cleveland in the 1940s also remembers witnessing firsthand black patrons being thrown over the fence at Garfield to keep them from swimming there.

through interpersonal conversation and in a broader dialogue to take place in the city's black newspaper.

This broader dialogue in the black press focused on the claims on full American citizenship being made by those black Clevelanders who sought to use Garfield Pool. The *Call and Post's* act of highlighting the participation of a war veteran at the 1944 action symbolically reinforced such claims to citizenship. The logic presented was that a man who had fought for his country in war should be allowed to swim in any pool of his choosing upon returning home. A year later, the *Call and Post* again carefully framed another attempt by African Americans to swim at Garfield. This incident took place at the pool on the Fourth of July in 1945, when a black family attempted to enter the pool, causing 200 white bathers to leave the facility. In this case, it appears that the man and his family acted on their own without coordination with any formal organization. The *Call and Post* described the father of the family, I. W. White, as a "prominent Negro" of the local community, a crane operator at the Osborne Manufacturing Company, and a member of the Central Area Community Council. With this description, the paper sought to demonstrate the respectability of this family of black swimmers. The article painted a picture of a nuclear family, including a father with a respectable job and commitment to civic engagement. The *Call and Post* repeatedly employed these types of descriptions of the respectability of black patrons who challenged the color line in Cleveland. The newspaper also framed the White family's effort to swim at the pool as an exercise of their rights of full citizenship. Surely the choice of visiting the pool on the Fourth of July, the holiday popularly marking the founding of the United States, was no coincidence in this story. By visiting the pool on this day, the family laid claim to full participation in the community traditions and recreational practices of the United States. White explained his reasoning in visiting the pool to

the newspaper: “This is a city pool, municipally operated by public funds supplied by citizens and taxpayers. I am a citizen and taxpayer and within my rights in seeking to use the pool and its facilities.”<sup>276</sup> Measured rhetoric based on claims to the full rights of citizenship underpinned the efforts to desegregate Garfield.

Mr. White’s assertion that he deserved to swim at Garfield due to his contributions as a taxpayer raises another important point. Cleveland residents, including the White family, did indeed see a portion of their tax dollars fund municipal parks such as Garfield. The residents of Garfield Heights, however, did not contribute any of their tax base to maintaining or staffing the park and pool. Suburban residents thus laid claim on the park due to proximity of residency, although they did not technically have governmental jurisdiction over the space. This management arrangement was a rather convoluted example of a broader trend of urban taxpayers subsidizing suburban infrastructure throughout the United States.

Mr. White made his claim to the rights of a citizen and taxpayer by visiting the pool. Over the next few years, more organized actions periodically continued at the pool, and CORE launched similar efforts at other locations, most notably the popular Euclid Beach swimming area and amusement park, located on Lake Erie.<sup>277</sup> The framing of these efforts to gain access to these recreational venues based on claims of black citizenship gained traction, including among city administration officials. In 1949, after yet another round of violence on the part of white patrons seeking to block access by black swimmers, the long-time head of the Recreation Department, John Nagy, issued a statement to the press. The *Call and Post* carried his statement

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<sup>276</sup> “White Patrons of Garfield Heights Park Protest When Negro Family Enters Pool,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 14, 1945.

<sup>277</sup> For more on the Euclid Beach campaign see Nishani Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 80-91

in its entirety on the front page under the headline “City Pools Are Open To All Citizens.” In his statement, Nagy declared that “rowdyism, Un-Americanism, and official indifference” would not be tolerated at Garfield.<sup>278</sup>

In characterizing discrimination as “un-Americanism,” official correspondence from the Recreation Department adopted the framing language crafted by organizations such as CORE and the NAACP, and articulated by both individual black Clevelanders and the *Call and Post*. Yet, despite this rhetorical stance by the city, as the 1950s began, intermittent violence continued when black swimmers organized trips to Garfield Swimming Pool. Although the city assured the public it would not stand for racist acts at Garfield as a matter of commitment to democratic principles, the practical implementation of this policy did not always match this claim. Such was the case in August of 1951, when a popular local African American youth worker and band leader, Jimmy Saunders, had to defend himself with a blackjack when “15-20 toughs” attacked him and hurled racial epithets when he tried to swim at the pool. Responding to the violence, the police took Saunders into custody instead of his assailants. Authorities held Saunders for thirty hours with no charge before releasing him, causing the NAACP to look into the case. In the aftermath of this incident, police officials’ stated assurances that they would protect black swimmers rang hollow.<sup>279</sup> Faced with this disconnect between city rhetoric and practice, local black activists continued to push for equal access at the pool through occasional planned direct actions. Another swimming season ended with no clear resolution of the struggle to open Garfield.

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<sup>278</sup> “City Pools are Open to All Citizens,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 6, 1949, Front Page.

<sup>279</sup> “More Trouble at Garfield Pool,” “Officer Ignores Mob, Jails Band Leader, *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 18, 1951; “Police Protection Pledged For Pools,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 25, 1951.

As the 1950s began, the issue of black swimming was not resolved in many northern urban locales. Black bathers were effectively barred from pools in white neighborhoods in Buffalo, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Denver, Grand Rapids, and Omaha. In northern Ohio, residents in Akron and Youngstown continued to practice *de facto* segregation along with Clevelanders.<sup>280</sup> Each summer, battles over the color line at Garfield Pool continued, and attempts to erase this line met with sharp resistance. In the summer of 1954, Garfield lifeguards sometimes denied access to black patrons wanting to swim at the pool on the grounds that they had “either an open sore, scratch, or athlete foot infection.” Black youths’ bodies were thus subjected to humiliating inspections not visited on their white counterparts and coded as diseased in order to justify discrimination. Other tactics by white staff at the pool included “misplacing” the clothing of black bathers or suddenly draining the pool for “repairs” when black patrons visited. The disconnect between official city policy on pool attendance and the practice of employees at the pool itself prompted one man to write the *Call and Post* comparing the situation at Garfield to segregation in the South. He wrote: “But as a matter of fact I prefer the honest mess in Mississippi, which is legal, to the dishonest mess in Ohio, which is a violation of the code of the state.” Black Freedom Movement activists in the North had to challenge an entrenched discrimination of popular practice rather than organizing to overturn a particular policy or law. As Victoria Wolcott has noted regarding black access to recreation facilities, the “disjuncture between civil rights laws and the reality of segregation was particularly stark in Ohio.”<sup>281</sup> While Garfield employees made up excuses in an attempt to cover continued apartheid practices, white patrons hurled both insults and rocks at black swimmers. When that failed to deter black visitors

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<sup>280</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 154.

<sup>281</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters*, 19.

from swimming, white patrons often left the pool in mass protest of integration. Faced with these tactics, the local NAACP Youth Council continued to hold swimming events at the park, coordinating their efforts with the local black press to call attention to the bigotry.<sup>282</sup>

Such entrenched resistance to black incursions into white neighborhoods was not unique to Cleveland, but rather a frequent reaction across the urban north. Historian Thomas Sugrue has described the 1940s through 1960s in Detroit as a period when white-led neighborhood groups “divided cities into strictly enforced racial territories,” and fought to ensure black residents did not transgress established boundaries.<sup>283</sup> Likewise Arnold Hirsch described a similar white stance against black entry into the Trumbull Park neighborhood in Chicago. When African Americans attempted to use a baseball field at Trumbull Park in Chicago, in 1954, they were met with white violence, despite police presence to protect the black patrons.<sup>284</sup>

In Cleveland, the integration efforts at Garfield wore on for a decade. In 1954, after the *Call and Post* ran a front-page article and editorial about the continued racist practices of employees and patrons at the park, the city responded by assigning a black lifeguard to Garfield.<sup>285</sup> Thus, while the struggle over Garfield Pool ostensibly centered on access to recreation, the most concrete example of success due to black community organizing efforts was an opening for a black employee. Activists’ celebration of this new job for one young black man

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<sup>282</sup> “Hoodlums Hurl Insults as Negroes Defy Bias at Cleveland Pools,” “Calls Abuse at Public Pools ‘Mass Bigotry,’” and “Shall Bigots Operate Cleveland’s Pools,” editorial, and “Jim Crow Ohio,” letter to the editor by River George, *Call and Post* July 17, 1954.

<sup>283</sup> Sugrue, Thomas, Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940, 1964,” *Journal of American History*, 82:2, September 1995, 560.

<sup>284</sup> Hirsch, Arnold, “Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966, *Journal of American History*, 82:2, September 1995, 535-536.

<sup>285</sup> “Negro Swimmers Avoid Glenville-Garfield Pools,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 31, 1954.



demonstrated that Black Freedom Movement struggles over recreation were never just about fun and games or even an important maneuver in a broader rhetorical claim of full black citizenship and access to the city. Sites of labor and leisure intersected on the urban landscape, and Black Freedom Movement efforts to open recreation spaces were also both rhetorically and practically efforts around spaces of labor.

While city officials declared Garfield Park open to all and the presence of a black lifeguard symbolized a victory at the site, a visit to Garfield in 1954 on a regular summer day when no direct action was scheduled would likely turn up few young black swimmers. The *Call and Post* attempted to discern why black young people continued to avoid certain city pools, interviewing a ten year-old boy who lingered outside the fence surrounding one swimming spot on a sunny summer day. The boy's answer to the question of why he did not enter to swim was simple. He pointed at the white swimmers and said, "They will fight me."<sup>286</sup> For this ten-year-old at least, black activists' organizing to desegregate swimming spaces had not sufficiently transformed his recreational experience. The newspaper might describe pools as desegregated, and a black lifeguard might confirm that assessment on the days when he was scheduled to work, but the ongoing threat of personal violence told one black youth differently.

Not all adults in the black community acknowledged the legitimacy of such fears of local youth. In the same edition featuring the interview with the ten-year-old, the *Call and Post* dedicated its weekly "Editorial in Rhyme" to the situation, including the lines:

When white folks open up the pools,  
An' Negroes are afraid to swim,  
My cup of anger gits so full

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<sup>286</sup> "Negro Swimmers Avoid Glenville-Garfield Pools" and "Officials Assign Negro Lifeguard to 'Hot Spot', *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 31, 1954

It spills across the brim.<sup>287</sup>

The poem's final stanza admonished: "Democracy is worth the fight, It's worth the highest price we'll pay." Just as recreation leader Florence Fairfax had written in her letter to the NAACP about alleged discrimination at Garfield Pool, the author of this poem saw "democracy" at stake at the city's swimming pools. He conceptualized the fight over Garfield and other swimming spots throughout the city within a broad framework of black claims on democracy and citizenship, and believed that opening Garfield was a noble cause worthy of personal sacrifice. For a young boy who likely came to his local pool to swim with a very different set of expectations—the hope of spending an enjoyable day playing outdoors—facing the threat of violence was simply not a worthwhile price to pay. It was safer to stay on the other side of the fence.

While organized desegregation efforts made substantial gains in opening spaces and opportunities for African Americans in Cleveland and across the urban North, not all members of the black community participated in this effort in the same ways. Considering recreation spaces provides the opportunity to especially examine how the movement both incorporated and excluded the experiences of young people. While teens and young adults involved in CORE and the NAACP Youth Council were active participants in the desegregation efforts at Garfield, after the direct actions by these groups ended, other black youth were left with the reality of a highly hostile white swimming clientele that did not welcome their presence. Adult movement leaders did not always consider the voices, fears, and needs of these young people as legitimate.

In addition to ongoing acts of interpersonal violence, white responses further challenged the desegregation campaign at Garfield in three ways, all of which were in part spatially

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<sup>287</sup> "No Free Rides," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 31, 1954.

constructed. In their first response, local whites and daily newspapers sought to characterize black activists as Communist outsiders invading the space of the pool. In the second response, the City of Cleveland reordered the spatial arrangement of swimming pools across the city, leading to eventual disinvestment and decline of Garfield. Finally, Garfield Heights residents and politicians argued that since the pool lay outside Cleveland city limits, it should be operated by the suburban, white government instead of by the City of Cleveland. Such a shift in jurisdiction would open renewed opportunity for user discrimination. Collectively, an examination of these responses demonstrates how important it is to consider the broader spatial-framework of white reactions to Black Freedom Movement desegregation efforts. Considering the relationship of city and suburb, and the jurisdictional planning decisions shaped by that relationship, is essential to making sense of what happened at Garfield.

### **White Responses to Black Organizing at Garfield Park**

At Garfield Pool, the first organized white response to Black Freedom Movement activism, besides interpersonal violence and ad-hoc attempts to bar black entry to the pool, was to characterize black activists as outside Communist agitators invading the park and community. This tactic began in earnest in August 1952. On a hot Wednesday afternoon, local white bathers harassed an interracial group of seventeen young activists who visited Garfield. A small local interracial organization, “Folkcul,” with likely Communist Party affiliation, played a lead role in coordinating the day’s direct action. When police failed to protect the activist-bathers who were driven from the pool by a group of white swimmers, Folkcul lodged a formal complaint with the Community Relations Board. Members of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, the International Longshoreman Association, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine

Workers (URMW), and the NAACP supported their complaint. These unions, especially the URMW, had a reputation for working with Communists. The representatives of these groups left the meeting with the Community Relations Board with more assurances of protection by police officials. Activists decided to continue to push the issue and pledged to stage swimming events each Sunday for the rest of the season. Members of the NAACP, the Future Outlook League, and the Community Relations Board promised to be present to witness the next swimming event. Police joined these observers the following Sunday. Faced with such an audience white patrons did not resort to violence again; instead, they left the pool and sat on the grass nearby until the black swimmers had vacated the facility. Reporting on the action, the *Call and Post* declared: “Race hatred took a terrific walloping Sunday afternoon at Garfield Park.”<sup>288</sup>

Others who observed the August actions held a different opinion, however. One prominent local newspaper, the *Press*, claimed that the activists who visited the pool were both outsiders to Garfield Heights and Communist agitators. While black activists employed citizen-based rhetoric to lay claim to the space, those opposed to black entrance resorted to redbaiting to undermine such claims. Since citizenship rhetoric animated the Garfield campaign, casting these activists as potential Communists was a strategy that could undermine the desegregation effort in the court of public opinion. Further, such allusion to communism also spatially defined these activists as “outsiders”—outsiders who had come to Cleveland from other cities, outsiders who wanted to stir up trouble in a quiet suburb, and outsiders to the protections and privileges afforded by white American citizenship.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> “The City Pools Are For All,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 16, 1952; “Folcul Blames Cops in Pool Disturbance,” *Call and Post*, August 16, 1952; “Hoodlums Watch as Mixed Party Swims,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 23, 1952.

<sup>289</sup> Such tactics were not unique to Garfield swimming pool, and a rich body of Black Freedom Movement scholarship has arisen to explore how inter and intra-national debates over communism impacted the Movement. Some of this scholarship has argued that the geopolitical context of the Cold War afforded opportunities for Black

In November 1952, three months after the August direct action by Folkcul, the *Cleveland Press* ran a series of articles that alleged connections between efforts to desegregate Garfield and the Communist Party. The *Press*'s involvement in this story was something local black community organizations had to take seriously, as the newspaper was one of the most powerful creators of public opinion in Cleveland at mid-century. *Life* magazine dubbed Louis Seltzer, the *Press* editor of 38 years, "Mr. Cleveland." One newsman from a competing paper remembered Seltzer as the "most powerful political force in Cleveland."<sup>290</sup> Another author recalled Seltzer as "probably the most powerful man in Cleveland's mass communication field."<sup>291</sup> The *Press* had a strong circulation in Cleveland's ethnic white working-class neighborhoods. In his memoir, Carl Stokes recalled that the paper "addressed itself in its idea of Cleveland's 'little man,' the ethnic blue-collar worker and his family."<sup>292</sup> Also, of the two major dailies in town, the *Press* had a reputation for a relatively progressive stance on race relations, at least compared to its more

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rights activists to exploit concerns over how domestic injustices would be framed to an international audience in order to put pressure on domestic authorities to support Civil Rights actions. Yet, other scholars have convincingly argued that such red-baiting served to limit and narrow the scope of the Civil Rights Movement, as activists sought to distance themselves from the specter of communist influence. What an examination of the events at Garfield Park adds to this debate, is it demonstrates how seriously Civil Rights organizations took the charge of communism and how local events and debates influenced the ways in which organizations responded to and situated themselves in response to the Communist question. The scholarship on Communism and the Black Freedom Movements is both rich and growing. Some notable works include: Tom Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002); Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: the Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2008); Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986); Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, eds., *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and, Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>290</sup> Porter, *Cleveland; Confused City*, 143-177. 200.

<sup>291</sup> Estelle Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 15.

<sup>292</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 99.

conservative competitor, the *Plain Dealer*. Thus, when the *Press* ran its series of articles about Communist activity at Garfield, local black community organizations took immediate notice.

The *Press* articles stemmed from a two-month undercover investigation conducted by a white female reporter, Rusty Brown, and centered on the involvement of Folkcul in the desegregation efforts at Garfield. In a five-part, front-page exposé, Brown described Folkcul as an interracial organization with several avowed Communist leaders, including two men who had recently come to Cleveland from Seattle and New York. She further alleged Folkcul had close ties with the “Labor Youth League, a Communist front” and “leftist” groups on the Western Reserve University campus. Brown had a very different take on the events at Garfield than the coverage the *Call and Post* presented back in August. She claimed that Folkcul members had gone uninvited to an NAACP-sponsored picnic at the park in order to stage an action at the pool. In her description, thirteen Folkcul members were joined by three NAACP members, who left the picnic at the spur of the moment to join the swimming party. Brown further alleged that there had been no pre-planning between the groups and that participants in the action had made an “attempt to incite a race riot” by picking fights with white police at the pool. She also claimed the group had staged a fake drowning only to have the victim saved by a member of Folkcul in order to cast aspersion on a white lifeguard for not helping the black bather. She noted that the Folkcul crowd attempted to exacerbate tensions by taunting the police by calling them Nazis. Brown characterized the young people involved in Folkcul as duped by the Communists. Quotes from Cleveland police sergeant John Ungvary, head of the local “subversive squad,” backed Brown’s claims. Ungvary argued: “[T]he majority of the groups members were being ‘taken in’ by the communists.” Finally, Brown’s article cast the pall of Communism beyond just the actions at Garfield Park, as she wrote: “In the field of race relations, the Red Elements join every

legitimate action in this field, always adding their own crooked twist of destructive propaganda.”<sup>293</sup>

In this series of articles, Brown undermined black activists’ rhetoric of American citizenship by characterizing their energies as tainted by communism. By describing manufactured fights with police and a staged drowning, Brown called into question the activists’ tactics. In recounting the infiltration of Folkcul members at the NAACP picnic, she cast doubt on the ability of the NAACP, the largest black community organization in Cleveland, to control its own events. Finally, by characterizing youth involved in the movement as “innocent victims” of Communist agitators, she attempted to take away the agency of this important contingent of local Black Freedom Movement organizing. This type of rhetoric, used to describe an interracial young activist group, also echoed the well-rehearsed tropes of white women being “innocent victims” of black male advances. Such allusions to interracial intimacy and sex often stood as the unspoken specter that haunted accusations of Communist subversion of Black Freedom Movement activism. Six years earlier, CORE’s national office had warned its members about navigating the line of “physical intimacy” of interracial recreation campaigns.<sup>294</sup> Civil Rights scholar Stacy Brauckman has argued that this conflation of communism and interracial intimacy, which became more pronounced in the post-War era, was a response to Civil Rights activism throughout the country, and had particular traction with “nonsouthern conservatives that would

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<sup>293</sup> *Cleveland Press*, November 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 1952, Rusty Brown, CSU-SC. Unvary and his subversive squad would go on to play a prominent role in the policing and repression of Black Freedom Movement organizations and individuals in Cleveland, as will be described in further chapters of this dissertation.

<sup>294</sup> “Recreation” The Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1942-1967, Reel 14, Series 3, 10, 441.

resonate for decades.”<sup>295</sup> This series of newspaper reports tapped into this resonance, and its impact on the desegregation campaign could hardly have been more complete—tactics and rhetoric, leadership and youth participants were all characterized as influenced by communism—both at Garfield Pool as well as in the larger “field of race relations.”

Such allusions to black activist’s communism were not unique to Cleveland and had a negative impact on CORE throughout the United States. The Cleveland CORE chapter, which had been a key initiator of action at Garfield Pool in the 1940s, was actually conspicuously absent from the 1952 campaign. By the early 1950s, the Cleveland chapter of CORE had a declining membership, and by 1952 one local chapter member declared the organization “Dead, Gone. No more.”<sup>296</sup> By 1953, the national office officially disbanded the chapter. It is important to note that the Cleveland chapter was not the only one to suffer a lack of strong leadership and operational difficulties in the early 1950s. Historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have dubbed the period from 1947 to 1954 as one marked by “growth” and then “disintegration” for CORE. According to the authors, the organization was caught in the “anticommunist scare that swept the country during the early 1950s.” While there is no evidence that anti-communist backlash solely precipitated the decline of the Cleveland CORE chapter, it is worth noting that the chapter was dogged by Communist allegations throughout the course of its organization efforts. In addition, the charge of communism had a negative impact on the organization on a national level, and the CORE chapter of Cleveland declined as the national organization came under such attacks. It was not until a decade later, in 1963, that a revived CORE chapter would

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<sup>295</sup> Stacy Braukman, “The Johns Committee, Sex and Civil Rights in Florida, 1963-1965,” in Dannielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer, eds. *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 164.

<sup>296</sup> Letter to Katie from “Sis”, December 8, 1952, CORE papers, Reel 9.



emerge as an important force for Civil Rights in Cleveland.<sup>297</sup> With CORE faltering, Communist allegations were leveled against other organizations that took up anti-discrimination efforts, and it fell to the NAACP and the Urban League to address the Communist controversy stirred at Garfield.

The first article in the *Press*'s expose series caused immediate alarm for the leadership of the Urban League. Although the Urban League had not directly participated in the actions at Garfield, the organization recognized the potential of the Communist allegations to undermine the broader, citywide effort to push for civil rights. In response, Urban League leaders outlined five points of objection to the article and then went to Louis Seltzer's office to express their concerns. This meeting with Seltzer and the *Press*'s news and feature editors lasted nearly an hour and a half. Yet the Urban League considered the story that the *Press* ran the next day as "bad or worse than the first one." The *Press* did include an editorial outlining the Urban League's position on the controversy, but that editorial was relegated to the back pages of the paper while the serial investigative story appeared on the front page under banner headlines over the course of five days.<sup>298</sup>

For its part, the NAACP issued a comprehensive review of the situation in both an open letter to editor Louis Seltzer and then a subsequent edition of its "Civil Rights Watchdog" publication. In both of these documents, NAACP leaders vehemently denied being used as Communist pawns, and instead described how NAACP leadership had been aware of the potential for an action by Folkeul at the pool and had contacted the police in advance of the event

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<sup>297</sup> Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 53; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE; A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), quote from page 63.

<sup>298</sup> "Charles J. Patterson –November, 1952." Container 41, Folder 3, Urban League, WRHS.

to ensure the safety of those who wished to swim. The letter to Seltzer argued that the number of “real communists” involved in the action was likely “small.” Finally, the “Civil Rights Watchdog” piece attempted to reorient the conversation to explain how NAACP efforts actually were anti-Communist at their heart:

There is not secrecy about any function of the Cleveland Branch NAACP. It is dedicated to the elimination of racial segregation and discrimination in every form. Adoption of its principles and philosophy is the best guarantee against Communism in domestic and foreign policy. It stands as [a] solid rock for announced democratic ideas to be put into actual practice in the real “American way.”<sup>299</sup>

In this pronouncement, the NAACP attempted to reassert its position as an organization dedicated to American citizenship and democratic principles, and argued that its work was a curative for potential communism instead of a symptom of red-influence.

It is important to parse out the subtle differences in the Urban League and NAACP responses to the accusation of Communist influence in the actions at Garfield. While the Urban League’s response argued that Folkcul had the right to participate in the actions, the NAACP made more of an effort to assert its own organizational control of the activities at the pool and to demonstrate its claim as a progenitor of the “American way.” Such variances in approach indicate the differences between these organizations in their relationship to the events at Garfield. The Urban League essentially had little (if any) direct participation in the swimming pool actions. The league became involved in the debate after the fact out of recognition of the potentially devastating impact the *Press* articles could have on the growing black activism in the city. Members of the NAACP, on the other hand, had participated directly in the actions, especially through the work of Youth Council members. They had also specifically been ridiculed as “dupes” of Communist influence, and they therefore attempted to distance

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<sup>299</sup> “Garfield Park” and “Folkcul” folders, NAACP, Western Reserve Historical Society, WRHS.

themselves from that claim. The leadership of the two organizations coordinated their responses to the *Press*, but these dissimilarities demonstrate how it would be a mistake for scholars to read one monolithic voice in Black Freedom Movement rhetorical response to redbaiting. Each organization sought to protect its utilization of a citizenship discourse, but both did so with the practical consideration of their organizational positions in relationship to a given tactical action. The Urban League's response should therefore not be over-read as an organizational embrace of Folkcul or the group's more radical politics, as it clearly was not. Instead, each of these organization's responses—and indeed the broader rhetorical framework of postwar activism in Cleveland—should be read as practical tactical decisions in a constantly changing local desegregation struggle. The NAACP, whose leaders had a presence on this supposed stage of Communist theater, attempted to distance itself from the drama. The Urban League, whose staff had remained offstage in this particular struggle, leveled a more comprehensive critique of the drama itself from the safety of the wings.

While the Urban League and the NAACP attempted to navigate the press coverage of the Garfield campaign, the impact of this coverage on the group Folkcul is harder to gauge. The swimming pool actions marked the first time that this small, oddly named group had received any substantial coverage by the local press, black or white. After the incidents moved to the back pages of local papers, the group fell away from the public spotlight. It appears that this short campaign was the one time Folkcul played any significant role in organizing at Garfield Park, or the Black Freedom Movement more broadly. It is possible that the anti-Communist backlash forestalled development of the organization as an active participant in further actions. However, it is also likely that the role and importance of this small group with Communist affiliations had been blown out of proportion in the media coverage. In either case, Folkcul did

not emerge as a substantial presence in the Cleveland Black Freedom Movement after the Garfield actions.

Attempts to characterize the desegregation efforts at Garfield Pool as the work of outside Communist agitators challenged the tactics and rhetoric of Black Freedom Movement activists. Another challenge came when city officials dramatically reconfigured the swimming landscape of Cleveland in the mid-1950s. While the city operated six outdoor and five indoor pools in 1949, the City Council approved the construction of ten new outdoor pools in 1953. This pool construction was part of a substantial city investment in public recreation amenities during the first part of the decade. Construction crews completed the pool projects by 1955, including five new pools on the west side of the city and five on the east side. These new swimming pools were typically much smaller than large pools like Garfield, which was originally intended as a citywide recreation destination. City planners conceived of these new, smaller facilities as “Walk to Pools.” The concept was that such pools would serve their immediate neighborhoods as residents could literally walk to the nearest swimming spot. With the opening of the new facilities, city swimming pool attendance soared to more than one million, with an additional 700,000 bathers visiting the city’s four municipally run beaches.<sup>300</sup> While these new pools opened more swimming opportunities, including in a few black neighborhoods, the “walk to” concept also re-entrenched racial apartheid at city swimming facilities. Since Cleveland residential patterns already were highly segregated, it followed that residents within walking distance from any given pool would be either predominantly white or black. Further, given this new spatial ordering of a system of smaller pools serviced by foot traffic, bigger pools intended

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<sup>300</sup> “The City Record” May 5, 1953, page 38, CPL; “Recreation in Cleveland, 1949” unnumbered, Subject File “Parks”, CPL-PA; Annual Report, City of Cleveland, Division of Recreation, John Nagy Commissioner, 16, 23, CPL-PA.

to draw a larger, at least partially vehicular- or rail-based clientele no longer fit well into this plan. This disinvestment would have devastating impact on the maintenance of Garfield Swimming Pool, leading to its material decline and eventual closure.

This reconfiguration of the swimming pool landscape in Cleveland occurred just as the Black Freedom Movement had managed to get a black lifeguard Garfield Pool. While no published document or internal city memo points to the desegregation campaign at Garfield and other swimming sites as an impetus for this decision, the construction of the new pools effectively undermined gains made at Garfield. Considered too big and old to fit into the new swimming landscape of small, local pools, Garfield became a consistent loser in city budget battles during the late 1950s and 1960s. A spatial reconfiguration of planned recreational use patterns based on a neighborhood model effectively re-segregated swimming without city planners ever having to mention race. In considering this change in Cleveland's swimming landscape, it is useful to keep in mind Edward Soja's assertion in the preface to his *Postmodern Geographies*: "We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life."<sup>301</sup> The neighborhood pool model adopted in Cleveland employed such an "apparently innocent spatiality of social life," for what could be more innocent than providing pools that young people could walk to? Yet this decision was one of many made by municipal planners in the late 1950s and early 1960s that reinforced divisions along racial lines in the city and diminished opportunities for interracial social contact (An examination of another such decision involving the location of new public schools will be addressed in Chapter Five.)

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<sup>301</sup> Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 6.

Finally, the early 1950s saw a third white response to Black Freedom Movement organizing at Garfield. In 1952, local residents from Garfield Heights began to ask in earnest: What if Garfield Pool were no longer part of the Cleveland Park system? The pool, and indeed the entire park, lay outside of the limits of the city proper, and although Garfield was technically a “city” park, some residents and politicians of Garfield Heights launched a protracted battle to challenge that jurisdiction. They argued the park should be handed over by Cleveland to Garfield Heights, claiming the suburban government could better manage the local space. Although not articulated, the subtext was that Garfield Heights could then oversee the racial policies at the park to fit their racist imaginations of how the park should function. This was a tactic of discrimination couched in a jurisdictional argument. Urban-suburban spatial rhetoric underpinned the logics employed about this recreation space. Officials from Garfield Heights reached out to Cleveland’s City Hall to explore the possibility of implementing their takeover proposal.<sup>302</sup>

Black Clevelanders who had worked on and read about the desegregation efforts at Garfield well understood the motivations behind this meeting. In 1953, the *Call and Post* issued an editorial entitled “A Rotten Proposal Cleveland Should Spurn,” making the editors’ understanding of the situation clear: “The object of this move is to turn the park into an exclusive recreation center for the residents of Garfield. Since no Negroes reside in this suburban village, this would mean that no Negroes would be welcome in the park.”<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> “Councilmen to Oppose Giving Park to Suburb,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 5, 1952; “Garfield Still Wants to Segregate Park,” *Call and Post*, July 11, 1953; *Cleveland Press*, July 4, 1953; *Cleveland News*, July 6, 1953, SC-MSLCSU.

<sup>303</sup> “A Rotten Proposal Cleveland Should Spurn,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 20, 1953.

The debate over park jurisdiction continued over the next two years until three east side Cleveland city councilmen joined forces to stand up against the proposal to sell Garfield Park. John. W. Kellogg, Theodore M. Williams, and Charles V. Carr opposed the sale of Garfield in part because they saw it as an attempt to deny black Clevelanders access to public recreation spaces. Those opposed to annexation found two powerful political allies in the African American councilmen, Kellogg and Carr, along with their white ally Williams. Kellogg was a junior councilman recently ascended to the Council seat of Ward 18, a black enclave that was a seat of local black political power. He had made a reputation for himself as a savvy politician in part by being a strong advocate for recreation services for the black constituents of his ward. Carr, an established political voice on the City Council who held the seat for Ward 17, also had considerable clout.<sup>304</sup> The three councilmen made the case that annexation by Garfield Heights worked against the interests of black Clevelanders. Further, they argued that the proposal was part of a larger, disturbing pattern of the erosion of public recreation facilities available to Cleveland's black residents, a disinvestment and reduction of services that followed in the wake of public park desegregation.<sup>305</sup> An overall decline in services in neighborhoods with growing black populations, and the proposed annexation of Garfield, alarmed Carr, Kellogg and Williams and galvanized them into action to forestall further deterioration of available black public recreation spaces. The efforts of the councilmen stalled the annexation scheme for the time being.

Thwarted in their efforts to take over the management of Garfield Park, leaders in the suburb of Garfield Heights decided to build their own pool in the mid-1960s, open only to the

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<sup>304</sup> Pranrab Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," appendix "City Councilmen in the 1960s."

<sup>305</sup> "May Act in Council to Save Park System," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1955.

residents of their community. If any Clevelander wanted to visit the new Garfield pool, she or he had to have a local sponsor to enter.<sup>306</sup> This new pool serviced an almost wholly white clientele, as residency in Garfield Heights remained closed off to African Americans. By the start of 1960, the town remained 99 percent white, including a fairly steady Polish population. At the same time, the black enclave of Lee-Miles, located along Cleveland's southern border near the park, had continued to grow. From 1950 to 1960, approximately 1,000 more African American residents had come to the area, and the black neighborhood had expanded from one to two census tracts. The median income of \$6,145 for black families living in the area meant that Lee-Miles remained one of the most affluent black neighborhoods in Cleveland, 23 percent above the city average for African American families and slightly above the median family income for the city as a whole.<sup>307</sup> A review of Cleveland's black neighborhoods in the 1960s, conducted by a Case Western Reserve University graduate student, described Lee-Miles as a stable residential area. The study found that this relatively new black enclave had only 3 percent substandard housing, well below the city average of 19 percent, and one-twentieth the level of the substandard housing found in the Central area, Cleveland's oldest black neighborhood.<sup>308</sup> Yet, despite the relative affluence of these nearby black residents, black patrons remained largely unwelcome in Garfield Heights, and especially at the suburb's new pool.

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<sup>306</sup> "Stokes will reopen Garfield Park pool," *Cleveland Press*, August 5, 1970, CSU-SC.

<sup>307</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Table P-1-General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts: 1960," and "Table P-4—Characteristics of the nonwhite population, for census tracts with 400 or more such persons: 1960" in "Cleveland, Ohio" *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 15, 25, 29, 135.

<sup>308</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 9.



During the 1960s, Garfield Heights residents enjoyed their new pool facility, and black activists had turned their attention to other campaigns in the city concerning schools, housing, employment, and police brutality. Garfield Swimming Pool slipped from the pages of local newspapers. Out of the media spotlight, the pool at Garfield Park, increasingly maintenance-plagued and in need of repair, became a predominantly black recreation space during the 1960s. As white Garfield Heights residents swam at their new pool, they left the old, dilapidated swimming spot to black swimmers, most of whom were from Cleveland. By 1970, the African American population in the Garfield Heights suburb remained small, although the nearly complete racial homogeneity had eased slightly as more than 1,700 African Americans had moved to the area, most just north of the park adjacent to the Lee-Miles neighborhood. Yet, this meant that the white population still accounted for 96 percent of the Garfield Heights residents.<sup>309</sup> The decade-long effort to desegregate Garfield followed by a fight to keep the pool part of the city recreation system had not resulted in integration, but rather in two unequal swimming facilities under separate jurisdictions.

This type of maintenance deterioration of black swimming spots was not isolated to Garfield. CORE's organizing efforts had also opened more opportunities for black swimming access at the city's beaches on Lake Erie, but there too a sharp decline in facilities and services followed the presence of black bathers. In August 1963, the *Call and Post* declared: "The slow painful death of healthful recreation facilities for Negroes along the beautiful shores of Lake Erie is a murder to which the City of Cleveland, its official administration, and its Recreation Department can well plead guilty." After black swimmers gained access to a portion

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<sup>309</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 27: Race by Sex, for place of 10,000 to 50,000: 1970," in "Characterizations of the Population, part 37, Ohio" *1970 Census of Population*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 37.

of the beach at Gordon Park, the city closed the restrooms and stopped providing concessions. Authorities also turned over the rowboat operations to a private company, which decided to only rent boats to fisherman, effectively eliminating recreational rowboats at the park. Finally, the city declared the water near the beach “polluted” and stopped all swimming at the beach without making substantial efforts to mitigate the pollution.<sup>310</sup> The neglect at the beaches followed the same pattern that had occurred at Garfield, as once premier recreational facilities were allowed to decline, privatize, or even close altogether after integration.

These events at Garfield and the Lake Erie beaches reveal an important aspect of what occurred in multiple U.S. urban areas in the aftermath of Black Freedom Movement campaigns. When black residents finally won official access to public recreation facilities, white residents often “used a variety of subterfuges, particularly privatization,” to keep recreation segregated.<sup>311</sup> As white recreation became increasingly private, urban public recreation spaces became candidates for disinvestment. Such disinvestment followed a spatial pattern. As black populations moved closer to premier public recreation facilities, maintenance of those facilities declined. While black city councilman and the *Call and Post* publicly protested this decline, they were not able to avert it.<sup>312</sup> The story of Garfield also demonstrates how public debates over the use of recreational facilities often jettisoned discussions of “race” while inserting other types of descriptors into the public dialogue. In the 1940s, the press debated whether “Negroes” would bring a criminal element to the pool and park. Postwar black activism over public accommodations won rhetorical support from City Hall for black access to parks and recreation

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<sup>310</sup> “What’s Wrong with Cleveland in the Summertime?” *Call and Post*, August 22, 1953.

<sup>311</sup> Wolcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters*, 8.

<sup>312</sup> May Act in Council to Save Park System,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1955.

spaces. Increasingly the press shifted away from explicit mentions of race in discussing Garfield, and instead framed the debate as to which pools “Clevelanders” and “Garfield Heights” residents should use. Debates over city and suburb had replaced debates about race in the popular dialogue. Although such spatial configurations and jurisdictional arguments avoided openly discussing race, the implications were clear to everyone who read these news stories.

“Clevelanders” had come to represent blacks, while “Garfield Heights Residents” stood in for whites.

## Conclusion

In the ten years from 1944 to 1954, CORE and other groups and individuals led an intermittent direct action campaign to challenge discrimination at Garfield Pool. Youth and adults, politicians and local residents, police officers and activists, newspapers in different parts of town, suburb and city all understood and approached the park in different ways. Black Freedom Movement leaders and activists, supported by the black press, targeted the swimming pool as a symbolic platform to publicly claim rights of full citizenship. This framework won the rhetorical support of City Hall and resulted in black employment gains at the location. It did not, however, make this space a safe location for black youth to enjoy a day of recreation.

In 1971, Garfield Pool closed for good when \$3,000 for needed repairs could not be found in the city’s budget.<sup>313</sup> The closing of the pool did not settle the matter of the rest of the park’s management, however. Some members of the Garfield Heights City Council continued to push for a suburban takeover of the park. Disagreements among Garfield Heights politicians

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<sup>313</sup> *Cleveland Press*, June 24, 1971; June 18, 1971; July 6, 1971; July 14, 1971. CSU-SC; “City Closes Garfield Pool,” *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, June 17, 1971 and “Councilman’s Efforts Fail To Re-Open Garfield Pool,” Ellen Schemmer, *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, July 15, 1971.

regarding the park's management, and the role the suburb should play in it, became "a hornets nest," so much so that in 1972 the Garfield Council had to call a "5-minute recess to 'cool it'" before resuming discussion on the matter.<sup>314</sup>

Concern and frustration stemmed from the fact that park had become an eyesore. In the early 1970s, Garfield Park was one of many casualties of the massive defunding of municipal recreation services as parks across the city became "dumping grounds."<sup>315</sup> By 1974, the number of picnic tables in the park had dropped from 32 to just 12. An internal review of the park system by the City of Cleveland found that the park had hit a "rock-bottom run down condition." The report further noted that "Garfield Heights Police are reluctant to patrol the park because of the atrocious condition of the roads – vandalism and littering are at their worst here – many of the facilities not opened or maintained due to vandalism."<sup>316</sup> This comment indicates that the decline of Garfield Park was in part precipitated by its location in the suburbs and the jurisdictional blame game this allowed. While the City of Cleveland was responsible for the park's upkeep, the Garfield Heights police were responsible for patrolling the grounds and

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<sup>314</sup> "Cleveland may sell park to Garfield Hts," *Cleveland Press*, March 3, 1971; "Garfield Hts. Plans to buy park, sell part," *Cleveland Press*, June 16, 1971; "Garfield Hts. Council Cool on Park Purchase," *Cleveland Press*, June 17, 1971; "Councilman Perk, Baugh favor Garfield Park Sale," *Cleveland Press*, June 18, 1971 "Rescue the Park," *Cleveland Press*, June 22, 1971; "Mayor says sell land to restore park," *Cleveland Press*, July 15, 1971; "Plan would give park to suburb," *Cleveland Press*, May 8, 1972; "Debelak threatens to cite Cleveland for messy park," May 9, 1972, *Cleveland Press*; "Mayor disturbed by plans to take over Garfield Park," *Cleveland Press*, May 11, 1972; "Garfield Park transfer plan is doubtful," and "Rescue Garfield Park," *Cleveland Press* July 24, 1971; "Garfield Councilman Wants City to Own Park," *Plain Dealer*, May 14, 1972; "City Warned to Maintain Park in Garfield Heights," July 25, 1973. CSU-SC; "Suburban News: Garfield Heights," *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, July 15, 1971; "Ask City Transfer of Garfield Park," *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, May 4, 1972; and "Garfield Hts. Council Notes" *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, June 1, 1972.

<sup>315</sup> Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," 44; *Cleveland: A Concise History*, and Wheeler, 172. Both books refer to Cleveland parks in the 1970s as "dumping grounds"

<sup>316</sup> "A Review Cleveland Division of Parks," 26, Parks Subject File, CPL-PA.

curtailing vandalism. This overlap allowed each agency to point the finger at the other for mounting problems at the site.

While the finger pointing continued, Garfield became a dismal sight to behold, as a reporter from the *Cleveland Press* vividly described:

Its giant swimming pool bakes emptily under the July sun. A pile of charred timbers is the remains of a refreshment stand. Toilets are broken, water shut off. Craters make its roads almost impassable. If there were still horses and cows around, its former tennis courts would be suitable for grazing.

Spray-painters marked the dilapidated concession stand and bathroom facility with six swastikas, “Keep Out,” “KKK,” and “White Power.” Some of these racial epithets remained prominent on the structure for the next four years.<sup>317</sup> Whoever painted these messages evidenced that racist claims on this public space endured, even after the pool’s closure. Such racism was also articulated through ongoing acts of interpersonal violence at Garfield Park. A twenty-year-old black man discovered this firsthand when he joined a group of African American young people hiking at the park in June 1974. A group of whites attacked the group, severely beating Phillip Cullum, a student at Cleveland Community College (Tri-C).<sup>318</sup>

Racial violence continued at Garfield Park. Ten years of anti-discrimination efforts had gained real victories at Garfield, including rhetorical support from city officials and even the hiring of a black lifeguard, but this campaign did not stop the ongoing hate crimes at the site. Further, the characterization of the discrimination campaign as Communist agitation undercut arguments of American citizenship that were the basis of black claims on Garfield. The planning decisions made by city officials, as well as the jurisdictional battles between city and suburb,

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<sup>317</sup> “Man tramples nature in Garfield,” *Cleveland Press*, July 11, 1974, includes block quote. CSU-SC.

<sup>318</sup> “Tri-C Student Severely Beaten In Garfield Park,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 8, 1974.

further destabilized the funding and maintenance of Garfield. The park went from one of the crown jewels of the Cleveland park system to an “open dump.” Considering broader urban-suburban spatial arrangements is crucial to making sense of postwar Black Freedom Movement campaigns in the U.S. North. Public recreation spaces were often key battlegrounds in these early post-war Black Freedom Movement struggles.

Public recreation spaces also played an important role in the construction of white community identity. The ability to control who could access public recreation was an element of this broader urban racial-spatial mapping. As Steven Gregory wrote in his study of New York, *Black Corona*: “The conflation of race, place, and class identity underscores the critical role that the consumption of public subsidized amenities tied to racial segregation played in the formation of white, middle-class identities.”<sup>319</sup> This investment in white access to public amenities remained an entrenched feature of life in Garfield Heights. When black residents attempted to access this space, they were met with staunch resistance. Black activists recognized the importance of such public spaces to the construction of a community-based exclusionary whiteness, and they therefore marshaled energy and resources into breaking the color line and parks and other public spaces throughout the United States. Such struggles to access public recreation space were much more than a matter of recreation or leisure; they were a fight over who could claim the rights of full citizenship, as illustrated in who could claim access to the city.

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<sup>319</sup> Steven Gregory *Black Corona*, 66.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: ETHNICITY, BLACK POLITICS, AND PUBLIC PARKS: ROCKEFELLER PARK AND CULTURAL GARDENS**

During the 1940s and accelerating into the early 1960s Cleveland, demographic changes and increased demands by black residents for fair access to city services resulted in escalating racial tensions in the city. City parks became important sites where black Clevelanders asserted their right to fully take part in the public sphere. These claims to park space—and by extension to participation in civic life—often met with sharp resistance. Yet this discrimination was never uniform throughout the city; black residents' experiences at a local playground or swimming pool depended significantly on where on the city's shifting demographic landscape a particular recreation space was located. While parks within Cleveland's black enclaves, such as the long established Central neighborhood, became cornerstones for the construction of local black community, parks at the borders of the city or located near white-ethnic enclaves, such as the suburb of Garfield Heights, often served as battlegrounds of racial strife. Still other spaces were simultaneously subject to inter-racial contestation and to debates emanating from within the black community. The most iconic park on Cleveland's landscape, Rockefeller Park and Cultural Gardens, became such a multi-contested space.

Rockefeller Park, named for Cleveland industrialist John D. Rockefeller, is located on Cleveland's east side. During the two decades following World War II, this area of Cleveland transitioned from a collection of white-ethnic enclaves, including Polish, Italian, and Eastern European neighborhoods, to majority African American in many sections. As the city's black population expanded, it pushed east (and north and south) from the Central neighborhood. To the west stood the barrier of the Cuyahoga River, a geographical border, which also served as an understood barrier to black migration. In 1950, only 1,277 black Clevelanders lived west of the river, and as late as the 1960s employment advertisements, which solicited "west side"

applicants, were understood to mean that whites only need apply.<sup>320</sup> As African Americans moved east, they also encountered resistance from ethnic white residents, especially over the issue of black attendance at white neighborhood schools. The move east also brought more African Americans to the borders of Cleveland's Rockefeller Park, by far the most widely known and celebrated park property in the city.

Part of Rockefeller's renown came from a series of Cultural Gardens established on the property. Each elaborate garden space was dedicated to the commemoration of a different European ethnicity represented in Cleveland's population. The gardens stood as a literally living, growing testament to the multi-ethnic heritage of the industrial city's workforce. Yet, the gardens afforded no space for the representation of the members of the African Diaspora that called Cleveland home. Even as black Clevelanders grew to become the largest single migrant working-class population in the city, and even as the east side neighborhoods that bordered Rockefeller Park transitioned to become predominantly African American, no garden space celebrating the culture of Africa was formally established until 1977. Thus for three decades after World War II, the most celebrated cultural landscape in the city stood as a stark reminder of the limits placed on black residents' ability to engage fully in local civic life.

However, the story of Rockefeller during this time is not solely one of inter-racial friction over black access to public space. As African American community leaders advocated for garden space, the direction of this initiative also revealed fissures between different local factions of black leadership. In the early 1960s, while some black politicians and community leaders aligned with City Hall on the location of a potential African or African American garden, other

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<sup>320</sup> Russel H. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in cooperation with the Western Reserve Historical Society, 1972), 353.



prominent black community leaders and politicians questioned these plans. As black Clevelanders gained more political power due to postwar white suburban flight, exactly *which* black individuals would control that new-found political clout was not a settled matter. This question of black political power was played out in part through the ability of black leaders to direct land-use decisions in the city. Rockefeller Park became one site of this political struggle, and the disagreements that emerged over Rockefeller reached the Supreme Court before they were fully settled.

An examination of Rockefeller Park thus provides the opportunity to consider how *both* white-and-black relations in a time of rapid urban demographic change, and internal tensions within an expanding black leadership class, affected the development of public space. This chapter begins with the founding of this iconic landscape and traces the development of African American representation at the site through the early 1960s. The seventh chapter then resumes the story of Rockefeller, to consider how the election of the city's first black mayor, the growth of Black Power politics, and the outbreak of an urban rebellion in the neighborhoods surrounding the park further influenced the direction of this public space.

### **Founding Rockefeller Park**

In order to fully explore the battles among black politicians that took place over Rockefeller Park in the postwar years, it is important to understand the origins of this park and its unique place on the Cleveland urban landscape. John D. Rockefeller, who while a young man in Cleveland began amassing his fortune in oil refining, donated 267 acres to the city for park land in 1897. Located east of the city limits and bearing his name, the park was identified with perhaps the most recognizable icon of the city's industrial heyday. Naming the park after

Rockefeller, notorious for his brutal dealings with labor and working people, also gave a classed signifier to this space. The landscape grew out of the middle- and upper-class ideals that undergirded the nationwide surge in founding urban parks, stemming from City Beautiful movement and inspired by the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The park stood at a distance from the working-class populations that crowded near the industrial plants along the Cuyahoga River. Carol Poh Wheeler and Robert Miller describe this period of park development in Cleveland on the following terms: “Following a plan prepared by Boston landscape architect Ernest Bowditch, the city’s parks took the form of romantically landscaped ‘pleasure grounds,’ with winding carriage drives and picturesque lakes. Although beautiful, the parks were located too far away from the Clevelanders who most needed them.”<sup>321</sup> According to sociologist Mitch Berbrier, Rockefeller Park was founded as part of larger Cleveland Park system “that was initiated by a group of wealthy power-brokers, taking their cue from elites in other major cities—particularly New York, Boston and London.”<sup>322</sup> This park was created by city’s the elites for the pleasure of those who could afford the trip out to its grounds.<sup>323</sup>

Well-appointed homes bordered much of the park and looked out upon green space whose site plan was designed by a student of famed landscape architect Frank Law Olmstead. The long, narrow curvilinear park followed the contours of Doan Creek. Two roads, East and Liberty Boulevards, ran the length of the park. The property became the flagship park in the city of Cleveland, due to both its size and location. As the city developed out to meet the park’s

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<sup>321</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 94.

<sup>322</sup> Mitch Berbrier, “The Peace Path of Cleveland Cultural Gardens: Making Place for Cultures of Peace,” *Peace and Change*, 37:3, July 2012, 416.

<sup>323</sup> Similarly Robin Bachin argued that the siting of such large pleasure ground parks in Chicago “showed little concern for the recreational and leisure patterns of the urban working class,” Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 138.

borders, the property was adjoined to some of the most prestigious cultural destinations in the city. Located at the southern edge of the park stood University Circle, including Severence Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra (1913), the Cleveland Museum of Art (1916), and Botanical Gardens (1930), and later the Cleveland Museum of Natural History (1961). The park also adjoined the campus of Case Western Reserve (1826), the city's premiere private university.<sup>324</sup> As is illustrated in figure 10, the park contributed to this broader landscape of the city's high culture.

By the early twentieth century, Rockefeller was part of a network of urban parks and a contiguous chain of park properties that ran the entire length of the city's east side, connecting to the north with Gordon Park, which stood on the shores of Lake Erie, and in the south with Shaker Heights park, which was located in a southeastern city suburb, as illustrated by figure 11. Rockefeller Park became the most celebrated of Cleveland's parks, and by 1940 had grown to slightly over 273 acres, comprising more than ten percent of the total park property in the city.<sup>325</sup> By 1944, the park included a rich variety of recreation amenities including an amphitheater, ten tennis courts, three baseball fields, a bicycle path, a lake with a casting platform and boating stand, an ice-skating pond, a comfort station, four drinking fountains, two playgrounds, six stoves and "stationary tables," a designated picnic ground, and 318 scattered benches. Visitors came to Rockefeller for a wide variety of outdoor activities, and the park's amenities reflected the leisure interests of the city's growing mobile middle-class population.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Mitch Berbrier, "Constructing Identities through an Urban Public Space: The Cleveland Cultural Gardens" unpublished paper, page 2. Mark Tebeau, "Sculpted Landscapes: Art & Place in Cleveland's Cultural Gardens, 1916-2006," *Journal of Social History*, 44:2, Winter 2010, 329.

<sup>325</sup> "The Department of Public Properties, City of Cleveland Ohio, A Description of Its Functions, 1940," File, "Park Facilities," CCA.

<sup>326</sup> "Facilities in Various City Parks – 1944," File, "Park Facilities," CCA.

During the years that followed the founding of the park, the population of Cleveland expanded to the meet its borders. As the city's industrial plants spread east of the river, so too did the growing numbers of ethnic European workers that immigrated to Cleveland to work in these factories. While many of these groups first formed neighborhoods on the near west side of the city or on the east banks of the Cuyahoga River, by the early twentieth century the east side was a dense patchwork of enclaves of European immigrants and their children and grandchildren who called the area home. In the early 1900s, Cleveland annexed many of the neighborhoods surrounding the park, spreading east with its growing population.<sup>327</sup> By 1920, foreign-born whites constituted just over thirty percent of the population. Czechoslovakians made up 15.1 percent of that number, followed by Poles at 14.2 percent, Italians at 10.3 percent, Germans at 9.8 percent, Hungarians at 8.3 percent, Yugoslavians at 8 percent and Russians at 6.6 percent. By 1930, the number of foreign-born Clevelanders had dropped to 25.5 percent. With the exception of the German population, which had become fairly dispersed in the city and its suburbs, many of these foreign-born residents lived in concentrated ethnic enclaves.<sup>328</sup>

In 1942, writers for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) completed a review of the "peoples of Cleveland." The writers reported that during the early twentieth century Cleveland had the fourth highest concentration of Czech people in the world, trailing only Prague, Vienna and Chicago.<sup>329</sup> The city's eastside was also home to a sizeable population of Hungarian immigrants, who formed an eastside enclave, with a reputation that "Hungarians are more

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<sup>327</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *A Concise History of Cleveland*, 100.

<sup>328</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 131, 133, 135. These figures come from a study entitled *The Population Characteristics of Census Tracts*, compiled by statistician Howard Whipple Green. The Irish population, which by the 1920s did not include as high a percentage of foreign-born residents had also become widely dispersed throughout the greater Cleveland metro-area.

<sup>329</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 26.

densely populated here in this area than anywhere else outside of Hungary.”<sup>330</sup> Hungarian Clevelanders were very active in local politics,<sup>331</sup> and two of them would play prominent roles in forming Cleveland’s recreational landscape. Hugo Varga served as Director of Parks and Public Property in the 1930s.<sup>332</sup> Varga wrote extensively about parks and recreation for local and national publications, and also gave local radio addresses on the subject. His ideas about parks and recreation became a guiding force for the philosophy of public recreation in Cleveland. He was joined by a fellow Hungarian, John Nagy, the long-time Director of Recreation and another prominent voice in local parks and recreation decisions.

Italians settled in three eastside neighborhoods. Little Italy, or the Murray Hill neighborhood, became the most well-known, and its row of Italian restaurants and annual Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary drew thousands each year. Italians also settled in the Collinwood and Woodhill neighborhoods. The east side also included three distinct Jewish enclaves, made up primarily of immigrants from Russia, Eastern Europe, Germany and Austria. In 1942, the WPA counted a total of ten different Cleveland Polish settlements, the largest of which were located on the eastside. Smaller pockets of German, Lithuanian, Slovenian and Ukrainian, and Chinese residents were tucked amidst these other neighborhoods.<sup>333</sup>

There was significant overlap and intermingling among these different ethnic groups and neighborhoods. Yet much of local community life centered on institutions that fostered close ethnic ties. Each enclave had its butcher shops and bakeries, social clubs, and most importantly

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<sup>330</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 61.

<sup>331</sup> Susan S. Papp, *Hungarian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org/hungarians/>.

<sup>332</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 62.

<sup>333</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 70-73, 76, 109.

churches, which stood as the centers of local social life.<sup>334</sup> Cultural centers and clubs also helped transmit ethnic-cultural traditions to younger generations. During the early twentieth century a rich variety of ethnic newspapers circulated in Cleveland by 1942, including the Czech *Svet American*, the Hungarian *Szabadsag*, the Italian *La Voce del Popolo Italiano*, *L'Araldo*, and *Italian Pictorial News*, the *Polish Daily News*, and the Slovenian *Ameriska Domovina* and the *Enakopravnost*.<sup>335</sup>

Ethnic ties sometimes resulted in economic and political opportunities. Neighbors often worked in the same job, or trade union. For example, the Tile Layers Local 36 consisted mostly of Italians. In 1965, the local's business agent explained how the union brought in members: "They have entered this business because either their father, uncle or a family friend had a tile business, and tended to train their own sons relatives or acquaintances."<sup>336</sup> These various ethnic enclaves also stood as concentrated voting blocs, and each neighborhood sent its representative to City Council, often voting along ethnic as much as political lines. According to Susan Papp, "It was generally said that "if your name isn't Hungarian, forget about running for election in [ward] 29 or 16." A Hungarian first took office in Ward 29 in 1921, and Hungarian politicians held the seat for nearly 45 years.<sup>337</sup> Ethnic residential patterns and voting solidarity often resulted in local political power.

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<sup>334</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 64.

<sup>335</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 30, 62, 74, 85, 111. Many other ethnic newspapers had folded or consolidated by the early 1940s.

<sup>336</sup> Mr. John Retino, Business Agent, Tile Layers Local 36, quote summarized in an interview with Commission on Civil Rights, January 28, 1966, NA.

<sup>337</sup> Papp, 254.

Located amidst these various European ethnic neighborhoods, Rockefeller Park became a significant space on the urban landscape for the celebration and representation of white ethnic cultures. In the early twentieth century, a new initiative began at the park, one that set this public green space apart from all other park properties in the city, and indeed made it one of the most unique urban park cultural landscapes in the entire nation. What came to be known as the Cleveland Cultural Gardens began in 1916, when Leo Weidenthal, a Jewish reporter at the daily *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper, helped found a Shakespeare Garden at Rockefeller Park. Intended to commemorate the three-century anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, the garden was one of several similar commemorative gardens established throughout the United States. A decade later, Weidenthal, along with Jenny K. Zwick, who was also Jewish, and Charles Wolfram, who was of German descent, comprised a plan to greatly expand this small initiative by granting a garden space to each major ethnic group in the city.<sup>338</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, given the ethnicity of the project's initiators, the first two ethnic groups to be provided a garden space were Jewish and German Clevelanders.

In 1926, what was known as the "Hebrew Garden" became the second garden plot. From the outset the gardens functioned as a political space. The "Hebrew Garden" was dedicated to the celebration of the achievements of the Jewish Diaspora. Prominent international Zionists attended various events and celebrations at the garden, including Chaim Weitzmann, the first president of Israel.<sup>339</sup> This garden was by no means the only garden space to be founded as part of a broader ethnic-nationalist project. Three years later, the German Garden was founded, and then during the 1930s, more gardens broke ground, each representing the diverse ethnic

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<sup>338</sup> Berbrier, "The Peace Path of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens," 420.

<sup>339</sup> Berbrier, "The Peace Path of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens," 422.

population of Cleveland. Significantly, these gardens did not follow the European map, for while they included Irish, Italian, and Polish garden spaces there was no space for Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia; instead, instead a Czech, a Slovak, and a Slovenian garden were founded. Significantly, while these white, European ethnic-nationalist cultural visions were allowed room for articulation in Rockefeller Park, two decades later Black Nationalists would have difficulty gaining similar access to this formalized cultural landscape.

A voluntary Cultural Garden League, which would be renamed the Cultural Garden Federation in 1952, was established to oversee the development of the gardens, and each ethnic group could elect two members to serve on the Federation board. Elite ethnic community leaders with strong ties to various ethnic enclave communities in the city, filled the majority of these positions. The federation worked closely with the City Council and city parks' staff to develop and manage the site. Berbrier described the project: "The Gardens vary somewhat in their content, but in each garden, in addition to foliage and flora, you will find sculptures, plaques, and monuments to cultural figures important to each community, as well as landscape architecture evocative of each region or group."<sup>340</sup> For example, as illustrated by the photograph in Figure 12, the Irish Garden adhered to a landscape pattern of Celtic cross, while the Jewish garden space followed the shape of a Star of David.<sup>341</sup> Statues and busts of well-known individuals such as Chopin or Dante dotted these often elaborate gardens. Plants and rocks transported from Europe were incorporated into the garden spaces, creating material ties to European landscapes.

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<sup>340</sup> Berbrier, "Constructing Identities," 4, accessed on September 23, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org>.

<sup>341</sup> Berbrier, "Constructing Identities," 4, accessed on September 23, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org>.



**Table 1: Rockefeller Park Cultural Gardens**

<b>Garden Name</b>	<b>Year Established</b>
British/Shakespeare Garden	1916
Hebrew Garden	1926
German Garden	1929
Italian Garden	1930
Slovak Garden	1932
Slovenian Garden	1932
Hungarian Garden	1934
Polish Garden	1934
American Garden	1934
Czech Garden	1935
American Legion Garden	1936
Lithuanian Garden	1936
Irish Garden	1939
Rusin Garden	1939
Greek Garden	1940
Ukrainian Garden	1940
Finnish Garden	1958
Estonian Garden	1966
Romanian Garden	1967
African American Garden	1977
American Indian Garden*	1977
Chinese Garden	1985
Indian Garden	2005
Latvian Garden	2006
Azerbaijan Garden	2008
Armenian Garden	2010
Croatian Garden	2011
Syrian Garden	2011
Albanian Garden	2012

\*Although the American Indian Garden was officially announced, it was never built and has been delisted.

Yet the Gardens were not simply transplanted European culture. For example, a prominent feature of the Hungarian Garden is a “Szeekely Kapus,” an elaborate gate “typical of Eastern Hungary” from which many of Cleveland’s Hungarian population hailed, as shown in

the postcard in figure 13. While in Hungary these gates were typically constructed out of wood, the rendition placed in the Hungarian Cultural Garden was made from wrought iron. According to Teabeau: “By forging the gate in Iron, the Hungarian delegation interpreted their past using local vernacular, drawing craftsmen from and connections to Cleveland’s thriving steel and iron industries.”<sup>342</sup> The Gardens represented ethnic-European cultural traditions transformed by the experiences of living and working in an industrial American city.

The Gardens were constructed with the support of a combination of private and public funds. Ethnically affiliated churches, businesses, organizations and individuals contributed money to their respective gardens. While prominent ethnic Clevelanders usually held the leadership roles at the Cultural Federation, working-class residents contributed to the landscape in meaningful ways. For example, in an oral history Cleveland resident Mary Fedak, related a Garden story involving her mother, a Ukrainian born immigrant to Cleveland, who lived on the city’s east side and worked nights cleaning buildings. She became involved in an effort to place a statue of poetess Lesya Ukrainka in the Ukrainian Garden. Fedak recalled her mother “had this little black hat perched on her head and went to these beer places collecting money, going to grocery stores, butcher shops, bakeries, just for this statue. It’s a huge bronze statue, still standing there.”<sup>343</sup> Through efforts such as these, women made significant contributions to the Cultural Gardens, including making sure that women’s cultural contributions were memorialized on the landscape. Fundraising efforts were not just limited to Clevelanders; for example, Benito Mussolini, the Fascist Prime Minister of Italy, made a donation to the Italian garden. During the

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<sup>342</sup> Teabeau, “Sculpted Landscapes,” 332.

<sup>343</sup> Mary Fedak, interviewed by Jeanette Tuve, October 23, 1986, page 6, Ethnic Women of Cleveland Oral History Project Series, Cleveland Memory Project accessed on September 23, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org>.

Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided significant labor to the gardens' construction and upkeep. In total, the WPA provided \$650,000, or roughly half of the total financing of the gardens for the first quarter century of their existence.<sup>344</sup>

In 1938, the Cleveland City Council heard and approved a resolution to set aside a section of Rockefeller Park to be formally known as the "Cleveland Cultural Gardens." The resolution recognized the "improvements heretofore installed" and designated land for future garden additions.<sup>345</sup> The Council vote officially established this public landscape, which drew thousands of visitors each year, and garnered Cleveland national and even international attention. As shown by the photograph in figure 14, a series of well-attended celebrations and events at various gardens became part of the ethnic-community life of Cleveland. Many of the cultural activities that occurred in this park space were similar to the events that occurred in the ethnic neighborhoods, such as costumed parades and traditional dance demonstrations, making the gardens an extension of these neighborhoods' socio-cultural spheres.

In 1940, an article originally written for *Parks and Recreation*, a prominent magazine read by park professionals, reviewed the "unique" garden project. The article described the various gardens, ending with the assessment:

In 1939 the series of gardens was dedicated as a unit. As the work on them moved to completion, separate nationality characters became overshadowed by the composite character of the whole. The result is one garden which is as American as the Statue of Liberty. The Cleveland Cultural Gardens have become an American cultural garden. Their dedication has marked Cleveland's recognition of the numerous contributions with which many nationality groups have enriched the

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<sup>344</sup> Tebeau, "Sculpted Landscapes," 331.

<sup>345</sup> "City Record, Ordinance No. 107422-A, February 9, 1938. p. 150-152, CPL.

life of the city. Their unification into one garden has symbolized the fusing of these diverse contributions into a distinct American culture.<sup>346</sup>

In addition to celebrating American culture, the gardens became internationally known as a landscape that promoted peace. In the early 1950s, the Cultural Garden Federation issued a history of the gardens entitled “Their Paths Were Peace.” Leo Weidenthal penned the foreword to the book, where he coined the slogan “One out of Many” to describe the garden project he had first started nearly three decades earlier.<sup>347</sup> While Garden officials promoted the “composite character” and “peace” promoted at the Gardens, most involved in the project raised money, tended plants, and participated in events based on their ethnic identity.

African Americans place in this “One out of Many” framework was most conspicuous in their absence from the gardens prior to World War II. This exclusion continued even as the African Americans became the largest single migrant group in Cleveland. By the early 1940s, in several east side ethnic neighborhoods, increasing numbers of black Clevelanders began to move in, many spreading east from the original large Central enclave, others coming to the city from the South. Black enclaves grew up in Glenville, Hough, Kinsman, Mt. Pleasant, and Lee Miles, all located on the eastside.<sup>348</sup> When black residents moved into these neighborhoods, white residents moved either further east or south to the suburbs, often establishing ethnic suburban enclaves, as was the case with Garfield Heights (described in the previous chapter). In another example, WPA writers in their 1942 study of Cleveland described what occurred when African

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<sup>346</sup> Harold E. Atkinson, “The Cleveland Cultural Gardens,” from “Parks of Greater Cleveland 26-27, reprinted from an earlier version of the article published in *Parks & Recreation*, November 1937, Manuscript Collection 3700, Cleveland Cultural Gardens, WRHS.

<sup>347</sup> Lederer, Clara, *Their Paths Are Peace; The Story of Cleveland's Cultural Gardens*, (Cleveland: Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation, 1954), 9. Also, for a scholarly discussion of the Cultural Gardens as a peace landscape see Berbrier, “The Peace Path of the Cultural Gardens.”

<sup>348</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 7.

Americans moved into a Czech neighborhood, “This settlement has now been largely taken over by the Negroes, and less than 200 Czech families now attend St. Adalbert’s Church...which used to be the center of the neighborhood.”<sup>349</sup> Similar stories could be told about churches in other east side ethnic neighborhoods.

Yet despite these shifting demographics, the Rockefeller Park Cultural Gardens’ exclusion of formal black representation persisted even as the two neighborhoods closest to the park, Hough and Glenville, transitioned from predominantly white-ethnic to predominantly black neighborhoods in the postwar years.<sup>350</sup> Despite the significance of their population, black residents did not acquire a garden space of their own until the late 1970s, and before then were seldom mentioned in records of the Cultural Garden Federation.<sup>351</sup> Berbrier has argued that the Cultural Gardens project “was as much about maintaining ethnic heritage as constructing whiteness.”<sup>352</sup> African American cultural representation was not included in either parts of this project.

### **Black Participation in Rockefeller Park after World War II**

Forms of ethnic cultural representation that took place in the gardens went beyond plantings, statues and programs and events featuring one ethnicity. In 1946, the Cultural Garden League began an annual collective celebration of Cleveland’s diverse ethnic heritage, and this “One World Day” pageant quickly became the highlight on the calendar of Cultural Garden

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<sup>349</sup> *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 29.

<sup>350</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 133.

<sup>351</sup> Berbrier, “Constructing Identities,” 15; Tebeau, “Sculpted Landscapes,” 340.

<sup>352</sup> Berbrier, “Constructing Identities,” 15.

events. According to Berbrier, “One World” was “lifted from the Wendell Wilkie’s best-selling book *One World*, where he advocated for American leadership in the pursuit of international cooperation.”<sup>353</sup> The pageant typically included “folk songs and dances by nationality groups in Old World Costumes, patriotic songs and addresses by prominent people.”<sup>354</sup> The “One World Day” pageant for the first time brought together the diverse ethnic groups represented in the garden into one shared celebration. Mark Tebeau has argued that this new, collective celebration reflected a Cold War mentality “where American patriotism drained the Gardens of their distinctive cultural expressiveness and complexity.”<sup>355</sup> Whereas previously most garden-related activities had taken place with, for example, the Cleveland Polish residents in one garden space and the Italian residents in another, the One World Pageant brought everyone together into shared marches, pageants, and ceremonies, where individual cultures were still recognized yet collective Americanism was emphasized. Alongside folk songs, the pageants provided ample opportunities for American flag-waving, patriotic songs, and in 1956 a “personification of the Statue of Liberty.”<sup>356</sup> Participating in One World Day thus became a way for these ethnic Clevelanders to exercise public claims on American citizenship.

Although they were the focus, ethnic white residents were not the only groups represented in One World Day. Cleveland’s black residents were acknowledged in the celebrations, as well. In 1950, the annual One World Festival included a pageant whose opening line was “Happiness is grown from the seeds of Tolerance and Love. We are all Brothers,

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<sup>353</sup> Berbrier, “The Peace Path of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens,” 428.

<sup>354</sup> “One World Day’s Brotherhood Theme to Replace Riot Scars,” *Plain Dealer*, August 21, 1966, in Container 2, Folder 4, Manuscript Collection 3700, Cleveland Cultural Gardens, WRHS.

<sup>355</sup> Tebeau, “Sculpted Landscapes,” 339.

<sup>356</sup> Tebeau, “Sculpted Landscapes,” 339.

begotten of the same Earth, and blessed by the same God.”<sup>357</sup> Such language reflected the Cultural Garden founders’ vision that the gardens would plant the seeds for inter-ethnic exchange and brotherhood. In this instance, Africa was included in the pageant’s script. The play’s section entitled “Africa and the Negro” opened by describing how “Gibel-El-Tarik” led his “Moslem Hosts” to conquer the “lower scena of Hispania.” Thus, the script introduced Africa by describing a violent incursion of African peoples onto the European continent. Further, since the audience of the One World Day Pageant would have been comprised primarily of Catholic white-ethnic residents, the introduction of Africa as a Muslim space is significant. It marked Africa as “other,” as a space quite different from Europe, and by extension removed from the ethnic-European immigrants who called Cleveland home.

Next the pageant narrator stated that after this contact with Tarik, Europeans became curious about Africa “a dark and unknown continent.” By referring to a “dark” continent, the pageant utilized a common trope of white authors in describing Africa. The script goes on to explain that it took Europeans “a thousand years of exploring, observing, and studying this mighty giant of mystery” in order to understand Africa. Such a description of European-African encounters erased the murder and pillage of the slave trade, war and colonialism visited on the African continent by its northern neighbors. Instead, Europeans are represented as benign observers who wanted nothing more than to understand the “mystery” of Africa.

Finally this section of the script describes how the Europeans came to appreciate the “the vast wastes of desert land, its tropical beauties, its jungled populations and its splendid people.” With this statement the script borrows from another dominant trope of American writings

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<sup>357</sup> “One World” July 24, 1950, 1, Container 1, Folder 18, Manuscript Collection 3700, Cleveland Cultural Gardens, WRHS. No author listed.

describing Africa, as a space of primal nature. Further by listing the “splendid people” of Africa in the list of environmental landscape features, the play incorporates Africans into this primal landscape. During the early twentieth century many ‘scientific’ race theorists explained what they saw as racial differences by environmental determinism.<sup>358</sup> While by the 1950s racial theory in academic circles had largely rejected this type of environmental determinist logic, the emphasis of the African landscape in describing African culture echoes these earlier writings, and demonstrates the lasting cultural reverberations of such theories.

It is not until African peoples are considered in the context of living in the United States, that the play acknowledges their specific cultural contributions:

Today the descendants of its kidnapped hordes present to us a branch of Humanity and wonderful possibilities, of high citizenship, and a valuable complement to the purposes of a great, free people. In our own midst, the names of Dunbar, Carver and Booker Washington fare in blazing colors, scintillating before us, and in Education, in all branches have proven themselves worth and equal to every phase of Civic Life, welcomed by all who desire the Progress, Peace and Happiness that festoon the dream of those who hail ONE WORLD.<sup>359</sup>

With these concluding remarks, the pageant narrator offered a path by which the African “hordes” could be counted in the echelons of “high citizenship.” By engaging in education and “Civic Life,” the peoples of African and the black Diaspora could earn inclusion in the dream of “one world.”

Thus, the One World Day Pageant of 1950s offered a proscription for black entrance into civic life, one rooted in a liberalism that emphasized education as the basis for cultural achievement. Any contributions to world culture emanating from the African continent were left

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<sup>358</sup> For an excellent synopsis of the relationship between environmental thought and racial theory in early twentieth century United States, Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, Chapter 4.

<sup>359</sup> “African and the Negro” in “One World” July 24, 1950, 9, Container 1, Folder 18, Manuscript Collection 3700, Cleveland Cultural Gardens, WRHS.



out of the script. However, pageants such as these by no means reflected Cleveland's black citizens only connection to Rockefeller Park; and, while white community leaders excluded African Americans from founding a physical garden space, this did not mean that they were wholly absent from this landscape. In 1948, for example, the black weekly, the *Call and Post*, carried a photo of black boaters rowing on the popular lagoon in the park. The paper published a similar photo in 1952.<sup>360</sup> Such photographs placed black bodies into the idyllic framework of the formal garden space represented by Rockefeller Park, and evidenced that black patrons could and did access the park.

Yet, not all images of black (or white) bodies at Rockefeller Park were so idyllic. In 1951, the *Call and Post* printed a short story about "[a] number of robberies, slugging and criminal attacks," at the park as well as a rape that had occurred at the boathouse of the park's popular lagoon. The race of the parties involved was not mentioned in the stories.<sup>361</sup> The next summer, Rockefeller Park was the site of what the *Call and Post* described as a fight between two groups of black teens following an altercation at a nearby teen dance the night before. On Tuesday night, the teens assembled again to fight in the park, but this time they were quickly dispersed by police.<sup>362</sup> Later that fall, a fifteen-year-old black boy reportedly met a "smaller child" at the park, then took him at knifepoint to a nearby house and sexually assaulted him.<sup>363</sup> A 14-year old black girl was raped at the park by two black men in 1955; in 1960, three white youths shot and wounded an eight-year-old black youth, who had gone to the park to ride

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<sup>360</sup> Untitled photograph, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 3, 1948; and, Untitled photograph, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 12, 1948.

<sup>361</sup> "Robberies, Attacks Continue in Parks," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 14, 1951.

<sup>362</sup> "Teen-Agers Use Park As Arena for Battle," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 5, 1952.

<sup>363</sup> "Hold 15-Year-Old in Sexual Attack," *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 25, 1952.

his new bicycle.<sup>364</sup> Such reports of violent crime stood in stark contrast to the idyllic, peace-promoting landscape presented in official representations of Rockefeller Park by park staff or the Cultural Garden Federation.

In 1953, the city removed the boats from the lagoon. The Parks Department cited “bad behavior” by patrons as the reason for not renewing the contract with the popular boating operation. Several organizations, including the Central Areas Council, the Glenville Areas Council, and the NAACP, as well as several individual black community leaders, questioned the discontinuation of boating, speculating that black people’s presence at the park had triggered the boats’ removal. The *Call and Post* presented the opinion that discrimination had motivated the reduction in services:

The lagoon in the park for 50 years had been famous all over the country for the row-boats which children plied across its waters all summer. Three years ago, the boats were suddenly discontinued; the reason given for the move was that the lagoon had become a “delinquency problem.” More widely believed, however, was that the boats had been discontinued because of the growing number of colored children using them, which had brought complaints from residents of a white apartment hotel nearby.<sup>365</sup>

Concerned black Clevelanders vowed to take up the issue with the Community Relations Board, but the boats did not return.<sup>366</sup>

The loss of the boating program was not the only change in recreation facilities to occur at Rockefeller in the mid-1950s. In 1954, the Parks Department closed the Cultural Gardens to picnics due an increase in vandalism. According to the *Call and Post*, this loss of shared picnic space meant that “different racial groups who once played happily together have begun

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<sup>364</sup> “Rape 14-Yr-Old in Park,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 16, 1955; “Boy, 8, Rides New Bike, Gets Shot,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 2, 1960.

<sup>365</sup> “May Act In Council To Save Park System,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1955.

<sup>366</sup> “Protest Removal of Boats from Lagoon,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 6, 1953.

congregating in small groups to themselves—away from others.”<sup>367</sup> While this assessment might overstate the harmony and level of interaction that had previously existed between different ethnic and racial groups of picnickers, it does point out the fact that the cessation of informal picnics at the gardens curtailed opportunities for unmitigated interactions between different groups in the space. While the gardens were supposed to bring diverse segments of the Cleveland citizenry together, closing the boating program and ending picnics limited chances for this to occur. As informal opportunities for recreation interactions among groups decreased, formal representations of the gardens that celebrated their power to bring people together became further divorced from peoples’ lived experiences at the park. Cleveland’s different ethnic groups might be able to march together in a staged pageant, but they could no longer eat or boat together.

Black city councilmen Charles Carr and John Kellogg voiced their opinion that disallowing picnics, just as closing down the boat operations, was a direct response to increased black involvement at the park. They saw these changes as part of an alarming trend of decreasing public recreation amenities in formerly white neighborhoods with growing black populations.<sup>368</sup> These black politicians saw changes at Rockefeller as more instances of the city’s failure to provide quality public services to black residents.

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<sup>367</sup> “Don’t be Litterbug,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 6, 1954.

<sup>368</sup> “May Act in Council to Save Park System,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1955. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, this article also placed the possible selling-off of Garfield Park to the suburb of Garfield Heights as part of this trend of eroding black public recreation spaces.

## **Black Politics, Property, and an African American Garden**

The changes in amenities and services were not the only reason for black leadership's dissatisfaction with the park. The lack of a formal garden to represent the city's black populace became more intolerable as African Americans became a larger percentage of the city's residents. In May 1962, during their regular meeting at the Mayor's Office, Cultural Garden Federation officials discussed the possibility of creating a "special Negro Garden." They quickly dismissed the idea, stating "the American Garden is the place for any bust of American Negro cultural expression." As a basis for this opinion, the meeting minutes cited an article in *Look* magazine that argued "the Negro is American—he does not follow the customs of his so called 'old country.' America is where his roots are."<sup>369</sup> The Cultural Garden Federation members asserted that the American Garden was the proper place for the expression of local black culture, and therefore no separate space was needed. While various European ethnic groups were afforded spaces to celebrate their history and culture, raising statues to Europeans such as Goethe, Beethoven or Madame Currie, black Clevelanders were denied the right to display African "roots." Where Euro-Americans could commemorate their histories in spaces marked out for Slovenian, Slovakian, Irish or Polish ethnicity, black residents could not form similar spaces to celebrate Ethiopian or Swahili cultures; indeed they could not even construct one space to represent all of the African Diaspora. Instead, the Cultural Garden Federation asserted that the American garden would suffice to represent local black culture.

Of course, not everyone shared this opinion that the American section could adequately represent Cleveland's black cultural contributions. Despite the lack of support from the Cultural

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<sup>369</sup> Cultural Garden Federation Meeting, May 31, 1962, Container 1, Folder 4, Manuscript Collection 3700, Cleveland Cultural Gardens, WRHS.

Garden Federation, by the early 1960s there was discussion among some black community members about establishing a Cultural Garden space for the city's residents of African descent. Yet this proposal became entangled in a complicated political fight that included fraught questions about local property rights, housing, and labor—a fight that would take nearly a decade to settle and would eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court before being fully resolved.

What was most significant about the political skirmishes to establish a black cultural garden space was that starting in the 1960s, these fights most frequently occurred between different black political figures. The decades after World War II saw a steady increase in black political power in Cleveland, and Rockefeller Park became one space where this political power was exercised. As whites left many east side neighborhoods for the suburbs, concentrated black enclaves became new bases of black political voting blocs, sending representatives to sit on the City Council. Miller and Wheeler have described this process: “As the black population spread eastward, gradually engulfing formerly white wards, the ghetto transformed into an increasingly formidable political power.”<sup>370</sup> In 1950, the city council included four African Americans and in 1959, with the election of Earl Hooper to the council, that number grew to seven. This made Cleveland the municipality with the highest number of African American city councilors in the United States.<sup>371</sup> In a city whose municipal planning structure relied heavily on individual ward politicians pressuring City Hall for local investment, these black council members brought public infrastructure and services to the neighborhoods they represented.

One of the most notable examples of this type of effective representation came in 1959, when the city built a new million-dollar recreation center in the Central neighborhood's Ward 18

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<sup>370</sup> Poh and Wheeler, 136.

<sup>371</sup> “Meet Members of the City's Council” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 11, 1959.

named after the respected recreation leader, Florence Fairfax, as described in Chapter Two. Over one thousand people celebrated its opening. Councilor Harold Gassaway, who represented Ward 18 in the 1940s, had long championed recreation infrastructure improvements for this underserved, mostly black neighborhood. Starting in the early 1950s, when John Kellogg took the seat, he continued to make recreation a key plank in his leadership platform.<sup>372</sup> These efforts facilitated the funding of the recreation facility, and upon its opening the Fairfax Center became one of the most prominent locations for black youth public recreation in the city. The *Call and Post* regularly reported on activities in the park, often in conjunction with reports on the programs at Portland-Outhwaite Recreation Center, which stood less than two miles away.<sup>373</sup> The receptionist at the new Fairfax Center opined: "It would be just fine if we had more buildings like this one," speculating that as a result of such investment "juvenile problems would be reduced to a minimum."<sup>374</sup> However similar investment in other black neighborhoods was slow in coming, especially in the newer black enclaves located further east in the city such as Hough and Glenville. According to one historian, the black representatives on the City Council rarely worked as a "unified body" to challenge the larger structures of oppression that shaped the landscape of discrimination in the city.<sup>375</sup> Such political infighting was by no means limited to

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<sup>372</sup> "Fairfax to Dedicate Million-Dollar Center," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 25, 1959; "1,500 Attend opening of Million-Dollar Center," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 2, 1959 (quote).

<sup>373</sup> "New Centers Buzzing: Citizens Flock to Gigantic Program," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 16, 1960; "City's Recreation Centers Open Monday," *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 1, 1960; "Recreation Centers Begin Fall Program," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 30, 1961; "Fairfax Center Presents Festival," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 14, 1962; "City Pools Launch Learn-To Swim Classes," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 14, 1962; "Friday Night is Family Night At Fairfax," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 11, 1962; "Volleyball Tourney Set," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 20, 1963; and, "City Swimming Meet Seen by Huge Throng," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 4, 1963.

<sup>374</sup> "New Centers Buzzing: Citizens Flock to Gigantic Program," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 16, 1960.

<sup>375</sup> Moore, "Carl Stokes," 81.

the black members of the council, which during the post-war years was characterized by “petty bickering among the civic leaders over petty issues.”<sup>376</sup>

One black councilor in particular often served as a lightning rod in local black politics. Councilor Leo Jackson first won the right to represent the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward, a section of the Glenville neighborhood, in 1957 when he ousted Harry T. Marshall “one of the City Council’s most prominent members.” Prior to his election to City Council, Jackson had built a popular reputation as a member of the Glenville Area Community Council (GACC), where he led efforts to combat urban blight.<sup>377</sup> The GACC, which included both white and black membership, was often vocal in members’ concern about lower-income African Americans moving into the area as part of the eastern expansion of the city’s black population.<sup>378</sup> During his first term, Jackson was a sharp critic of what he described as slumlords in his district, a category he applied to both white and black property owners that he felt exploited his constituents. Also vocal in his indictment of racist practices in the local housing market, the outspoken councilor won his first bid for re-election by 82 percent, the second-highest majority won by any councilman in 1959.<sup>379</sup> Jackson often used his position to criticize what he perceived as a less-desirable emerging class of black leaders—lower-income or working-class young black men. Sometimes Jackson’s positions put him at odds with other black members of the City Council.

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<sup>376</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland, A Concise History, 1796-1990*.

<sup>377</sup> Russell H. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 333.

<sup>378</sup> Cleveland Cultural Garden Records 1916-1976, Executive Committee Meeting, August 26, 1965.

<sup>379</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” Table 8-1, “Predominantly Black Wards and Black Councilmen Representing Them in the Nineteen Sixties.”

Jackson's skepticism about younger black leaders was not the first instance of a divide among black community leaders along the lines of generation or age. Writing about Cleveland in the early 1900s David A. Gerber described "bitter confrontations between the two groups of racial leaders," where the older generation called for an integrationist strategy to address black community issues, and newer arrivals to the city pushed for all-black institutions, such as founding a hotly contested black-run hospital. This generational debate played out again among Cleveland black community leaders in the early 1960s, as will be covered further in the sixth chapter. The matter a potential black Cultural Garden at Rockefeller Park would become an issue on which Jackson would attempt to stake out his role as a key player in these black political power struggles.<sup>380</sup>

The central unanswered question to potentially founding an African or African American Cultural Garden was where it would be located. Councilor Jackson led the debate. He proposed locating such a new garden at 931 East Boulevard, a site adjacent but not contiguous to the existing gardens. This piece of property already had a complicated and contentious relationship with its Rockefeller Park neighbor. During World War II, Robert Riffe, one of the leading black real estate developers in the city, purchased the three and half acres of plot located at 931 East Boulevard. Riffe's plan was to construct affordable housing for black residents, but his dream languished because of a lack of building materials due to war demand and also because his proposal was "bitterly opposed by the upper-class social conscious negroes of the area" who were not eager to see lower-income black residents move to their neighborhood. Riffe later proposed building a high-rise apartment complex on the site, which Councilor Leo Jackson and the Cultural Garden Federation opposed. Black attorney and politician Chester Gillespie helped

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<sup>380</sup> Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 455.



lead the charge to stop the project. Known locally as “Mr. Civil Rights,” Gillespie was a formidable political foe who had led multiple anti-discrimination efforts in the city, held the office of Cleveland’s NAACP President in 1936 and 1937, and served three terms as a State Representative.<sup>381</sup> Gillespie’s disapproval helped ensure the apartment complex would not get off the ground, and by the time Riffe died in 1959, the future of the property remained unsettled.

With Riffe’s passing, the 931 East Boulevard Company continued the effort to develop the property on behalf of his widow. Local black businessman William Seawright served as the project’s spokesman. A known “Cleveland numbers racket figure,” Seawright had also previously served two years in jail on a Mann Act charge.<sup>382</sup> He represented a type of black community leader that made many established black leaders, including Councilor Leo Jackson, uneasy. Councilor Jackson would on occasion speak openly about what he perceived as a potentially dangerous class of black leadership in Cleveland, such as when he commented that there was “a power struggle by thugs for leadership of the Negro community.”<sup>383</sup> The fate of the 931 East Boulevard property would become yet another battlefield between Jackson and one of these men he labeled “thugs.”

Councilor Jackson had begun to eye the contested piece of property at 931 East Boulevard as a potential solution to a long-standing problem the city faced concerning Rockefeller Park. Since the end of World War II, the city had allowed the employees of three local companies, White Motor Corporation, Park-Ohio Industries, Inc. and Eaton Yale and

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<sup>381</sup> “*The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. “Gillespie, Chester K.” accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

<sup>382</sup> Fred McGunagle, “Officers of Firm in Park Feud Told,” June 8, 1962, *Cleveland Press*.

<sup>383</sup> “Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” Table 8-1 “Predominantly Black Wards and Black Councilmen Representing Them in the Nineteen Sixties.”

Towne, to encroach on a little over three acres of Rockefeller Park by parking regularly on the land. The city allowed this encroachment in part because the piece of property where the employees parked stood at a higher elevation than the rest of the property. Not fully integrated into the park, it had also become a site of frequent trash dumping. While this parking had started out informally, in what was described as ““Topsy” during wartime by individual employees of the companies,” it had become ingrained practice by the 1960s.<sup>384</sup> This stood in direct violation of the terms dictating the gift of the land by the Rockefeller family to the city, which stated that the property must be used for park purposes. Violating this agreement could jeopardize Cleveland’s ownership of the entire park, and representatives for the Rockefeller Foundation made it clear that they wanted the issue resolved. In order to correct this problem, the city had to either remove the parking lot or find land of equal size and value to purchase for use as park property to replace the misused land. Jackson’s proposal, backed by the Mayor’s office, was to seize the 931 East Boulevard parcel through eminent domain, paying approximately \$60,000 for the 3.5 acres. The city would then formally sell the parking lot property to the three companies for \$123,000, making a profit on the exchange.<sup>385</sup> Thus, with one political move the controversial high-rise apartment proposal near Rockefeller Park would be squashed, the city would not have to anger the companies that used the parking lots, and the city would finally have a Cultural Garden for its black citizens.

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<sup>384</sup> Judge Eugene R. McNeil, “Opinion of the Court of Common Pleas,” February 2, 1966, in Bernard A Berkman, Bernard A. Berman, Paul D, White, “The 1931 East Boulevard Co. v. City of Cleveland U.S. Supreme Court Transcript of Record with Supporting Proceedings,” 23.

<sup>385</sup> Al Sweeney and Len Watkins, “East Boulevard Property Seizure, “Hurts” Widow, *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 1, 1963; “Jackson Loses Battle for Action on Park,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 14, 1963; and, Donald Sabath, “Council Unit Split: Deal for Park Land is Stalled,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 18, 1963; “Judgment Entry to the Court of Common Pleas, 1966, reprinted in “The 931 East Boulevard Co. v. City of Cleveland U.S. Supreme Court Transcript of Record with Supporting Pleadings,” Bernard A Berkman, Bernard A. Berkman, Paul D. White, US Supreme Court Records and Briefs, 1982-1978, The Making of Modern Law, Print Edition, pages 29-32.

Yet, not everyone was enthusiastic about the Jackson plan. This was not the first time that eminent domain had been proposed in an effort to establish a black park space on the Cleveland landscape. As discussed in Chapter Two, eminent domain played a significant role in the establishment of both the Portland-Outhwaite and the Fairfax parks and recreation centers. Those two park projects alone displaced dozens of families. What made Jackson's proposal particularly egregious to some was that it seemed to blatantly serve the powerful corporate interests of his district at the expense of the interests of private citizens or smaller business owners. Many perceived Jackson's proposal to place an African American Garden at the site as political cover to win support for a land-grab.<sup>386</sup>

When in 1961 Councilor Jackson submitted his first ordinance to enact eminent domain on the Riffe property, he met stiff resistance<sup>387</sup> Three African American Councilors, Charles Carr, Lowell Henry and John Kellogg opposed the Jackson ordinance. Carr explained his objection to the proposal to expand Rockefeller Park by describing the existing park land as a space where "we have nothing but a lot of bums lying around drinking beer." Another councilman questioned the wisdom of creating more parkland when "we can't maintain what we have today."<sup>388</sup> Such comments stood in stark contrast to the typically celebratory language that was used to describe Rockefeller Park, and they demonstrated that this landscape was by no means wholly idyllic, but rather was plagued by the increasing park maintenance and budget shortfalls in Cleveland. The councilors questioned whether expanding the park's foot-print would be an undisputed good thing for the local community. For the next several months the

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<sup>386</sup> Al Sweeney and Len Watkins, "East Boulevard Property Seizure, 'Hurts' Widow, *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 1, 1963; Ordinance Number 1323-69, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Smith and Mr. Katalinas. CCA.

<sup>387</sup> "Henry Halts Park Project," *Cleveland Call and Press*, November 28, 1961.

<sup>388</sup> "E. Blvd Park Fight Stalled," *Cleveland Call and Press*, September 11, 1962.

Jackson proposal languished in various council committees.<sup>389</sup> As the head of the Finance Committee, Councilor Carr, admonished: “Perhaps the sponsor, Leo Jackson wants to satisfy certain elements in the community by seizing the property of a negro, I am not.”<sup>390</sup> Carr proceeded to stall the bill from coming to a committee vote.

Jackson was not about to take this opposition lying down, and he had several prominent allies in his corner. Along with the continued support of attorney Chester Gillespie, Jackson also had support from his days serving on the Glenville Area Community Council (GACC). Most significantly, Russell H. Davis, a principal of a local junior high school and a colleague of Jackson’s who served as the first president elected by the GACC backed Jackson.<sup>391</sup> The GACC, which had long expressed worries about lower-income black residents coming to their area, sent representatives before council meetings to support their former member.<sup>392</sup> So, too, did the Lower Kempton Avenue Block Club, a smaller neighborhood organization.<sup>393</sup> Perhaps Jackson’s most powerful political ally was the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) Labor Council, which backed Jackson’s plan because union employees parked on the lots that encroached on parkland. In April 1963, a reported 100 union members attended a council meeting to vocalize support for the Jackson proposal. Union leadership reportedly pressured councilors to support the plan, threatening a loss of union

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<sup>389</sup> Sanford Watzman, “Council Oks Garden Plan of Jackson,” December 12, 1961, *Cleveland Press*.

<sup>390</sup> “East Blvd. Land Seizure Clears Council Unit; Headed for Courts,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 27, 1963.

<sup>391</sup> “Negro Culture Garden Blocked,” *The Plain Dealer*, June 26, 1962. Along with publishing many newspaper stories about local black history, Davis wrote two significant works: Russell H. Davis, “Civil Rights in Cleveland 1912-1961: An Account of the Cleveland Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” and, *Black Americans In Cleveland: George Peake, The First Black Settler to Carl Stokes, The First Black Mayor*.

<sup>392</sup> Donald Sabath, “Council Unit Split: Deal for Park Land is Stalled,” *Cleveland Press*, April 18, 1963;

<sup>393</sup> “Negro Culture Garden Blocked,” *The Plain Dealer*, June 26, 1962.

endorsements for those who stood against the land swap.<sup>394</sup> The fight wore on in the council, and both sides of the debate had to struggle to keep votes in order. Fourteen of the twenty-six councilors who held their seats throughout the prolonged debate voted on both sides of the issue at some point during multiple hearings and debates on the matter.<sup>395</sup>

While the political wrangling over the project continued at City Hall, it also was fought in the local newspapers. The *Cleveland Press* strongly backed the Jackson proposal, printing dozens of stories tracking the multiple votes on the issue.<sup>396</sup> The paper issued several editorials in favor of the Jackson plan, one arguing that “Cleveland’s famed cultural gardens will suffer” if a “towering small-suite apartment house” was built. Further, the editorial speculated that all of Rockefeller Park might be “endangered” if the parking property violation was not addressed. Finally, it characterized the apartment proposal as an effort at “rezoning sought by outsiders.”<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> “Union Members Back Rockefeller Park Swap,” *Cleveland Press*, May 27, 1963; and, Al Sweeney and Len Watkins, “East Boulevard Property Seizure, ‘Hurts’ Widow,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 1, 1963.

<sup>395</sup> Fred McGunagle, “Council Just Hems and Haws on East Blvd. Park Proposal,” *Cleveland Press*, April 19, 1963.

<sup>396</sup> “Henry Halts Park Project,” *Cleveland Call and Press*, November 28, 1961; “Rockefeller Park Bill Due For Vote Monday,” *Cleveland Press*, December 5, 1961; Sanford Watzman, “Council Oks Deal on Land after Fight,” *Cleveland Press*, December 12, 1961; Fred McGunagle, “Prods Council Groups to Decide About Park,” *Cleveland Press*, December 5, 1961; “Faster Park Moves Demanded by Leo,” May 24, 1962, *Cleveland Press*; “Hearings to Resume on East Blvd. Parcel,” *Cleveland Press*, June 4, 1962; Fred McGunagle, “Officers of Firm in Park Feud Told,” *Cleveland Press*, June 8, 1962; Plan Group OKs Park Land Switch,” *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1962; Fred McGunagle, “Ideas for Adding to Rockefeller Park Seen Losing Despite Groups Pleas,” *Cleveland Press*, June 15, 1962; “E. Blvd Park Fight Stalled,” *Cleveland Press*, September 11, 1962; Fred McGunagle, “Council to Try New Vote on East Blvd Land Issue,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 15, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “Council Just Hems and Haws on East Blvd. Park Proposal,” *Cleveland Press*, April 19, 1963; “Council Unit OK’s East Blvd. Park Deal,” Fred McGunagle, “3 Councilman Seek Hike in Lot Needed for Park Deal,” *Cleveland Press*, April 23, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “East Blvd. Park Deal Stalled Again After Bitter Debate in Council,” *Cleveland Press*, May 14, 1963; “Union Members Back Rockefeller Park Swap,” *Cleveland Press*, May 27, 1963; “Jackson Fails in Close Vote in Park Fight,” *Cleveland Press*, May 28, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “Hearing Set on Bill for East Blvd. Park,” *Cleveland Press*, June 12, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “East Blvd. Park Deal Stalled Again After Bitter Debate in Council,” *Cleveland Press*, May 14, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “Vows New Vote on Park Land,” *Call and Post*, June 26, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “City Action Due Tonight on Park Deal,” *Cleveland Press*, September 9, 1963; “East Blvd. Issue Again Fails to Get to Council Floor,” *Cleveland Press*, September 10, 1963; “Carr Willing to Call Vote on East Blvd. Park Bill,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 12, 1963; Fred McGunagle, “East Blvd. Park Seizure Certain to Get Court Test,” *Cleveland Press*, September 24, 1963.

<sup>397</sup> “Preserve Rockefeller Park,” *Cleveland Press*, June 13, 1962. Other *Press* editorials included: “Get this Vital Park Land,” *Cleveland Press*, April 15, 1963; and, “We Mustn’t Lose Rockefeller Park,” *Cleveland Press*, May 15,

In at least one instance, newspaper reports backfired when one councilman decided to vote against the Jackson plan due to a “vicious article” printed in the *Press* that the councilor perceived as an attempt “to browbeat the legislative body.”<sup>398</sup>

The *Call and Post* also covered the story, offering a very different perspective than the *Press*. In one article the *Call and Post* presented several quotes from Seawright, including:

The daily newspapers controlled by the power structure ha[ve] refused to print our side of the story...Why aren't the daily newspapers being fair? It is common knowledge that the labor unions, which are fighting us, make substantial campaign contributions at each election. And several councilman have told me that the union officials have threatened to get them if they don't go along.<sup>399</sup>

The *Call and Post* also took the opportunity of this ongoing council debate to ridicule Councilor Jackson, describing his reaction to yet another defeat of his land-swap proposal: “His scratchy voice continued to soar and soar into higher octaves as he worked himself into an emotional lather as he paced in the well of the council floor. Finally, Jackson dashed out of the council chamber shaking with emotion.”<sup>400</sup>

Why did Jackson get so emotional about this relatively small parkland deal? And why did the newspapers, especially the powerful *Cleveland Press*, spill so much ink covering the story? This seemingly small park land deal actually represented much bigger stakes over who would determine the future development of the Cleveland urban landscape. On one hand there

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1963. This allusion to “outsiders” could have referred to the fact that the 931 East Boulevard Company included members who were not Clevelanders, most notably well-known black comedian Dick Gregory. It is also another example of the *Press* using a spatial logic to describe who it deemed eligible to enter and participate in the making of public space in the city.

<sup>398</sup> Fred McGunagle, “East Blvd. Park Deal Stalled Again After Bitter Debate in Council,” *Cleveland Press*, May 14, 1963.

<sup>399</sup> Al Sweeney and Len Watkins, “East Boulevard Property Seizure, “Hurts” Widow,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 1, 1963.

<sup>400</sup> “Council Won’t Snatch Widow’s Land, So Leo Goes into Tantrum,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 14, 1963.

was Councilor Jackson, a “liberal” black councilman, allied with labor leaders and the white politicians who controlled City Hall. On the other hand, there was a reputed black numbers-runner, allied with black politicians more skeptical of the existing white political system. As the city’s black population grew, and with it black political clout, how this black political power would help shape the urban landscape remained an unsettled question. The 931 East Boulevard property was one point on the city landscape where the answer to this question was being contested.

The result of this political and legal wrangling between various elected and non-elected black community leaders meant that no African or African-American Garden developed at Rockefeller for many years. When the Council finally acquiesced and voted for the Jackson land-swap proposal, the 931 East Boulevard landowning interests challenged the city’s right to invoke eminent domain in the courts. The case eventually went all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was finally settled in the city’s favor in 1967.<sup>401</sup>

Yet the Cleveland City Council or even the Supreme Court did not have the last word on Rockefeller Park. Every day, black community members, and especially youth, frequented the park space for a variety of activities and programs. Some of these individuals and families organized their own activities at the park, as in the case of a young boy who celebrated his birthday there in the summer of 1964.<sup>402</sup> In other instances, black youth participated in programs offered by city recreation staff. One of the most popular of these programs was the annual “regatta” of miniature boats at the park lagoon, an event that drew participants from playgrounds

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<sup>401</sup> “The 931 East Boulevard Co. v. City of Cleveland,” The central reason for the case reaching the Supreme Court was that the owners of the 931 East Boulevard property did not think they had proper opportunity and notice to appeal the decision for city-seizure of the land as was decided by the lower courts. The Supreme Court found that there had been proper opportunities for appeal.

<sup>402</sup> Untitled Photograph, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 18, 1964.

throughout the city.<sup>403</sup> Not only black youth, but also adults visited Rockefeller Park for planned programs, and not all of them were Clevelanders. Over Labor Day weekend in 1967, Rockefeller Park hosted the “Tri-City Tennis Tournament,” an annual contest between black tennis players from Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago competing for the pride of their respective cities.<sup>404</sup>

Local black women led many of the programming activities at Rockefeller Park, just as they did at other park spaces throughout the city. In the spring of 1962, two local “sales ladies” held an Easter Egg hunt for neighborhood youth at the park, gathering sponsorships for the event from several local businesses.<sup>405</sup> That same year, Mrs. Sadie Bell celebrated her tenth year as a tennis instructor at the park. While men dominated the public debates over the park space in city hall, women more frequently took the lead in providing activities in the space. In this regard, women made significant contributions to the everyday vernacular meanings of this park. The formal representations in the Cultural Gardens, and the political debates that attended such representations, were only one part of the multiple layers of meaning constructed in this prominent Cleveland landscape.

Sometimes these meanings came from planned community programs, such as Easter egg hunts or tennis lessons, and other times individual mappings of the space happened on a much more informal level. Such was the case for James A. Dingus, Jr., an African American bachelor accountant who lived in an apartment overlooking Rockefeller Park. Dingus used the park to

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<sup>403</sup> “Hundreds Witness Playground Regatta,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 25, 1962; Untitled Photos, *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 17, 1963; “Sailboat Regatta Held at Rockefeller Park,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 3, 1966.

<sup>404</sup> “Detroit Cops Tri-City Net Tourney,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 9, 1967.

<sup>405</sup> “Two Salesladies Initiate Colorful Easter Egg Hunt,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 5, 1962.



walk his Afghan hound, and both the accountant and his dog, “Mr. B,” were well known figures around black Cleveland. The *Call and Post*’s society pages regularly reported on Dingus’s activities in the city, as well as his travels to Canada, India, Mexico, London, France, and throughout the United States. The paper was also sure to mention Mr. B’s kennel arrangements while his owner was out of town.<sup>406</sup> For Dingus, visiting Rockefeller was more than just a walk in the park—it was a chance for him to be seen by his neighbors and extend his local celebrity. Those who followed the activities of Dingus and Mr. B in the newspaper could see them as a “familiar sight” walking on the park pathways.<sup>407</sup> Dingus’ upper-middle class position within the local black community was in part performed through his walks in the genteel landscape of Rockefeller Park, as well as in his ability to regularly access the park by his proximity of residence to this desirable urban location. Using the spatial analytical framework of Lefebvre, Dingus’s *spatial practice* of living near and walking through the park, was then reinforced by the black newspaper’s depiction of the *representational space* of this landscape as part of an upper middle-class urban lifestyle.

When the city decided to construct a twelve-foot wall at one entrance of the park near the Cultural Gardens, it jeopardized this spatial practice. Dingus took great exception to the plan. He

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<sup>406</sup> On Dingus’s social standing and recognizability in the black community: “Goal 5,000 Members in Wheatley Friendship Hunt, *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 9, 1963, and “Phillis Wheatley Annual Friendship Hunt Begins,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 16, 1963 Dingus was a member of the membership drive committee for the Phillis Wheatley House; Effie Young, “The Lively Ones,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 21, 1967, trip to Mexico City “NAACP Adds 34 New Life Members,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 21, 1967, Dingus became a life-time member of the NAACP; “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 23, 1970, trip to Oklahoma City and Seattle; “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 15, 1970, trip to Ontario; “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 17, 1972, report on Dingus’s Mercedes Benz; “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 4, 1972, trip to India; “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 19, 1973, more on Dingus as part of Cleveland’s “Mercedes Set”; and, “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 14, 1973, trip to London and France.

<sup>407</sup> “Inside Cleveland with Dominique,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 25, 1973.

called the construction project the “Berlin Wall” and described it as “ugly and foreboding” and an “eyesore.” The city had initiated the project, along with increased policing in the park, in response to vandalism. By referencing the Berlin Wall, Dingus accused the city of curtailing his freedom to enjoy the park, comparing officials’ actions to the German limitation of citizen mobility in a divided Berlin. Although hyperbolic in his assessment of the problem, Dingus took the issue quite seriously and proved it by taking the city to Common Pleas court to stop what he considered “an arbitrary interference with public use of the park.”<sup>408</sup> The suit was unsuccessful, and in the 1970s Dingus moved further east in Cleveland to another apartment building overlooking another park, Forest Hills.<sup>409</sup> While Dingus and his vacation travels remained regular items of note in the pages of the *Call and Post*, he no longer lived near Rockefeller Park. Local meanings of public spaces, such as Rockefeller, were created in part by such daily activities of park users. The regular presence of a prominent black figure, and his equally popular dog, contributed in a small way to the significance of Rockefeller Park. Visiting Rockefeller meant one could possibly run into Dingus and hear an account of his latest travels. A public space might have been constructed by a local City Councilman and their powerful political allies, but such spaces were also given meaning by a man simply out walking his dog.

At other times, park landscapes such as Rockefeller were given meaning by citizens visiting the spaces for explicitly political purposes. In May 1967, a local black activist, Lewis Robinson, helped to organize a “Be In” at Rockefeller Park, borrowing a tactic used on the West Coast. The concept of a “Be In” was to occupy the space of the park to bring attention to the needs of local black youth. While the specific demands of the “Be In” were not expressed in the

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<sup>408</sup> “‘Berlin Wall’ In the Park Hit by Accountant’s Suit,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 1, 1966.

<sup>409</sup> “Dingus Has Open House,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 9, 1974.

newspaper coverage of the event, Robinson had previously worked with local black youth on matters such as police harassment, white-on-black youth violence, and the lack of local recreation opportunities. According to the *Call and Post*, 150 youth “played ball, bongos, ran, tussled, and ate donuts and drank coolaid [sic].” In this event recreation merged with political action, and the park landscape became a stage upon which black youth could be seen, and express their needs to the local community.<sup>410</sup>

## Conclusion

Park as political football, park as a space to build community connections, park as a location to exercise class privilege, and park as a stage to launch political protest—Rockefeller embodied each of these different functions, often simultaneously. Each of these multiple meanings and uses came from within the black community itself. The cultural landscape that had been developed as a celebration of white ethnic culture had become over time an important black political space. There was never one “black” interpretation or way of accessing Rockefeller Park or its gardens, just as there was never a singular black vision for the broader landscape of Cleveland as a whole. Rockefeller Park became a key site in a growing black political landscape, a space contested by different factions of local black leadership.

While some of these political battles raged in City Hall and the pages of the local newspapers, other fights were much smaller in scale: teenagers using the park to gain attention by the press, or even a man trying to stop changes at the park where he enjoyed walking his dog. One cannot help wondering what would have happened if Mr. Dingus and his afghan hound had stumbled across Lewis Robinson and his large group of teenagers while out on one his daily

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<sup>410</sup> “Human ‘Be In’ Held in Rockefeller Park,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 13, 1967.

constitutionals. Would he have stopped and joined them for a drink of Kool-Aid, or would Mr. Dingus have crossed to another section of the park—worried, as were so many Clevelanders both black and white, about the growing unrest among young residents on the city's east side? The next chapter two chapters takes a closer look at this unrest and its importance to recreation space on the Cleveland's east side during the tumultuous years of the 1960s.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RACE, RECREATION AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACE: SOWINSKI PLAYGROUND

“Sowinski playground does not echo today with the shouts and laughter of boys and girls at play. The atmosphere there bursts with the pressures of anger and grief. Last night the playfield almost became a battle ground.” The *Cleveland Press* carried this statement on its front page on June 14, 1963, two days after six black teenaged boys allegedly beat a white teenaged couple and raped the girl in a small playground on the east side of Cleveland. Sowinski Playground was located on the eastern edge of the Rockefeller Park complex, and the playground’s location on this highly celebrated white-ethnic landscape contributed to the public reaction to the events. Incendiary media coverage fanned public outrage over the attack, and soon the area around the playground balanced on the precipice of a race riot. In the aftermath of that night and during the ensuing trial, the youth accused in the Sowinski incident came to symbolize the supposedly growing problem of black male youth violence in the city and became an important touchstone in local debates about the Civil Rights Movement.

This chapter argues that the local press played an active role in constructing the symbolic meaning of Sowinski as a vernacular landscape representing black youth criminality, and that the collective actions and imaginations of the police, City Hall and everyday Cleveland citizens contributed to this production of spatial meaning. The imaginative production of this one small public space soon extended beyond the playground’s borders, and public parks throughout the city became increasingly viewed as racialized landscapes fraught with crime. This production of spatial meaning of public parks also actively constructed black male teens as “marked bodies” and potential criminals.<sup>411</sup> Sowinski was thus an example of how local ethnic and racial

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<sup>411</sup> Eugene J. McCann, “Race, Protest and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City,” *Anitpode* 31:2,, 1999, 173, 179. In this article McCann argues that newspapers and newspaper editorials play an important role in producing meanings of space. Further, the article outlines Lefebvre’s idea that the production of meaning of public

meanings are in part spatially constructed. Further, this chapter argues that such constructions of meaning at public spaces did not “just happen.” Rather, the racialized symbolism of Sowinski was actively produced.

This production not only had consequences for black male teens, who found themselves increasingly the object of policing; the symbolism of Sowinski also reverberated through local debates about the Civil Rights Movement in the city. Thus, this chapter traces how some whites seized on the symbol of Sowinski and attempted to use it to call into question the gains and demands made by black activists in Cleveland. In the midst of the most intensive period of Civil Rights organizing and activism in the city, and the most important summer in the national Civil Rights Movement, some white Clevelanders argued that the alleged criminal acts of a few young men could undermine the struggle for justice for all African Americans.

Yet these were not the only symbolic constructions of Sowinski. Among Cleveland’s African American community, the handling of the case resulted in a counter-symbolic construction of Sowinski as representative of the racial inequities embedded in Cleveland’s justice system, as well as the city’s failings in providing educational, employment and recreational opportunities for black youth living on the east side. For those with this perspective, Sowinski stood as a symbol of injustice.

### **Black Cleveland in the Early 1960s**

The 1963 attack at Sowinski came at a time when racial tensions informed practically every arena of urban Cleveland life from housing to schooling to employment. In 1960

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spaces in turn, “marked bodies” who move through these spaces. Yet, according to McCann, not enough work has been done by scholars to consider the role of race in the productions and connections between making spatial meaning and marking bodies. This chapter attempts to take up that analysis.

Cleveland was the eighth largest city in the United States, with slightly less than a 29 percent African American population. In the highly segregated city, more than 98 percent of black residents lived in a few neighborhoods, all located on the city's east side. Rapid suburban white flight exacerbated by a series of poorly executed urban renewal projects during the 1950s further resulted in highly concentrated residential areas of black urban working class and poor. In the starkest example of this rapid demographic change, the Hough neighborhood moved from 95 percent white in 1950 to 74 percent black by 1960.<sup>412</sup> Decaying housing conditions plagued many of these black neighborhoods, with 25 percent substandard housing located in the neighborhood of Hough and nearly 60 percent in Cleveland's oldest black neighborhood, Central.<sup>413</sup> Overall, black Clevelanders were four times more likely to live in substandard housing than whites.<sup>414</sup>

Housing was not the only challenge faced by the growing number of black east side residents. From 1953 to 1963, the erosion of Cleveland's once strident industrial economy accelerated as the central city lost 80,000 blue-collar jobs. As industrial manufacturing firms moved to the U.S. South and Cleveland suburbs, it severely affected the economic outlook of black workers who were aggressively excluded from suburban relocation.<sup>415</sup> By 1960, black unemployment soared above 30 percent.<sup>416</sup> According to a study conducted by the local Urban

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<sup>412</sup> Nissam-Sabat, "Panthers Set Up Shop in Cleveland," 90-96; and, Miller and Wheeler, "Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of An American City,"; and, Hill "The Cleveland Economy," 126.

<sup>413</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 9. This compares to a city-average of "dilapidated housing" of 18 percent.

<sup>414</sup> *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-1963: An Analysis of the Social and Economic Characteristics of the Negro Population; the Change between 1950 and 1963* (Cleveland: Cleveland Urban League, 1964), 16, 19.

<sup>415</sup> Moore, "Carl Stokes," 82.

<sup>416</sup> Urban League, *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-1963*, 22, 35.

League, black children faced school overcrowding and inadequate facilities as the city spent \$500 per capita annually for white children's education and only \$379 per black child.<sup>417</sup> While black activists' efforts in the late 1940s and early 1950s had loosened discriminatory practices at public accommodations and at recreation spots, acts of interpersonal racial violence persisted at many locations.<sup>418</sup>

By the early 1960s, grassroots activism to address these inequities was on the rise in the city, driven in large part by working-class black residents. Lewis Robinson became one of the leaders of this renewed emphasis on direct action and community organizing. Robinson had been born to a large African American family in Decatur, Alabama, and in 1944 had run away to Cleveland on the advice of friends. After leaving for an 18-month term in the army and earning a law degree in Boston, Robinson returned to Cleveland in 1951, where he became involved in the burgeoning local Civil Rights Movement.<sup>419</sup> Frustrated with what he perceived as the local NAACP chapter's inability to generate "any mass action for the people in the street," Robinson helped found a new local group, the United Freedom Fighters (UFF) in 1960. Born out of the Youth Council of the NAACP, the UFF became an economically independent organization of approximately 35 or 45 mostly working-class members in their late twenties and early thirties. In his memoir, Lewis described the organization as a:

[g]roup of factory workers, not people with degrees; not the bourgeois, but hungry ex-southerners like me who came North looking for equality and brotherhood and discovered you had to fight even harder than in the South.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Urban League, *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-1963*, 22.

<sup>418</sup> See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a case study of black activist challenges to public recreation discrimination and the persistence of interpersonal violence at these locations.

<sup>419</sup> Lewis G. Robinson, *The Making of A Man, An Autobiography* (Green and Sons: Cleveland, Ohio, 1970), 59.

<sup>420</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, Chapter 2; Allen Howard, "The Dedicated People Who Fight Prejudice," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 30, 1963.



The UFF was a black-led organization, and while white activists participated they could not hold office. UFF members focused the bulk of their energy on economic issues affecting Cleveland's black working class and poor, including housing and employment, in the tradition of the 1930s Future Outlook League.<sup>421</sup> The aims of the UFF were summarized in their demand for "Freedom NOW!"<sup>422</sup>

When the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) looked to restore a Cleveland chapter after a decade of no activity in the city, the UFF became a primary contact for, and ally of, renewed organizing efforts. During this period, CORE chapters experienced a revival in many northern and Midwestern cities. In Cleveland, CORE's resurgence was spurred by concerns about black employment discrimination, unfair housing, and discriminatory service at local hotels and hospitals. Police brutality and slow response times to black neighborhood calls also became a focus of CORE organizing. The newly revitalized CORE chapter joined the UFF and several other small grassroots organizations in the streets, holding pickets against local employers. Predominantly middle-class black residents, many of whom had migrated from Cleveland from the south, led the renewed organization. Arthur Evans, a black man raised in West Virginia who had moved to Cleveland in 1954, led Cleveland CORE during its most active years of the 1960s. While Evans served as the organization's titular head, the local face of CORE became Ruth Turner. A black woman of middle-class background in her early twenties, she had lived in Chicago until age ten, when her family moved to southern Ohio. A graduate of Ohio's Oberlin College with a Master of Arts in teaching, Turner taught high school in Cleveland and became one of the most recognized names in local black activism. Turner helped push CORE

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<sup>421</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, 59-60; Nishani Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 128-132.

<sup>422</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, 59.

locally and nationally toward a more militant stance, and national CORE leader James Farmer remembered Turner as “a tiger with sharp claws.”<sup>423</sup> Alongside Turner, the man who eventually became her husband, Antoine Perot—a Louisiana native with a law degree—served as another key organizer in the chapter. Complimenting this African American leadership, CORE included several active white members, some with openly socialist affiliations. The most prominent white members were not socialists, however, but pastors Paul Younger, a Baptist, and Bruce Klunder, a Presbyterian. Reverend Klunder, a Yale graduate with experience in the southern sit-in movement, along with his wife Joanne, became regular participants of Cleveland CORE’s direct actions, and he used the platform of his pulpit to support the movement.<sup>424</sup>

Several smaller organizations joined the UFF and CORE in this project of grassroots activism, and some focused on specific issues of black oppression. One of these, the Hazeldell Parents Association, had as its aim improving education for black students at Hazeldell Elementary School.<sup>425</sup> Another small but active organization was Job Seekers, “the sole purpose of which was to gain equal employment opportunity for Cleveland Blacks in every possible variety of businesses.” Ancusto Butler, who came to Cleveland from Oxford, Mississippi, founded Job Seekers; he was also involved with the UFF.<sup>426</sup> In 1962, a local teacher from

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<sup>423</sup> James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart* (Texas Christian University Press: Fort Worth, 1998), 320. See also Manning Marable’s discussion of Turner’s import to CORE in Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-1960*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Jackson: Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 66.

<sup>424</sup> For a more thorough analysis of Cleveland CORE’s membership, philosophy, and tactics, see Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” chapter 4. Here cited, 112-118; Allen Howard, “The Dedicated People Who Fight Prejudice,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 30, 1963.

<sup>425</sup> “Apathetic Parents Asked to Join the Fight,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 18, 1964.

<sup>426</sup> Allen Howard, “The Dedicated People Who Fight Prejudice,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 30, 1963; Alvin Ward, “Ancusto Butler, Civil Rights Fighter Dies,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 4, 1972; and “Ancusto Butler Revolutionary,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 11, 1972 (quote).

Kennard Junior High, Donald Freeman, established a local Black Nationalist organization, the Afro-American Institute, and also helped found a national organization, Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). “Afropinion,” the monthly newsletter of the Afro-American Institute, was published with the masthead quote from Frederick Douglass, “Without struggle there is no progress” and it provided a written forum for discussing issues facing Cleveland’s black population.<sup>427</sup> Many individuals affiliated with one or more of these groups, with CORE increasingly occupying the center of local movement activity. Even members of the NAACP, which previously had followed a more legal activist approach rather than direct action, occasionally joined the picket lines and protests sponsored by these various groups.

The loose collaboration of these organizations became more formalized in May 1963 with the founding of the United Freedom Movement (UFM), an umbrella organization that coordinated the work of fifty local Civil Rights and community groups. Lewis Robinson played a key role in bringing the more “militant groups” to the table, though he soon grew disillusioned by the large consortium, believing the NAACP had co-opted the coalition’s leadership.<sup>428</sup> Despite ongoing internal squabbles about tactics and aims as well as class tensions between the various activists, the founding of the UFM demonstrated the momentous energy behind Civil Rights organizing in Cleveland in the spring of 1963.

May of that year also saw one of the largest Civil Rights events in Cleveland’s history. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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<sup>427</sup> “Kennard Teachers Support Suspended Donald Freeman,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, and “Afropinion,” undated from “The Black Power Movement Part 3: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement 1962-1966, Reel 2, Library of Congress. Kennard Junior High is located across the street from Portland-Outhwaite Park, and was discussed in chapter one of this dissertation.

<sup>428</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 79-81; Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 128-134; Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, chapters 2-5.

(SCLC), visited Cory Methodist Church with his chief lieutenant, the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, the sanctuary could not hold the crowd. Three other local black churches had to open their doors to accommodate the estimated 15,000 who came to hear King speak.<sup>429</sup> Civil Rights activism was reaching its zenith in Cleveland.

This robust Civil Rights activism, along with a manufacturing base that had started to decline, and shifting residential demographic patterns, all signaled that the cultural landscape of Cleveland was in a period of rapid transition. For many white residents, their location on that landscape must have seemed increasingly precarious. Their grown children or friends may have packed up house and moved to the suburbs, neighborhood demographics changed seemingly overnight, rumors of plant closings swirled, and the front pages of local newspapers regularly showed images of picketing African Americans—not in some far off southern location—but at businesses or schools just around the corner.

As Clevelanders attempted to navigate this shifting landscape, local public spaces such as Sowinski played an important role. As discussed in Chapter Three, geographer Susan Ruddick argued: “Interactions in and *through* public space are crucial to the formation and maintenance of social identities.”<sup>430</sup> In Cleveland circa 1963, Sowinski Playground became a key location for the construction of racial social identities in the city. The attention the attack received in the press, and the subsequent trial and its coverage, actively constructed black youth as criminals and urban parks as criminalized spaces. In a decade marked by rapid change, Sowinski became a powerful symbol of white fear.

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<sup>429</sup> Charles Price “Enthusiastic Reception “Deeply Moves” King,” *Call and Post*, May 18, 1963.

<sup>430</sup> Susan Ruddick, “Constructing Difference In Public Spaces: Race, Class, and Gender as Interlocking Systems,” *Urban Geography*, volume 17:2, 1996, 135.

## History of the Neighborhoods Surrounding Sowinski Park

Sowinski Playground was perhaps an unlikely spot for such symbolic representations and debates about race in Cleveland. It consisted of only 1.29 acres, a small playground tucked away in a residential neighborhood. Located at the outer edge of the city's large Rockefeller Park complex, it was a playground that few Clevelanders outside of the immediate neighborhood knew. At the time of the rape and beating, the neighborhoods on either side of the park were in the midst of a decade-long period of demographic transition.<sup>431</sup> One local newspaper called Sowinski Playground "a natural boundary between white youths who live[d] in neighborhoods to the west and Negro youths who live[d] to the east and south."<sup>432</sup> The area that lay to the west of the park was a long-established Polish enclave. The influx of Poles to the neighborhood started during the late 1870s, with most immigrating to work as laborers in manufacturing plants, particularly the city's steel mills. By 1893, they had established a Catholic church, St. Casimir, which became the center of local community life. The Polish area came to be known as Poznan. Poznan grew to include approximately 25 blocks, making it one of the most well established Polish communities in all of Cleveland. According to one historian, the enclave "had the attributes of a small European village in which each resident knew his neighbors." By the late 1890s, in recognition of the heritage of the residents who lived in the area, most of the local streets had Polish names, including one short street called Sowinski, named for the Polish artillery general Josef Sowinski who had died in the 1830 Polish uprising against Russia.

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<sup>431</sup> The space that used to be Sowinski Playground was a small playground, located at the edge of one of the most prominent parks in Cleveland, Rockefeller Park. During the aftermath of the attack, much of the press coverage used the terms Sowinski Park, Sowinski Playground, and Rockefeller Park interchangeably. For purposes of this paper, I will refer to the space as Sowinski Playground, unless directly quoting a primary source, since it appears to be how those who lived near the park most commonly referred to the play area.

<sup>432</sup> "Racial No Man's Land: Rockefeller Park Saw Many Rock Fights," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 20, 1963.

Sowinski also became the name of the local public playground, marking the recreation space as a community symbol of Polish residents' pride in ethnic heritage. During the early twentieth century, social life for many living in the area centered on the church and clubs such as the Polish Falcons. Bertha Modrzynski, a first-generation resident born in the neighborhood in 1914 recalled the close-knit character of Poznan: "My sister married a boy from Aetna Road. And he's Polish. And my brother Casimir, married Cecilia Sawicki and she was Polish and just four blocks away from home..."<sup>433</sup> Yet slowly this close-knit Polish community was starting to unravel, as in the postwar period many Polish residents left Poznan for the suburbs. The 1960s marked a period of transition for the area. At the beginning of the decade, the three census tracts nearest to the park remained predominantly white and St. Casmir remained an important anchor for the neighborhood, especially for the remaining 17 percent of those living in the area who identified with a Polish heritage. However, the census tract nearest the playground showed signs of change as African Americans moved to the area, making up slightly less than one-fifth of the population in this tract. In 1960, nearly half of the residents near the park had lived in their homes for only five years or less, with 70 percent of these newcomers, black and white alike, moving to the area from other parts of central and east Cleveland. By 1970, the area became predominantly African American.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Bertha Modrzynski, interviewed by Jeannette Tuve, April 15, 1986, Ethnic Women of Cleveland Oral History Project Series, Cleveland Memory Project.

<sup>434</sup> Charles W. Coulter, *The Poles of Cleveland*, (Western Reserve University, Under the Direction of the Cleveland Americanization Committee, Mayor's War Advisory Committee); John J. Grabowski "The Polish Community of Cleveland," in John J. Grabowski, Judith Zielinski-Zak, Alice Boberg, Ralph Wroblweski *Polish Americans and Their Communities in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1976), 173; 1960, U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing, Cleveland, Ohio, "Table P-1.—General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts," 22-27.

To the east of the Sowinski playground stood the neighborhood of Glenville, which by the 1960s was a well-established black Cleveland enclave. Glenville was first established before the Civil War, and in 1905 when Cleveland annexed this neighborhood, it was one of the most fashionable areas in the city to live, drawing many well-to-do residents of Germanic and English descent. By the mid-1930s, the demographic makeup of the neighborhood had shifted, and the area became home to one of Cleveland's largest Jewish populations, including many eastern European and Russian Jews, as well as an increased number of eastern European Catholics. After World War II, more African Americans settled in the neighborhood, some from the nearby black enclave of Central and others from the South.<sup>435</sup> During the 1940s, the African American population grew from 1,069 to 20,517 until the area became the second largest concentration of African Americans in the entire city.<sup>436</sup>

Many black Clevelanders considered the move to Glenville from poorer black districts such as Central an economic step up. Glenville enjoyed a reputation as "far above the average of the total new Negro population in Cleveland in terms of education, economic status, and social class." But as more black residents continued to move to Glenville, they were not always welcome. Many white and black residents living in the area had grown increasingly uneasy about the new arrivals to their neighborhood. Many of these residents considered the newcomers to be "lower class." One of the worries about new black residents moving into the area was the fear that these recent arrivals would cause overcrowding of the local housing stock and drive home values down. In interviews of local residents collected for a report by the Glenville Area

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<sup>435</sup> The Church in a Changing Neighborhood: A Survey of the area around the Glenville Presbyterian Church conducted for the Presbytery of Cleveland of the United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A." Cleveland, Ohio: Regional Church Planning Office, 1960, Cleveland, Ohio, 5, WRHS.

<sup>436</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996*, 147.

Community Council (GACC), a common concern amongst white as well as several established black residents was that houses were “being cut up” and more roomers being taken in by black families. One longtime black resident noted: “Some older residents become hostile toward new residents thereby enforcing class distinctions and making the cooperative action which is necessary by the two groups to prevent overcrowding more difficult.” One Jewish resident summed up his feelings on the matter more concisely, noting: “It’s a question of class, not race.”<sup>437</sup> The GACC became an active interracial organization, consisting of mostly established Glenville residents determined to keep up the home values of their neighborhood.

Despite these concerns, during the next decade the demographic transition of Glenville continued. By 1960, the neighborhood consisted of 89 percent African-American residents, and a 1962 study of the area found that 60 percent of families had lived in Glenville for less than five years. While increasingly racially homogenous, the neighborhood remained mixed economically. The study also found the area to have 16 percent unemployment, higher than the city level but approximately half the average of African Americans in Cleveland. The median family income of Glenville was \$5,357 or 77 percent of the city average. This placed Glenville as the second most economically prosperous area for black Clevelanders after the Lee-Miles neighborhood. Glenville, for example, was far more prosperous than the black neighborhood of Hough, which it abutted. The housing stock in Glenville also was better than the city average for black residents. Intra-racial class tension continued to shape interactions in the area.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> David Mayo Austin, Del Jay Kinney, Robert Perlman, John Brister Turner, “A Test Tube for Democracy: A Case Study of the Glenville Area Community Council From September 1, 1946-January 31, 1948, with an Analysis of Community Population, Participation in the Program of the Council, the Characteristics and Inter-Cultural Attitudes of a Sample of Participants and the Process and Results of the 1947-1948 Membership Drive,” Thesis, Western Reserve University, May 6, 1948, 140-141.

<sup>438</sup> Ernest J. Bohn, “Glenville: Its People, Shopping Habits and Buying Power,” (Cleveland, Ohio Planning Commission, 1962), 13,22, WRHS; 1960, U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing, Cleveland, Ohio, “Table P-1.—General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts,” 22-27; Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black



## June 1963: Attack at Sowinski Playground

During the 1940s and 1950s, as the neighborhoods surrounding Sowinski Playground underwent demographic transition, the area's public recreation spots became increasingly spaces of interracial hostilities. As early as 1940, GACC members noted a reluctance of local white youth to participate in recreation programs alongside black children.<sup>439</sup> Council members brought their concerns before the Cleveland Board of Education in 1945, asking for assistance in improving local recreation opportunities and healing racial animosities. Their plea included a description of the growing problem:

The Rockefeller Park section north of Superior Avenue has been the scene of youth conflicts resulting from the search for recreation by children from the Glenville and the Ansel Road section [area near the Sowinski Playground] west of the park. In March an organized gang conflict in the park along racial lines was prevented by police action following a tip. About 400 youths, evenly divided between groups was present on this occasion that contained all the elements of a race riot.<sup>440</sup>

Over the next few years, recreation became a top GACC priority, especially for local black mothers, who made up the largest demographic group participating in the council.<sup>441</sup> The GACC agitated for increased municipal spending on recreation amenities for their neighborhood,

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Communities,"9, Table 8-1 "Leo Jackson." In her dissertation, Donna McIntyre Whyte, makes the this type of integrated class-structure was important in the organization of black neighborhoods in Cleveland: "In Cleveland and Chicago, where racial segregation presented fewer housing options to African Americans than in some other cities, the extent to which blacks could separate themselves from one another by class was minimal." Donna McIntyre Whyte, "African-American Community Politics and Racial Equality in Cleveland Public Schools: 1933-1973" (dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 2003), 180-181.

<sup>439</sup> Austin, "A Test Tube for Democracy," 30.

<sup>440</sup> "Statement to Cleveland Board of Education," Glenville Area Community Council, December 1945, 1. from NAACP – Cleveland, Ohio Records, 1924-1969, Container #36, Files Fre-Inn, Folder 4, Gen-Gle, WRHS (Hereafter referred to as NAACP Records, Gen-Gle).

<sup>441</sup> Austin, "A Test Tube for Democracy," 59, 66, 77, 102.

lobbied for assistance in providing recreation facilities at area schools, invited support from the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other local youth agencies, and coordinated these efforts with similar councils from other Cleveland neighborhoods.<sup>442</sup> The reason GACC leaders articulated for continuing work on these projects was “to insure the maximum development of persons physically, emotionally, and socially,” and to provide opportunities for families to “be drawn closer together through recreation.”<sup>443</sup> The Council framed the provision of recreation space as a contribution to the landscape of a healthy community. Yet, despite these efforts, acts of interracial youth violence at Sowinski Playground occasionally occurred throughout the rest of the 1940s and into the 1950s. While local mothers worried about the ongoing skirmishes, the fights did not garner significant attention from city leaders. Violence at Sowinski remained a largely local problem.

Such playground violence was certainly not limited to Sowinski, Cleveland’s eastside, or to only inter-racial conflict. In 1953 the *Plain Dealer* reported that at Cameron Playground located on the city’s west side there was a problem with “teenage gang warfare and rowdiness interfering with the organized play of smaller youngsters.” Located in an almost wholly white section of the city, the rival “gangs” of youth at the playground were most likely comprised of white members. Older boys used the playground space to take part in “gambling, smoking, vandalism and rough horseplay.” When local mothers confronted the boys about their behavior, the teens responded with “torrents of vile language.”<sup>444</sup> Across the city there was a conflict

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<sup>442</sup> “Progress Report,” Glenville Area Community Council, February 1946, 1-2; “Summary of the First Annual Report,” Glenville Area Community Council, June 11, 1946, 1; “Glenville Bulletin,” Vo. I, No. 3, December 6, 1946, 1-3; “Glenville Bulletin,” Vo. II, No. 3, December 30, 1947, 2-3; “Annual Report,” Glenville Area Community Council, June 1948, 2. NAACP Records, Gen-Gle, WRHS.

<sup>443</sup> “Glenville Bulletin,” Volume II, No. 3, December 30, 1947, 2-3, NAACP Records, Gen-Gl, WRHS.

<sup>444</sup> Robert J. Drake, “Toughs at Playgrounds Stir Westside Parents,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 10, 1953.

between the expectations of some mothers about the proper function of playground spaces as sites for constructive and supervised recreation, and some youth who saw playgrounds as opportunities to engage in unsupervised and unstructured activity away from the prying eyes of adults. Often, playground spaces offered the screen of foliage or were located at the ends of streets, making them some of the less visible public spaces on the city landscape available to young people. Therefore playgrounds were often where “street gangs” of youth did their fighting. Such battles were not limited to Cleveland, as historian Jim Barrett described playgrounds as serving a similar function in Chicago.<sup>445</sup>

What had been a local problem at Sowinski suddenly became front-page, citywide news in June 1963. Early that summer, skirmishes between black and white youth at Sowinski occurred with increasing frequency. In one incident, an African American man named Ellsworth Harpole stopped an interracial rock fight at the playground. The youth, black and white, then hurled rocks at Harpole’s car for his trouble.<sup>446</sup> Harpole was likely a familiar face to some of the rock-throwing boys. A community leader, he had recently retired as a vice principal of a local junior high school, and he headed the Cleveland Community Relations Board (CRB), a bi-racial organization charged with promoting racial justice in the city. Perhaps no episode better captured the disconnect between the efforts of city officials to address racial tensions in Cleveland and the lived experiences of youth, than that of a group of white and black boys hurling rocks at a retreating chair of the CRB. As an organization, the CRB had about as much success bringing about racial harmony in the city as Harpole had in stopping the fighting boys.

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<sup>445</sup> Jim Barrett, *The Irish Way*; see also Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 75-77.

<sup>446</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, Common Pleas Case #78915, The State of Ohio, County of Cuyahoga, In the Court of Common Pleas (Criminal Branch), 891, CAC, 616-617.

Harpole lived near Sowinski and had witnessed firsthand the escalating tensions between groups of young people at the park. In attempting to pinpoint the cause of this anger, he noted: “There’s no bone of contention, nothing you can put your finger on,” and then speculated if only the quarrelling youth could get to “know one another as individuals, not as stereotyped members of a group,” perhaps there would be hope for improved relations. His analysis did not meaningfully address the material inequalities experienced by black youth in the area such as poor schools, housing discrimination and high unemployment. The assessment also did not acknowledge the inadequate amount of public recreation space in the area that underpinned the fights between grade school and middle school boys at Sowinski.<sup>447</sup>

Harpole’s hope that the boys could get along if they just got to “know one another” was not to be realized. On Wednesday, June 12, 1963, after a series of skirmishes at the playground over the course of several days, a group of black youths attacked two white teens, an 18-year-old boy, Thomas Griffin, and a 15-year-old-girl. They allegedly beat and stabbed the boy and raped the girl. Both victims were hospitalized, and they recovered from their injuries. Public outrage broke out across the city, fueled by an incendiary local press that exaggerated the injuries of the white teens. By the next day, as many as 100 policemen combed the Glenville-Sowinski area around Rockefeller Park, going door to door in their search for suspects and stopping at local schools and parks to interview boys about the case. An African American member of the city’s

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<sup>447</sup> “Racial No Man’s Land: Rockefeller Park Saw Many Rock Fights,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 20, 1963, (quote); “Relations Chief Gave Tip on Case,” *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963.

juvenile police division played a prominent role in the investigation. One of the lead detectives on the case vowed: “We’ll get these six boys if it is the last thing we do.”<sup>448</sup>

His confidence did little to pacify the Cleveland public, whose members demanded arrests for the attack. By Thursday night, fistfights had broken out between white and black adults around the playground. Clevelanders besieged the police department, offering to assist the investigation, voicing concern, and clamoring for arrests. Police Chief Richard Wagner asked the public to remain calm, pleading with white residents to “stay at home and not complicate an already bad situation.”<sup>449</sup> Many did not heed his advice as rumors about the case flew, including fears about the recovery of the female victim.

By Friday, white impatience to find those who had attacked the couple could not be checked. That night, after a community baseball game held at the playground, the area around the park exploded into violence as large crowds of whites clashed with smaller groups of blacks. The *Press* described the scene: “Residents of the surrounding Polish community—muscular teen-agers, women with babies, fathers with small children, boys with dogs—flooded the grounds and streets.”<sup>450</sup> Crowds threw rocks and bricks at black motorists and pedestrians, and heavily damaged two black-owned stores and several cars. The police arrested more than twenty people and shut down a portion of Ansel Road near the park in an effort to quell the violence. Fourteen people were treated at local hospitals for various injuries. This report also indicated that at least according to one newspaper’s assessment, the white response after the Sowinski

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<sup>448</sup>“Police Vow Arrest of Six Rapists,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 14, 1963; “Sowinski Playground Attack is Solved,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 19, 1963; “Hunt 6 Youths Who Stabbed Boy and Assaulted Girl,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 13, 1963. State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 891, CAC.

<sup>449</sup> “Leave Work to Us, Chief Asks,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 14, 1963; See also, “Avoid Fight Area, Locher, Wagner Warn Outsiders,” *Cleveland Press*, June 15, 1963.

<sup>450</sup> Henry Gordon, “Pressures of Anger, Grief Build Up at Attack Scene,” *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963.

attack was led by nearby “Polish” residents. This was at least in part a case of ethnic-white Clevelanders reacting violently to a perceived black threat or encroachment into their Polish enclave.

The violence continued into the next night, and police arrested forty-six more men on charges including disorderly conduct, intoxication, and throwing bottles at moving vehicles. Almost half of those arrested were not yet 21, and the police also took five juveniles ages 14 to 16 into custody. Some of those arrested lived as little as a block or two away from the park, but many did not live in the immediate area at all and had traveled there from around the city, and even beyond municipal borders, to participate in the violence.<sup>451</sup> As the map of those arrested in figure 15 demonstrates, just a few days after the attack, due in large part to the media blitz surrounding the manhunt, Sowinski Playground had ceased to be just a local park; it had become a symbolic space on the landscape of race relations in Cleveland. Some participants in the violence travelled nearly nine miles to throw rocks at black motorists.

Black and white community leaders, alarmed by the news reports coming from the area surrounding the park, moved to stay the growing violence. On the Monday after the turbulent weekend, the City Council of Cleveland met to discuss the situation. The white councilman representing the Sowinski area put forward a resolution to ask the Governor and General Assembly of Ohio to make rape punishable by death. Black Councilmen renounced this proposal as a “slur on the community.” A bi-partisan council committee met for 90 minutes behind closed doors to draft a “milder resolution,” which unanimously passed, citing the “gravity and

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<sup>451</sup> “Autos Damaged, Business Set Afire by Bigots,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1963; “Race Violence Erupts on E. Side,; Arrest 16,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 15, 1963; “Police Move In on Tense East Side,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 16, 1963; “70 Police Roam Streets Around Rockefeller Park,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 17, 1963; “Names of 46 Arrested Listed,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 17, 1963.

seriousness” of the moment and urging “all the citizens of this community and the news media” to “practice restraint, calmness and reason.”<sup>452</sup>

The local media reported on this resolution as well as the pleas from Cleveland Mayor Locher for people to keep calm. Daily newspapers used the headlines in their editorial pages to warn the public “All in the City Must Help Keep the Peace” and to “Stay at Home,” admonishments that conveniently omitted references to the press’s role in inciting the racial violence in the first place. The *Press* urged church leaders as well to “do their utmost to restore and maintain peace,” and some clergymen took a prominent role in the effort to reestablish order. Two days after the attack, sixteen ministers “representing different faiths and races” met to discuss how to quell the violence. The ministers, including Paul Younger from CORE, issued a statement urging peace in the streets. Their statement also framed the events at Sowinski in terms of the ongoing Civil Rights struggle in the city, and included the assessment that “[r]acial tension has developed because minority groups, especially the Negro, do not have equal opportunity.” Two east side congregations with predominantly black memberships wrote checks of about \$100 each to the families of the injured white youth to help defer medical costs.<sup>453</sup>

As city officials and local church leaders attempted to respond to the Sowinski attack and the violence it ignited, the police arrested 17-year-old Robert Gould as a suspect. They then arrested a second boy, Charles Clark, age 16, on the basis of a tip from Ellsworth Harpole, who

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<sup>452</sup> “The City Record,” June 19, 1963, Volume 50, No. 2584, Res. No. 1221-63 and 1228-63, 16, 23, CPL; Donald Sabbath, “Council Moves to Halt Race Flare-Ups,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 18, 1963. The Council also considered offering a \$5,000 award for finding those who had committed the crime, but were unable to do so under the rules of the city charter.

<sup>453</sup> “Two Eastside Churches Assist Assault Victims,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1963; “Stay Home,” editorial, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 17, 1963; “Enlists Clergy: Mayor Pleads for Race Peace,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 15, 1963; “Ministers Call for Calm: Racial Balm Urged,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 15, 1963; “Avoid Fight Area, Locher, Wagner Warn Outsiders,” *Cleveland Press*, June 15, 1963; “All in City Must Help Keep Peace,” editorial, *Cleveland Press*, June 15, 1963.

named Clark as a participant in previous rock-throwing incidents at Sowinski. On June 18, the police brought four more young suspects into custody: Eugene Foose, 15; Timothy Stewart, 14; and brothers Jerome and Ben Martin, 16 and 13, respectively, on information gathered from Gould and Clark. The press labeled the boys the “Sowinski Six,” and reported regularly about the case as the suspects were formally charged on June 20, issued confessions to the police, and prepared for a juvenile court date set in late July.<sup>454</sup>

### **Cleveland Newspapers and Sowinski**

After the arrest, the newspapers referred to the boys under the headlines with the collective nickname of the “Sowinski Six.” Through this invocation of Sowinski, the boys became linked in the public imagination with the space of their alleged crime. Grouped together under a Polish surname, the African American youths’ individual identities were erased and a new criminal moniker became their public representation.

Yet, at the same time that the media provided the public shorthand for referring to the six arrested youth, the newspapers also reported detailed information about their families and backgrounds. Some of the suspects were relative newcomers to Cleveland or black youth of poor or working-class backgrounds, the very type of individuals that had long concerned the Glenville Area Community Council. Of the arrested boys, Charles Clark was the lead suspect. A 16-year-old orphan, Clark had lived in the foster care system since he was four years old, and

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<sup>454</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 891-892, 914-915, 937-938, 981, CAC; Bob Williams and Allen Howard, “Judge Vacations as ‘Sowinski 6’ Held in Solitary,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1963; Bob Williams, “Judge Woldman Assures Call Post ‘Sowinski Six’ Will Get A ‘Fair Trial,’” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 6, 1963. Many black Clevelanders did not think highly of Harpole for his role in naming potential suspects in the case. Later Harpole claimed he had been promised by the police that his name would be kept out of the matter in the press. By 1966 he was trying to leave his job as Community Relations Board, disillusioned with Mayor Lochers, disliked by many eastside Black Clevelanders and “catching hell from all sides.” “Interview with Mr. Ellsworth Harpole,” Commission on Civil Rights, 453, 10, File “Drafts of Interviews in Cleveland,” NAACP.



he had been placed with his current family in the Glenville neighborhood for ten years. Local youth knew him by the nickname “Superman,” because of his strength and participation in local street fights. He had trouble making good grades, while testing conducted by his school had labeled him “feeble minded.” Another suspect, Robert Gould, 17, lived with his single mother. At the time of the attack, Gould had resided in Cleveland for less than a year, having moved to the city from St. Louis and before that living in East St. Louis, Illinois and Brookfield, Mississippi. Gould sometimes picked up odd hours of employment at a local beverage store, and according to police occasionally spent the night in the store’s basement because of a strained relationship with his mother. Jerome Martin, the 16-year-old suspect who stood accused of the act of rape in the attack, came from a two-parent home in the Glenville neighborhood. His mother was a domestic worker, and Jerome occasionally worked nights with Gould at the beverage store, though he did not sleep there. The press characterized Jerome’s 13-year brother Benjamin, and the other two younger boys as accomplices to the older, rougher teens’ crime. According to the newspaper, both Eugene Foose and Timothy Stewart were “quiet boys” who made good grades at school.”<sup>455</sup> The fact that this coverage included information about their economic standing, with an emphasis on the poor class status of two of the alleged attackers, indicates that public perception of the detainees was shaped at the intersection of both the race and class of the young men held by the police. Age was also a factor, as the older boys were painted in the press as more of threat to white womanhood than their younger friends.

As the young defendants awaited trial in juvenile detention, Sowinski remained in the local headlines. Cleveland newspapers played a leading role in structuring public discourse in

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<sup>455</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 197-199, 429, 466, CAC; “Attack was 1<sup>st</sup> Slip for Most of Six Held,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 30, 1963.

the city. According to one scholarly analysis of Cleveland media in the early 1960s, local television journalism during this era was “in its infancy,” making newspapers the “primary public opinion makers” in the city. The *Cleveland Press* appeared on newsstands every afternoon, and its powerful editor, Louis Seltzer, was one of the leading public opinion makers in the city. The *Plain Dealer*, the leading morning daily, was also a prominent news voice. In the early 1960s, the *Press* staff included a total of three black reporters, while the *Plain Dealer* had only one, and the “newspapers in Cleveland were far behind the times in their attitude towards coverage of Negro news.”<sup>456</sup> In addition to the daily papers, many smaller, ethnic and local presses represented the interests of the city’s diverse population. The largest of these papers was the *Cleveland Call and Post*, the city’s black weekly.<sup>457</sup> The symbolic construction of Sowinski occurred largely through a debate in the pages of these papers—with the *Press* and *Plain Dealer* on one side and the *Call and Post* on the other.

In the mainstream press, this symbolic construction of Sowinski lay at the intersection of class, race and gender, and the playground became emblematic of public fears of *poor* and *black* and *male* youth violence in the city. The media contributed to Sowinski Park becoming such a symbol in three ways. First, the mainstream newspapers fanned the flames of hysteria in the sensationalized way they reported the Sowinski attack. Second, the press under-reported acts of white-on black-violence near the park, further solidifying a racialized picture of violence that cast black male youth as aggressors and whites as victims. Finally, the mainstream media characterized Sowinski as a symbol of fears about crime in *all* park and public space. The major newspapers did not have the only voice in this dialogue, and black community leaders, especially

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<sup>456</sup> Estelle Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 15, 12.

<sup>457</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 11.

through the *Call and Post*, attempted to redirect the troubling symbolism emerging around Sowinski by challenging the reporting tactics and editorial stances of the other papers. The newspapers competed to construct what Lefebvre has called the *representational space* of Sowinski Playground, the symbolic meaning that would be consumed by the reading public.

The sensationalized coverage of Sowinski in the newspapers, as well as the broadcast media, had escalated racial tensions after the attack. Both the *Press* and the *Plain Dealer* ran close-up photos of the male victim, Thomas Griffin, with a bruised and battered face, and exaggerated the extent of the female victim's injuries.<sup>458</sup> One local resident had heard these rumors, and told a *Press* reporter: "They say she is dying, I hear she may lose an eye...such a gentle girl, she goes to [C]ommunion every Sunday."<sup>459</sup> Such reporting characterized the victim as a religious girl participating in the sacraments of the church, a message that would have had great resonance with the large Catholic readership of the *Press*. Such characterizations heightened outrage over the crime. There was much criticism in the black community over this type of rumor-based reporting, and the *Call and Post* issued a pointed critique of the way the major papers presented the crimes against the female victim, noting the "wild rumors of brutal, sadistic acts" on the girl were "wholly unfounded." The black paper went on to emphatically renounce these exaggerations, stating: "They are not true. They did not happen. They are vicious lies," and blamed the other papers for moving "Cleveland to the verge of a full-scale

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<sup>458</sup> Henry Gordon, "Pressures of Anger, Grief Build Up at Attack Scene, *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963, quote; "Stabbed Boy Might Have Run; Hurt Fighting For Girl," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 15, 1963.

<sup>459</sup> *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963. Such irrational fear and reaction of a white population to a rape of a white female by a black male or males has a long history in the United States. For excellent scholarship on this manifestation of U.S. racism, see Gail Berman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics; African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 63-65, in which Collins traces the trope of black man as rapist to the post-slavery South.

racial war.”<sup>460</sup> To be sure, the *Call and Post*’s critique of the mainstream press’s exaggeration of the injuries had merit. The *Plain Dealer* first reported that the male victim had been “stabbed 14 times” in his back, but six days later the paper had to revise the report to speculate the wounds might have been caused by being “pinned against a wire fence in the park.”<sup>461</sup> The allegations of stabbing proved unfounded.

A radio station popular in the local black community, WABQ, hosted a panel to discuss the press coverage of Sowinski. Panelists included Dr. Kenneth Clement, president-elect of the National Black Medical Association; Harold Williams, executive secretary of the NAACP; and attorney Louis Stokes, chairman of the NAACP’s Legal Redress Committee. During the broadcast, Williams had this advice for listeners to the show: “We should continue to buy the local newspapers and take them back to the newspaper plants—in the same way we take contaminated meat back to the butcher.”<sup>462</sup> Stanley Tolliver, the African American attorney who headed CORE’s legal redress department, blamed the press for escalating tensions in the city and causing “the first riot in the city over the Sowinski Park incident.”<sup>463</sup> Despite these critiques, the mainstream press continued sensationalizing the case.

Perhaps one of the most inflammatory tactics employed by the mainstream media was revealing the names and addresses of the six youth in custody for the crime, which spurred

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<sup>460</sup> “Police Say, Tales of Park Attack All Lies,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29 1963.

<sup>461</sup> “Police Vow Arrest of Six Rapists,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 14, 1963; “Two More Youths Confess,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 20, 1963.

<sup>462</sup> “Panel Raps Press, PD for Park Attack Stories,” *Cleveland Press*, June 25, 1963 (quoted); “Negroes Hit Coverage of Sowinski Attack,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 25, 1963.

<sup>463</sup> Interview with Mr. Stanley Tolliver, From Roy Littlejohn, Assistant General Council, December 1, 1965, Box 10, File, Drafts of Interviews in Cleveland (memoranda), RG 453, Records of the Commission of Civil Rights NA.

harassing phone calls and threats against their families.<sup>464</sup> This angered many in Cleveland's black community, who also voiced displeasure at the police releasing the boys' information in the first place. One of the most important protections afforded by the juvenile justice system was the anonymity of the accused. The police and the press combined to strip the accused boys of this very thing.

Black frustration with the local media also stemmed from the fact that coverage of this one crime was disproportionate to the reporting of other, similarly sexualized assaults that took place in Cleveland that year. In 1963, there were 56 cases of "Rape and Assault" handled by the Cleveland Police—and none of them garnered the level of press attention generated by the "Sowinski Six." For example, when a white man allegedly raped an eight-year-old African-American girl later that summer, the story received scant mainstream press attention.<sup>465</sup>

This was not the only instance of the leading daily newspapers marginalizing coverage of crimes with African American victims. The *Call and Post* criticized the mainstream press for under reporting the ongoing incidents of white-on-black crime in the Sowinski area. One example of this type of criticism occurred on August 17, 1963, when the *Call and Post* ran a front-page story about a black youth named Jerry Tolbert, who had been badly beaten and whose bicycle had been stolen near the Sowinski Playground. Two white men had allegedly attacked the boy, causing severe bruising to his face and breaking some of his teeth. The *Call and Post* reported this incident as one instance of ongoing, racially motivated violence, a series of "little Sowinski" attacks that had taken place since mid-June. The paper criticized both the police and

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<sup>464</sup> Al Sweeney, "The Theory of Innocence Doesn't Apply," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1963.

<sup>465</sup> "Annual Report, Cleveland Police Department, 1963," 22, Cleveland Commission on Civil Rights, 453:12, file "Police Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio), NA; "Questions Police Intent," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 6, 1963, [Patricia] Kaye Stokes, letter to the editor; Bob Williams. "Vendor's Rape of Girl, 8, 'Blackout' Angers E. Siders, *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 3, 1963.

mainstream press for not investigating or reporting on the Tolbert attack with the same urgency that they had given to the crime against the white teens. The black newspaper ran a close-up photograph of the bruised face of young Tolbert, clearly echoing the earlier pictures of Thomas Griffin printed by the mainstream press. The message of the photo was clear: Black youth who were victims of crime deserved equal treatment from the justice system, as well as in the court of public opinion.<sup>466</sup> The black press presented Sowinski as a symbol of the unequal justice afforded to black young people in Cleveland, while the mainstream press presented Sowinski as a symbol of black youth criminality.

In covering Sowinski, the mainstream newspapers increasingly used language and imagery that moved the event away from a specific crime that occurred at one small playground to a symbol of the perceived dangers of urban park space throughout the city. The *Cleveland Press* in particular made the connection between Sowinski Playground and *all* park spaces, as its editorial page ran the headline “The Parks Must Be Safe.”<sup>467</sup> This move was most clearly seen in an editorial cartoon run by the *Press*, as seen in figure 16, which depicted a picture of a picnic table and a tree under the title of “No Man’s Land.” Posted on the tree was a welcome sign for Rockefeller Park, and the word “welcome” was crossed out to read “unsafe.” Rockefeller, Cleveland’s most celebrated park space and the flagship of the park system, had come to be portrayed as dangerous landscape of crime and a symbolic “no man’s land.” While the black City Councilors spent much of that summer squabbling over the potential location of an African

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<sup>466</sup> “Sowinski Park Beating Victim,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 1.

<sup>467</sup> “The Parks Must Be Safe,” editorial, *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963. This rhetorical shift in media coverage of parks also precipitated a steady decline in municipal funding for these spaces, a process detailed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. While multiple factors led to this funding decline, I argue that the rhetorical criminalization of urban park space played a role in municipal disinvestment in urban parks that led to their material decline in Cleveland during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

American Cultural Garden, Rockefeller Park as a whole became increasingly popularly perceived as a dangerous space.

By October, such symbolism had gained nationwide attention when the popular *McCall's* magazine published an article entitled "Fear Takes Over Our City Parks." Cleveland's Rockefeller Park, which included Sowinski Playground, was ranked as the second most feared park in the country after Morningside in New York City. White women made up the primary readership of *McCall's*, and the article portrayed urban parks as landscapes of peril for white womanhood; recent events in Cleveland fit neatly into this racialized narrative. The *McCall's* article declared: "A simple stroll through the neighborhood park is becoming a deadly gamble that fewer and fewer people dare to take." Later, the author of the article speculated that the danger at urban parks stemmed from "a loosening of manners and morals, due, among other things, to post war population shifts."<sup>468</sup> Without ever expressly referring to race, the article inferred that increasingly diverse cities were the reason for a national increase in urban park crime. The characterization of dangerous urban parks, which stood at the intersection of raced and gendered constructions of a spatialized criminalization, had gained national salience.

### **Sowinski, the Press, and the Cleveland Civil Rights Movement**

Through constructions presented in both the white and black Cleveland press, Sowinski became an important touchstone in local debates about youth, race, and crime and it even garnered national attention. The mainstream press also condescendingly invoked Sowinski as a potential threat to the success of the Cleveland Civil Rights Movement. This connection first occurred in the *Plain Dealer*, just two days after the attack, in an editorial entitled "A Special

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<sup>468</sup> "Fear Takes Over Our City Parks," *McCalls*, October 1963, 108, 111.

Responsibility for the Negro Community.” The editorial asserted that the newspaper generally did not believe “any ethnic or nationality group” should be expected to “police” all of its members, but went on to argue that the Sowinski attack should be treated as an “exception from that general rule” and that the “Negro community of Cleveland” had a duty to help with “getting into custody the hoodlums who brutally assaulted a young couple in Rockefeller Park.” The editorial reasoned that the Sowinski attack was likely to “inflame resistance to civil rights,” and that in order to avoid such consequences the black population must somehow help the police apprehend the suspects and “demonstrate a horror shared by the whole city.”<sup>469</sup> While the editorial stopped short of arguing that the Civil Rights Movement as a whole *should* be checked in Cleveland because of the alleged criminal action of a handful of black youth, the piece clearly implied that this *could* be an outcome of the incident. Based on the logic of this editorial, instead of the police and justice system taking responsibility for the apprehension of suspects for a specific crime as part of the due process of law, an undefined “Negro community” was expected to demonstrate its collective apology by helping to find those who had committed the crime. In this editorial, the events at one small, local public space had been expanded to include, and thus implicate, the city’s entire black population.

This editorial from the *Plain Dealer* elicited an immediate and strong public response, some in support and some in opposition of the paper’s position. The *Call and Post* led in this response, and fired off its own editorial, emphatically stating: “What happened is a law enforcement matter, pure and simple.” In the same issue, Al Sweeney, a popular *Call and Post* columnist, gave his opinion: “This unfortunate incident is being used by certain forces in the community to inflame a reaction against the leadership group of Negroes who are initiating a

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<sup>469</sup> “A Special Responsibility for the Negro Community,” editorial, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 14, 1963.



movement to end second-class treatment of the race in all segments of city life.”<sup>470</sup> Sweeney recognized that some Clevelanders would attempt to use Sowinski as an excuse to derail the local Civil Rights Movement. He also argued that city officials needed to address the unequal treatment black residents faced in the Cleveland justice system.

Several members of the public sent letters to the *Call and Post* supporting this rebuttal to the *Plain Dealer* editorial. Some of the leading black voices involved in the local justice system voiced their opinions. This included Perry B. Jackson. Jackson, an African American judge on Cleveland Court of Common Pleas, active member of the NAACP, and former head of the Central Area Community Council, who sent in his assessment: “No one has charged the entire white community of Mississippi with the shooting of Medgar Evers in the back.”<sup>471</sup> Some Cleveland residents also sent responses directly to the *Plain Dealer*. One white woman from the east side of the city asked the paper: “Had the situation been reversed, and a Negro couple attacked by a gang of white boys, would you have called the white community to do the same?”<sup>472</sup> The implied answer to her question was that the Cleveland black population was being held to a collective standard of culpability that white Clevelanders did not share for white-perpetrated crimes. One black man from the east side who wrote in refused to take “the smallest iota of blame or shame” for the attack, and instead listed the “environmental factor in the Negro

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<sup>470</sup> “Negro Community has No Special Responsibility in Assault Case,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1963; and All Sweeney, “City Desk: A Tragic Lack of Real Understanding,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1963.

<sup>471</sup> “Attorney Agrees,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 6, 1963, letter from D. Rudolph Henderson, Jr. Attorney at Law; “Entire Community’s Blame,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 13, 1963, Perry B. Jackson, Judge, Court of Common Pleas” (quoted).

<sup>472</sup> “Reader’s Say” Warner Jackson, Gene Reddich, and Albert Taborn *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 19, 1963; “A Job for Police” (quoted), Hazel Bjorge and “Asking for Trouble” Junatia T. Shorter, July 21, 1963, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

communities, the ghettos, the employment discrimination and lack of education opportunities” as contributing factors of the crime.<sup>473</sup>

Yet, while some decried the *Plain Dealer’s* premise of black community culpability, other black Clevelanders worried that the warnings penned in the editorial might prove prescient. One African American man living near the scene of the attack expressed his fear that “this terrible business has set race relations in Cleveland back 25 years.”<sup>474</sup> One letter sent to the *Call and Post* did indeed use Sowinski as an excuse to call into question the black struggle for civil rights in the city:

There are right now 7 colored punks loose in the city of Cleveland that should be lynched like they do in the South. You, and others who consider yourselves leaders in your colored community are doing anything to bring about the capture of these punks to justice and be punished? You are not doing a damn thing. Don’t you know, what these punks do will reflect on all the colored people in the country?<sup>475</sup>

In this statement, the anonymous letter writer asserted that the Sowinski case would “reflect” not only on black Cleveland, but on African Americans in the entire nation.

Others sent similarly angry letters to the president of the Cleveland branch of the NAACP. One white man from the Hough neighborhood charged: “The Negro Race, not community, must, repeat must bear the guilt... We keep our daughters inside at night, you know why, I hope.”<sup>476</sup> Again, in this letter not only African Americans living in Cleveland, but the

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<sup>473</sup> “Behind the Terrorism,” Cecil C. Whiting, Jr., *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 23, 1963.

<sup>474</sup> *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1963.

<sup>475</sup> “It’s Typical,” unsigned, *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 29, 1963.

<sup>476</sup> Letter to Mr. C. H. Holmes, NAACP, from Ben Ahwing, June 15, 1963, from NAACP – Cleveland, Ohio Records, 1924-1969, Container #65, Correspondence 1961-1964, WHRS, (Hereafter called NAACP Records, correspondence).

entire “Negro Race” was handed the guilt of Sowinski. Such letters went beyond even the dire warnings of the *Plain Dealer* editorial, and also reinforced the raced and gendered response to the Sowinski crime, casting white females as endangered by black males.

In a third example, one person clipped an editorial about the Sowinski case from the *Cleveland Press*, typed the following in the margins and sent it to the NAACP, drawing an explicit connection between the local Civil Rights Movement and the playground attack:

Don't do too much pushing and aggravate the whites for they are beginning to hate you and any laws on the books will be of no avail once the whites think they have enough...Your mob demonstrations, sit ins, die ins, chaining yourselves to the chairs in the state house and lying on the floor of the Governor's office. All of these performances are infantile and people with brains wouldn't do this. The ones who deserve better are the American Indians. So wake up and act like human beings instead of animals.<sup>477</sup>

In this note, the unidentified author referred to a direct action that took place in June 1963 at the State House and Governor's Mansion in Columbus, in which CORE activists from Cleveland (including Ruth Turner and Bruce Klunder) and other Ohio chapters, lobbied in support of a fair housing bill. Although the bill failed to pass, it marked one of the first times that Cleveland CORE had used civil disobedience tactics such as “loud protests, refusal to leave, and blocking entrances.”<sup>478</sup> The person who sent this message to the NAACP characterized these new tactics as “infantile” and both the protest and the Sowinski case were presented as justifications for white hatred of blacks. In this example, additionally, a direct connection between the local press's handling of the Sowinski case and individual responses by the public can be seen. This unnamed individual literally framed the words of his personal response to the attack around the

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<sup>477</sup> Unsigned letter, NAACP Records, correspondence, WHRS.

<sup>478</sup> Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 123-124.

words of a newspaper cutout. The press fanned the flames of Sowinski, and the public added fuel to the fire.

The largest black community organization in Cleveland, the NAACP, became the main target for such vitriol. Spokespersons for the association tried several strategies to address the tensions unleashed by the Sowinski case. On June 14, the organization issued a press release declaring NAACP officials as “deeply shocked by the heinous attack perpetrated against Thomas Griffin and his female companion,” and announced that the organization had established a fund “to be awarded to the person or persons supplying information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators of this act.”<sup>479</sup> Two African American city councilors, including Glenville representative Leo Jackson, publicly donated a total of \$125 to the fund.<sup>480</sup> This press release by the NAACP in some ways met the demands of the controversial *Plain Dealer* editorial issued that same day: It at least seemingly alluded to black community responsibility for catching those who committed the crime by offering a reward, as well as expressed “horror” at the crime, as demanded by the newspaper. However, in a subsequent statement issued to the *Plain Dealer*, NAACP officials clarified their position further, asserting “we fully understand that the Negro community cannot bear group guilt for the irresponsible acts of a few.”<sup>481</sup> The NAACP attempted, clumsily, to navigate the fraught symbolism of Sowinski, recognizing the power of such a symbol in public imagination.

The press played a powerful role in constructing public perceptions of the small playground and the crime that had occurred there. But everyday people who picked up a rock to

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<sup>479</sup> Press Release, June 14, 1963 from NAACP – Cleveland, Ohio Records, 1924-1969, WRHS.

<sup>480</sup> “Few Leads Found to Girl’s Attackers,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 15, 1963.

<sup>481</sup> “NAACP Deplores Attack,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 14, 1963.

throw at a passing motorist, or a pen to write a letter to the local paper, also contributed to the popular understanding of the space. Both the newspapers and the public awaited the trial of the six arrested boys. Violent outbreaks between groups of white and black youth continued in the Sowinski area, and the Cleveland Police Department declared all public playgrounds closed at dark. The tense summer continued.<sup>482</sup>

### **The “Sowinski Six” Go to Trial**

While the newspapers played the most prominent role in constructing the symbolism of Sowinski, the court proceedings surrounding the case also contributed to popular symbolisms of this space. The Sowinski trial started on July 22, 1963, and it became the longest juvenile hearing in Cleveland history up to that time. All six of the youth were tried together in juvenile court, but with different attorneys representing them. Most of the boys had their cases handled by public defenders, though a prominent local African American attorney, Norman S. Minor, shown in a photograph in figure 17, defended the brothers Jerome and Ben Martin. Minor lived in the Glenville neighborhood, and his involvement brought an impressive resume to the trial. He had been named the first African American assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor in 1932, handling more than 5,000 cases for the office before retiring to private practice in 1948. Soon, another rising African American star in Cleveland’s legal field joined Minor’s defense team. Louis Stokes, the chairman of the NAACP’s Legal Redress Committee and the brother of popular local politician Carl Stokes, took the brothers’ case *pro bono*. The involvement of arguably the two most prominent black lawyers in Cleveland demonstrated the importance of this case to the local black community.

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<sup>482</sup> Bob Williams, “Mass Hearing Set July 22, Bail Possible,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 6, 1963.

Not only were two defense attorneys at the juvenile trial prominent public figures, but so too was the presiding judge. During his tenure, Juvenile Court Judge Albert Woldman was one of the foremost public authorities on the topic of juvenile delinquency in Cleveland and all of Ohio. He had crisscrossed the state giving radio addresses and regular speeches to local civic groups about his opinions on the causes of youth behavioral problems. In these talks, Woldman attempted to identify the reasons for the rise in juvenile crime in Cleveland, and he developed a long list of factors he saw as contributing to this trend: a lack of proper leadership by parents, a failure of the schools, a need for more positive probation programs, and the impact of cultural media such as radio, movies, and comic books. Woldman's speeches on this topic demonstrated that discursive constructions of the problem of urban youth violence did not start with Sowinski, but rather had long inhabited public attention. Yet, the Sowinski Playground attack and subsequent trial helped move public perception from one of a general problem of youth delinquency to one of *black male* youth violence. Woldman's involvement in the case drew both praise and criticism. Although one of his colleagues lauded him for his "King Solomon-like" oversight of the case, others were less pleased with Woldman's decisions. During and after the long trial, the judge received several death threats.<sup>483</sup>

Attorney Minor was among those displeased with Woldman's handling of the case, and he tried to move the trial to adult court. Minor attempted to get the case moved to Common Pleas Court for a couple of reasons. One key protection for youth in juvenile court was supposed to be the anonymity of the proceedings. However, the police and press had already violated this

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<sup>483</sup>“WXEL Radio Address, October 25, 1954; “Delinquent Youth in a Delinquent World,” Address Before the Ohio Municipal League,” September 8, 1959, Akron Ohio, Letter from Bernar B. Easton, August 5, 1963, Woldman Papers, the Albert A. Woldman Papers 1918-1969, Container 2, Folder 24, WRHS, “Woldman Gets Death Threats,” *Cleveland Press*, December 20, 1963; Williams. “Sowinski Six Lawyers Battle to Take Case from Woldman,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1963.

protection, meaning the defendants had already lost the benefit of having their case heard in Woldman's courtroom. Minor also reasoned that the criminal court would throw out the defendants' signed confessions, which the youths claimed were coerced. In the "semi-formal" Juvenile Court, the decision to include the confessions rested solely with Judge Woldman. At the time of the Sowinski case, constitutional rights granted to adults in criminal court did not extend to the juvenile system. The reasoning behind this was that the rehabilitative aim of juvenile justice should allow for more leeway than criminal proceedings. Moreover, juvenile court included no safeguards against self-incrimination. In 1958, Judge Woldman had presided over a landmark case, *Shardell v. State*, which had set the precedent for the admissibility of youth self-incrimination in juvenile hearings in Ohio.<sup>484</sup> This same judge now would decide whether to admit the Sowinski defendants' confessions.

At juvenile court, attorneys from both sides debated the validity of the confessions. Multiple alibi witnesses stepped up to testify for the defendants, their information sometimes contradicting one another as well as the youths' signed statements about the attack. The hearing wore on for thirteen days. Finally, Judge Woldman handed down a bench decision that the three older boys, Jerome Martin, Charles Clark, and Robert Gould, would face adult charges before the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas. He sent the three younger defendants home pending psychiatric evaluations that could result in time at the juvenile detention facility, the Boys Industrial School. The judge warned the three released boys to stay away from Sowinski Playground. In making this decision, Woldman ruled that he believed that while the three

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<sup>484</sup> Bob Williams, "Sowinski Six Lawyers Battle to Take Case from Woldman," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1963; "Sowinski 6 Case Confuses Woldman," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 3, 1963; Susan A. Burns, "Is Ohio Juvenile Justice Still Serving Its Purpose?" *Akron Law Review* (Volume 27, 1993-1994), 4, 23; "Rights and Rehabilitation in the Juvenile Courts," *Columbia Law Review* (Volume 67, No. 2, February, 1967), 281-341, especially 336.

younger boys were likely in the park during the attack, they had not actively participated. In his ruling, Judge Woldman allowed the controversial confessions, but openly questioned whether they would hold up in criminal court.<sup>485</sup>

On Wednesday, November 6, 1963, the adult trial of the three remaining defendants began, with each young man facing six counts ranging from rape to aggravated assault. Minor and Stokes remained as counsel for Jerome Martin and again public defenders represented the other two youth in a joint trial. For the attorney representing Charles Clark, it was his first case as public defender. This second trial covered much of the same ground as the earlier juvenile case, including a lengthy preliminary hearing over the confessions' admissibility as evidence. The tactics used by police to get the boys' confessions became the focal point of the legal motions filed by the defense before the trial, as well as a key issue in the ongoing public debate in the press about the case. According to the defense, police initially denied the boys' parents and guardians access to their sons when they tried to visit them in juvenile detention after the arrests. This separation was used as leverage to gain confessions, as Jerome Martin illustrated when he testified that a detective told him "he couldn't go home until he made a statement."

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<sup>485</sup> Bob Williams, "Sowinski Six Lawyers Battle to Take Case from Woldman," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 20, 1963; Bob Williams, "Cop 'Wanted to Shoot Me,' Sowinski Defendant Reports," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 27, 1963; "Sowinski 6 Case Confuses Woldman," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 3, 1963; Bob Williams, "Three of Sowinski Six Free, Three Face Trial," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 10, 1963; "Judge Rules Today on Six Confessions," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 23, 1963; "Youth Says Threats Made Him Confess," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 24, 1963; "Attack Case Ruling is Expected Today," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 25, 1963; "Act to Put Attack Case 6 on Stand," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 30, 1963; "Park Attack Story Told By Court Aide," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 31, 1963; William C. Barnard, "2 Boys Call Sowinski Statements 'Lies'," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 2, 1963; William C. Barnard, "Hits Slurs on Police In Sowinski Attack," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 3, 1963; William C. Barnard, "3 Face Jury in Sowinski Assault Case," August 6, 1963; "Statements in Park Case Explained," *Cleveland Press*, July 23, 1963; "Confession Threats Are Denied," *Cleveland Press*, July 24, 1963; "Attack Case Motions Fail to Stop Hearings," *Cleveland Press*, July 25, 1963; "More Give Alibi for 6 in Attack," *Cleveland Press*, July 26, 1963; "Testifies Alibi Stories Conflict in Park Case," *Cleveland Press*, July 29, 1963; "Sowinski Gang Assault Case Leaves Judge 'Sorely Confused,'" *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1963; "Alibis in Attack Case Hit by 2 Witnesses," *Cleveland Press*, July 31, 1963; "Investigator Again Refutes Park Alibis," *Cleveland Press*, August 1, 1963; "Park Attack Ruling Studied by Woldman," *Cleveland Press*, August 3, 1963; "Attack Case Confessions Still Issue," *Cleveland Press*, August 6, 1963.



Martin recounted how the police had kept him in a small room during his confinement, even though they knew the boy had an extreme fear of enclosed spaces since being accidentally locked in a small room when he was younger. Martin also stated that a detective threatened him saying: “I’ll knock your damn head through that wall,” while Gould reported being physically struck by a police officer during his stay. Clark testified that the police kept him in a room with a light burning even at night until he confessed. None of the boys had legal counsel when they agreed to provide taped confessions. All of them reported learning details of the case, which they used in their confessions, from local media and neighborhood conversations heard prior to their arrests. Two separate school-administered tests taken two years before the crime had labeled Clark as “feeble minded” with a “tendency to express himself in grandiose ideas” and “difficulty distinguishing at times between what he thought was real and what was real.” Clark was the first of the boys to confess, and the police used his signed testimony to encourage the other boys to follow suit. There were also considerable discrepancies between what was recorded on the Martin tape and the typed transcripts of that confession. Finally, after three weeks of legal wrangling over the taped confessions, Judge Parrino, who presided over the criminal trial, ruled out their admissibility.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, CAC, The entire first three volumes of the fifteen volume court proceedings deal with testimony about how the confessions were obtained. Specific pages of interest include, pages 11-12 (Martin’s quote), 73 (Gould’s quote), 156-157 (testimony concerning Clark’s school administered aptitude tests, which included the Wexler Intelligence Scale for Children, the Rorschach, Thematic Apperception Test), and 17-25, 161-162, 434-435 (parent’s being denied right to see their children). Bob Williams, “Tape Confession” Snarls Trial of Sowinski Youth,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, “Sowinski “Tape Confessions,” Edited, Charges Attorney Minor,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 23, 1963; “Sowinski Witnesses Testify,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 30, 1963; Bob Williams, “Sowinski Confessions Ruled Out,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 7, 1963; “3 Youths Go on Trial in Sowinski Attack,” November 6, 1963; “Youth Says Threats Made Him Confess,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 24, 1963; William C. Barnard, “Two Boys Call Sowinski Statements ‘Lies’” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 2, 1963. Parrino based his decision on the admissibility of the confessions on the fact that “Parents were denied the privilege of seeing their children before statements were taken from them,” citing Supreme Court case *Gallegos v Colorado* (1962) in his decision.

The case moved forward despite the removal of these confessions. The empanelled jury included eight white men, three white women, and one black man.<sup>487</sup> Although the taped confessions had been omitted, Judge Parrino allowed police to testify that they had heard oral confessions by Clark and Gould. The prosecution presented no material evidence, no weapon, and no witnesses to the crime. The male victim of the crime positively identified one of the three defendants, Charles Clark, from the stand. The female victim, who had said she would not be able to recognize any of the attackers during the investigation and juvenile trial, changed her mind and identified Clark and Gould. Neither could place Jerome Martin at the scene, though police postulated that he had been the one to commit the act of rape.<sup>488</sup>

The defense presented an alibi witness for Martin and Gould. An African American woman, Barbara Doyle, testified that the two boys had been at work at the Parkgate Beverage Store during the time of the attack. In the course of cross-examination, the prosecution sought to undermine Doyle's reputation. Prosecutors brought up the fact that Doyle had had children out of wedlock; they also noted that she had applied for welfare relief a week after the attack, and in her application claimed that she did not have employment despite her work at the beverage store.<sup>489</sup> In his closing arguments, Minor addressed Doyle's treatment by the prosecution while on the stand:

Mrs. Doyle, who is to be hung and quartered and castigated and thrown out of society and branded as nothing, because the motherless kids that she has and without a father, because she had the anonymity and the shame of having lived with

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<sup>487</sup> Bob Williams "Sowinski Confessions Ruled Out," *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 7, 1963.

<sup>488</sup> "1 Identified at Sowinski Attack Trial," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 4, 1963; "Girl Identifies 2 as Sowinski Attackers," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 5, 1963; "2 Say Boys Confessed Orally," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 6, 1963; "Wasn't There Says Sowinski Case Defendant," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 14, 1963.

<sup>489</sup> "Defense Case Begun in Sowinski Attack," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 7, 1963.

a man without benefit of clergy and as a kid bore him illegitimate children—she should be hanged and quartered, should she, and her mouth be made just the spitting place for lies to come...<sup>490</sup>

Minor's hyperbolic language hit upon an important point, which was that Doyle's gendered status as an unwed mother and her class status as a relief recipient would influence the jury's assessment of her overall credibility.

Indeed, the familial and economic status of the accused, as well as witnesses, played an important role in the trial. Attorneys from both sides of the aisle repeatedly alluded to the class status of the defendants, discussing their family backgrounds and highlighting the fact that Gould and Martin occasionally worked at a local beverage store for money. The defense tried to frame their families' lack of financial resources as an impediment to accessing justice; the prosecution, in turn, tied their poverty to uncontrolled, deviant behavior.<sup>491</sup> Finally, each side presented closing arguments. Attorney Minor made his case for the acquittal of Jerome Martin, and implored the jury:

Wouldn't it be an awful thing for a kid like Jerome, who's already got three strikes against him—if you don't believe it, examine the story, his answers, in the filthy underwear he wears—don't hang around his neck a millstone of guilt that has not been proved. At best, he's got a tough way to go.<sup>492</sup>

The prosecutor's closing remarks rejected this idea of economic status being a “strike against” the accused and argued:

And we ask you to deliberate this matter without any sympathy, any bias or prejudice of any kind, just on the facts, and don't be concerned about whether the

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<sup>490</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 3844, CAC, Attorney Minors closing arguments for the case of Jerome Martin.

<sup>491</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, references to economic and familial status of the youth appear throughout the trial transcripts. See especially, 29-43, 62-63, 233, 429, 3848, 3880-3881, CAC.

<sup>492</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 3848, CAC.

boys are poor and they did this because they are poor...I don't care how poor or how rich you are, you have no right to do the things that these boys did down in the park, and the evidence is clear that they did it, so don't be moved by the fact the he is so poor that he didn't have but one pair of khakis.<sup>493</sup>

In a trial for rape and assault, some of the last words presented in the cases concerned a defendant's quality of underwear and pants. The alleged actions of the youth were not the only thing on trial that day; the intersection of their race and class, and whether such youth represented a danger to the community, also figured in the courtroom. After six weeks, the trial drew to a close. Finally, on December 19, at one in the morning, the jury returned their verdict: Each defendant was found guilty on five counts, and they were sentenced to terms ranging from four to forty years in prison. The defense lawyers filed an appeal to the decision, but a new hearing was not granted.<sup>494</sup>

As they had during the lead up to the trial, the white and black press had very different interpretations of the handling of the case by the justice system. The case presented by the defense team in the courtroom contributed to the black paper's framing of the meaning of Sowinski. In its coverage of the hearings, the *Call and Post* referred to the youths' confessions in quotations, indicating doubt about the legitimacy of the statements.<sup>495</sup> When the jury handed down the guilty verdict, the *Call and Post* hypothesized that although jurists had been instructed to disregard the formal confessions, verbal reports from the police had likely swayed their

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<sup>493</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 3880-3881, CAC.

<sup>494</sup> State of Ohio vs. Robert Gould, Charles Clark, and Jerome Martin, 3968 and 3982, CAC; The boys being found guilty on five counts represents the maximum number of charges that could have been brought in against them, because the first and second charges, having to do with the rape, were mutually exclusive; John Nussbaum "3 Sowinski Defendants Convicted," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 19, 1963; "Convict 3 Youths in Sowinski Attack," *Cleveland Press*, December 19, 1963.

<sup>495</sup> "Sowinski 'Taped Confessions' Edited, Charges Attorney Minor," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 23 and "Sowinski Witnesses Testify," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 30, 1963.

opinions.<sup>496</sup> The black paper also questioned the truthfulness of the police more generally, noting that one of the defense attorneys in the case had stated: “A policeman’s badge doesn’t make his mouth a fountain of truth.”<sup>497</sup> The *Call and Post* framed the Sowinski trial as another example of a miscarriage of justice for black Cleveland residents due to inappropriate police tactics—an issue that had increasingly become a focus for local Civil Rights organizing, especially by CORE, in the early 1960s.

The black newspaper also framed Sowinski in relationship to the violence black people faced in the United States more broadly. In its reflective review of the year 1963, the paper focused the June section on the slaying of Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers. Then the *Call and Post* made the following connection between national and local events, comparing Evers murder to:

A bit of ugliness paralleled in Cleveland when mobs of white citizens began to attack Negro motorists because of the alleged Sowinski park rape and assault. Negro citizens told that white policemen stood by and did nothing as groups of white youths stoned Negro cars.<sup>498</sup>

In making this connection between the Evers slaying and the events around Sowinski, the *Call and Post* year-in-review demonstrated to its readers that violence and injustice for African Americans in the United States was not something relegated to the South—it was increasingly a reality of black life in Cleveland.

The white press’s commentary of the police and court handling of the case struck a much different tone. After the initial arrest of the six boys, the *Plain Dealer* printed an editorial titled

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<sup>496</sup> “To Appeal Sowinski Decision,” *Cleveland Call and Post* December 28, 1963.

<sup>497</sup> Bob Williams, “Jury Wrangles With Sowinski Case,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 21, 1963.

<sup>498</sup> “June,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 4, 1964.

“A Note of Gratitude,” opining: “To the city’s competent Police Department much is owed for the intelligent and relentless work that went into the capture of the gang responsible for the sickening crime in Rockefeller Park.”<sup>499</sup> In this editorial, the *Plain Dealer* not only lauded the police efforts, but the paper also assumed the guilt of the suspects even before the opening arguments of the case began in court. When the jury rendered its guilty verdict, the newspaper’s editorial staff declared it “A Case Well Handled,” complimenting the “way the police force and allied agencies of the law” resolved the attack.<sup>500</sup> The perspective of the *Plain Dealer* stood markedly apart from the interpretation of the case presented in the black press. Both of these interpretations added to the two divergent meanings of Sowinski in Cleveland’s popular discourse.

## Conclusion

After the trial, the youth went to prison and their names and lives fell out of public view. Yet, the symbol of Sowinski persisted in the public imagination of Cleveland as a turning point in the history of that city. Sowinski Playground became an enduring representation of black youth crime, a symbol of a city beginning to take a wrong turn, and a marker of the decline of a once proud urban center. In a popular history of Cleveland written by Philip Porter, a long-time newspaper man in the city, he identified 1963, the year of Sowinski, as the moment when Cleveland began to go “Downhill all the Way.” Porter wrote: “The first sign of big trouble came when gangs of black kids began running through streets...”<sup>501</sup> This retelling of that violent

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<sup>499</sup> *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 19, 1963.

<sup>500</sup> “A Note of Gratitude,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 20, 1963.

<sup>501</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 227-232.

summer erased the tangle of interracial youth violence and cast black youth as the sole perpetrators of criminal activity. This version of historical memory has had considerable traction in the city, and it is a narrative that began with newspaper accounts immediately following the Sowinski crime.

This casting of black youth as criminals “running through the streets” had consequences. Black youth, especially boys, became subjected to increased police scrutiny. Public parks and playgrounds in Cleveland became heavily policed spaces. The dusk closing time implemented at playgrounds after the attack continued into 1964, and Police Chief Wagner instructed his patrols to visit playgrounds hourly to “check out” any “undesirable persons.”<sup>502</sup> This was certainly not the first time that city officials had responded to black-on-white crime by increasing patrols at city parks. As far back as 1914, when a black man allegedly robbed and attacked a white woman in the suburb of East Cleveland, newspapers had stirred public outcry and Cleveland police had randomly detained black men who were in parks during evening hours until a suspect had been apprehended.<sup>503</sup> Police Chief Wagner revived this type of tactic with his edict, making black male youth the target of his sweeps. This type of mandate to investigate undefined “undesirable persons” gave police considerable leeway in how they conducted their playground patrols. In a city where the local press had actively represented young black men as potential criminals, the result was an increased police targeting of black teens. In 1960, African Americans accounted for 48 percent of the arrests of juvenile boys in Cleveland. By 1964, that number had escalated to 61 percent.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> “Police Chief Urges Playground Patrol,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 27, 1964.

<sup>503</sup> Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 431-432.

<sup>504</sup> “Annual Report of Cleveland Police Department, 1964,” 25, 453, Box 12, File “Police-Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio (publications and reports)” NA.

During and after the Sowinski trial, the city did little to address the racial tensions and lack of recreation opportunities on the city's east side. The codification of black youth as criminals cast these children as problems for the city to manage instead of citizens who could claim and demand equal access to city services. The late 1960s ushered in a period of decline in Cleveland's public recreation infrastructure. In urban centers across the United States during the mid-twentieth century, the criminalization of black youth precipitated state disinvestment in public infrastructure in black neighborhoods. Sowinski was but one example of a national trend of coding certain urban areas as dangerous, black-racialized spaces.<sup>505</sup>

This trend reverberated throughout the U.S. urban landscape over the next several decades. In perhaps the most famous example, five youth of color in 1989 were accused and convicted of raping a young white woman in New York City's Central Park. The boys were labeled in headlines across the country as the "Central Park Five," echoing the label of "Sowinski Six" used in the 1960s Cleveland case. The Central Park case sparked national outrage, and the police described the event with the word "wilding," evoking animalistic savagery to describe the boys' alleged crime, and characterizing urban youth as out of control and urban landscapes as dangerous, disordered spaces. The convicted youth did not in fact commit the crime and were finally exonerated in 2002 when another man's confession was corroborated by DNA evidence. Describing this case, before the convictions were overturned, black feminist theorist bell hooks explained:

Images of black men as rapists, as dangerous menaces to society, have been sensational currency for some time. The obsessive media focus on these representations is political. The role it plays in the maintenance of racist domination is to convince the public that black men are a dangerous threat who must be controlled by any means necessary, including annihilation. This is the

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<sup>505</sup> Jennifer Tilton, *Dangered or Endangered? Race and the Politics of Youth in Urban America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), introduction.



cultural backdrop shaping media response to the Central Park rape case, and the media has played a major role in shaping public response.<sup>506</sup>

The stakes for young black men in the media's criminalization of urban park spaces is clear in hooks' analysis.

Hooks also explained that there are important stakes for black women in such media coverage. While the media sensationalized crimes against white women, crimes against black women's bodies received scant attention. Hooks argues: "We desperately need to explore and understand the connections between racism and sexism."<sup>507</sup> Only then can the "annihilation" of black men and the erasure of black women, which occurred and continues to occur across urban landscapes, be meaningfully addressed. Historians can play a role in uncovering the "connections between racism and sexism" by examining how these connections were constructed around particular moments and events, uncovering and mapping their history on urban vernacular landscapes. In Cleveland, the Sowinski case stood as such a key moment in the criminalization of the urban landscape, and in particular park spaces. Disinvestment and increased policing of urban parks followed in its wake.

Increased policing and public disinvestment of black neighborhoods were not the only responses to Sowinski, however. In the absence of city support, black activists organized to meet the needs of their youth. In 1964, local black activist Lewis Robinson founded a community-run recreation center specifically designed for black teens. This recreation center is the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>506</sup> bell hooks, "Reflections on Race and Sex," in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1990), 61.

<sup>507</sup> hooks, "Reflections on Race and Sex," 63.

## CHAPTER SIX: RACE, RECREATION, AND RIFLES: THE JOMO “FREEDOM” KENYATTA HOUSE

In 1964, a small group of African American men established a new kind of youth recreation center on the city’s east side—the Jomo “Freedom” Kenyatta House. Born out of frustration with the lack of recreation opportunities for black young people, and the increased city policing of black teens following the Sowinski incident, the space was developed specifically for black youth, particularly teenaged boys. Community-funded and community-run, this new center offered an alternative to the city-managed recreation structure. Lewis Robinson, a black activist and founder of the United Freedom Fighters (UFF), led the effort to create the new center. He was joined by Albert Ware and Harlell Jones, the latter of whom would become one of the leading voices of the Black Power Movement in the city.

At the entrance of the storefront recreation center, the founders hung two portraits. The first was of the recently assassinated president John F. Kennedy. The second was of Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta, who had helped bring Kenya independence from colonization and had been elected as the country’s prime minister in 1963 and then president in 1964. The two portraits of Kennedy and Kenyatta visually represented the transitional position of this recreation space for the City of Cleveland, for the J”F”K House came to symbolize and help facilitate a transition between the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the city. At J”F”K, the paintings of the popular liberal president and revolutionary African leader hung side by side. Below the paintings, center visitors discussed and practiced a move from a liberal to black revolutionary local politics. Yet, the J”F”K House became a short-lived and controversial recreation space on the black Cleveland landscape.

Building on the theoretical groundwork of Henri Lefebvre, cultural geographer Don Mitchell has argued that social movements must have *space* to develop. In describing the Free

Speech Movement in 1960s Berkeley, California, Mitchell argued: “[P]ublic space was crucial after all, it was only through control over that space that political action could expand.”<sup>508</sup>

Having the space to come together, share ideas, develop ideology, and publicly represent themselves as a part of the city’s cultural landscape was a crucial component to the development of Black Power in Cleveland, and in urban centers throughout the nation. The argument of this chapter is that the J“F”K House served as one pivotal space for the development of a proto-Black Power ideology in Cleveland. It functioned as what Aldon Morris has described as a “local movement center: “a social organization within the community of a subordinate group, which mobilizes, organizes and coordinates the common end of that subordinate group.”<sup>509</sup> J“F”K became a place where young people could come together, talk about issues of local racial oppression, plan strategies to address those issues, and meet leaders from other organizations in Cleveland and beyond.

In making this argument, this chapter traces how the J“F”K House developed out of the conflict and repression surrounding the June 1963 attack at Sowinski Playground.<sup>510</sup> When six African American youth were accused of attacking two white teenagers, the City of Cleveland teetered on the edge of a race riot. In the aftermath of the attack, and during the course of the trial, the local press facilitated a public perception of the city’s parks as dangerous, racialized landscapes of crime, and black young men became increasingly marked as criminals passing through these landscapes. The east side of Cleveland simmered with escalating tensions between black and ethnic white neighborhoods, and between the police and many of the city’s young

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<sup>508</sup> Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 100.

<sup>509</sup> Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 40.

<sup>510</sup> Sowinski Playground is the subject of the previous chapter of this dissertation.

black residents. The men who founded the J“F”K House did so in part to address these tensions, and to provide a healthy and inviting space for black youth to socialize free from confrontations with their white neighbors or police who patrolled public recreation spaces, as well as a haven from public disinvestment in park spaces.

This chapter also argues that the J“F”K House’s role in facilitating the beginnings of a Black Power politics led the center to become embroiled in local controversy. When the 1966 Hough rebellion rocked the city, J“F”K and its founders were burdened with the blame for inciting the violence. The city forced the permanent closure of J“F”K, less than three years after its doors first opened. This chapter examines J“F”K as a case study of the importance and tenuous nature of gathering spaces, including recreation spaces, for the formation of revolutionary social movements and as a means of black community self-defense.

Recent scholarship has sought to unpack the origins and unifying themes of Black Power, a complex and multi-faceted social movement. Whereas previous scholarship has largely treated Black Power as the chaotic declension of the Civil Rights Movement, these new works have demonstrated how Black Power emerged as a distinct social movement with its own leaders, organizations, framing discourses and symbols, strategies and ideological approaches to addressing black oppression.<sup>511</sup> The scholarship points to the beginning of Black Power with Stokely Carmichael’s invoking of the term in June 1966. According to Peniel E. Joseph, one of the leaders in Black Power Studies: “Black Power activists trumpeted a militant race consciousness that placed black identity as the soul of a new radicalism.”<sup>512</sup> This chapter argues

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<sup>511</sup> For a synopsis of the scholarly debates around the relationship between the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, see Cha-Jua Sundiata Keita and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Spring 2007).

<sup>512</sup> Peniel Joseph, ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights Black Power Era* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis: New York), 2006, 3.

that this “militant race consciousness” manifested itself locally as well as nationally, and that for this to occur it needed space to grow and develop. In Cleveland, the J“F”K House provided room for this very growth.<sup>513</sup>

Thus the J“F”K became a ‘proto’ Black Power space—‘proto’ because it was a space where young people and activists engaged a set of ideas not fully formed. It was a space where viewpoints coalesced, discussions were held, and a later movement was generated. These young activists wrestled with ideas that had long been developing in Cleveland and across the United States, and that tapped into a Black Nationalist tradition. According to political theorist Robert C. Smith, Black Nationalist ideology can be traced back at least as far back as black abolitionism in the nineteenth century, and it is marked by four tenants. First, Black Nationalism recognizes white oppression of African Americans and it locates the cause of that oppression in racism. It celebrates “the persistence of group traits that distinguish Africans from others,” and promotes a pan-African consciousness. Finally, Black Nationalist ideology posits that the challenge to oppression must come from a black “group self reliance and unity.” The answer to white oppression lies not in working with the white power structure to enact change, but rather in pursuing self-determination and sovereignty. These tenets aptly described the type of emergent ideology that Robinson and his fellow activists embraced. In 1964, they moved to form a new

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<sup>513</sup> Some notable scholarship on the Black Power Movement includes: Peniel Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006); James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Jean F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North*, chapters 6-11; Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), Part IV; Self, *American Babylon*; and, Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

space on the Cleveland landscape where these ideas could flourish in a Black Power ideology that would help transform the movement later that decade.<sup>514</sup>

### **Black Cleveland and the Transition to a Proto-Black Power Ideology, 1963-1966**

In a city residentially segregated by race, in the early 1960s more than 98 percent of the city's black residents lived in several neighborhoods on the east side. It was here in the midst of these neighborhoods that J“F”K was founded. Historian Robert O. Self has argued that it is important to consider how local conditions and events helped shape the Black Power Movement. In his book, *American Babylon*, Self argued that the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense began in Oakland because the “[i]ntellectual, social, and physical geographies intersected here in powerful combination.”<sup>515</sup> In the early 1960s Cleveland's east side similarly became an intellectual location for the exchange of ideas about black self-determination and armed self-defense, as national figures and local intellectuals met, talked, and shared their thoughts on these topics. Local social geographies made the east side the location of the majority of significant cultural and community institutions in Cleveland's black community. Located between two of the largest black enclaves in the city, Hough and Glenville, J“F”K stood at the heart of this black social geography. Finally, the city's physical geography was sharply shaped by racism and black oppression. Robinson and his allies founded J“F”K in direct response to this oppression and as an answer to the crumbling city recreation infrastructure that could not meet the needs of black youth.

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<sup>514</sup> Smith, 214.

<sup>515</sup> Self, *American Babylon*, 223.

The founding of J“F”K took place during the height of Black Freedom Movement activity in the city, as the 1960s ushered in a dramatic increase in Civil Rights organizing in Cleveland and throughout the U.S. urbanized North. Led by a rejuvenated chapter of CORE, as well as by local groups such as Lewis Robinson’s UFF, The Afro-American Institute, The Hazelwood Parents Association, Support Our Schools, and Job Seekers, a coalition of activists targeted discriminatory employers with pickets, and organized around issues ranging from overcrowded black schools and predatory landlords to police brutality and discriminatory service at hotels and hospitals. In May 1963, a coalition of fifty community groups and Civil Rights organizations joined together to found the United Freedom Movement (UFM). While some of the more militant, direct-action activists expressed hesitancy in joining “an organization to which the NAACP was lending its leadership,” the potential efficacy of a united front approach encouraged their involvement.<sup>516</sup>

During the 1963-1964 school year, the UFM, led especially by member organization COR, launched an intensive campaign against *de facto* public school segregation. Robinson witnessed these actions, and his wife Beth was very involved in this protest movement. During the campaign, he and other black activists saw firsthand both the unequal treatment of black youth by the local educational system and the poor police handling of black activists at school demonstrations. Combined with the continued lack of response from City Hall to address the street violence between white and black youth in the aftermath of the Sowinski attack, the

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<sup>516</sup> “Ruth Turner,” Interview, November 16, 1963, The Maurice Klain Research Papers, Manuscript Collection 4219, Container 13, Folder 663, page 11, WRHS.

experience of the school campaign was a key factor leading to Robinson's founding of J'F'K and the emergence of a proto-Black Power politics in the city.<sup>517</sup>

The school campaign that year built upon the previous work of Support Our Schools and the Hazelwood Parents Association, which had organized in response to the inequity in public education faced by Cleveland's black children. In the fall of 1963, the newly formed UFM, pressed into direct action tactics by member organization CORE, launched protests over the inadequate facilities and overcrowding endemic to the city's black neighborhood schools. When the school board agreed to bus some black students to traditionally "white" schools until new facilities could be built to alleviate the overcrowding, the UFM shifted the protest to target the severe discrimination these students faced at their new schools. Bussed black students were not allowed to eat lunch or participate in gym classes or afterschool activities with white students. On January 30, 1964, activists who had organized to protest treatment of black students at the Murray Hill elementary school in the Little Italy section of the city met fierce violence from local residents, who drove protestors off the hill as police stood by. Protests and violence continued as the school board moved forward with plans to build three new elementary schools, all to be built in poorly selected locations in the predominantly black Glenville neighborhood. One proposed school site was so small that it could not support a playground for the children at the school. The UFM organized against this plan, recognizing that by the schools' site selection in all-black neighborhoods was meant to solidify existing educational segregation patterns in Cleveland. Actions included pickets, demonstrations, and a sit-in at the Board of Education building. Police arrested sit-in participants, dragging them down the steps and out of the facility.

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<sup>517</sup> Davis, *Black Americans In Cleveland*, 378-382. Donna McIntyre Whyte, "African-American Community Politics," Chapter 4; Todd M. Michney. "Race, Violence, and Urban Territoriality: Cleveland's Little Italy and the 1966 Hough Uprising." *Journal of Urban History*. 32, 2006; Frazier, "Harambee Nation," Chapter 4.



Then on April 7, tragedy struck. The Reverend Bruce Klunder, who was participating in a demonstration at one of the new school construction sites, lay down to block a bulldozer and was inadvertently crushed to death. While most people believed his death was an accident, the loss of the popular minister sent shockwaves of grief through movement leadership. That day and night, sporadic violence and looting erupted on Cleveland's eastside. Twenty-six people, mostly African American, were arrested and several policemen sustained injuries, mostly from thrown objects.<sup>518</sup> Beth Robinson was at the school site where Klunder died, and the death deeply affected her husband Lewis; he later identified Klunder as one of the six "men in the movement" who "shall live with me as long as I live." The others were Congolese rebel Patrice Lumumba, John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the then-recently assassinated Medgar Evers.<sup>519</sup> Grieving the loss of Klunder, activists nevertheless continued to organize around the school issue. On Monday, April 20, 1964, CORE activists successfully led a one-day boycott of city schools, with estimates of 85 or 90 percent black student participation. The UFM held sixty-two Freedom Schools throughout the city that day, making Cleveland the most successful of seven major city school boycotts organized in northern cities that year. Because of this activism, the chair of the school board eventually stepped down, and the board agreed to meet many of the UFM's demands. Yet, these gains in the end were limited, as the construction of the three new schools ultimately went forward as planned, reinforcing *de facto* educational segregation patterns. While the NAACP pursued legal challenges to the school board's choice of

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<sup>518</sup> Davis, *Black Americans In Cleveland*, 382.

<sup>519</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 102.

school construction locations, for CORE and other members of the UFM coalition the experience moved many to embrace a more militant organizing philosophy.<sup>520</sup>

As historian Nishani Frazier explained in her dissertation on Cleveland's CORE chapter: "The traumatic ending of the school desegregation effort forced members to re-examine the utility of the non-violent tactic....and propelled CORE to embrace Black Power."<sup>521</sup> Another scholar, Leonard Nathaniel Moore, called the school campaign a "victory in defeat" for black Clevelanders that "forced them to place greater emphasis on attaining political power." It was this experience that led some members of CORE to throw their energy into electoral politics, organizing for Carl Stokes, and helping him to win election in 1967 as the first black mayor of a major northern U.S. city.<sup>522</sup>

Describing this season of protest in his memoir, Lewis Robinson wrote: "This was Cleveland 'The Best Location in the Nation,' Not Mississippi. But it *was* Mississippi, and blacks like me had thought we had escaped Southern racism only to find it alive and growing north of the Ohio River."<sup>523</sup> The year-long, often violent school desegregation effort had demonstrated to many the entrenched, structural nature of racism in Cleveland. For activists such as Robinson, this led to exploring new alternatives, including armed self-defense, in pursuit of rights for the city's black residents.

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<sup>520</sup> Donna McIntyre Whyte, "African-American Community Politics," Chapter 4; Todd M. Michney. "Race, Violence, and Urban Territoriality: Cleveland's Little Italy and the 1966 Hough Uprising." *Journal of Urban History*. 32, 2006; Frazier, "Harambee Nation," Chapter 4.

<sup>521</sup> Frazier 149-150.

<sup>522</sup> Leonard Nathaniel Moore.

<sup>523</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, 71. The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company coined the slogan "The Best Location in The Nation" for Cleveland in 1944. It became a frequent tongue-in-cheek reference of black activists in the city by the 1960s.

## Black Cleveland and the Police

Perhaps no single issue galvanized the move toward an armed self-defense ideology in Cleveland more than the relationship between the police and the city's black residents. Police treatment of protesters during school pickets and at the Board of Education put the spotlight on a long festering problem in the city. Black frustration with police stemmed from five key issues: Unnecessary force in handling black suspects, slow response times to calls from black neighborhoods, over-policing of black youth, lack of black officers, and poor police support of activists at Civil Rights demonstrations. Unnecessary force was perhaps the issue that generated the most fervor among local black activists. In 1961, CORE generated a "Fact Sheet on Police Brutality and Misconduct In the City." Based on research conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the fact sheet listed six incidents that year in which police did not respond in a timely manner to black calls for assistance, and police shootings and beatings of black residents who had committed no crime.<sup>524</sup> In a 1962 issue of its newsletter, the Afro-American Institute compared police tactics in Cleveland to those used in Birmingham, Alabama, and lambasted local black councilmen and ministers for not being more vocal about this issue.<sup>525</sup> In 1963, the police's handling of the explosive Sowinski case generated sharp criticism by the black press.<sup>526</sup> Further, as police stepped up patrols of the city's recreation spaces in the aftermath of Sowinski, the over-policing of black youth became a growing concern.<sup>527</sup> By 1964, the arrests of 1,336 black youth accounted for 61 percent of the juvenile boys taken into custody by the police that

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<sup>524</sup> "Fact Sheet on Police Brutality and Misconduct In City Of Cleveland, Ohio," CORE, Reel 23, 833.

<sup>525</sup> "Afropinion" undated, Afro American Institute, The Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1969, The Black Power Movement Part 3, Reel 11.

<sup>526</sup> Bob Williams, "Jury Wrangles With Sowinski Case," *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 21, 1963

<sup>527</sup> "Police Chief Urges Playground Patrol," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 27, 1964.

year. Although much less frequent in occurrence, 250 black females accounted for 59 percent of all juvenile girls arrested.<sup>528</sup> Frustration over the number of arrests of black youth was further exacerbated by the demographics of those doing the arresting. Of the 105 new police recruits who successfully completed training from December 1963 to December 1964, only six were African American.<sup>529</sup> This meant that the majority of African American young people taken into custody had a white arresting officer, resulting in a wide-spread perception among black Clevelanders of white police singling out and harassing black youth. Finally, the failure of the police to protect Civil Rights demonstrators, and the rough handling of activists by those in uniform, made regular headlines in the black press. In 1964, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigated reports of police brutality at Civil Rights demonstrations in Cleveland but determined no finding of fault.<sup>530</sup>

The deteriorating relationship between black residents and police did not generate much change in policy or practice from City Hall, whose representatives dismissed the problem as a fiction drummed up by Communists and troublemakers. In response to the FBI investigation of the police department's handling of Civil Rights demonstrations, Mayor Ralph Locher said: "I resent their spending our tax money to investigate our police when we know there are communists among the demonstrators."<sup>531</sup> In this statement, Locher tapped into the well-

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<sup>528</sup> "Annual Report of Cleveland Police Department, 1964," 25, NA, 453, Box 12, File "Police-Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio (publications and reports)."

<sup>529</sup> "Memorandum to Cleveland Task Force" From Roy Littlejohn, Assistant General Council, "Interview with Captain Lloyd Gary, Planning Officer, Police Academy, Cleveland, Ohio, December 1, 1965, 53, 7, File "Cleveland, Ohio Interviews (2 of 2), NA.

<sup>530</sup> Cleveland, Ohio," 2, 453, Box 12, File Police-Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio (publications and reports), 5, NA.

<sup>531</sup> *Cleveland Press*, April 21, 1964, in "Cleveland, Ohio," 5, NA, 453, Box 12, File, Police-Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio (publications and reports).

rehearsed trope that had long circulated in Cleveland's newspapers, and in media throughout the nation, equating black activism with communism. In the autumn of 1964, when CORE called for black residents to attend a City Council meeting to demand a response to the problem, Cleveland Police Chief Wagner told the media that the organization had called for the "arrest" of the city's police officers. The mainstream media echoed Wagner's statements and painted CORE's efforts as an unreasonable action made by a group of extremists. Despite the documentation of multiple acts of police violence, CORE's calls for improved police training and a citizen's police review board went unheeded.<sup>532</sup> Chief Wagner became increasingly antagonistic towards Civil Rights activists in the city. In a 1965 interview with the federal Commission on Civil Rights, he alleged an "increasing number of assaults on policemen" that he asserted was "motivated by the civil rights movement itself." He also blamed black "juveniles who were rebelling against their position in the community." At his city desk hung a cartoon of a police officer being attacked by "hoodlums,"<sup>533</sup> which visually represented Wagner's attitude about the relationship between the city's black youth and the police: Black youth were aggressors and the officers, victims.

With this type of attitude in City Hall, demands for changing police practices in the black community gained little purchase in Cleveland. By 1964, however, the problem had garnered attention beyond city borders. The *York Gazette and Daily* in the neighboring state of Pennsylvania editorialized:

The policy of the Cleveland Police Force is to employ terror and brutality toward Negroes and to do so systematically. This is a charge so extreme to seem absurd.

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<sup>532</sup> "Open Letter to Citizens," Ruth Turner, Executive Secretary, Cleveland Chapter, CORE, *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 8, 1964.

<sup>533</sup> Memorandum, Cleveland Task Force to Roy Littlejohn, Assistant General Counsel, Interview With Chief of Police Richard Wagner, November 24, 1965, Commission on Civil Rights, 453, 10, File "Police Interviews General," NA. During the interview Wagner also referred to Reverend Bruce Klunder's death at a Civil Rights protest as "Klunder's Blunder," a phrase that represented his lack of respect for Civil Rights activists, even in death.

We make it on the basis of information presented to us which we have verified through independent sources.<sup>534</sup>

By 1964, black frustration with the police in Cleveland became so acute that news outlets in other cities had begun to take notice.

### **Black Armed Self-Defense in Cleveland, 1964**

In Cleveland, the experience of the 1963-1964 school desegregation campaign and the sharply deteriorating relationship between police and black residents caused some activists to espouse a self-defense ideology. Yet, this response stemmed from more than local events; important also were the philosophies of black empowerment articulated by one local black activist and two national figures who visited Cleveland during these transformative years. The first important black public intellectual advocating black empowerment was Donald Freeman. Freeman had helped found the Revolutionary Action Movement, or RAM, at a meeting in Philadelphia in 1962. From Cleveland, Freeman regularly contributed writings to the RAM journal *Black America*, and became a leading voice in an emerging local and national Black Nationalist consciousness.<sup>535</sup> In the fall of 1964, he published an article entitled “Black Youth and Afro-American Liberation,” making the case that “young nationalists are the vanguard of the Black Revolution in America.”<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> *York Gazette and Daily*, November 14, 1964, in “Cleveland, Ohio,” 2, NA, 453, Box 12, File, Police-Community Relations in Cleveland, Ohio (publications and reports), NA.

<sup>535</sup> Joseph, *The Black Power Movement*, 255-257.

<sup>536</sup> “Don Freeman, Black Youth and Afro-American Liberation,” *Black America*, Fall 1964, 15-16, quoted in Maxwell C. Sanford, “Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of An Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society, (masters thesis, Atlanta University, 1986).

Another important figure was Mae Mallory. She was a visible supporter of Robert F. Williams, an NAACP leader who had gained national attention for leading black activists in armed self-defense in Monroe, North Carolina. In 1961, an elderly white couple had mistakenly driven into the black area of Monroe during a moment of violent confrontation between local blacks and whites, and Mallory, who was visiting Williams at the time, had helped to shield them from retaliatory violence. Later, the federal government accused her of kidnapping the white couple. Mallory fled and eventually came to Cleveland, where local law officials arrested her. For a year and a half she fought extradition, and Cleveland activists organized a local Monroe Defense Committee, gathering 10,000 signatures for a petition demanding her release.<sup>537</sup> Support came not only from the black community, but also from the 200 members of the local United Auto Workers, who sent a telegram to the governor on Mallory's behalf, and white Republican Cleveland Councilman Ralph Perk, also publicly lobbied for her release.<sup>538</sup> Despite these efforts Mallory was returned to North Carolina to face charges related to the case; yet, her influence had already registered locally. During her time in Cleveland, Mallory became a symbol to many black activists. According to Lewis Robinson, "Mae Mallory brought to Cleveland the word 'black' instead of Negro and the natural 'Afro' hair style." Mallory, through her public speeches and her connection to Williams's espousal of armed self-defense, articulated a transformative black consciousness to many Clevelanders.

This consciousness received another boost on April 3, 1964, when the former Nation of Islam spokesman Malcolm X visited Cleveland, where he delivered his famous "Ballot or the

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<sup>537</sup> "Afropinion" undated, Afro American Institute, The Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1969, The Black Power Movement Part 3, Reel 11.

<sup>538</sup> "UAW Council Backs Malory," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 17, 1962; and, "Ralph Perk Seeks to Reverse Disalle Mallory Ruling," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 17, 1962.

Bullet” speech to a packed Cory Methodist Church. In the speech, Malcolm proclaimed that “[o]ur gospel is black nationalism” and articulated a demand for black political and economic power. In a later interview, Robinson explained the influence of Malcolm’s address: “It’s impossible for a black man with eyes open in America, not to think like Brother Malcolm.” Robinson recalled that the words of Mallory and Malcolm X resounded in the minds of many black Clevelanders.<sup>539</sup>

Robinson had followed the press and police handling of the Sowinski case in 1963, had seen the increased policing of black youth that followed, and had witnessed the police department’s poor handling of school desegregation efforts. He also had heard and read the words of Mae Malory, Donald Freeman, and Malcolm X. Out of these experiences, Robinson formulated two new avenues for his activism—the founding of a black self-defense rifle club, and the creation of the J“F”K House. Although these were two separate endeavors, in the public perception the connection between rifles and recreation became personified in the person of Robinson. It was a connection that would make many in Cleveland uneasy.

The rifle club came first. Robinson began to discuss the possibility of forming a local self-defense group with several other black men at a barbershop after listening to Malcolm X’s speech at Cory Methodist. On April 4, Robinson issued a press release announcing the Medgar Evers Rifle Club, named after the assassinated NAACP activist. The eleven o’clock nightly television news reported live from outside his apartment. The next morning, local papers ran the announcement as front-page news. On the evening of April 7, the same day that Bruce Klunder

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<sup>539</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, 69-77. Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 163, Robinson Interview, Howard University, quote. For more on the significance of the “Bullet or Ballot Speech see, Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, 102-103.



died, approximately forty men potentially interested in the new group met at Robinson's apartment. The stated purpose of the club was to promote the "protection of civil rights demonstrators when police don't protect them." In founding the rifle club based on this logic, Robinson was part of a national growth of black self-defense organizations, perhaps best exemplified by the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an armed-defense group operating out of Louisiana. According to historian Lance Hill, the founding of such organizations "reflected a growing disillusionment of working-class blacks with the pacifistic, legalist and legislative strategies proffered by national organizations."<sup>540</sup> Such was the case in Cleveland.

The rifle club never became very large, and approximately only a dozen active members constituted the core membership. The club met periodically on land outside the city for target practice, and on several occasions the men brought their families along to enjoy a picnic out in the country while the men honed their marksmanship. Robinson recalled that the club allowed the participants to feel like "masters of their destinies, protectors of their women and families." Such masculinist discourse marked much of the rhetoric emerging from black armed self-defense clubs throughout the United States. While detailing how the club members practiced, Robinson's memoir does not discuss many instances when the rifle club actually carried guns on

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<sup>540</sup> Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2. While it is important to mark the founding of such organizations such as the Deacons for Defense and the Medgar Egar Rifles Clubs as significant moments in local Black Freedom Struggles, it is likewise important to recognize that there had been a long tradition of black activists employing self-defense tactics. Hill cautions against buying into the "myth of nonviolence" in analyzing the movement nationally (5). It is perhaps better to consider these new organizations more formal manifestations of long-existing, often working class, ethos of self-defense that had long run through Civil Rights struggles. Likewise Simon Wendt argues that "Armed resistance serves as a significant auxiliary to non-violent protest in the southern civil rights struggle in the 1950s and 1960s," and that while many organizations such as the SCLC or CORE embraced a non-violent philosophy on a national level, the pragmatic approach to the question of non-violence on a local level often resulted in a hybrid between non-violent rhetoric coupled with self-defense support. Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*, 1.

the streets of Cleveland or showed up to Civil Rights actions armed. It seems that the club's existence was mainly discursive.

This did not quiet criticisms of the club, however. Robinson lost his job as a city housing inspector for "conduct unbecoming a city employee," and he became a target of editorial vitriol from Louis Seltzer at the *Cleveland Press*, who pegged Robinson as a leftist troublemaker.<sup>541</sup> The police also harassed him, pulling him over for questionable traffic violations, and once arresting him, his wife, and more than seventy others at a "socialist" party held at the (Eugene) Debs Hall in Cleveland. Yet, not only did the white press and the police question Robinson's new tactic of armed self-defense, but some local black leaders also expressed doubts about his brand of activism. Ellsworth Harpole, the African American head of the Community Relations Board, pegged what he perceived as troublemaking not on Lewis, but on his wife, who he labeled a Communist "way out" of the mainstream Civil Rights Movement.<sup>542</sup> Among other things, Beth Robinson was a white woman married to an African American man, and as Civil Rights scholar Stacy Bruackman has recently argued, the conflation of communism and interracial intimacy gained considerable traction in the postwar era, including in northern cities.<sup>543</sup> Respected physician and black political activist, Dr. Kenneth Clement and black City Councilor Leo Jackson also became vocal opponents of Robinson.<sup>544</sup> Perhaps it was not

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<sup>541</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 87-88; "Jobless "Black Rifleman" To Continue Rights Role," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 4-18-1964. Robinson filed a defamation suit against Seltzer and his paper, but did not pursue the case to trial.

<sup>542</sup> Interview with M. Lewis and Mrs. Beth Robinson" 15-16, and "Interview with Mr. Ellsworth Harpole," 13 (Harpole Quote) Commission on Civil Rights, 453, 10, File "Drafts of Interviews in Cleveland," NACP.

<sup>543</sup> Stacy Bruackman, "The Johns Committee."

<sup>544</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland*, s. v. "Clement, Kenneth," accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>. Dr. Clement was a "leading advisor" to the successful Carl Stokes campaign for Mayor, he also served as national director of both the NAACP and the Urban League. Clement was one of three black community leaders who

surprising that Harpole, Jackson, and Clement levied critiques against Robinson and the rifle club. But even Ruth Turner, the leader of Cleveland CORE, scornfully dismissed the rifle club as “military role playing.”<sup>545</sup> Further, according to Robinson, some CORE activists partially blamed Klunder’s death on him and other more militant activists for ratcheting up tensions in the city. The rift between CORE and Lewis would continue. Turner’s position on the rifle club demonstrated that even those activists with local reputations for radicalism did not necessarily embrace the practice of armed-self defense. According to one scholar, Robinson had come to embody the “divide” between relatively recent African American arrivals to Cleveland from the South and more “established” residents of the city.<sup>546</sup> The founding of the rifle club caused debate and consternation among many black activists, leaders, and the general community. That consternation grew precipitously as these rifles came to be associated with black youth recreation.

### **The Jomo “Freedom” Kenyatta House: A Space for the Development of Proto-Black Power**

While the rifle club stirred up controversy, its leaders moved to organize their second new effort—addressing the unmet recreation needs of black youth on the city’s east side.<sup>547</sup> Robinson also led this initiative, joined by fellow activists Harlell Jones and Albert Ware. For these men, the recreation center was a practical articulation of their black consciousness forged through their observations of the CORE organizing campaigns, the teachings of Mallory,

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participated in a radio panel on station WABQ to decry the mainstream press’s handling of the Sowinski attack. Clement was an active member of Cleveland’s black public sphere, an opinion-maker.

<sup>545</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 80.

<sup>546</sup> Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 22.

<sup>547</sup> Robinson, *The Making of A Man*, 71-92.

Malcolm X and Freeman, and the founding of the rifle club. Collectively, these experiences led the men to cease relying on the white-run public recreation system, and to instead open a black-run storefront recreation space with programs specifically developed for black teens. Whereas the emphasis of earlier black activism around sites of recreation had been to achieve the goal of integration, this new endeavor sought to create a separate space focused on meeting the needs of black youth.

J“F”K opened its doors in the fall of 1964. The name of the center was a play on words that took a well-known political acronym—JFK—and used it to represent a black political figure and black recreation spot. The name also marked the site as a new type of recreation space for the city—an intentionally black space. The chosen location of the center also differentiated J“F”K from many previous recreation endeavors. Since at least the 1940s, some leaders of Cleveland’s black community had worried about black teens, and especially boys, hanging out on busy commercial streets instead of taking advantage of programs in neighborhood parks. Robinson and his fellow center organizers decided to open J“F”K on one of the busiest commercial thoroughfares in the city, Superior Avenue, at the juncture of two of Cleveland’s largest black neighborhoods, Glenville to the northeast and Hough to the southwest. Its location signaled that the center’s purpose was to serve the very youth who were unrepresented, and increasingly unwelcome, at park facilities throughout the city.

The center received a less than warm reception by some local residents, who looked with unease at the new gathering place for black teens. In addition, just after its opening, a gang of approximately 75 black youth from the nearby Hough neighborhood paid a visit to J“F”K, and broke windows and stabbed one of the center’s adult leaders in the hand. It is unclear what precipitated this attack. It could have been that the new center’s position between two different

neighborhoods positioned the space in the midst of a turf war between different groups of young men. After the attack, rumors swirled that it was the police themselves who had put the Hough youth up to damaging the new center.

Despite this attack, others in the neighborhood cautiously welcomed the fledgling endeavor, including many local black parents and the black press. In addition, while investigating the incident involving the youth from Hough, the Sixth District Police Captain declared the “purpose of the center good.” With the doors open, J“F”K set about building a full slate of programming. Operating funds came from local donations, and Robinson’s Freedom Fighters (discussed in the previous chapter) provided a public address system. Robinson, in particular, regularly gave money to keep the center afloat, despite the unemployment stemming from his activism. He was able to do this because he had invested in property on a small scale in the city, which brought him some rent revenue. He espoused the belief that such capital holdings would support black community autonomy, and in this sense J“F”K was a beneficiary.

From its inception, J“F”K met all four criteria of Black Nationalism laid out by scholar Robert C. Smith. The space emerged out of concern by Robinson and his co-founders about the oppression of local black youth by the police and continuing street youth violence. Talks at the center included open conversations about the local racism that undergirded this oppression, and activists and youth at the center collaborated to document the ongoing violence faced by black youth in the Sowinski area. Center leaders instructed youth to “demand proper respect from police.” If a youth participant at the center was brought into Juvenile Court, an adult from the

facility accompanied the individual in an attempt to ensure fair treatment. Justice for black youth became a core part of the center's mission.<sup>548</sup>

J“F”K was also an exercise in “group self reliance and unity,” a black-managed community space. Finally, the center celebrated a pan-African consciousness and African American culture.<sup>549</sup> Taking its name from a prominent African revolutionary, the center's founders placed the space in an intentional connection to an anti-colonial figure. The inclusion of the word “Freedom” further announced the purpose of the center as a space where black teens could experience liberation from the oppression of Cleveland's streets. While the center's founders officially declared the space open for all, they specifically developed the space for black teens. Through the various talks and programs held at the site, young people and adults who visited the center were able to learn about African and African American culture and history, and share ideas of black empowerment. While the initial focus of the center was youth recreation, and recreation programs and activities always were part of the program at J“F”K, the space quickly became a location for the planning and implementation of strategies to address the oppression of black youth. J“F”K became a short-lived Local Movement Center in the nascent stages of Black Power.<sup>550</sup>

Teens entered the recreation center through a “narrow plywood doorway,” to attend a busy schedule of planned events that took place in the center's main floor rooms and basement.<sup>551</sup> The center's location and structure partially dictated the type of programs that

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<sup>548</sup> Beth Robinson, “Laments Closing of J.F.K. House,” *Call and Post*, January 15, 1966; “Teach Kids Rights: Robinson Defends JFK House Program,” *Call and Post*, May 21, 1966; Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, Chapter 9.

<sup>549</sup> Smith, 214.

<sup>550</sup> Morris, Chapter 3.

<sup>551</sup> “Troops Watch JFK House,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jul 25, 1966.

could take place there. With no large tract of land or gym space, the center did not lend itself to organized sporting activities. Ahmed Evans, a local black activist who practiced astrology would sometimes visit to make predictions for the youth.<sup>552</sup> Programs that were scheduled included dances, which brought further revenue to the center, as well as card games, courses on African history, a “charm school” for girls, and workshops for boys to learn “responsibility toward our girls.”<sup>553</sup> This description evidences that some of the center’s programs were designed to foster certain gendered behaviors among participants. Robinson entitled his memoir *The Making of a Man*, and he was clearly invested in promoting his conception of a positive black masculinity in his writing, the rifle club, and at the center. Programs for young ladies, in contrast, were never the major focus of his organizing efforts.

On December 12, 1964, the center held a party to celebrate Kenya’s independence. That summer, an “art jamboree” showcased the creativity of the center’s young people. One popular program featured a slate of guest speakers, including then State Representative Carl Stokes and Dr. Bernard Mandel, an activist with CORE. On another evening Henry Austin, a member of the Deacons for Defense, made a trip from Louisiana to raise money for his organization. At J“F”K, he spoke about his experiences with armed-self defense. Cleveland Civil Rights attorney Stanley Toliver also was on the program that night, and he explained his support of Austin’s organization: “As James Farmer of CORE put it, you might be non-nonviolent, but it feels awful comfortable to know the Deacons are around.”<sup>554</sup> Through these talks, African American teens learned about different strategies for addressing black oppression, including the election of black

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<sup>552</sup> “Ahmed El Ibn Said, (Fred Evans), Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown, U.S.A.*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 323. Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 41.

<sup>553</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 127.

<sup>554</sup> Alvin Ward, “Defense Deacons Raise Funds Here,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 27, 1965.

officials, direct action organizing, and armed-self-defense. From the reasons and methods of its founding, to its name, to its programs, J“F”K became a space for the development of a proto-Black Power in Cleveland.<sup>555</sup> Writing on J“F”K and the rifle club, historian Simon Wendt noted: “Thus two years before Black Power activists began to call for political power, self defense, black pride and economic self help, these elements were already part of Cleveland’s black freedom movement.”<sup>556</sup>

Significantly, the youth themselves played an active role in developing programs for the space, planning and leading events held each Friday and Saturday night, especially dances. The center thus served not only as a site where African American adults conceived of and implemented a recreation program based on their understanding of community needs; it was also a space where black young people could articulate and realize their own recreation ideas. In a city where black youth were increasingly arrested and characterized as “hoodlums,” the formation of J“F”K was an opportunity for these young people to represent themselves in a public space on their own terms. Cultural geographer Don Mitchell has explored the importance of the role of public space for oppressed groups to articulate their needs in urban settings. He argues that “public spaces are decisive, for it is here that the desires and needs of groups can be *seen*.”<sup>557</sup> In Cleveland, as elsewhere, space for the articulation of the “desires and needs” of black youth, and especially young black men, had largely been circumscribed on the public

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<sup>555</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 115-133. ““Rifleman’s” Youth Center Wins Praise From Parents, and Police,” *The Call and Press*, December 12, 1964; “Deacon Talks,” December 23, 1965, *The Drummer*, Volume 1: 7, Cleveland, Ohio, Civil Rights Commission, 453, 11, File “Urban Areas General.” According to Lance Hill, *Deacons for Defense*, Austin was 21 years old in 1965. He was both “unquestionably one of the brightest and best-educated Deacons,” and also had a “volatile temper,” 141.

<sup>556</sup> Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*, page 163.

<sup>557</sup> Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 33.



landscape. As a result of negative media characterizations and police practices, many existing public spaces had become locations for the policing of black bodies, not spaces where black young people could creatively express themselves or articulate their frustrations with ongoing oppression. The creation of J“F”K gave youth the room for that type of expression. Although not technically a “public” space in the same way as park property or a streetscape functioned, J“F”K provided an openness to participating black youth that was lacking in many of the city’s so-called public recreation venues. Further, the media attention paid to the new center also made it a platform from which black youth could articulate their needs and have those needs heard by a broader public.

The J“F”K Center was not the only space on the city’s landscape where the development of a proto-Black Power ideology emerged. Conversations about black activism in the city took place at multiple locations from local barbershops, to churches, to activists’ apartments. Cory Methodist Church, where Malcolm X delivered his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech, in particular served as another important gathering space on this emerging social movement landscape. Youth and adults at J“F”K were part of a growing conversation in the city.

### **Spotlight on Race Relations in Cleveland**

The need for the types of conversations going on at J“F”K became even more acute over the next year. In June 1965, the Cleveland chief of police made headlines across the state when he went to the capital in Columbus to advocate the expanded use of the death penalty in Ohio. In his testimony before the State Legislature, he cited the activity of the black activist group RAM as a key reason he thought capital punishment should expand. In targeting RAM, Wagner followed the lead of the FBI, whose director J. Edgar Hoover considered the organization

dangerously militant.<sup>558</sup> In Cleveland, the *Plain Dealer* covered the story under the headline “Police Rap Racist Plot Here” in a front-page article that alleged a conspiracy of local black men to undermine law and order in the city. While most of the black Cleveland City Councilmen stayed silent on Wagner’s testimony and subsequent news coverage, two black councilmen publicly demanded that the police chief explain his position further. The *Call and Post* charged that the police and media were “stirring up an atmosphere of racial tension among Clevelanders” that could result in white-on-black violence.<sup>559</sup> Similar to Robinson, RAM founder Donald Freeman lost his job as a junior high history teacher due to his activism and revolutionary writings.<sup>560</sup> According to one newspaperman’s memory of this time, Police Chief Wagner became increasingly preoccupied with Robinson, his rifle club, and the J“F”K House as sources of black unrest alongside RAM. This reporter recalls that on occasion Chief Wagner would “prowl through the Hough area himself with a rifle convinced there were snipers ready to kill policemen.”<sup>561</sup> The police chief openly speculated about a black plot against the city’s law officials, and located both RAM and J“F”K at the center of subversive activity. Black youth recreation became entangled with images of black men with rifles, and J“F”K was subjected to increased police scrutiny.

As Chief Wagner worried about increasing black militancy on the city’s east side, the discrimination faced by Cleveland African Americans became a focus of the federal Commission

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<sup>558</sup> Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, 60.

<sup>559</sup> Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 14; Estelle Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 30-31; “Kellogg, Bell Want Wagner’s Explanation,” *Call and Post*, May 29, 1965.

<sup>560</sup> “Freeman Calls Dismissal Plot to Stifle Militants,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 6, 1965; Cora Lewis, “Freeman to Appeal Dismissal,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 20, 1965 “For the Record: School Board Holds Freeman Dismissal “Trial,”” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 17, 1965.

<sup>561</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 224.

on Civil Rights. In the fall of 1965, the federal government sent a team of commission investigators to the city to conduct a comprehensive review of race relations. Commission representatives interviewed dozens of people from the mayor and the chief of police to students, teachers, Civil Rights activists, church leaders, and regular citizens, including young people. Based on these interviews, a public hearing on the state of Civil Rights in Cleveland began on April 1, 1966. Over the course of six days, nearly 100 witnesses gave almost forty hours of testimony about the deep discrimination that existed in housing, policing, workplaces, and schools. Carried by a local television station, the hearing played in the living rooms of Clevelanders throughout the city. The hearing detailed the many failings of city officials in providing basic services for its black residents, including the lack of adequate public recreation services in black neighborhoods.<sup>562</sup> On the first day of televised testimony, Ethel Plummer, a black single mother of two boys living in the Hough neighborhood, took the stand. When asked by one of the hearing's commissioners "If you could get one wish, in other words, if I were able to grant one wish, what would you ask for?" Plummer responded that she would like a safe place for her children to play, explaining: "If we get a recreation center, we have kids off the street, some place for them to go."<sup>563</sup> Three months after the televised hearing, the commission issued a formal summary of its findings, including the assessment that "[p]rovisions of outdoor play space and indoor recreation centers has not kept pace with the increase in child population

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<sup>562</sup> Bob Williams, "Cleveland On the Spot: Rights Probers Bare City's Dirty Linen," *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 9, 19.

<sup>563</sup> USCCR, Testimony of Mrs. Ethel Plummer, 59.

in over-crowded central areas.”<sup>564</sup> The inadequacy of public recreation for black youth in Cleveland had become a recognized fact by the U.S. federal government.

### **J“F”K House: Growing Controversy**

Yet, even as the Civil Rights Commission documented the lack of public recreation options in Cleveland’s black east side neighborhoods, community support waned for the J“F”K House and its brand of youth recreation. The center, with its emphasis on serving black youth, had never fit well with the city recreation staff’s integrationist conceptualization of the role of recreation space. In 1953, the *Call and Post* quoted recreation leader Florence Fairfax as saying: “It is dangerous when a center or program only caters to one kind of group, (i.e.--of similar race, nationality, background, religion or age). And it is the task of recreation leaders and the community's citizens to see that such practices are not condoned.”<sup>565</sup> For many city leaders, then, the J“F”K house stood as a prime example of this type of “dangerous” space.

The equation of rifles with black recreation had also taken its toll. Some city officials and community leaders had begun to question the center’s purpose, and the police who had initially praised the effort, albeit cautiously, took to watching the center. In particular, they kept a close eye on Robinson, photographed at a rally in figure 18, who had become a controversial figure ever since founding the black rifle club. The FBI also took interest in J“F”K. The *Plain Dealer* suggested black youth would be better served by attending the local Police Athletic League (PAL) Club. Given the highly tense relationship between black youth and police, this

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<sup>564</sup> Record Group 453, Box 5 Report of the Cleveland Sub-Committee of The Ohio State Advisory Committee To the United States Commission on Civil Rights, June 30, 1966, quote concerning outdoor play space, page 9, NA.

<sup>565</sup> *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 18, 1953.

recommendation evidenced the sharp disconnect between conceptions of the white press and the lived experiences of black young people.<sup>566</sup> Police harassment of the center became more pronounced. Under the pretense of a fire code violation, juvenile officers entered the center, lined the youth up against the walls and searched the premises for two hours, presumably looking for rifles or some other weaponry. The police left after finding nothing.<sup>567</sup>

However, it was not only the white press and the police who called into question the legitimacy of the J“F”K House. The *Call and Post* also became more equivocal in its support and began to take swipes at Robinson in its coverage. Further, Democratic City Councilman Leo Jackson, one of the leading black political figures in Cleveland, remained wary of the center and opposed its requests for city funding to support operations. Robinson in turn regularly critiqued Jackson as unsupportive of local black activism, and the two openly feuded in the press.<sup>568</sup> Robinson represented the type of challenge to his leadership feared by Councilor Jackson.

After fifteen months of operations, J“F”K was limping along financially and had to temporarily close its doors. The center reopened a few months later when two white ministers, reverends Charles Rawlings and Paul Younger, helped launch a new means of financial stability under a fundraising effort called “Support our Youth.” In Rawlings and Younger, the center found two formidable allies, as the ministers had access to a network of potential supporters that

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<sup>566</sup> Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 20; “Interview with M. Lewis and Mrs. Beth Robinson” 15-16, and “Interview with Mr. Lewis and Mrs. Beth Robinson, 17, Commission on Civil Rights, 453, 10, File “Drafts of Interviews in Cleveland,” NACP;

<sup>567</sup> Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” CSU, 103. Given Robinson’s former position as a Cleveland housing inspector, it seems highly unlikely that he oversaw a building with repeated building code violations, for he certainly would have been familiar with legal requirements. Further, in one case the pictures of debris the city used as evidence of violations actually came from the building next door to the center.

<sup>568</sup> Lewis Robinson,” Interview, November 16, 1963, The Maurice Klain Research Papers, Manuscript Collection 4219, Container 13, Folder 663, page 14; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 20.

reached beyond city limits. Pledges of funding from several white suburbanites and a handful of local black Clevelanders amounted to nearly \$13,000. The money allowed the center to expand into a new, better location a few “doors down” from the original space, pay Robinson a stipend of \$100 a month, and put eighteen local young people on the payroll to clean the building each week. This made J“F”K not only a space for recreation, but also a space for black youth employment.<sup>569</sup> Freeman, barred from teaching history in the public school system due to his affiliations with RAM, provided “Afro-American history” sessions at the rejuvenated center. But this connection between the RAM activist and the embattled center further incited the press to speculate about growing black radicalism at J“F”K.<sup>570</sup>

Soon after the new facility opened its doors, the police charged that black youth from J“F”K had assaulted two whites on a street near the center. The *Call and Press* then issued an editorial declaring “some doubt in our minds of the basic philosophy behind JFK house” and postulating that the center fostered in black youth “an intensification of their angers and hatreds of the white power structure.” The editorial claimed that the recreation needs of black young people could be met by area YMCAs and the Recreation Department’s Fairfax Recreation Center. Finally, the editorial specifically called into question the two white ministers’ involvement in the project, wondering whether they were trying to bolster their “reputations as ‘saviors of the Negro’” through their support of J“F”K. The editorial also commented that “[b]efore either [minister] became widely known for their militant views in racial matters, there is little evidence that they held substantial positions in their own white world.” The *Call and*

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<sup>569</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 81-82; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 20. “Laments Closing of J.F.K. House,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, Letter to the Editor by Beth Robinson, January 15, 1966; “Robinson’s Recreation Gets Aid From Suburbanites,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 30, 1966.

<sup>570</sup> Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 20.

*Post* also critiqued the use of white money from the suburbs as financial backing for the center.<sup>571</sup>

In leveling a critique of “suburban money” supporting J“F”K, the *Call and Post* editorial employed a spatial logic to its argument. Emphasizing the clergymen’s suburban ties, the editorial cast the ministers as outsiders to the city’s community leadership structure. Further, the ministers’ identification as white situated them as outsiders to the black community. Robinson’s wife, a white woman herself, issued comments in response to the *Call and Post*, challenging the arguments made in the editorial. She made the point that suburban money was needed because local residents did not have the financial wherewithal to contribute to the center. Another woman who lived near J”F”K also wrote the paper, challenging the editorial’s suburban angle and reminding readers that Paul Younger was not a suburban minister at all, but rather a long-time resident and well-known activist living in Hough.<sup>572</sup>

These two women brought up important points in their responses to the *Call and Post*, but even their letters did not fully explicate the twists of logic presented by the newspaper in its article about the ministers and J“F”K. By 1966, Reverend Younger was a known figure in Hough, had been active in CORE, and was one of the co-chairs of the United Freedom Movement. Further, his wife had served in the leadership of the Support Our Schools organization. Later, in 1966, he would become the official local representative of the Commission on Civil Rights Subcommittee on Municipal Services, tasked with following up on the report’s findings on various issues including trash removal and recreation. Younger would

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<sup>571</sup> “Some Plain Talk About The Kennedy-Kenyatta House,” editorial, *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 7, 1966.

<sup>572</sup> “Robinson Defends JFK House Program, *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 21, 1966; “A Defense for Rev. Younger,” Letter from Readers, Lois Pickett, *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 28, 1966. “Board Organizes to Aid JKF (sic) House,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 18, 1966.

also serve as director of the City's Protestant Ministry to Poverty in 1966, and he helped organize a March to Columbus for welfare rights later that year.<sup>573</sup> In these varied activities, Younger had long affiliated with organizations and causes with strong local black leadership. For his part, Rawlings served as the director of the Metropolitan Affairs Commission of the Cleveland Council of Churches. Far from being extremist radicals, these two ministers held various leadership positions in some of the most respected Civil Rights organizations and committees in the city. The *Call and Post* could have reported on the involvement of these two well-known Cleveland residents as legitimating the J" F" K House. Instead, the paper sought to characterize their involvement as a white takeover of the space and co-optation of its mission. In the same article, the paper ironically critiqued J" F" K's leaders for inciting youth to race hatred and separatism while casting aspersion on the center's collaboration with prominent white Civil Rights activists.

Such debates about the role of white activists in black causes, the efficacy and potential downfalls of black separatism, and the legitimacy of various methods of funding would continue during the Black Power Movement in Cleveland and throughout the nation.<sup>574</sup> Such debates also concerned the presence of white bodies, ideas, and money in the shaping of black spaces. In the case of J" F" K, while the leadership collaborated with white fundraisers, the center continued to be a space where black teens could develop programs and demand justice. The mainstream press continued to represent the space as a location for an emerging black separatism on the city's landscape. Black radicalism had become the popularly accepted vernacular meaning of J" F" K.

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<sup>573</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 21. *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. "United Freedom Movement."

<sup>574</sup> For example, for a detailed analysis of the white monies funding Black Power programs in Cairo Illinois, see Kerry Pimblott, "Soul Power: The Black Church and the Black Power Movement in Cairo, Illinois, 1969-1974," (dissertation, University of Illinois, 2012), Chapter 4.



## J“F”K Confronts Continued Violence Around Sowinski

One way in which J“F”K continued its function as a proto-Black Power space in the city was through a renewed effort to address local racism and its impact on black youth. A newly constituted J“F”K board forged a relationship with scholars at the Western Reserve School of Applied Social Sciences and worked to develop community projects. The board planned a Block Clean-up Campaign and a Youth Good Citizenship cash prize to be awarded bi-monthly to one young person involved at the center. J“F”K youth and leaders also decided to track the mounting instances of white-on-black youth violence in the Sowinski area. On June 3, 1966, a group of thirty white youth chased black youth from the playground, then painted swastikas and anti-black slogans on the utility building on the property. When park maintenance workers repainted the building, white vandals re-sprayed “niggers keep out” on June 10. Over the next few days, several incidents of white-on-black beatings occurred both at Sowinski and on nearby streets. Of pressing concern were ongoing instances of young black children being harassed on their daily walk to school.<sup>575</sup> The police largely turned a blind eye to the graffiti and violence at the space and even may have encouraged it. According to one witness, an officer counseled a group of white youths: “If you are going to beat up those niggers, take them down to the [Sowinski] Park where we can’t see.”<sup>576</sup> Youth brought reports of such incidents to the J“F”K House and compiled a record of what black youth faced at and around the playground. Through these efforts, those involved at J“F”K moved beyond the walls of the center structure, and sought to change the lived experiences of black youth in one local neighborhood.

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<sup>575</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 148-150; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 23; *Cleveland Call and Post*, photos of graffiti vandalism, June 11, 1966. “Bobbing Along,” Bob Williams, June 18, 1966; “Board Organizes To Aid JKF (sic) House,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 18, 1966.

<sup>576</sup> Louis H. Hasotti and Jerome R. Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland, Black Militants and the Police: A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*, May 1969.

Tensions had nearly reached their breaking point when police failed to investigate yet another incident of white-on-black youth violence. A crowd of black youth gathered at the intersection of 90<sup>th</sup> and Superior, about twelve blocks from Sowinski Playground and two blocks from J“F”K, and armed themselves with bricks and other debris from a partially demolished apartment building. When, later that day a white man driving a car through the area shot and wounded a ten-year-old African American boy apparently at random, violence erupted. Blacks launched firebombs into several white-owned businesses along the Superior Street corridor. Two hundred police were rushed to the area. According to Robinson, he attempted to help quell the violence, keeping the J“F”K House open until two in the morning as a space where youth could gather safely off the streets and away from trouble.<sup>577</sup> That night, Harlell Jones went into the streets and talked to a large crowd of blacks that was threatening two African American police officers; he persuaded them to disperse. In the context of a nation that had witnessed Watts burning, it seemed that Cleveland was about to erupt into its own urban rebellion. The next night, as another crowd nearing 300 African Americans gathered, the chief of police again asked Jones to intervene. Jones managed to talk another large crowd out of further violence.<sup>578</sup>

The events on Superior forced city officials and community leaders at last to recognize that they had a potentially serious problem brewing on the city’s east side. The *Call and Post* issued a front-page editorial, warning that “time is running out” and that Cleveland stood on the precipice of a full-scale “riot.” The paper blamed the violence on “idle, unsupervised, aimless teen-agers” and noted that these “bad boys” had nothing to do during the hot summer days since

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<sup>577</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 150. Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 36;

<sup>578</sup> “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” CSU, 95; “Cleveland Calm After A Week of Racial Tension! Shooting of Youth Triggers Outbreak,” Ken Temple, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 2, 1966.

they were mostly unwelcome at local recreation centers. The *Call and Post* editorial apparently made this last comment with unintended irony—just several weeks before, the paper had called into question the need for the J“F”K House, whose target audience was just such youth.<sup>579</sup>

The *Call and Post* was not the only institution that observed the potential for more violence brewing in the city streets. In the aftermath of the Superior events, Mayor Locher finally decided to address the long-simmering tensions between black and white youth, and black youth and the police. He held a meeting with Robinson, Jones, and a group of J“F”K youth and their parents. At the meeting, the teens presented a list of nine demands, which included the recognition of J“F”K as a legitimate recreation center; policing of the area by teams of black and white officers; the assignment of a black police officer to the center; and recreation equipment and funding. After presenting their demands, they agreed, reluctantly, to “cool it” for three days to give the mayor time to consider their requests. The center activists also decided to “deputize” 300 youth to keep the violence in check. Robinson appeared on a local television news program alongside the head of the Police PAL club and publicly invited the police to visit J“F”K to forge better relationships with area young people.<sup>580</sup>

Yet Robinson and his group of parents and teens were not the only ones meeting with city officials. Various community organizations, neighborhood councils and City Councilors scrambled to hold meetings of their own to discuss what to do about the growing tensions. *Call and Post* editor W. O. Walker brought his own contingent of black leaders to meet with Mayor Locher, and the group issued its own “8-Point Peace Pact.” The Walker contingent’s eight

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<sup>579</sup> “An Editorial: Time is Running Out,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 2, 1966, front page.

<sup>580</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, # and “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” 134, testimony of Beth Robinson. “Bobbing Along,” Bob Williams, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 2, 1966.

demands dovetailed neatly with the J“F”K list on many items, including the need for better integration of the police force and improved recreation opportunities. But the Walker list also included a request for “[i]nvestigation of the leadership and source of the community problems, and the distributors of race hate literature.” This last point referred to pamphlets that had been recently distributed in the Sowinski area decrying the white power structure in the city. While this point did not mention the J“F”K House by name, the Walker list clearly implied the recreation center was behind the pamphlets, hence causing local unrest and stirring up rebellion.<sup>581</sup>

Despite the fact that these other black leaders had sought to undermine the credibility of J“F”K, long-time City Recreation Director John Nagy delivered on one of the nine demands made during the youths’ meeting with Mayor Locher. Nagy’s department provided the center with twelve softballs, twelve hardballs, twelve baseball bats, eight pairs of boxing gloves, enough mitts for two baseball teams, and several basketballs. To Robinson, this delivery of recreation equipment carried with it a significant lesson to local black youth: Violence got results. In his memoir, Robinson wrote: “Now, after a violent demonstration, we got part of what we wanted. Apparently in America, Violence commands respect. And how do you teach kids to forget that lesson?”<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> “Area Groups Map Search for Solution,” Daisy Craggett, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 9, 1966; “Locher, Community Leaders Pledge 8-Point Peace Pact,” Bob Williams, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 9, 1966. Walker and the *Call and Post* had a complex record in regards to Robinson and the J“F”K Center. Throughout his career Walker had supported working class black organizations dating back to the 1930s when his support was instrumental in the success of the Future Outlook League—and Robinson followed in this tradition of black working-class activism in Cleveland. Further, although the *Call and Post* frequently criticized Robinson and his center, the paper also offered support when the center was smeared in the white press. In particular, members of the *Call and Post*’s editorial staff backed Robinson in their columns. See for example, Charles H. Loeb “World on View, Looking For a Scapegoat,” editorial, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 30, 1966.

<sup>582</sup> Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 151-153.

Although the youth were pleased by the delivery of the recreation equipment, the rest of their demands remained unanswered. The J“F”K teens arranged a march of 100 young people and adults to the home of black Councilman (and Robinson critic) Leo Jackson to insist that City Hall address the rest of their list of grievances. The police met the youth in the street in front of Jackson’s Glenville home. Officers sprayed mace at some of the marchers, and some youth threw rocks and chunks of cement at the police, who detained several young people. After the unsuccessful direct action march, the youth of the area settled into an uneasy “wait and see” attitude, waiting on the city to deliver on their unmet demands.<sup>583</sup>

While Councilor Jackson remained unmoved, another African American City Councilor did act to address the lack of recreation facilities for the city’s black youth. That June, City Council Democrat Charles Carr, who had long championed causes of public facility desegregation and municipal investment in black neighborhoods, successfully guided a \$7 million bond through the City Council for the purchase of new park and playground land and the construction of new and improved recreational facilities.<sup>584</sup> The passing of this bond acknowledged the need to invest in recreation infrastructure throughout Cleveland, but even with the infusion of cash the construction of new facilities would not occur overnight. The city had finally begun to move to address its recreation deficiencies, but the action did not stave off the growing anger about previous inaction on this and many other municipal services in black neighborhoods.

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<sup>583</sup>Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 153.

<sup>584</sup> City Record, June 15, 1966, Resolution Number 1434-1966, page 19; Adopted June 27, 1966, City Record July 1966, CPL.

## The Hough Rebellion

On July 18, 1966, the neighborhood of Hough erupted into violence. Hough was a predominantly black neighborhood in Cleveland located southwest of Glenville and immediately south of the J“F”K House. The Hough neighborhood was markedly more economically challenged than Glenville to the north. The median family income in Hough in 1960 was \$4,623, or only 67 percent of the city average.<sup>585</sup> Twenty-five percent of all city welfare aid recipients in Cleveland resided in Hough,<sup>586</sup> and twenty-five percent of the housing stock was dilapidated.<sup>587</sup> Tensions were already high in the neighborhood in the aftermath of the nearby Superior Street violence when someone posted a sign on the door of a white-owned neighborhood bar door reading “no water for niggers,” and the bartender refused to serve a potential black patron. A crowd of nearby black residents gathered, and the neighborhood became engulfed in what came to be known nationally as the “Hough Riot.” By the time a rainstorm helped to quell the violence on July 24, 2,200 National Guard troops had been ordered into the neighborhood and four black Clevelanders lay dead.<sup>588</sup> In the aftermath of Hough, the question resounded across Cleveland: How had this happened?

While the incident at the bar helped trigger the rebellion it did not cause it. The “National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,” more popularly known as the Kerner

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<sup>585</sup> 1960, U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing, Cleveland, Ohio, “Table P-1.—General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts,” 22-27;

<sup>586</sup> Miller and Wheeler, “Cleveland: The Making and Remaking of an American City,” 44.

<sup>587</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 9.

<sup>588</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 36-37. This death toll followed a national pattern in the urban rebellions. The Kerner commission’s review of 24 rebellions found that the “overwhelming majority of persons killed were negro civilians.” *The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 5. (hereafter referred to as the Kerner Commission)

Commission, reviewed twenty-four urban rebellions that occurred in 1967 and concluded that “a series of tension-heightening incidents over a period of months” that “were linked in the minds of many in the negro community with a reservoir of underlying grievances” precipitated those uprisings. While the events in Hough happened a year prior to those studied in this report, the Hough Rebellion reflected a similar pattern; a series of incidents of racial-conflict in the area led to breakout of rebellion, which was also instigated by the continued lack of response to black residents’ grievances by City Hall.<sup>589</sup>

Tasked with explaining the events of Hough, the city convened a grand jury on July 26, almost before the smoke had cleared. Louis Seltzer, the recently retired editor of the *Press*, who had long had disagreements with Lewis Robinson, was named foreman of the jury. For decades, Seltzer’s editorial weight had helped to shape public opinion, and now he was once again tasked with bringing the “truth” to light. Despite the fact that there had hardly been time to mount anything like an investigation into the events that had led up to Hough, the grand jury heard testimony from police and other witnesses. Some of this testimony included that of secret informants whose words and identities were sealed from the public. At the close of the trial, the grand jury issued a formal report.

No charges were levied against any individuals, but the blame for the events of Hough was laid at the feet of a “relatively small group of trained and disciplined professionals at this business,” and it was further postulated that some behind the violence were “either members or officers in the Communist party.” Mayor Locher and Police Chief Wagner had long referenced a supposed secret plot of black subversives and Communists to undermine Cleveland’s law and order, and Hough became characterized as the action of such subversives. Seltzer, whose

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<sup>589</sup> Kerner Commission, 6.

newspaper had previously printed stories about shadowy Communists infiltrating the Civil Rights Movement efforts at Garfield Park, had once again raised the specter of a Communist threat in Cleveland.

Seltzer and the grand jury were by no means alone in attributing urban unrest to outside agitators and shadowy subversives. City leaders faced with rebellions across the United States came to similar conclusions. Starting in 1967, the US Senate conducted a three-year investigation into “Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders,” led by Arkansas Senator, John C. McClellan. The McClellan Committee, relying heavily on police testimony, came to a similar conclusion that Communists were behind the urban rebellions spreading across the nation.<sup>590</sup> On the other hand, the Kerner Commission, completely rejected this assessment, unequivocally stating: “The urban disorders were not caused by, nor were they the consequence of, any organized plan or conspiracy.”<sup>591</sup> Yet, rather than face the material conditions that had led to the rebellions, officials from the Cleveland grand jury to the US Senate searched for scapegoats.

But the grand jury report did not stop with such vague accusations. It specifically named Lewis Robinson and the J“F”K House as the space from which the violence originated, accusing the recreation center’s leaders of buying rifles and training youth to make Molotov cocktails. Robinson’s rifle club and youth recreation activities had become irrevocably joined in the public dialogue. The public report of the grand jury listed Robinson, his wife Beth, Harlell Jones, Albert Ware, and another leader of the center by name, and included their home addresses. It accused Jones of being a member of RAM and a vice president of the Deacons for Defense (both claims

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<sup>590</sup> Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 72.

<sup>591</sup> “Kerner Commission,” 8.



he denied), and described him as “a black power apostle with a bitter hatred for all whites.” The report made no mention of Jones’s assistance in quelling the earlier Superior Street violence on behalf of the police department just a few weeks earlier.

But the report saved its most scathing indictment for Robinson, rehashing his earlier arrest at the Debs Center and tracing his alleged connections with specific Communist agitators from Chicago and New York. The Grand Jury blamed Robinson for “inciting these youth to focus their hatred and as indoctrinating them with his own vigorous philosophy of violence.” Jones and Robinson denied these affiliations, but some powerful black leaders in Cleveland amplified these characterizations. Councilman Leo Jackson publicly blamed Hough on “a power struggle by thugs for leadership of the Negro community.” Clearly, it was not only the white establishment that saw Jones, Robinson and their fellow activists as a potential threat to their power.<sup>592</sup>

The grand jury report closed by briefly listing the socioeconomic injustices that existed for black residents in Hough, including the “woefully inadequate recreation facilities for children” in the area. Yet, after listing these socio-economic factors the report warned:

Impatience among the negro people for the improvement of their citizenship is understandable but the opinion has been expressed they may be attempting

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<sup>592</sup> “Special Grand Jury Report Relating to Hough Riots,” Judge Pa Judge Thomas J. Parrino, Criminal Branch Common Pleas Court of Cuyahoga County, CPL-PA and also, file number 1738-66, 3-9, CCA; “Grand Jury Report: Robinson, Communists Keys in Hough Riots” *Cleveland Press*, August 13, 1966. See also, Russel Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 404-405; Todd Michney, “Race, Violence and Urban Territoriality: Cleveland’s Little Italy and the 1966 Hough Uprising,” *Journal of Urban History*, 32:3; March 2006. 404-428, especially 416. Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” Table 8-1 “Predominantly Black Wards and Black Councilmen Representing Them in the Ninteen Sixties,” Jackson quote. Robinson and Jones’ disavowal of affiliation with these organizations appears valid. While Robinson clearly attended some Socialist events in the city, such as the event at Debs Hall where he was arrested, there does not seem to be evidence of a Communist affiliation. While the J”F”K House did have a guest speaker from Deacons for Defense according to historian Simon Wendt, there was never an active Deacons chapter in Cleveland, Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*, 92-93.

to exact too much too fast for the community to bear within an arbitrarily fixed time limit.<sup>593</sup>

Thus, according to the findings of the grand jury, racial injustices had helped lead to Hough, but so too had the Civil Rights Movement's "too fast" efforts to right these wrongs. The report went on to laud the police and fire departments' handling of the uprising, and advocated for a more severe set of legal penalties for those found to incite or participate in riots.

As a result of the hearing and report, the J"F"K House came to stand as a symbol for black, male and youth violence in the imaginations of many Clevelanders, much like Sowinski Playground had a few years before. Robinson in particular came to embody this symbolism. Some members of the black media questioned this symbolic framing, such as this editorial that ran in the *Call and Post*:

As long as [Robinson] was content to follow the pattern of more conservative leaders, and confine his energies to the more conservative civil rights groups, he was one our young citizens who could easily have been selected "Man of the Month," "Youth of the Century," or any of those titles we love to confer on our soul brothers who show sufficient restraint and/or non-violent inclination.<sup>594</sup>

Since Robinson and his center did not fit this model, both instead became a target of the grand jury. In the aftermath of the hearing, the center was again temporarily closed, this time by Cleveland housing inspectors for alleged code violations. Robinson explained his understanding of the popular symbolism of J"F"K, declaring: "To the City's downtown establishment—which is their white power, JFK is the despised symbol of Black Thinking, Black History, Black

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<sup>593</sup> "Special Grand Jury Report Relating to Hough Riots," 15, CPL-PA, CCA.

<sup>594</sup> Charles H. Loeb, "World on View, Looking For A Scapegoat," editorial, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 30, 1966.

Action, Black Pride.”<sup>595</sup> For the white establishment, J“F”K had become a convenient and despised symbol in the aftermath of Hough.

For many black Clevelanders the grand jury report on Hough read as a particularly horrible fiction. Unsatisfied with the report’s findings, a “Citizens Committee” was convened on August 22, 1966 at Liberty Hill Baptist Church. Eight black community leaders presided over the panel including George Livingston of the NAACP; Arthur Evans of CORE; Gerrard Anderson of the Urban League; Reverend Nickerson of the Negro Pastors’ Association; and DeForrest Brown of the Hough Area Council. Four lawyers, including Louis Stokes took testimony from twenty-six witnesses over the course of three evenings.<sup>596</sup> Afterward, the Urban League paid for the publication of the “The Cleveland’s Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” which included transcripts of the testimonies given.

The Citizens Committee report reached markedly different conclusions about what happened in Hough than those presented by the grand jury. The Urban League report rejected the idea of a Communist conspiracy, chastised the grand jury for publishing the addresses of private citizens who were not formally convicted on any crime, and lambasted the police for their handling of the rebellion. Perhaps the most wrenching testimony came on the first evening when Diana and Henry Townes took the stand. The Townes were a black couple who had tried to leave the scene of the rebellion with their infant child in their car. The police stopped them, and when Henry again tried to drive away from the violence, officers shot up his car, causing his

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<sup>595</sup> Bob Williams, “Links With Riots Denied As JFK Plans to Reopen,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August, 6, 1966. Robinson’s center was closed by the very city department he had worked for before being fired for his organizing activities. Quote from “Robinson: Grand Jury Found Scapegoat,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 13, 1966.

<sup>596</sup> “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” 1, SC-MSLCSU. The remaining panelists included Lynn Simpson, Citizen’s Committee, Phil Mason, Council of Churches, and Harry Rubenstein, National Association of Social Workers.

wife to lose her eye and suffer brain damage, as well as injuring and causing brain damage to the infant. Testimony after testimony described excessive force by the police that escalated instead of quelled the violence of Hough.<sup>597</sup>

Some of the longest testimony during the trial came from the accused leaders of the J“F”K House, Harlell Jones and Beth and Lewis Robinson. Jones described the founding of J“F”K to serve the unmet recreation needs of the area’s black youth, as well as to give young people access to things not taught in schools such as “Negro history.” Jones went on to describe the center as most importantly a space where black pride was taught, providing as an example the fact that J“F”K encouraged young black women to adopt natural hairstyles. Jones’s testimony described black pride as a positive for the community, instead of the danger portrayed during the grand jury hearing and subsequent press coverage.<sup>598</sup>

Jones’s testimony also revealed a gendered response to the charges leveled at the center. When the local media and grand jury described J“F”K as a space for the fostering of black male unrest, Jones countered by emphasizing activities offered for young women at the site. Likewise, Lewis Robinson, responding to media references of J“F”K as a “fire bomb school,” instead characterized the space as “charm school for young ladies.”<sup>599</sup> In rejecting the grand jury description of J“F”K as a school that taught young men hate, Lewis presented a school that taught young women charm. This emphasis on a female presence as legitimizing the space evidences the entrenchment of negative black male stereotypes that dominated the local media.

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<sup>597</sup> “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” 17-18. For more on police misconduct during the Hough Rebellion see testimony of Edward Adams page 19, Mrs. Pollard, 25, Dennis Hilliary, 34, Geneva Burns, 37, Gwendolyn Franklin, 45, Leo Sutton, 51-53, Jon Appling, 69-70, Mr. Hewey, 86, and David Hayward 112.

<sup>598</sup> “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,” 89, SC-MSLCSU.

<sup>599</sup> UPI Photo, July 24, 1966.

Even though young women were not the primary focus of programming, Lewis still attempted to emphasize their presence in a gendered attempt to defend the activities at the center.

The Citizens Committee Report, along with news stories in the *Call and Post*, also presented an alternative version of J“F”K’s role in the Hough Rebellion. First, Robinson vehemently denied that youth from his center caused the violence in Hough. Further, he described how the National Guard had entered the center more than once during the rebellion, releasing tear gas without provocation. Robinson also pointed out that in the immediate aftermath of Hough, more than a dozen youth from his center had helped to distribute food donated to families in need because of the rebellion.<sup>600</sup>

The Citizens Committee Report emphasized the socio-economic discrimination, racism and injustice that had led to Hough. Many of these factors were discussed during the three nights of testimony: lack of job opportunities, residential discrimination leading to unacceptable housing quality, poor schools, and inequitable policing. Lack of recreation options for youth was also repeatedly referenced, starting with the first witness, Mr. Earl Rowe, a social worker in the Hough area. He testified that the local youth “know of the recreational facilities in other sections of the city, and the sparse recreational facilities in the Hough area. They want to know when do we get a playground.” On the second day of the Citizens Committee testimonies, another witness, Jon Appling, a local resident who had been detained by police and then released during the Hough Rebellion, picked up this theme. He blamed the events at Hough on the “broken promises” of the city administration. When one of the lawyers interviewing asked him to explain what he meant, Appling responded:

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<sup>600</sup> “Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances,”; “Support Our Youth Com Reviews JFK Incidents,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 6, 1966.

This here, we have a playground on the corner of 77<sup>th</sup> and Lexington which was put in supposedly by the city. I wish some of you would go down and look at this playground for these kids. Just go down and look at it when you go home. And they promised to clean this playground up because I asked personally to have this playground cleaned up, and it has not been cleaned up yet. And yet, they told me that's no sweat, no sweat, I'll get right on it.<sup>601</sup>

Broken playgrounds stood as visual symbols of the broken promises of a city that had failed its black citizens in nearly every aspect of service delivery. The Citizens Commission on Hough was issued as the black community's rebuttal to the grand jury.

The two reports stood as starkly different interpretations of the causes of the violent rebellion. Both reports also provided markedly different perspectives on the role of J“F”K during that week in July. The grand jury painted J“F”K as the center for black militarism, a training ground for angry, Molotov-cocktail wielding black teens. The Citizens Commission, in contrast, presented J“F”K as a space for the development of black pride and part of a strong black community. The grand jury interpretation of the space ultimately held sway in the mainstream press, and it had the most impact on public perception of J“F”K beyond Cleveland's borders.

The national media reported the version of events that portrayed J“F”K as a hotbed of violence leading directly to Hough. In particular, the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) newswire services distributed negative images and stories about J“F”K throughout the country. For example, the API circulated a photograph of a building burnt to the ground during the Hough rebellion. The photo was sent to news outlets throughout the nation with the caption: "The smoking ruins of University Party Center, gutted by a fire believed to have been set by terrorists on July 21st [1966], are seen in this aerial photo. Cleveland police

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<sup>601</sup> "Cleveland Citizens Committee on Hough Disturbances," 3, 75.

chief Richard Wagner declared July 22nd that the fire bombers were graduates of 'a fire bomb training school' at the JFK House in Cleveland. The JFK House, named after Jomo 'Freedom' Kenyatta,' is a Negro extremist group."<sup>602</sup> Another wire photo described the J“F”K House as a fire bomb training school, shown in figure 19. Through images and captions such as these, the youth recreation center became subject to negative characterizations nationally. On August 10, based on an AP news release, the *Milwaukee Journal* ran the headline “Reds, Agitators Blamed in Cleveland Riot.” That same day Kansas’s *Lawrence Journal-World* declared “Black Nationals, Reds Blamed in Cleveland Riots.” In these and many more articles Black Nationalists, Communists, and the J“F”K Center were equated and blamed as the sources of interracial violence in Cleveland.<sup>603</sup>

Not only the national media, but also the United States Congress relied on the grand jury interpretation of J“F”K. U.S. Attorney General William Ramsey Clark testified before the Senate and cautioned against assigning blame for the uprising on a subversive plot.<sup>604</sup> Despite his assessment, the May 1968 report, “Guerilla Warfare Advocates in the United States,” issued by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, cited passages of the Grand Jury Report and arrived at the following description of J“F”K:

According to the grand jury findings on the Cleveland riot of July 18-23 1966, RAM was using as its headquarters and training grounds a recreation center in the heart of the Hough district where the riot took place. This center, called the JFK House—the Jomo “Freedom” Kenyatta House—after the President of Kenya and

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<sup>602</sup> UPI Photo, July 22, 1966, Cleveland Memory Project, CSU-SC.

<sup>603</sup> “Reds, Agitators Blamed in Cleveland Riot,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 10, 1966 and “Black Nationals, Reds Blamed in Cleveland Riots, *Lawrence Journal World*, both stories generated from the AP wire service. That same day the UPI wire service resulted in the story “Reds Charged in Hough Riot,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, August 10, 1966.

<sup>604</sup> Massotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 38.

the former leader of the Mau Mau—was described by Senator Frank J. Lausche (D-Ohio) as a “training ground” for snipers.<sup>605</sup>

In the U.S. Capitol, J“F”K had been deemed a dangerous space and some black activists a potential threat to national law and order.

The federal response to this perceived threat would include more FBI surveillance of Black Power activists in Cleveland and throughout the country. It would also include federal funding for summer youth programs, an initiative that many hoped would stave off further urban violence. In 1965, the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity allocated just under \$185,000 for summer programs in Cleveland as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. In 1966, that amount almost tripled to \$560,000 and then increased again for 1967 to a \$760,000 allocation, although the actual distributed funds for Cleveland that year would be just over \$635,000.<sup>606</sup> A 1967 a memo to regional program administrators included the following description of the purpose of these funds:

Summer youth programs are intended to provide jobs, additional steps in preparation for work, educational upgrading, recreation, cultural enrichment, improved physical well being, leadership training, and constructive community impact. Ideally, any summer program should offer each participant active experiences in a number of these areas. It is anticipated that the impact of summer programs on the participants will be to increase their self-respect, self-direction,

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<sup>605</sup> “Guerilla Warfare Advocates in The United States,” Report by the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, May 1968, 21.

<sup>606</sup> Untitled Chart, File “Summer Programs 1967,” Box 44; Memorandum From C Theodore M. Berry to Regional Directors and CAP Managers, May 8 1967, File “Summer Programs 1967,” Box 45; and, “An Evaluation of 1968 Summer Youth Programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity,” December 16, 1968, 49, File “Summer Youth Program, 1969 (3 of 3),” Box 89; Community Services Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Director, Subject Files 1965-1969, NA.

<sup>606</sup> Community Services Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Director, Subject Files 1965-1969, NA. The exact programs funded in Cleveland during these years are not clear, as the Cleveland-specific files for this program have not yet been released to researchers, and are currently under FOIA request.



practical skills, community awareness and interests, as well as their capacity to work and play with others.<sup>607</sup>

One goal of the federal funding for summer programs was to “cool off” potential summer unrest in urban centers such as Cleveland by providing job training and recreation programs.

Federally backed summer initiatives often fell short of these aims, perhaps because the intended youth participants questioned the motives and assumptions of black pathology behind these government dollars. An assessment report of the 1968 summer program included perspectives from youth across the nation. One quote, attributed to a 15-year-old black male from Cleveland, served as the opening line of the entire report: “Summer programs are jive because the government is not sincere.” Later in the document, another young black man, aged 21, commented: “A lot of money is being wasted on dumb supervisors and project directors. The kids still don’t have enough.” In a third example, an 18-year-old black male stated: “It’s hell for a Black man and Programs won’t solve a thing. We want ‘in’ and we’ll get ‘in’ or else.” Perhaps this disillusionment stemmed from the fact that in Cleveland young people were shut out of giving input to the direction of the programs. Of the sixteen programs offered in the city in the summer of 1968, none had a youth planning component despite a federal directive for funded programs to include youth perspectives. This lack of inclusion meant that many of the youth questioned the purpose of the federally backed summer initiatives and embraced other means to

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<sup>607</sup>Memorandum From C Theodore M. Berry to Regional Directors, CAP Administrators, December 18, 1967, File “Summer Programs 1967,” Box, 45, Community Services Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Director, Subject Files 1965-1969, NA.

affect change in their communities. The report found that 75 percent of the nearly 6,000 youth interviewed across the country thought that the riots were “doing good.”<sup>608</sup>

## Conclusion

Federally supported summer programs were one response to urban unrest. In Cleveland, various groups of community leaders, black and white, city officials and private citizens, also set about trying to ensure there was not a repeat of the summer violence. Of particular concern was what adults perceived as a continued restlessness and anger among local black teens. Responses by the city included both increased punitive measures to forestall potential rebellions as well as infrastructure and service investment in the Hough neighborhood. Two black City Councilors sponsored ordinances representing these very different responses. In November 1966, Councilman Leo Jackson backed a law codifying the “making, use or possession” of Molotov Cocktails as punishable by a \$500 fine or 6 months in jail for a first offense.<sup>609</sup> Jackson’s response to Hough was more punitive policing.

Other council members advanced a different response. In July of 1967, the city opened a new recreation center in Hough, a construction project supported by the bond that Councilor Carr had sponsored. Councilor Carrie Cain the first black woman to serve on the Council, proposed that the new center be named for Thurgood Marshall. The name was selected through a

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<sup>608</sup>“An Evaluation of 1968 Summer Youth Programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity,” December 16, 1968, quotes from front page, 3-4, 37, 80-81. File “Summer Youth Program, 1969 (3 of3),” Box 89, Community Services Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Director, Subject Files 1965-1969, NA.

<sup>609</sup> City Record, November 16, 1966, Ordinance Number 2398-66, page 14-15, passed on February 27, 1967, City Record, March 8, 1967, CPL.

community competition and honored Marshall's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>610</sup>

The large, well-appointed facility opened its doors to serve Hough youth that summer. Thus, the City of Cleveland responded with both improved recreation facilities and an increased law-and-order mindset in dealing with black teens on the eastside.

By the time the Thurgood Marshall Center had opened its doors, the J“F”K House had closed permanently. Robinson had set about reopening the J“F”K Center just weeks after Hough, and he had been able to get the city closure of the building lifted long enough to repair the damage caused by the National Guard and sponsor a teen dance a few nights later.<sup>611</sup> This final reopening of the J“F”K House was to be short-lived. In April 1967, the City of Cleveland bulldozed the center after ruling the building a “health hazard.” Interviewed by the *Call and Post* amidst a cloud of dust from the destruction, Robinson declared: “They can destroy this building, but they can’t destroy the idea of black unity and black pride that was taught there.”<sup>612</sup> For the young black Clevelanders who had participated in J“F”K during its brief existence on the Cleveland landscape, the center stood as symbol of black pride and functioned as a Local Movement Center for a proto-Black Power.

Writing in 1984, Aldon Morris, lamented that scholars of the Civil Rights Movement had “largely dismissed” the importance of movement centers, and in doing so had failed to fully understand the multiple, local origins of that social movement.<sup>613</sup> Likewise, more work is

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<sup>610</sup> City Record, July 26, 1967, Resolution Number 1853-67, Adopted July 24, 1967, City Record, August 2, 1967, page 18, CPL.

<sup>611</sup> Bob Williams, “Links With Riots Denied As JFK Plans to Reopen,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August, 6, 1966.

<sup>612</sup> “J.F.K. House is Torn Down,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 8, 1967.

<sup>613</sup> Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 74.

needed to uncover how local spaces fostered the development of the Black Power Movement. J“F”K was one such space.

Morris also reminds his readers that it is important to remember that movement centers never operated in a “benign environment.” Those who formed these spaces faced “repression,” “fear,” “difficulties associated with devising effective strategies and tactics,” and “meager financial resources.”<sup>614</sup> J“F”K certainly faced all of these, and indeed eventually the repression of the ideas espoused by Robinson and his partners led to the facility’s closing. That oppression did not end with the closure of the building; it also extended to how J“F”K has survived in the popular historical memory of Cleveland. The local press played a key role in promoting such negative symbolism of J“F”K along with the report of the grand jury investigation into Hough. The lack of support and occasional outright hostility of long-established black leaders such as Councilman Jackson further cemented the negative images of the recreation space. Collectively, these actions by the media and local individuals constructed J“F”K into a negative symbol that still resounds in local collective memory. Such scapegoating, however, elided the systemic problem of youth violence, unfair policing, and a lack of recreation opportunities for black youth that persisted on Cleveland’s east side. Violence continued around the Sowinski Playground area, and in 1969 the *Cleveland Press* once again ran articles about festering racialized youth violence at the small park.<sup>615</sup> With the loss of J“F”K, the most tangible effort to address the problem of the continued youth violence in the area had been bulldozed off the city’s landscape.

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<sup>614</sup> Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 75.

<sup>615</sup> Untitled, *Cleveland Press*, June 12, 1969; “Action Planned to Calm Sowinski,” *Cleveland Press*, June 117, 1969, SC-MSLCSU.

What remained was a popular memory that cast black youth as violent aggressors and blamed them for the local violence.

Yet, the proto-Black Power ideologies that had been given room to speak at J“F”K during its brief existence were not soon silenced. For a brief period, a black public recreation space had provided room for a new black activist ideology to grow and develop in Cleveland. When in June 1966 Stokely Carmichael proclaimed the concept of “Black Power,” he provided a rallying point for a set of ideas that had already sunk deep roots in Cleveland. The J“F”K Center was a transitional space between Civil Rights and Black Power in the city. It was a space where some activists invested in earlier Civil Rights struggles came together to discuss new strategies of black empowerment. In the years following the closing of J“F”K, these nascent rumblings of Black Power would erupt in Cleveland. Harlell Jones went on to found the local Black Power organization, Afro Set. Other organizations, including the Republic of New Libya and the Black Panther Party, also became active in the city.

Despite the closing of his center, Lewis Robinson continued to organize around community issues, including youth recreation. In July 1969, he helped to put together a “Hough Memorial Day Cultural Week” to commemorate those who lost their lives in the rebellion. Approximate 600 local community members attended events at playfields surrounding the new Thurgood Marshall Center. Twenty-four businesses donated food for the weekend, and a local drill team entertained the crowd. The highlight of the weekend came when Robinson unveiled a plaque naming the baseball fields at the site “Joyce Arnett Square.” Arnett had been shot and killed by police during the Hough Rebellion.<sup>616</sup> Through the work of Robinson and others, the

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<sup>616</sup> “Hough Week Scheduled July 18-20, *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 19, 1969; Alvin Ware, “600 Residents Attend Hough Memorial Day Cultural Fete,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 26, 1969.

Thurgood Marshall Center became a local space for the celebration of black culture and pride. Although a lack of adequate operational funds continually plagued the center in the next years, the center's director, ex-Cleveland Browns linebacker Gerald King, was able to build a solid recreation program at the facility.<sup>617</sup>

In 1973, a photo of 1968 black Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos hung inside the entrance of the Thurgood Marshall Center. The photo showed the athletes with fists raised in perhaps the most powerful image of Black Power and sport captured on film. Beneath the picture, someone had printed on masking tape "Not Hate but Pride."<sup>618</sup> The placement of this iconic Black Power photograph at Thurgood Marshall echoed the portrait of Jomo Kenyatta hung nearly a decade before at J"F"K. It demonstrated that the ideas of black pride and empowerment, and their connection to local recreation had not disappeared in the rubble of the destroyed J"F"K Center. The ideas endured and moved to new spaces on the city landscape. In considering social movements, scholars must consider how these movements were mapped onto local landscapes and the spaces that provided these movements the room to grow and develop.

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<sup>617</sup> Cindy Cooper, "When Children Are Out of School, Recreation Centers Are Closed," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 6, 1973; Cindy Cooper, "Thurgood Marshall Center Runs On Pride, Not Hate," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 17, 1973.

<sup>618</sup> Cindy Cooper, "Thurgood Marshall Center Runs On Pride, Not Hate," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 17, 1973.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: RACE, REBELLION AND PUBLIC PARK SPACE: ROCKEFELLER PARK AND CULTURAL GARDENS REVISITED

In July 1968 members of the Ohio National Guard “encamped” at Cleveland’s Rockefeller Park on the city’s east side.<sup>619</sup> The Guardsmen had been called into the city in response to the Glenville Rebellion, an uprising of black citizens in response to the continued injustices of poor housing, inequitable education, lack of jobs, and especially, repressive policing. Six nights of rebellion resulted in the deaths of seven people, the damage or destruction of sixty-three businesses, and more than \$2 million in property damage.<sup>620</sup> In response, Mayor Carl Stokes called in the National Guard, which stationed some of their men at the most iconic public space in Cleveland, Rockefeller Park, which stood at the center of the rebellion. Men in uniform carrying loaded weapons stood in stark contrast to the more typical prosaic scenes of families on picnics, neighbors walking their dogs, young people taking tennis lessons, or community volunteers tending to the extensive public gardens at the park. Perhaps no image could better capture the extent of the unsettling racial-tumult that rocked Cleveland in the late 1960s than that of soldiers among the rose bushes.

Yet long before the appearance of the National Guard, the shifting ethnic and racial relations on Cleveland’s east side were part of the history of the Rockefeller Park landscape. Located between the neighborhoods of Hough and Glenville, the park stood at the nexus of demographic change in the city, as the two neighborhoods moved from predominantly ethnic-European at the close of World War II, to almost wholly African American by the dawn of the 1970s. The Glenville rebellion was not the first time that violence was visited on this park

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<sup>619</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 76.

<sup>620</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, xiii.

landscape. Just a few years before, a rape that had occurred at Sowinski Playground on the park's western edge had nearly launched the east side into a full-blown race riot. In the late 1960s, as Black Power radicalism grew in the surrounding neighborhoods, the iconic Rockefeller landscape became an increasingly contested space between Black Nationalist and white supremacist factions.

Yet as was discussed in Chapter Three, the landscape of Rockefeller Park was also contested among members of the city's black political and community leadership. If this was true in the early 1960s, the intra-racial debates over Rockefeller Park became even more heated with the introduction of Black Power leadership. Indeed, before the decade concluded, dynamite and spray paint would be used in determining the direction of Rockefeller, alongside city ordinances and court cases. Examining the events that occurred at Rockefeller Park, especially during the tumultuous late 1960s and early 1970s, can thus afford the opportunity to consider how Black Power was inscribed (and perhaps, more to the point, excluded) from the city's cultural public landscape.

### **Rise of Black Power**

What happened at Rockefeller Park can only be understood in the context of the growing unrest among local black youth in the late 1960s. One of the greatest shifts in black cultural and political life in Cleveland was the rise of Black Power.<sup>621</sup> Several significant Black Power groups became active in Cleveland in the neighborhoods surrounding the park. One of the former leaders of the short-lived J“F”K House, Harlell Jones, who for a period of time went by the name Harlell X, became the founder of a new organization known as Afro Set. In 1967,

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<sup>621</sup>Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 29.



Harlell opened the Afro Set Cultural Shop, continuing much of the same type of outreach that had occurred at the J“F”K. Afro Set operated predominantly in the Hough and Glenville areas, though it most closely associated with Hough. While the J“F”K House had served as a transitional space between a Civil Rights and Black Power, or Black Nationalist philosophy, Afro Set clearly embraced a fully formed Black Nationalist politics.<sup>622</sup> In an interview, Jones outlined his definition of Black Nationalism: “Black Nationalism is an organization, a political party too. What we’re really trying to do is create black business, a black police force and a black city within a city or a nation within a nation.”<sup>623</sup>

The Afro Set Cultural Center promoted this philosophy. Center organizers purchased imported clothing and art from Africa and then sold the items to Clevelanders, and they used the profits from these sales to fund programs, including “Swahili classes, current event classes, drum classes, jewelry making, [and] pottery making.”<sup>624</sup> The group conducted neighborhood clean-up projects, and placed an emphasis on black self-defense classes and evening street patrols to maintain order in Hough. The Cultural Center also hosted weekly “Soul Sessions.”<sup>625</sup> Afro Set grew to become what one scholar described as “the largest black militant outfit in Cleveland.”<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Interview with Harlell Jones, March 18, 2010 conducted by Michael Zadell, in “‘By Any Means Necessary,’ the History of New Libya/Afro Set as a Case Study of Black Nationalists in Cleveland 1964-1971,” Cleveland Memory Project, accessed September 23, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org>. Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 91; Nissam-Sabat, “Panthers Set Up Shop in Cleveland,” 105;

<sup>623</sup> “Harlell X (Harlell Jones),” Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown, U.S.A.*, 124.

<sup>624</sup> “Harlell X (Harlell Jones),” Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown U.S.A.*, 127.

<sup>625</sup> Interview with Harlell Jones, in Zadell, “By Any Means Necessary,” Cleveland Memory Project, accessed September 23, 2013, <http://clevelandmemory.org>; Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 91; “Harlell X (Harlell Jones),” Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown U.S.A.*, 127.

<sup>626</sup> Nissam-Sabat, “Panthers Set Up Shop in Cleveland,” 100-101.

Ahmed (Fred) Evans, shown in the photograph in figure 20, was a second important leader in the rise of Black Nationalism on Cleveland's east side. Born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1931, one of twelve children, Evans was a Korean War veteran who had moved to Cleveland in 1952, where he became a bus driver. Evans described the vision that led him to take a leadership role in his community:

Then in 1962 I saw a UFO [Unidentified Flying Object] at Seventy-ninth and Kinsman [an eastside Cleveland intersection]. It hovered for a while and disappeared. That started me thinking about the stars and God and I thought that here I was thirty-three and Jesus had died at thirty-three and I hadn't even gotten started yet. So I moved off by myself to study the science of astrology and philosophy.<sup>627</sup>

These studies informed Evans' style of leadership, in which he on occasion referred to astrological signs as guiding his interpretation of events as they unfolded in east Cleveland. Such public comments also resulted in the mainstream press's casting of Evans as an eccentric leader at best, or even as a dangerous and unstable militant. Yet despite these misgivings, Evans became a vocal leader on Cleveland's east side, garnering a strong following of young black men in the Glenville area. He had made visits to the J" F" K house, "making astrological predictions" for some of the youth who frequented the center.<sup>628</sup> While the city's white press remained uncertain of what to make of Evan's astrology, Robert Allen has argued that such mysticism should not be considered a surprising element of Black Nationalism. Allen explained that in the context of white oppression "the tendency of this [Black] nationalism to withdraw into mystical, religious fantasies, escapist dreams" has always "existed in the cultural life of black people, especially in their music, but most whites are unaware of it until it finds a conscious

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<sup>627</sup> "Ahmed El Ibn Said, (Fred Evans), Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown U.S.A.*, 322.

<sup>628</sup> "Ahmed El Ibn Said, (Fred Evans), Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown, U.S.A.*, 323. Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 41.

advocate.”<sup>629</sup> Evan’s philosophy was thus legible to his black audience, but was quickly dismissed as odd by most white Clevelanders.

Evans also founded the Afro Culture Shop and Bookstore, and he served as a key leader in the Republic of New Libya, a Black Power organization. Evans later described the décor of the center: “[It] had hangings on the wall, with the signs of the zodiac and information relating to astrology, numerology, and philosophy, and we had a Black Nationalist flag there, black, red, and green, it had the crescent and star on it.” The center also had a “wall of truth” where center leaders would tack up articles from local and national newspapers and magazines concerning “the plight of the Negro.” Finally, on the walls hung photographs of Malcolm X, Jomo Kenyatta, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, and Patrice Lumumba.<sup>630</sup> These photographs, especially the one of Kenyatta, echoed the images hung at the J“F”K house earlier in the decade, and they marked the new Cultural Center as a space that celebrated strong, male black leadership, both in Africa and in the United States.

There was additional Black Nationalist or Black Power activity on Cleveland’s east side. Cory Methodist, which had hosted Malcolm X when he delivered his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech in Cleveland, continued to serve as a space for the exchange of Black Nationalist ideas. The college campuses of Case Western Reserve and Cuyahoga Community College (or Tri-C) also saw the development of a Black Power dialogue among students. At the Tri-C campus, located in the Central neighborhood, Mae Mallory, who had returned to Cleveland after settling her legal troubles in North Carolina, became a regular contributor *The Black Liberator*, a campus

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<sup>629</sup> Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Garden City: New York: Double Day Company, Inc., 1969), 99. Allen states that such mysticism was often tied to a return to Africa or the US granting an independent state for African Americans. It is not clear from the records I have reviewed whether Evan’s astrological predictions touched on such matters.

<sup>630</sup> “Ahmed El Ibn Said, (Fred Evans), Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown U.S.A.*, 324.

newspaper that supported Black Nationalism.<sup>631</sup> At Case Western Reserve, located in Glenville just south of Rockefeller Park, similar activities occurred. In the fall of 1968, an organization previously known as the Young Socialist Alliance began to call themselves the Panthers, but the Black Panther Party (BPP) did not officially establish a chapter in Cleveland until 1970. When BPP members did come to town, their efforts were centered in the Kinsman neighborhood, located southeast of Central, a growing black enclave on the city's east side. Thus, the three most significant Black Power groups in Cleveland had effectively divided their respective spheres of influence geographically. The Panthers claimed Kinsman, Afro Set operated primarily in Hough, and the Republic of New Libya focused on Glenville.<sup>632</sup>

While Black Nationalism grew on college campuses, in storefront cultural centers, the sanctuary of Cory Methodist Church, and in other spaces across the city's east side, not all members of the city's black citizenry subscribed to these ideas. Many prominent black leaders regularly criticized the rising black militancy, including William O. Walker, the influential editor of the *Cleveland Call and Post*. Councilman Leo Jackson continued to be one the most vocal critics of the young black men involved in organizations like Afro Set and the Republic of New Libya, adding to his ongoing rebuke of local "thugs" threatening his authority.<sup>633</sup>

Yet, despite this criticism and the geographical turf dividing various Black Power groups, there was often cooperation among the leadership. There were also connections between Black Power organizations and Civil Rights leadership. In the summer of 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) initiated a campaign in Cleveland.

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<sup>631</sup> Mallory, *The Black Scholar*, 19.

<sup>632</sup> Ryan Nissam-Sabaat, 101, 106.

<sup>633</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 241.

This effort was part of Dr. King's "Operation Breadbasket" initiative, a campaign to open black employment opportunities, with an emphasis on northern cities. The initiative also focused on registering black voters, a push coordinated with local CORE organizers and other activist groups.<sup>634</sup> Throughout that spring summer King made several trips to Cleveland. In May, King attended a "closed door" meeting with several Black Nationalists, including Ahmed Evans. Evans later was with King as he attended a rally and visited five high schools in the Hough Rebellion vicinity.<sup>635</sup>

On a trip in July King participated in a "mock hearing" before a "ghetto jury" held at Greater Avery AME Church in the Hough neighborhood. The program, developed as part of black citizen's response to the Hough uprising, featured King as one of the hearing's "jurors." The jurors listened to various grievances brought by Cleveland's black residents. Prominent among those who testified were Lewis Robinson and Ahmed Evans. Evans used his time before the jury to "call for a separation of the Negro from the White race," while another member of his organization recited a "protest in poetry" for the jurists. Black Power cultural forms and rhetoric interacted with Civil Rights leadership at this event, which was designed to draw attention to the systemic problems of police brutality, unsafe housing conditions and other forms of discrimination faced by local black residents.<sup>636</sup>

## Graffiti and the Gardens

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<sup>634</sup> "King Aides Dig in on Cleveland Front," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 17, 1967; "Ministers Meet with Dr. King," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 17, 1967; "Seatest is First Target of King Group," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 15, 1967, "Seatest Boycott Gets 50 New Jobs," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 12, 1967, and, "Stokes Victory Depends on Negro Registration," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 19, 1967. See also Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 58-60.

<sup>635</sup> Press Release, May 16, 1967, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 3: Records of the Public Relations Department.

<sup>636</sup> Alvin Ward, "Ghetto Jury Judges City," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 8, 1967.

This community trial before the “ghetto jury” illustrated the multiple deficiencies in municipal service delivery that plagued the expanding black neighborhoods surrounding Rockefeller Park. At the same time, the changing demographics of these neighborhoods resulted in increased tensions and violence between growing black populations and the remaining ethnic white enclaves on the city’s east side. As discussed in Chapter Five, in 1963 the beating and rape that occurred at Sowinski Playground at the edge of Rockefeller Park precipitated a near race riot. The crime resulted in Rockefeller Park coming in second in *McCall’s* magazine’s top ten list of most dangerous park in the United States.<sup>637</sup> The flagship park of the Cleveland system stood as an emblematic landscape in local and national media constructions of increasing, racialized urban violence. Rockefeller Park became a highly contested space, as inter-racial skirmishes between youth and vandalism by different groups occurred intermittently over the next three summers. When the Hough neighborhood, which bordered the park to the southwest, erupted into rebellion, Rockefeller became a space for the articulation of anger by different groups. Twice that summer, anti-black slogans and images were painted on park buildings, including at the Sowinski Playground. In September 1966, just a few short weeks after the grand jury issued its report on Hough, vandals defaced several statues in the cultural gardens. Spray painted messages of “Get Whitey” and “Black Power” tagged several statues, including busts of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>638</sup>

Both the black and mainstream press were quick to decry this Black Power vandalism. So, too, was the leadership of many prominent black community organizations, including the

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<sup>637</sup> “Fear Takes Over Our City Parks,” *McCalls*, October 1963, 108.

<sup>638</sup> “Cultural Gardens Vandals Hit,” *Plain Dealer*, September 9, 1966; “Monuments Are Smeared in Gardens,” *Cleveland Press*, September 8, 1966.

Glenville Area Community Council and the NAACP. The fact that this vandalism occurred just a few days before the annual One World Day Festival and celebration of the Cultural Gardens added to the sharp criticism of the vandals.<sup>639</sup> The *Cleveland Press* issued an editorial, which included the assessment:

Undoubtedly there will be many glowing words about brotherhood spoken Sunday [at the Cultural Gardens celebration]. The defaced memorials should serve to remind us that in Cleveland, 1966, brotherhood is not an accomplished fact but rather an ideal still to be attained.<sup>640</sup>

According to the *Press* analysis, the most symbolically rich cultural landscape in Cleveland had gained yet another layer of symbolic meaning as a result of the graffiti: The defaced Cultural Gardens stood as a symbol of how far the city had to go to reach its oft-stated goals of ethnic and racial harmony. Not only white newspapers, but also the black-run *Call and Post* took a similar stance on the vandalism, running an article “Hoodlums Smear Garden Monuments” on the front page of the paper and offering a \$100 reward for information on the perpetrators.<sup>641</sup> For its part, the NAACP issued a formal statement in response to the graffiti, declaring: “The perpetrators of this type of racist exhibitionism should be sought out and made to answer for their offense.” The NAACP statement did not stop with chastising those who painted the Black Power messages, but went on to speak against the white racist graffiti, and noted that police had failed to make an arrest for this vandalism.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> “Cultural Gardens Vandals Hit,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 9, 1966; “City to Speed Cleanup of Smeared Monuments,” *Cleveland Press*, September 9, 1966; “Gloomy Outlook for One World Day,” *Cleveland Press*, September 10, 1966.

<sup>640</sup> “Wanton Vandalism,” *Cleveland Press*, September 9, 1966.

<sup>641</sup> “Hoodlums Smear Garden Monuments,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 17, 1966.

<sup>642</sup> “Cultural Gardens Vandals Hit,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 9, 1966.

While no individuals were ever brought to trial for the anti-black vandalism, the police quickly made arrests after the Black Power graffiti.<sup>643</sup> Just two months after the graffiti was painted, five defendants, all young African American males – Harlell Jones, Albert Ware, Phillip Morris, Marvin T. Wolfe and Harold Mitchell – stood trial for defacing the statues. Jones and Ware had been focal points in the grand jury report and media coverage following the Hough rebellion, and the grand jury reported briefly mentioned Morris.<sup>644</sup> Jones was clearly the main target of the vandalism charges. Besides the graffiti charge, Jones was also indicted for attempting to burn down a grocery store and a Job Corps center as well as the “felonious assault” of a fifteen-year-old girl in the basement of the J“F”K house, crimes he was alleged to have committed during the summer of 1966. These other charges were tried in separate court proceedings, none of which resulted in conviction.<sup>645</sup>

At seventeen-years old, Mitchell Rogers was the only teenager brought to trial for the graffiti, as well as the only defendant to be represented by a public defender. Louis Stokes, who had volunteered his services for two of the Sowinski Six, also provided legal counsel for two of the defendants in the vandalism case, Harlell Jones and Phillip Morris.<sup>646</sup> Before the jury selection, Stokes moved for a change of venue, arguing that his clients could not get a fair trial in Cleveland. He read into the record excerpts from the grand jury report on Hough, which

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<sup>643</sup> “Echoes of Riots: Grand Jury Indicts Eight,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1968; “Jury Indicts Jones, 7 Others in Rampage,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 17, 1966. While originally eight individuals were indicted only five went to trial, one defendant plead guilty before the trial. “Dismiss Racist Charge Against 1 of 8 Indicted,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 7, 1967.

<sup>644</sup> The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, Harlell Jones, Phillip Morris, Harold Mitchell, and Albert Ware, Case No.85,587, January 2, 1968, 2, CAC.

<sup>645</sup> “Jones on Bond, Departs Jail in City Truck,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 18, 1966.

<sup>646</sup> “The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe,” 2, CAC. One other teenage defendant, alleged to have participated in the garden graffiti and to have connections to the J“F”K House plead guilty before going to trial, “Boy Admits Guilt in Park Destruction,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 30, 1966.



characterized Ware and particularly Jones as troublemakers with a record of inciting violence. He then introduced as evidence a book entitled “Road to Revolution: Communist Guerilla Warfare in the U.S.A.,” which alleged ties between Communist agitators and urban revolts in the United States. The book’s author argued: “In Cleveland, Ohio, the Communist doctrine of promoting and supporting violence was clearly evidenced. The special grand jury report on the riots was very clear regarding the role of the Communists.”<sup>647</sup> The book then directly quoted the grand jury report on Hough for five pages, including the section that listed the names and addresses of Jones, Ware and Morris. According to Stokes, the book was available at “books stands in the city of Cleveland” for 75 cents. His argument was that because of the circulation of such literature and media reports, three of the defendants had already been deemed guilty in the Cleveland court of public opinion, and therefore they could not get a fair trial in the city. The judge decided to move the case forward in Cleveland despite these concerns. Stokes then argued to dismiss the jury because only four of the potential fifty member jury pool were African American, in a city where black residents constituted slightly more than a third of the population. Again, the judge ruled against Stokes. The empanelled jury ended up including two black jurists out of twelve. The case went to court in January 1968.<sup>648</sup>

The prosecution alleged that the defendants had caused \$3,400 worth of damage to twenty-three statues in the Cultural Gardens. Their theory of the case was that the group had met in Wolfe’s apartment and hatched the plan to deface the statues, and that the accused adults had put several black youth up to the task of vandalism. The first witness for the prosecution was

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<sup>647</sup> Defendant’s Exhibit Group 1-d,” The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, referenced on page 36-37, 894, CAC, Phillip Abbot Luce, *Road to Revolution: Communist Guerrilla Warfare in the U.S.A.* (San Diego California: Viewpoint Books, no date).

<sup>648</sup> The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, January 3, 1968, 36-37, 54, CAC.

John Bonza, superintendent of the maintenance for the Parks department. Pictures of each of the graffiti-covered statues were entered into evidence. Bonza testified that he found spray painted messages that read “Kill Whitey!” Yet upon further inspection of the photographic evidence it was shown that only one picture showed a message reading “Get Whitey!” The word “Kill” was not documented anywhere in the photos.<sup>649</sup> Similar exaggerations had occurred in aftermath of the Sowinski trial, where media estimations of black violence and alleged brutality went beyond any documented act or event. This type of testimony was another example of how urban parks became increasingly framed as dangerous landscapes; landscapes dripping, in at least in one man’s imagination, with violent painted messages to “kill” white people. Popular images of racial violence at Rockefeller Park were constructed not only at the physical site of the park itself, but also at the Municipal Court.

However, this was not the only representation of Rockefeller Park presented in court. On cross-examination attorney Louis Stokes asked Bonza: “Are there many nationality groups of Cleveland that are not represented in that park?” Bonza replied: “Not many.” Stokes then asked: “Is the negro nationality represented in that park?” Bonza answered, “Not that I know of, sir.” In this brief exchange Stokes entered into the court record the fact of black exclusion from the Cultural Gardens. Understanding the possible motivations behind the Black Power graffiti could only be accomplished in the context of this exclusionary landscape. The prosecution next brought to the stand the commissioner of parks, who testified that an “Afro Garden” was in the works, specifically referencing the proposed garden at the East Boulevard site discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, January 8, 1968, 121-160, CAC.

<sup>650</sup> The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, January 8, 1968, 177, 180-81, CAC.

Mitchell Rogers, the lone teenage defendant, became the star witness for the prosecution. He testified that the men, and particularly Jones, had put him and others up to the vandalism. He testified that on the night of the vandalism, Jones and Morris had gone to the “top part” of the park but that they “didn’t come down into the park and paint no statues.” The prosecution then presented evidence from the police laboratory that matched paint on a pair of pants belonging to Rogers to the paint on the statues. Upon cross-examination by the defense, Rogers contradicted several of his earlier statements. After the testimony of several more witnesses, the case went to the jury. They found Rogers guilty of “malicious destruction of property,” but could not come to agreement on any of the other defendants.<sup>651</sup> The case was over and Jones was free. In an interview after the trial, Jones thanked his supporters and declared “that it was the black community, not these defendants on trial.”<sup>652</sup> Jones did not clarify his statement further, but in this brief comment positioned himself and the other black men on trial as representatives or symbols for the entire “the black community.” Jones thus framed the stakes of the case as far greater than whether or not a few young men would serve time for vandalism; this case concerned all black Clevelanders and their access to public space. The racialized criminalization of the urban landscape, accelerated by the Sowinski Playground case and the Hough Rebellion, had cast all black residents, and especially all young black men, as potential vandals threatening the long-standing white spatial order. The outcome of the trial, if the young men had been found guilty, would feed further into this stereotype. Jones’s trial was over but the decision about if or

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<sup>651</sup> The State of Ohio vs. Marvin T. Wolfe, 402-407, CAC; January 16, 1968, 778; and, January 17, 1968, 828; “Defense Rattles Youth in Park Vandalism Trial,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 13, 1968; “Bobbing Along With Bob Williams,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 27, 1968; “Vandal Charges Dropped,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 6, 1968.

<sup>652</sup> “Bobbing along with Bob Williams,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 27, 1968.

how African American Clevelanders would be represented at the Cultural Gardens remained unsettled.

### **Electing the First Black Mayor of A Major US City**

The Cultural Gardens of Cleveland's public landscape was of course not the only space for contested black representation in the city; and increasingly, representation at the ballot box became the focus for local black community leaders. Fed up with a City Hall that remained unresponsive to black concerns, many local activists became convinced that the only viable solution was black control of the Mayor's office. Thus, the late 1960s not only saw a rise in Black Nationalist cultural spaces in Cleveland, but it also saw an increase in black political power in the city. White flight, which had shifted growing numbers of the city's ethnic white population to the suburbs after World War II, accelerated after the 1966 Hough Rebellion. In the aftermath, the city scrambled to find solutions to ensure such a rebellion did not occur again, but conditions were slow to change. As the summer of 1967 approached, many predicted the city would teeter into violence again. One such dire prognosticator who gained national attention was Ahmed Evans. In a story published in *The Wall Street Journal*, he predicted that May 9 would be a "terrible day" of violence in Cleveland. He based his prediction on an eclipse of the sun that was supposed to happen that day.<sup>653</sup> The date came and went without incident, but city officials and businessmen stood uneasy. Later that month, Lewis Robinson predicted summer violence in Cleveland's black neighborhoods in an article published in *Look* magazine. He

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<sup>653</sup> Monroe W. Karmin and David Vienna, "Racial Powder Keg, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 1967. Later Evans claimed that the *Wall Street Journal* had misrepresented his prediction and claimed that he had actually predicted trouble in 1966, before the Hough Rebellion, and not in 1967. "Ahmed El Ibn Said, (Fred Evans)," Frank L. Keegan, *Blacktown U.S.A.*, 323-324.

predicted “You can’t stop the riot that’s coming,” and Cleveland newspapers, including the *Call and Post*, picked up the interview and reprinted portions of it.<sup>654</sup>

To many Clevelanders, it was clear that the Democratic incumbent, Mayor Locher, was not up to the challenge of dealing with the issues that had led to Hough. In 1965, Carl Stokes had narrowly missed winning the Democratic primary for mayor of the city, and by 1967 the political winds in the city seemed to be shifting in Stokes’ favor. He benefited a great deal from the mounting frustration with Locher. When Locher’s chief of police went to the State Capitol to advocate for an increase in the death penalty due to the activity of black militants, many saw this as a grave political misstep for the administration.<sup>655</sup> The federal Civil Rights Commission’s visit to the city, and the Hough rebellion, had further cast Cleveland in a negative light in the national media.

Further, the debacle that was Cleveland’s urban renewal program had gained national attention. The Department of Housing and Urban Development had stopped all federal funds to Cleveland projects until the city got itself in order and started showing that at least a portion of the multiple unfinished projects was moving forward. This federal funding freeze jeopardized several public housing and civic development projects, including the city’s most touted urban renewal effort, the Erieview project. Erieview, which has been described as “one of the nation’s most ambitious urban-renewal plans,” was a major federally subsidized mixed-use business, residential and hotel project at the edge of the downtown district that was supposed to jump start economic renewal for Cleveland’s flagging economy. Key portions of the project were designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei, and the total project called for one dozen new buildings.

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<sup>654</sup> “Ghetto Leader Predicts New Cleveland Riots,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 27, 1967.

<sup>655</sup> Estelle Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 31.

Erievue became the most important initiative on the city's urban renewal agenda.<sup>656</sup> Critics of the plan argued that the attention and monies spent on this one effort "claimed all of the city's energy and momentum" and drained resources from other, much needed neighborhood infrastructure projects.<sup>657</sup> The threatened loss of federal funding for Erievue, the city's flagship development initiative, along with multiple other housing and urban renewal projects that stood at various stages of incompleteness, convinced many local industrial and business leaders that change must come to City Hall.<sup>658</sup>

Some of these leaders also became convinced that electing a black mayor would be a step toward ensuring that another summer of racial violence would not occur in the city.<sup>659</sup> In his memoir, Stokes explained "those white men believed that if they could put me out front they would be buying off the ghetto."<sup>660</sup> The support of these businessmen and political leaders was key to Stokes's successful campaign, but the reason that he was able to win office was because of his strong grassroots organizing, which one author has described as "one of the most efficient volunteer organizations ever seen in modern politics."<sup>661</sup> Stokes received considerable support from the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), whose national office had named Cleveland one of three northern "target cities" for organizing. Locally, CORE activists had decided to make the

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<sup>656</sup> Poh and Wheeler, 163.

<sup>657</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 164. Cleveland Newspaperman Philip O. Porter concurred with this criticism of Erievue, blaming the Hough Rebellion in part on the draining of city resources into the downtown business district renewal project., Porter, *Cleveland: A Confused City*, 237.

<sup>658</sup> Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 17.

<sup>659</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 261; Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 17; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996*, 169; Porter, *Confused City on a Seesaw*, 233; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 17.

<sup>660</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 99.

<sup>661</sup> Haskins, 24.

Stokes election and black voter registration their focus after the organization had become frustrated with the local political process during their 1963-1964 school desegregation campaigns. CORE not only brought volunteers for Stokes but also financial resources. The Ford Foundation granted CORE \$175,000 to support voter registration in Cleveland.<sup>662</sup> While this funding of Cleveland's CORE marked the foundation's "first direct grant to a militant group," it should not be read as a wholesale endorsement of CORE or its increasingly radical philosophy. The Ford Foundation had been "trying to 'calm' Cleveland since 1961 by funding various research and action projects," but as the 1966 Hough Rebellion had demonstrated, racial tension remained very high in the city.<sup>663</sup> The Ford Foundation's grant to CORE was a new dimension in this ongoing effort to buy peace in Cleveland.

King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) also made Cleveland a priority and the election of Stokes a focus for the organization.<sup>664</sup> The Stokes campaign was wary of King's involvement, however, and advisors worried that the presence of the famous Civil Rights organizer in the city might threaten the delicate political coalition of his campaign. Specifically, Stokes was worried that King organizing marches and rallies in the city might turn off potential white voters and jeopardize his chance of winning the election.<sup>665</sup> Despite these concerns, the

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<sup>662</sup> Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 77; Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 22; Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 100; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 75.

<sup>663</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*,

<sup>664</sup> The Stokes election was just one component of the SCLC's 1967 campaign in Cleveland, which included four goals, the organization of tenant unions, an "Operation Bread Basket" to organize around issues of food and hunger, the development of a black-run bank, and voter registration. Chatterjee, "Local Leadership in Black Communities," 57.

<sup>665</sup> Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 19; Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 100; Disagreements with between the Stokes campaign and King's organization continued after the campaign. According to Stokes, Coretta Scott King claimed that SCLC spent \$500,000 on the Stokes election, a figure that Stokes contends was more than was spent on his entire campaign. Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 100.

collective efforts of these national organizations and local activists led to the registration of 25,000 new voters, 70 percent of whom were African American.<sup>666</sup> These newly registered voters helped put Stokes in City Hall, making him the first black mayor of a major U.S. city, with more than 95 percent of the black vote and nearly 15 percent of voting white residents in the Democratic primary. This outcome carried him to a narrow victory in the general election.<sup>667</sup>

When Stokes entered office, he faced many pressing problems. A rapidly declining tax base, deteriorating infrastructure, and sharp animosity between the city police force and many of its black residents were just some of the items that clamored for immediate attention from the new mayor. Stokes faced a further challenge in seeking to address these problems. Due in part to the political fallout over Councilor Jackson's Rockefeller Park land swap fiasco, several Democratic councilors had actually lost their labor endorsements. There was a shake-up in council leadership in 1965. Stanton, a west side Democrat of Irish descent, saw his opportunity and made a successful move for the council presidency. Leading a coalition made primarily of west side, ethnic white councilmen, Stanton became a political force in Cleveland, and throughout Stokes' two terms as mayor he increasingly marshaled his political clout in the council against the mayor's plans.<sup>668</sup> While the Rockefeller park-land fight had by no means been the only factor in the change of Council leadership, it contributed to the shift at the top of the Cleveland Democratic Party, which in turn affected the efficacy of the Stokes administration.

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<sup>666</sup> Frazier, "Harambee Nation," 227.

<sup>667</sup> Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 19, 28.

<sup>668</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 133-139. Stokes blamed Stanton for the fact that the black members of the Council did not support him in the 1965 election, a lack of support that likely cost him that narrow race. Stanton on the other hand harbored his own ambitions for the Mayor's office, which he blamed Stokes for derailing.



Questions of parks and public property reverberated far beyond their immediate geographic boundaries or specific planning and policy decisions.

Faced with an uncooperative City Council, the early Stokes administration was further set back by poor choices for a couple of key staff positions. After the first few rocky months of Stokes's first term, the news came that King had been assassinated in Memphis. While many other cities in the United States erupted into violence at the news, Cleveland remained relatively calm. The business leaders who supported Stokes took this calm as a sign that their plan of keeping the peace by backing a black mayor had paid off.

Sensing that his political capital was on the rise, Stokes introduced a bold new campaign. Dubbed "Cleveland Now!" the plan was to raise local money from the public and business community to leverage increased state and federal funding "for projects ranging from new housing to job training to recreation centers."<sup>669</sup> Posters, bumper stickers, window stickers, buttons, and handouts helped promote the campaign.<sup>670</sup> An early press release about the initiative described a "program which enlists the aid of the total community—business, civic groups, professional people, the news media, and the general public," to tackle urgent needs of the city. Local fundraising efforts were headed by two groups. The Cleveland Growth Association was charged with soliciting donations from local businesses, and was led by George Dively, the CEO of the communications and electronics firm, the Harris Corporation, and John Sherwin, the chairman of the Cleveland Foundation.<sup>671</sup> George Steinbrenner, the Cleveland ship-building mogul, led the drive to solicit donations from the general public. In these three men,

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<sup>669</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 130.

<sup>670</sup> "Cleveland: Now!" Memorandum, April 29, 1968, Cleveland Now Records, 1967-1977, box 1, folder 5, WRHS.

<sup>671</sup> "Fact Sheet," May 1, 1968, Cleveland Now Records, 1967-1977, box 1, folder 5, WRHS.

Stokes aligned some of the most powerful business and philanthropic leaders of the city behind his plan to revitalize Cleveland.<sup>672</sup> Enthusiasm for “Cleveland Now!” ran high in the city, and the Stokes administration shot 4,000 feet of film with the assistance of the city’s three major television networks to promote the effort. The campaign immediately surpassed expectations, raising \$4 million in local corporate donations by the end of 1968 and receiving a \$1.6 million federal grant. The overall goal of the program was to raise \$1.5 billion over the next ten to twelve years. Seven-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars was slated for youth programs, and increasing employment in the city was a major focus of the initiative. In addition, Stokes was able to get more than \$70 million in federal funding, which had been put on hold due to inept management of his predecessor, restored to Cleveland.<sup>673</sup> Optimism about the new Mayor and the direction of the city ran high during the spring of 1968.

### **Competing Visions for Black Representation in the Cultural Gardens**

That spring, Councilman Leo Jackson, whose beleaguered plans for an African American Cultural Garden had still not come to fruition, came up with a new proposal concerning Rockefeller Park. Jackson suggested that Cleveland memorialize Dr. King with a statue in the Cleveland Cultural Gardens. At least one Clevelander questioned this proposed location, writing to the *Call and Post*, “quite a number of people don’t even know where this is or, if they do, they very seldom visit there.”<sup>674</sup> This quote demonstrates that the once proud Cultural Gardens,

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<sup>672</sup> “Fact Sheet,” May 1, 1968, Cleveland Now Records, 1967-1977, box 1, folder 5, WRHS; “George Dively, 85, Harris Leader, *New York Times*, November 5, 1988.

<sup>673</sup> Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 32-34; Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 39; Moore, “Carl Stokes,” 88-89; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 126-128.

<sup>674</sup> Helen Das, Letter to the Editor, “King Memorial Suggestion,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 8, 1968. Mrs. Das’ suggestion was to name Municipal Stadium, where the city’s professional baseball and football team played their

increasingly beset with vandalism and declining maintenance, were slipping from the prominent place on the city's landscape they had once enjoyed. Yet, while at least one resident questioned "where this is," another group of black Clevelanders had been working on their own, different idea for a new statue in the park.

In 1967, a group of prominent black Clevelanders approached the Cultural Garden Federation with the idea of placing a statue of either George Washington Carver or Booker T. Washington in the gardens.<sup>675</sup> Spearheaded by the Cleveland chapter of the Tuskegee Alumni Association, the group eventually settled on first installing a statue of Washington, while possibly honoring "two or three more nationally known personalities" in the future. Those interested in the project formed a group named the "American Committee Commemorating Booker T. Washington." In correspondence with the Cultural Garden Federation, the chairman of the committee explained the selection of Washington for commemoration:

We chose to honor Booker T. Washington now because of the contributions he made to America in the field of industrial education. He is known world wide as an educator, lecturer and organizer. He was the only American to make the long journey from the slave cabin to the Hall of Fame.....He was, is and will ever be one of America's total citizens.<sup>676</sup>

In this short description, the organization made a claim about how the proposed statue would fit into the landscape of the Cultural Gardens. Although it is not clear what "Hall of Fame" the letter referred to, the entreaty echoed the kind of language used in the African section of the 1950 One World Day pageant, which had called for the celebration of the "high citizenship"

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games, for King. Councilor Jackson's proposal for a King statue went nowhere, although in 1981 Liberty Boulevard, which runs the length of the park was renamed in honor of Dr. King.

<sup>675</sup> S. T. Brinkley, Acting President to Mr. William Ware, November 22, 1967, Container 1, Folder 11, Tuskegee Alumni Association, WRHS

<sup>676</sup> William J. Ware to Mrs. L. Phillips, July 27, 1968, Container 1, Folder 11, Ms 3700, Cleveland Cultural Garden Records 1916-1976, WRHS.

represented by figures such as “Dunbar, Carver and Booker Washington” who “in Education, in all branches have proven themselves worth and equal to every phase of Civic Life.”<sup>677</sup> The use of this type of rhetoric, as well as the proposal to place the Booker T. Washington statue in the American Garden, won the quick approval of the Cultural Gardens Federation, as the proposal mirrored the Federation’s ideas of how black Clevelanders should be incorporated into the gardens.

Yet, while this proposal might at first glance seem to have done little to challenge white elites’ imagination of how black cultural contributions should be mapped onto Rockefeller Park, this project was an important step forward in the Gardens. The Gardens were constructed as a space for celebrating some of the most prestigious cultural icons of Europe, with busts and plaques honoring Bach, Beethoven, Goethe, Virgil, Dante and Marconi tucked among the various plantings and fountains. By adding Booker T. Washington to this list, a black figure was placed into this pantheon of human achievement. The acknowledgement of Washington as a “total citizen” worthy of inclusion in the gardens meant by extension black Clevelanders could claim they, too, should be able to access the full rights and recognition of citizenship.

Indeed, those involved in the Booker T. Washington statue initiative were some of the most prominent black citizens in Cleveland. The group included Judge Perry Jackson, the first African American judge in Ohio. Judge Jackson was also a former representative to the Ohio General Assembly and active in the NAACP, Urban League, and the Phillis Wheatley House.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> “African and the Negro” in “One World” July 24, 1950, 9, Container 1, Folder 18, Ms 3700, Cleveland Cultural Garden Records 1916-1976, WRHS.

<sup>678</sup> *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. “Perry B. Jackson,” accessed September 23, 2013, <http://ech.cwru.edu/>. Judge Jackson was an important figure on Cleveland’s Black Public sphere for more than four decades. Before entering politics from 1923-1927 he served as the editor for the *Cleveland Call*, one of the two black newspapers consolidated into the *Cleveland Call and Post* under William O. Walker. He was someone who would speak out publicly on issues important to the black community, take for example his letter to the editor concerning the Sowinski Trial, discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Entire Community’s Blame,” *Cleveland Call and Post*,

Jackson was joined by another black judge, Paul D. White.<sup>679</sup> Ethel Storey, the retired former director of the Phillis Wheatley House who had assumed that role upon the retirement of founder Jane Edna Hunter, also served on the statue committee.<sup>680</sup>

These prominent black Clevelanders quickly raised money for the statue project. A special concert by the popular musical group, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension, headlined the fundraising efforts.<sup>681</sup> In 1968, the formal commemoration of the spot set aside for the new statue was a highlight of the annual One World Day celebration.<sup>682</sup> Two years later, the Booker T. Washington Statue was unveiled, and a photograph of the statue is shown in figure 21.<sup>683</sup> Yet, not everyone in the black community supported this version of black cultural inclusion on the city's public landscape. Twice during the 1970s, attempts were made to blow up the statue, dynamiting likely conducted by local Black Power groups.<sup>684</sup>

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July 13, 1963, Perry B. Jackson, Judge, Court of Common Pleas." In another example of his local leadership, Jackson was featured on a panel of "Negro Leaders" attended by 100 prominent black Clevelanders in 1957. "Negro Leaders Hold Meeting," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1957.

<sup>679</sup> Al Sweeney, "Heavy Negro Vote Elects Paul White," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 9, 1963.

<sup>680</sup> "Ethel Storey to Retire From Phillis Wheatleay," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 26, 1960.

<sup>681</sup> "Concert Features 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 10, 1969, "5<sup>th</sup> Dimension sings to Help Honor Negro," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 10, 1969.

<sup>682</sup> "Cultural Garden Federation Celebrates "One World Day," *University Circle*, newsletter, November 1968, Container 2, Folder 1, "Related Publications." 1929-1976, undated Ms, 3700, Cleveland Cultural Garden Records 1916-1976, WRHS; "Dedication Set: Cultural Garden Plot to Honor African American Greats," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 28, 1968.

<sup>683</sup> "American Committee Commemorating Booker T. Washington, Press Release August 21, 1970, Container 1, Folder 12, Tuskegee Alumni Association, WRHS.

<sup>684</sup> Tebeau, "Sculpted Landscapes," 342.

## The Glenville Rebellion

As the attempt to blow up the statue of Booker T. Washington demonstrated, at least some black Clevelanders held a deep skepticism and outright animosity toward a politics of integration or accommodation, and the inscription of such a philosophy on the public landscape. In these east side neighborhoods, politicians' promises of full citizenship for the city's African Americans echoed hollowly through the rat-infested streets and hallways of crumbling schools. They fell on the deaf ears of young men who endured increasingly hostile policing while waiting for jobs that never materialized. While the "Cleveland Now!" campaign was gaining momentum, the fundraising would take time and consequently could not address the multiple, immediate city service shortfalls that had become the norm in many of the city's neighborhoods.

Efforts such as the Booker T. Washington statue project and the election of Carl Stokes as mayor evinced the hope of many in the city that another episode of violent rebellion could be staved off through increased black participation and representation in civic life. This hope was not realized. The second large-scale urban rebellion in Cleveland to occur in two years broke out in Glenville in July 1968. As a neighborhood, Glenville had a much broader range of income than did the economically challenged neighborhood of Hough, the scene of the city's 1966 rebellion. Pockets of poverty stood next to streets of middle-class homes owned by African Americans, an economic geography one author has described as "a highly factionalized community."<sup>685</sup> During the 1960s, Glenville was a neighborhood in transition, and by 1962, 60 percent of families had lived in Glenville for less than five years. Yet, several prominent black Clevelanders, such as Councilor Leo Jackson, continued to call the area home. The median family income of Glenville was \$5,357, slightly more than three-fourths the city average, giving

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<sup>685</sup> Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 141.

Glenville the second highest income level among predominantly black Cleveland neighborhoods.<sup>686</sup> Yet, what this median average concealed was the great economic disparity within the neighborhood. According to the principal of Glenville High School, this economic diversity did not mitigate, but rather served to exacerbate, the unrest among poor young black residents of the area. As early as 1966, he predicted: “The Watts pressure exists in Glenville more so than in Hough because of the greater range in population in the Glenville area.”<sup>687</sup> In the summer of 1968, that “Watts pressure” boiled over.

That July, the FBI told Cleveland police about a suspected plot by controversial Black Power leader Ahmed Evans and his organization, The Republic of New Libya. According to the FBI, Evans’s group was amassing weapons and had a hit list for assassinations, including Mayor Carl Stokes, Councilman Leo Jackson, and William O. Walker, the editor of the *Call and Post*. While the Cleveland police doubted the veracity of some of these speculations, on July 23 they held a meeting to discuss a potential “outbreak of violence” supposedly scheduled to start the next morning at eight a.m. Around six that evening, black City Councilor George Forbes, accompanied by Walter Beach, an ex-Cleveland Brown and Director of the Mayor’s Council on Youth Opportunities, visited Evans’s Glenville residence to determine if they could help avert any potential violence. On the way to the meeting, they stopped by the headquarters of Afro Set, the Black Power organization founded by Harlell Jones. They did not find Jones, but picked up one of the group’s young members to bring to the meeting with Evans. Pulling up to Evans’

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<sup>686</sup>Ernest J. Bohn, “Glenville: Its People, Shopping Habits and Buying Power,” (Cleveland, Ohio Planning Commission, 1962), 13,22; 1960, U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing, Cleveland, Ohio, “Table P-1.—General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts,” 22-27.

<sup>687</sup> Mr. Stafford, Principal of Glenville High School, Interviewed by Leda Rothman, Box 7, File Cleveland, Ohio-Interviews (1 of 2) [general.; welfare, police-community relations, education], Record Group, 453, Records of the Commission of Civil Rights, NA.

apartment building, they found two police cars with four police officers parked across the street in an obvious stakeout. At the meeting with Forbes and Beach, Evans expressed his concern about the police surveillance and ongoing harassment. Forbes agreed to try to get the police cars removed, and left the meeting feeling that progress had been made. He was on the phone with Mayor Stokes discussing the situation when news of the start of Glenville rebellion broke into the phone call.<sup>688</sup>

What happened to spark the rebellion is a matter of great debate. One version of events was that on the afternoon of July 23, a police officer had noticed an old “junk car” on the street near the building where Evans lived. After confirming with neighbors that it was indeed an abandoned car, he ticketed it and called a tow truck. While responding to the call, one of the municipal police tow truck drivers was shot three times and identified Evans as the shooter. The theory was that Evans had set up the abandoned car as a trap to lure police to the neighborhood so as to ambush them with sniper fire. Police cars then came to the scene, and a shootout between the police and Evans’s group commenced. In another version of the evening’s events, the police cars were the first targets of the shooters and the tow truck just happened to get caught in the crossfire. In still another version, the police shot first, drawing defensive fire from those Evans’s apartment. By the time the bullets stopped flying an hour later, three police officers had been killed and twelve injured. Three people from Evans’s group had been killed, and one injured. One other civilian had been killed, and two injured, adding to a total of fifteen gunshot injuries and seven deaths. That night, looting broke out across Glenville, and the fire department responded to more than fifty fires. Mayor Stokes called the governor to request the support of

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<sup>688</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 45-47. Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 207-211.



the National Guard.<sup>689</sup> The next morning, the shooting and burning in Glenville dominated the newspaper headlines and broadcast news. The media characterized the night's events alternately as an "incident," a siege," an "inferno," a "disaster," and a "riot." Cleveland police referred to what happened in Glenville as a "planned ambush."<sup>690</sup>

While the public woke up to the news, City Hall scrambled to decide how to respond the next evening. Stokes's decision became perhaps the most controversial he made during his tenure as mayor. On the morning of the July 24, he held a meeting with more than 100 black community leaders. No white individuals, not even white members of the mayor's own staff were allowed into the meeting. The discussion lasted for an hour and a half. Several Black Power leaders left the mayor's office and regrouped at a nearby hotel to continue to wait to see what he would decide to do, while Stokes weighed his options for much of the afternoon. Finally at 4:15 pm, Stokes announced his strategy. He cordoned off six square miles of the city, comprised primarily of the Glenville and Hough neighborhoods. The National Guard would patrol the borders of that section of the city, ostensibly to ensure that agitators would not attempt to enter the area, but only black policemen and individuals from the community would patrol the streets inside the cordoned zone. Four black men led the civilian patrols, which included approximately 300 volunteers.<sup>691</sup> As depicted in the photograph of figure 22, Harlell Jones, from Afro Set, led the first group. William Denton from United Youth Council took the second group. Benjamin Lloyd and Ronald Turner, from Pride Inc., led the final two groups. Many black

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<sup>689</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 33-67. For more on the debate over who started the shootout and how the Glenville Rebellion unfolded see: Moore, "Carl Stokes," 89-90; Ryan Nissam-Sabat, "Panthers Set Up Shop in Cleveland," 100-101, Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 213. In this memoir Stokes speculated "It seemed as though the top officers of the [police] department wanted some kind of incident to discredit the Mayor."

<sup>690</sup> Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 133.

<sup>691</sup> "Statement by Mayor Carl B. Stokes," July 25, 1968, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, box 46, folder 870, WRHS.

prominent middle-class leaders, and especially black clergy, were skeptical of the mayor's plan and did not participate in the peace-keeping patrols. Although a few white officers broke the mayor's orders and responded to calls in the black-only zone, by and large the directive went forward according to plan. White police officers angry at their exclusion from the area were heard that night using racial epithets openly on their service radios, including one comment to "Fuck that nigger [m]ayor." That night, only three fires were set, thirty-six stores looted and thirteen people arrested, and no deaths occurred. Newspapers across the country, and as far away as Ireland and England reported on the Mayor's all-black policing strategy, and the London *Guardian* declared, "Negro Mayor Stakes his Career on Bold Step."<sup>692</sup> Despite the reduction in the level of violence and looting the Mayor faced extreme pressure, especially from white storeowners, to let the full power of the police and National Guard back into the area.<sup>693</sup>

Bowing to public pressure, Mayor Stokes set a 6:30 p.m. curfew for the area the following night and allowed the full police force and National Guard back into the cordoned area. For the next three nights, intermittent looting and arrests occurred, but nothing like the earlier shootout happened again. Rockefeller Park bisected the cordoned zone, as evidenced in figure 23, and the National Guard used the open space of the park as an "encampment" and staging ground. On July 25, the *Plain Dealer* ran a photo of a guardsman foodline set up in Rockefeller Park.<sup>694</sup> The trees in the background and long table covered with trays of food and

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<sup>692</sup> Allistaire Cooke, "Negro Mayor Stakes his Career on Bold Step," *The Guardian*, July 26, 1968; see also, "Cleveland Returns to Uneasy Peace," *The Irish Times*, July 25, 1968; DJR Bruckner, "Negro Peace Unit," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1968; and, Dave Hess, "Cleveland Shaken, How Calm Returned," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 1960.

<sup>693</sup> Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 71-75; Moore, "Carl Stokes," 89-90; Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 216-218.

<sup>694</sup> "Guard Stand Looks Permanent," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 25, 1968, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, box 46, folder 874, WRHS.

ketchup bottles could have been the scene of picnic, except for the men serving and raking the food were dressed in military uniforms and helmets. The park also served as a “buffer zone” during the rebellion. Most of the violence and looting occurred east of the park, with only a few incidents breaking out west of Rockefeller. Much like a firebreak is used to stop the line of flames of a forest fire, the expanse of open park space helped to slow the fires of the rebellion from moving west.<sup>695</sup>

On the fourth night of the rebellion, police arrested Harlell Jones for breaking curfew and carrying brass knuckles, charges that were later dropped. Evans, however, was arrested, indicted, tried and convicted on seven counts of murder. He was sentenced to die in the electric chair, but he died in prison of lung cancer a decade later in February 1978 before the sentence could be carried out.<sup>696</sup>

Just as had occurred in Hough, almost before the smoke cleared, finger pointing began. No definitive version of the Glenville rebellion was ever produced to meet the satisfaction of all Clevelanders. In May 1969, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence released in paperback a 126-page report, entitled “Shoot-Out in Cleveland,” often referred to as the Masotti report, after its lead author. Although many in the public clamored for the report’s release prior to the Evans trial, it was not made public until after the trial’s conclusion. The report was also greatly scaled back from its original 400 pages. The delay in its release and the shortening of the findings led many, especially in the city’s black neighborhoods, to question the report’s veracity. While the Masotti Report clearly characterized Ahmed Evans as guilty, ambivalence about the details of those July days ran throughout the assessment. At one point,

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<sup>695</sup> Masotiti and Corsi, 62. 76.

<sup>696</sup> Masotti and Corsi, 76-77, and 97-100; Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 221-222; “Ahmed Evans Eulogized,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 11, 1968.

the report's authors asked, "Who shot first? And at whom? Various accounts of where, how, and why the shooting started have appeared. Even after extensive investigation, questions remain unanswered."<sup>697</sup> After the report's release, a local political cartoon, depicted a black nationalist and a police officer standing back to back, arms crossed, with the shadow of "Glenville violence" between them. A copy of the Masotti Report with two hands drawn on its cover, floats between the two figures. Each hand is pointing—one at the Nationalist and one at the officer, as shown in Figure, 24. The report did little to settle the deep differences of opinion that raged across Cleveland about the events in Glenville. According to one scholar, "Generally, the west side residents sided with the police and the east siderers with Ahmed Evans, a separatism much wider than the Cuyahoga River." Glenville further deepened the already existent geographical-racial divide that mapped the city.<sup>698</sup>

Many in the black community were vocal in their critique of the Masotti Report and the Cleveland police's response to Glenville. Mae Mallory, a regular contributor *The Black Liberator*, a campus newspaper at Cuyahoga Community College was at the forefront of skepticism about Evans' guilt and in questioning the police version of events. She helped found the July 23<sup>rd</sup> Committee to Save Ahmed Evans. The committee raised money and tried to generate public awareness around the Evans trial, including holding sit-ins at the office of the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor, John T. Corrigan.<sup>699</sup> In 1971, she published an article titled "The Framing of Ahmed Evans," in *The Black Scholar*. In the article, Mallory critiqued the police's actions in Glenville during the rebellion and questioned Evans's guilt. She also detailed the

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<sup>697</sup> Massoti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 47.

<sup>698</sup> Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 141-145.

<sup>699</sup> Dick Peery, "Militants Storm Corrigan's Office: Holding Daily Sit Ins," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 31, 1969. Corrigan was the same prosecutor that had sent Mallory to North Carolina to face kidnapping charges.

police harassment of Evans predating the Glenville rebellion. She wrote: “An advocate of black nationalism, black pride and self help, Ahmed worked in the black community of Cleveland throughout the 1960’s, developing communes, advocating self-defense and opening his Afro Cultural Shop and Bookstore on Superior Avenue. These activities made him the target of police harassment and surveillance (His Culture shop was closed 3 times in 1967 for alleged “sanitary violations.”)<sup>700</sup>

This harassment of Evans brings up an important point. While city officials first denied and then repeatedly delayed black cultural representation on the city’s most prominent public cultural landscape, Rockefeller Park, they also harassed certain forms of black cultural expression when it occurred on private property. A black cultural bookshop was not allowed free operation when those who frequented the space were deemed to be too militant, revolutionary or dangerous. Curtailed in public space and surveilled in private space, black cultural expression had to navigate a complicated Cleveland landscape that limited and silenced black voices on multiple spatial levels.

Mallory was not alone in her criticism of the police response to Glenville and harassment of Evans. Roldo Bartimole, the white editor of the popular Cleveland underground newsletter “Point of View,” expressed incredulity at the police’s explanation of events. According to Bartimole, the initial tip that Evans was amassing guns came from Sergeant John Ungvary. Bartimole explained, “Conspiracy has been Sgt. Ungvary’s job for nearly thirty years as head of the subversive squad. You might say it’s an obsession with him.” Indeed, Ungvary was the same officer who had labeled the efforts to desegregate Garfield Park as a Communist

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<sup>700</sup> Mallory, *The Black Scholar*, 19. It is notable how similar the harassment of Evan’s shop was to the repeated “code violations” leveled against Lewis Robinson and his J“F”K Center just three years earlier.

conspiracy in the early 1950s. Bartimole and others questioned a Cleveland police and justice system that seemed to pin all instances of black unrest on elaborate conspiracies plotted by shadowy outsiders. “Point of View” characterized the Evans trial as “Mississippi justice in Cleveland.”<sup>701</sup>

Such assessments of the Glenville rebellion and the Evans case were by no means limited to Cleveland. Radical black newsletters circulated their own versions of what happened at Glenville to readerships in cities throughout the United States. These stories often placed the words “shootout” or “sniper” in quotations or referred to the event as the “so-called shootout.”<sup>702</sup> In October 1969, the *Black Panther* newspaper published its version of the story. The article speculated that more policemen had died in the gun battle than was reported, but that authorities covered up the deaths. The article emphasized the lack of evidence in the Evans trial and recounted efforts to fund his defense, including “leafleting, petitions, demonstrations, and a public meeting.”<sup>703</sup> A year and a half later, the “Black News” a monthly newsletter printed in Brooklyn with a circulation of about 1,200, picked up the story, describing Evans as “one of our bravest Black freedom fighters.” The article also chastised readers for not giving Evans the same level of support that efforts to free Angela Davis and Bobby Seale had generated.<sup>704</sup> For her part, black political activist Angela Davis described the Evans verdict “as a reprisal for the

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<sup>701</sup> Roldo Bartimole, “The ‘Conspiracy’ of White Justice,” *Point of View*, vol. 1, no. 22. Roldo Bartimole was a journalist at the *Plain Dealer* before leaving to distribute his own bi-weekly newsletter *Point of View*, known for challenging the Cleveland power structure.

<sup>702</sup> “Legal Lynching and More of the Same,” *Black Panther*, volume 3, issue 21, September 13, 1969, p. 9; “Brother C, “Ahmed Evans,” *Black News*, volume 1; issue 3, March 28, 1971, p. 19; and, “Appeal Set for Ahmed Evans,” *African World*, April 30, 1972.

<sup>703</sup> “Ahmed Evans’ Story,” *Black Panther*, volume 3, issue 29, October 18, 1969, p. 9.

<sup>704</sup> Brother C, “Ahmed Evans,” *Black News*, volume 1; issue 3, March 28, 1971, p. 19.

mass insurrection of the Black Community in Cleveland and his own political activities,” placing Evans as part of a larger systematic decapitation of radical black community leadership nationwide.<sup>705</sup> Davis spoke from first-hand experience with government reprisals for black political action, penning her support of Evans in the midst of her own legal troubles in California stemming from her activism. From Detroit, the Republic of New Africa sent a representative to Cleveland to offer assistance to the efforts to free Evans.<sup>706</sup>

While many African Americans in Cleveland and beyond followed the Evans trial, the Stokes administration faced immediate backlash from many others in the city, and especially the police force, for his handling of the rebellion. The police stood in almost open defiance of the mayor. While many black civic leaders wrote the *Call and Post* to express their support for Stokes’s handling of the July events, the mayor’s political capital declined greatly.<sup>707</sup> When it was revealed that Ahmed Evans’s Cultural shop had received a \$10,300 grant from the “Cleveland Now!” campaign, this fueled further outrage. The money for Evans’s shop came from a larger grant given to the Hough Development Corporation for an initiative entitled project AFRO. According to the original grant application, the aim of Project AFRO was the “development of self-identity, self-pride, self-respect and positive ambitions among youth in the poverty stricken areas.”<sup>708</sup> Many in Cleveland speculated that Evans had actually used the grant

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<sup>705</sup> Angela Davis, “The State Unleashed its Machine of Repression on the Chief of Staff Of the Black Panther Party,” *Black Panther*, volume 6, issue 29, August 14, 1971, p. 9.

<sup>706</sup> “Nationalist Groups Pledge Ahmed Support,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 17, 1969.

<sup>707</sup> Norman Wain, General Manager of WIXY Radio, “Commendation For Mayor,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 3, 1968; “Letters Support Mayor’s Action in Use of Civilian Task Force,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 10, 1968; and, William J. Ware, Drexel Avenue Street Club, “More Support For Stokes,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 24, 1968.

<sup>708</sup> Memorandum From Daniel B. Wilse, to George Grabner, Exhibit I, Cleveland Now Records, 1967-1977, box 4, folder 64, WRHS.

money to buy the guns he had allegedly used to shoot at the police.<sup>709</sup> This speculation became established fact in the popular memory of many Clevelanders. For example, one black man who wrote a memoir about his middle-class boyhood growing up in Cleveland during this time period recalled, “Armed with weapons that they had bought with Cleveland Now funds, the nationalists set buildings afire and waited for the fireman and police to arrive.”<sup>710</sup> The scandal derailed “Cleveland Now!” and although the program continued to limp along, it never reached the promise of its initial months of fundraising success.<sup>711</sup> While the mayor was able to win a second term in office, much of his agenda, including plans to improve parks and recreation services in the city, were never fully realized. Stokes’ relationship with the City Council continued to deteriorate to the point that the mayor and his top staff stopped attending council meetings altogether.<sup>712</sup>

### **Cleveland Parks after Glenville**

Yet, despite these challenges in the aftermath of Glenville, Stokes and his staff still had a city to manage. This included an effort to improve the flagging parks and recreation

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<sup>709</sup> Bob Modic, “‘Cleveland Now’ Cash Bought Riot Arsenal, Evans Says, *Cleveland Press*, July 24 1968; Donald Sabath, “City Admits Ahmed Got \$10,000,” *Plain Dealer*, July 26, 1968; “Probe Ahmed’s Fund Pipeline,” *Plain Dealer*, July 26, 1968; “Buying Peace Won’t Work,” *Cleveland Press*, July 26, 1968; Bob Modic, “Violence Weakens Stokes’ Position, *Cleveland Press*, July 26, 1968, from Exhibit G, Cleveland Now Records, 1967-1977, box 4, folder 64, WRHS.

<sup>710</sup> Philip M. Richards, *An Integrated Boyhood, Coming of Age in White Cleveland* (Kent, Ohio, Kent University Press 2012), 98.

<sup>711</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 28; Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 35; Masotti and Corsi, *Shoot Out in Cleveland*, 40; Moore, “Carl Stokes,” 89; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 141.

<sup>712</sup> Chatterjee, “Local Leadership in Black Communities,” 30; Haskins, *A Piece of the Power*, 43; Moore, “Carl Stokes,” 93; Zannes, *Checkmate in Cleveland*, 229; Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 139-140.



infrastructure and services. These efforts often met with resistance from inside City Hall. In his memoir, Stokes recalled:

The Parks in the middle class areas of town were well kept and the ones in the ghetto looked like battle grounds. This was no[t] strictly on a racial basis. The parks in poor-white and Puerto Rican areas of near West Side were also in shoddy repair.<sup>713</sup>

Stokes instructed the parks department to stop this unequal level of maintenance; despite his mandate, though, real change was slow in coming. Stokes explained “the basic services, which depend on workers who have been their job for years are intractable to renewal.”<sup>714</sup> Part of the reason that the rank and file were slow to change their practice, according to Stokes, was that John Nagy, the long-time recreation director, did little to improve the unequal levels of service. In his memoir, Stokes referred to Nagy as a “canny West Side Hungarian,” implying that the recreation director was invested in providing services in ethnic white enclaves to the detriment of others.<sup>715</sup>

Sometimes under the Stokes administration, other pressing land needs encroached upon city park properties, and parkland came out on the losing end of political deals. For example, in 1969, Stokes’s attempt to get his proposal for an Equal Employment Opportunity ordinance (EEO) through the City Council stalled. The proposed ordinance codified the requirement that any firm doing business with the city had to have “an active and specific program for recruiting, hiring and upgrading persons from minority groups.” In order to move his proposal, Stokes decided to make a deal to garner the support of Council President Stanton. Stokes agreed to a

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<sup>713</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 119.

<sup>714</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 119.

<sup>715</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 120.

rezoning of a portion of Euclid Beach Park for the construction of high-rise apartments, a pet project for Stanton.<sup>716</sup> In return, the EEO made it through Council, at the price of a few acres of prime lakefront park property. In another example, during his second term Stokes engaged in an acrimonious debate with the City Council to get a housing project approved in the predominantly black Lee-Miles neighborhood. Thwarted by local politics, Stokes attempted to move the public housing project outside city limits, and the reach of the Cleveland City Council, by proposing to sell Garfield Park to the suburb of Garfield Heights, on a condition that portion of the park be used for the subsidized housing. Council officials in both Cleveland and the suburb lined up for and against the proposed sale, fighting a war of words in the local press. Eventually the outcry defeated Stokes's plan.<sup>717</sup> For Stokes at least, it was worth exploring giving up jurisdiction of one of the city's largest parks if it could help ease the persistent and acute black housing problem. Further, these two examples indicate that any consideration of a public recreation space must be approached in context and conversation with a broader urban landscape. Black political decisions over park properties and recreational services intersected with issues of labor and housing. Sometimes park properties were sacrificed to achieve other priorities.

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<sup>716</sup> Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 140-141

<sup>717</sup> "Cleveland may sell park to Garfield Hts," *Cleveland Press*, March 3, 1971; "Garfield Hts. Plans to buy park, sell part," *Cleveland Press*, June 16, 1971; "Garfield Hts. Council Cool on Park Purchase," *Cleveland Press*, June 17, 1971; "Councilman Perk, Baugh favor Garfield Park Sale," *Cleveland Press*, June 18, 1971 "Rescue the Park," *Cleveland Press*, June 22, 1971; "Mayor says sell land to restore park," *Cleveland Press*, July 15, 1971; "Plan would give park to suburb," *Cleveland Press*, May 8, 1972; "Debelak threatens to cite Cleveland for messy park," May 9, 1972, *Cleveland Press*; "Mayor disturbed by plans to take over Garfield Park," *Cleveland Press*, May 11, 1972; "Garfield Park transfer plan is doubtful," and "Rescue Garfield Park," *Cleveland Press* July 24, 1971; "Garfield Councilman Wants City to Own Park," *Plain Dealer*, May 14, 1972; "City Warned to Maintain Park in Garfield Heights," July 25, 1973. CSU-SC; "Suburban News: Garfield Heights," *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, July 15, 1971; "Ask City Transfer of Garfield Park," *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, May 4, 1972; and "Garfield Hts. Council Notes" *The Neighborhood News: The Garfield Heights Tribune*, June 1, 1972.

Beset by budget problems, the city's parks had suffered significant decline. White flight continued to erode the city tax base, further reducing funds available for city services including park maintenance and programs. All recreation projects did not stop however, and the money that had been raised for "Cleveland Now!" did bring recreation improvements to some local neighborhoods. Throughout the summer of and early fall of 1968, several new playgrounds were opened, including one in Councilor Leo Jackson's Glenville district. Pamphlets were printed for each ceremony held to celebrate the completion of a playground. These pamphlets included "before" shots of vacant or trash-strewn lots and "now" shots of the new play equipment, the smiling pictures of the mayor and City Councilmen and women and children, and the quote: "This beautiful playground is an example of what can be accomplished with foresight, good planning and civic leadership that has faith in our youth."<sup>718</sup> Given the deep uneasiness that many in the city felt about local youth in the aftermath of Glenville, this asserted "faith" from City Hall was not an insignificant comment. Stokes's administration continued to develop new recreation space, even as budget shortfalls mounted, as shown in the photograph at one new playground opening named in honor of Dr. King, in figure 25.

In December 1968, Stokes was able to announce the construction of six recreation centers with swimming pools, several adjacent to high schools located throughout Cleveland. The plan to partner with high schools would "stretch the tax dollars" and allow schoolchildren to use the facilities in the day and the broader community to take advantage of the new facilities in the evening or when school was not in session. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the new recreation center pools was slated for Glenville High School to help answer the demand for better public

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<sup>718</sup> "Stouffer Field" October 23, 1968; "Garden Valley Playfield," August 16, 1968; Elk Playground, 1968; Charles Orr Playground, August 23, 1968, "Playgrounds" file PAL- CPL.

recreation facilities in an area that had just experienced rebellion that summer.<sup>719</sup> Just as part of the city response to Hough had included a new recreation facility, the Stokes administration followed a similar plan in Glenville.

Yet, in the acrimonious political atmosphere of Cleveland following Glenville, even new community pool projects were not without controversy. This was evident at the opening of the new pool at Kerruish Park, located on the city's southeast side. African American Democratic Councilman Clarence Thompson was in the midst of a political squabble with the mayor over the proposed subsidized housing project in his district. The debates over the housing project had grown so sharp that the issue became one of the major reasons that the mayor and his staff stopped attending City Council meetings altogether. When Councilman Thompson was not invited to speak at the new Kerruish pool opening, he believed it was payback for blocking the mayor's subsidized housing plans. Worse still, vandals had already wreaked havoc at the pool prior to its opening, cutting the fence around the facility and causing significant damage. On the day of the ribbon cutting, Mayor Stokes officially opened the pool by jumping into it. When he did, a swirl of muddy water churned to the surface due to sand that vandals had poured into the pool. According to the *Call and Post*: "Children who brought swimming trunks to swim with the Mayor were turned away."<sup>720</sup> Even the opening of a new pool got caught up in the muddy eddies of politics and a growing vandalism problem that City Hall could not seem to solve.

The muddy waters at the new pool were not the only park problems through which the Stokes administration had to wade. Throughout the city, parks were deteriorating due to vandalism, lack of funding, and general decline in maintenance. Stokes pinned his hopes on

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<sup>719</sup> "Glenville, JFK High Schools to Get Recreation Centers" *Cleveland Call and Post*, December 7, 1968.

<sup>720</sup> Alvin Ward, "Fiasco Mars Pool Opening," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 30, 1969.

turning around the slide to a general tax increase and a recreation bond issue. Both funding initiatives rested in voters' hands. In order to drum up support for the bond issue, Stokes and his executive secretary donned their tennis whites and played "all comers" at the courts at Rockefeller Park and a park on the west side. After the doubles tennis matches, Stokes signed autographs for young people.<sup>721</sup> Rockefeller Park once again served as a political space. Despite this publicity campaign, Stokes's efforts to pass new funding initiatives were unsuccessful. His general tax increase was twice defeated, and the impact on city recreational facilities was devastating. The second tax vote followed racial lines in the city, with fifteen of eighteen wards on the east side supporting the measure and all fifteen majority-white west side wards voting it down.<sup>722</sup> The popular *Call and Post* sportswriter William "Sheep" Jackson, upon learning of the vote, made this dire prediction: "The Cleveland youngsters are a sad group today. The voters didn't think of the Kids when they went to the polls last week. They killed the Tax Issue, and they might as well have done the same to their youngsters and their neighbor's youngsters."<sup>723</sup> Jackson's words proved prescient. When Stokes left office a year later, deciding not to seek reelection after two terms in office, the parks budget was gutted under the administration of Mayor Ralph Perk, the first Republican mayor since 1942. In one year, the budget for parks was nearly halved from approximately \$1.5 million to \$861,000. Staff levels dropped from 1,383 people, including seasonal employees, to just 134.<sup>724</sup> Although federally funded employment programs were able to provide some relief to this decimated staff, the department did not come

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<sup>721</sup> "Mayor Volleys for Bond Issue," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 19, 1970.

<sup>722</sup> "Vote Seen As Effort to Embarrass Stokes," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 6, 1971.

<sup>723</sup> "Mayor, Council Huddle, Tax Issue Defeat Brings City to Financial Crisis," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 14, 1970.

<sup>724</sup> "Cleveland Parks and Recreation Study," William A. Behnke Associates Landscape Architects 1976, 43-45.

close to regaining its previous personnel levels. This massive defunding led to cuts in municipal recreation services as parks across the city became “dumping grounds.”<sup>725</sup> Increasingly, park maintenance and programs became dependent on federal funds.<sup>726</sup> In 1972 federal funding accounted for 22 percent of the overall parks budget in Cleveland. A year later the federal portion had nearly doubled to 42 percent, and by 1975 the number had climbed to 56 percent.<sup>727</sup> The increase in the percentage of federal funds in the park’s budget reflected both a decline in local funding and an increase of dollars from Washington D.C, as the amount of federal recreation monies per capita for Cleveland jumped from just under a dollar in 1972 to \$6.43 in 1975. Already in 1972, Cleveland relied heavily on federal money to keep parks open and supply basic services. The *Call and Post* declared that the “opening of 217 playgrounds and 33 pools” was “hinging on receiving \$354 thousand in federal funds.”<sup>728</sup> When the city received less than half of the hoped-for federal support, Perks had to find innovative ways to cover the unfunded park expenses and deliver services.<sup>729</sup> Two years later, when the city laid off the plumbers responsible for park maintenance, the city had to scramble to find a way to keep the Cultural Gardens irrigated. According to a 1974 review of Cleveland Parks: “[T]he gardens’ water was turned off, but by ingenious methods of hose extensions and fire plug hook-up the

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<sup>725</sup> Perry, “Cleveland: Journey to Maturity,” 44; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 172. Both books refer to Cleveland parks in the 1970s as “dumping grounds.”

<sup>726</sup> “William A Behnke and Associates, “Cleveland Park and Recreation Study,” 1976, 22, CPL-PA.

<sup>727</sup> Table 4: “Federal Percentage of Total Recreation Budget,” and Table 5 “Per Capita Receipt of Federal Recreation Assistance,” “National Urban Recreation Study: Cleveland/Akron/Lorain,” September 1977, United States Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, 36, CPL-PA.

<sup>728</sup> Coleridge Jones, Jr., “Summer Recreation Programs Endangered by Lack of Funds,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 13, 1974.

<sup>729</sup> Coleridge Jones, “Vandalized Cant Buildings Pose Threat to Children’s Summer Fun,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 27, 1972.

gardens get their water—a ludicrous situation.”<sup>730</sup> Similar “ludicrous situations” could be found at parks throughout the city.

A decline in park maintenance occurred in many U.S. cities during the mid 1970s and 1980s, but the situation was particularly dire in Cleveland. In 1971, the national average of urban parks and recreation expenditures was 4.5 percent of total municipal budgets. In 1972, Cleveland spent only 2.7 percent, and the number hovered just above or below 3 percent of annual budget for the next four years.<sup>731</sup> According to a 1974 city self-assessment of the management of Cleveland’s park services:

It would appear that the City has an extensive Parks system which, under current economic conditions, it cannot afford to properly maintain. By comparison, New York City, Chicago and San Francisco, all currently experiencing financial difficulties, do a much better job with their park systems. Apparently, their Park Departments are more successful in the “battle of the budget” than Cleveland’s.<sup>732</sup>

In 1974, while Cleveland only spent \$4.53 per capita on parks and recreation Chicago allocated \$18.70 per capital, Baltimore \$10.79, and within Ohio, Columbus spent \$12.10 and Akron \$11.54.<sup>733</sup> Cleveland’s parks, which had once been considered some of the best in the nation, had become one of the most underfunded and poorly maintained systems in the entire country.

Despite these challenges, Cleveland residents did not simply sit idly and allow the continued under-service of public recreation facilities to go unchallenged. Just as they had in the

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<sup>730</sup> “A Review, Cleveland Division of Parks,” 1974, 25, CPL-PA.

<sup>731</sup> Table B-2 “Annual Parks and Recreation Budget Comparisons, Cleveland Ohio, in “National Urban Recreation Study: Cleveland/Akron/Lorain,” September 1977, United States Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, 86.

<sup>732</sup> “A Review, Cleveland Division of Parks,” 1974, 36, CPL-PA.

<sup>733</sup> “1974 Figures for Urban Parks and Recreation,” “William A Behnke and Associates, “Cleveland Park and Recreation Study,” 1976, 125.

following World War II, in the late 1960s and early 1970s many of Cleveland's black community leaders organized to add to and improve recreation properties in the city. In 1969, the Hough Development Corporation (HDC), "a self-help organization funded by the federal government," (in response to the rebellion) received the donation of a city block in the Hough neighborhood for use as a playground. Working with the local City Councilman, the HDC was able get the city to lease the property with the promise of helping to turn it into a play spot. Twenty-five young people from another community organization, the Youth Employment Service, helped pull weeds to improve the property.<sup>734</sup> Faced with a lack of clean, safe public recreation spaces, black community leaders often found creative ways to advocate for and deliver the amenities and programs they wanted for their children. Such was the case in 1971, when Olivet Baptist Church opened a playground on its property, complete with a swimming pool, to serve the youth of the Central neighborhood.<sup>735</sup> In yet another example, at the start of the summer of 1972, Bill Black, a popular radio deejay at WJMO radio station, came up with an idea to garner support for youth recreation. He sponsored a "run for recreation," in which twenty-four African American young people ran from the radio station to City Hall. Led by Ohio State track team member and former East Technical High School athlete Don Foggie, the purpose of the run was to generate public awareness of the need for public recreation and playgrounds.<sup>736</sup> While efforts such as these could not stem the tide of underfunding that decimated Cleveland parks and playgrounds, this community organizing did result in pockets of new or improved recreation space that would otherwise have not existed during this lean era in city support.

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<sup>734</sup> "Councilman Sponsors New City Block as Playground," *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 6, 1969.

<sup>735</sup> "Olivet Baptist Church Opens Boys Rescue Mission Playground," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 24, 1971.

<sup>736</sup> William (Sheep) Jackson, "Bill Blacks' Marathon Ticked," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 10, 1972.



### **A New Proposal for An African American Garden**

One of the most active of these black community-led park development projects was a renewed effort to develop an African American Garden at Rockefeller Park. Booker T. Tall, a professor at Tri-C, helped to lead this charge. He received support from Clarence Fitch, the administrative aid to the newly elected U.S. Congressman Louis Stokes, brother of the former mayor and long-time Civil Rights attorney in the city. Fitch lent his political clout to the project by serving as “spokesman” for the effort. In 1971, Tall and Fitch, along with a handful of other interested community members, held a meeting on the campus of Cleveland State to discuss potential ideas for an “Afro-American” Garden.<sup>737</sup> By 1972, the group had gained enough support to write to the Cultural Garden Federation to apply for membership, formally creating the African American Cultural Garden Federation the following year.<sup>738</sup> The garden project was by no means Tall’s only community organizing effort or contribution to Cleveland’s black cultural landscape. He had helped establish the first Black Studies program at a community college in the state of Ohio, the “Department of Black Affairs” at Tri-C, as well as the Cleveland chapter of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History.<sup>739</sup> When long-time black activist John O. Holly passed away in 1977, Tall organized a memorial to commemorate

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<sup>737</sup> Ron Hutson, “Garden Ruins: Blacks Push for Representation in Cleveland Cultural Gardens,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 22, 1971.

<sup>738</sup> Booker T. Tall, Afro-American Cultural Garden Federation, to Mrs. Phillips, The Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation, October, 17, 1973. Booker T. Tall, Department of Black Affairs Cuyahoga Community College to Mrs. L. W. Phillips, June 4, 1973, Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation, Folder 1, WRHS.

<sup>739</sup> Tall, Booker T. accessed online at ech.case.edu; Cindy Cooper, “Accolades Heaped on Booker Tall at ‘Community Salute,’” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 16, 1973.

his contributions to Cleveland.<sup>740</sup> Along with two partners, he also helped publish a “Black Pages” for Cleveland, a directory designed to help “promote, advertise, acquaint and support” black-owned businesses in the city.<sup>741</sup>

This emphasis on black-owned business also led Tall to take part in the short-lived umbrella organization Operation Black Unity (OBU). According to Nashani Frazier, the OBU, founded in 1969, “was the culmination of a re-energized version of the United Freedom Movement.” Affiliated groups included Afro Set, the Federation of Black Nationalists, and the July 23<sup>rd</sup> Committee Defense Committee, but also organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, the SCLC, and CORE. At its peak, the OBU included 23 organizations, and the most notable activity of the organization was a controversial boycott of local McDonald’s chains to gain more black franchise ownership.<sup>742</sup>

It was out of this black-led, self-help ethos that this latest Cultural Garden project emerged. As Clarence Fitch, who became treasurer of the group, declared, “It is high time we include ourselves in the Cultural Gardens.”<sup>743</sup> No longer content to wait for an offer of inclusion from those who managed the Rockefeller Park Cultural Gardens, black community members had adopted a philosophy to “include ourselves.” In Fitch, the African American Cultural Garden Federation not only had a powerful political member, but also someone who had long worked to

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<sup>740</sup> “To Hold Memorial for John O. Holly,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 2, 1977.

<sup>741</sup> “New Black Directory to Publish,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 25, 1970; and, “Black Directory Started at CCC,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 2, 1971.

<sup>742</sup> Frazier, “Harambee Nation,” 260; Alvin Ward, “McDonald’s Ready to Deal with Operation Black Unity,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 19, 1969; and Chas H. Loeb, “McDonald’s Agrees to Sell Outlets to Blacks,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 2, 1969.

<sup>743</sup> Ron Hutson, “Garden Ruins: Blacks Push for Representation in Cleveland Cultural Gardens,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 22, 1971.

support black culture and education on the city's east side. Before Fitch moved on to become an aide for Congressman Stokes, he had served as a principal in the Glenville area, at Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Junior High located just a few blocks west of Rockefeller Park.<sup>744</sup> As principal, Fitch had implemented a "Soul Gate" shopping center, whereby students enrolled in summer school operated businesses including a nursery, gift shop, print shop and advertising agency. Seed money from both Mayor Stokes's Council on Youth Opportunity, and the local Gund Foundation, supported the effort.<sup>745</sup> Other leaders of the African American Cultural Garden Federation were also local black Clevelanders who had also made significant contributions to black cultural production in the neighborhoods surrounding Rockefeller Park. The secretary of the organization, Carol Bugg, worked with Tall at Tri-C as the assistant to the Department of Black Affairs.<sup>746</sup> Previously, Bugg had served as the principal of Charles Lake Elementary School, a Glenville neighborhood school that stood just to the east of the northern edge of Rockefeller Park. As principal, she too had implemented black pride programs at her school, including an "Afro Culture" celebration and a program through which students sent their artwork on an exhibit tour to Africa.<sup>747</sup> The predominance of these black educators in the leadership of the African American Cultural Garden Federation demonstrates that the 1970s effort to create a black garden space grew out of a broader community-based tradition of celebrating and honoring black culture and history. Starting a garden space was an extension of

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<sup>744</sup> Anita Lewis Polk, "Name Clarence Fitch 'FDR' Principal," *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 29, 1966.

<sup>745</sup> Dick Peery, "At FDR Earnings Divided on Soul Gate Day," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 15, 1970.

<sup>746</sup> Cindy Cooper, "Accolades Heaped on Booker Tall at 'Community Salute,'" *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 16, 1973.

<sup>747</sup> "Students Send Art to Africa," *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 26, 1969; Afro Culture Recreated at Charles Lake School," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 13 1970.

these other efforts, a formalized public representation of the type of cultural production long practiced at the schools led by these educators.

In realizing their vision for a Cultural Garden, these leaders had the added challenge of fundraising during the era of decreasing park property budgets and increasing vandalism.<sup>748</sup> Even as the group organized to create a space for the placement of plaques and statues of black contributors to Cleveland and American culture, plaques from other established garden spaces were damaged or went missing all together.<sup>749</sup> This vandalism and decline marked a low point in public interest in Rockefeller Park, making the African American Garden project all the more difficult to realize.

Securing a site for the proposed African American Garden became another challenge to the project. The debates about potential locations for the garden remained unsettled since the question had completely derailed the project in the early 1960s. The African American Cultural Garden Federation chose, as their original proposal, the location on East Boulevard previously championed by Councilman Leo Jackson. The eminent domain case over rights to the property, a case that had gone all the way to the Supreme Court, had finally been resolved in the city's favor.<sup>750</sup> However, not everyone was thrilled by this site selection. The proposal met with sharp disapproval by the Executive Committee of the Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation because the site was not contiguous with the other existing gardens. In notes from a closed meeting, the

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<sup>748</sup> Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation, Executive Committee Meeting minutes, January 15, 1971, Container 1, Folder 6, WRHS; Ron Hutson, "Garden Ruins: Blacks Push for Representation in Cleveland Cultural Gardens," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 22, 1971.

<sup>749</sup> Ralph M. Veverka, Deputy Commissioner of Parks and Recreation to Georger Gardner, Secretary of Police Safety Department, September 8, 1970, listing sixteen plaques that went missing from the "Hebrew," German, Lithuanian, "Jugoslav," Polish and Ukrainian Gardens during 1969 and 1970, WRHS.

<sup>750</sup> "The 931 East Boulevard Co. v. City of Cleveland U.S. Supreme Court."

Executive Committee “questioned [the African American] Garden membership in the Federation” if the non-contiguous site plan went forward.<sup>751</sup>

The Cultural Garden Federation was not the most formidable opponent to the chosen site for African American Garden, however. In 1976, that role was held by black Democratic Council member Mildred Madison. Councilwoman Madison lived across the street from the proposed garden site and opposed the plan on the questionable premise that the garden would drive down property values in the area by bringing more people to the property. Madison went on to propose that a tennis court be built at the site instead, seemingly undercutting her argument against increased foot traffic at the property. Madison used her seat on the Council to block a vote on the proposal to officially sanction the garden site. The *Call and Post* decried the twisted logic of Madison’s position, publishing the story under the tagline “apathy, selfishness” and with the title “Historical Negro Problems Wreck Plan to Dedicate Cultural Garden.”<sup>752</sup>

Representatives of the African American Cultural Garden Federation called Madison’s objections “ridiculous and inadequate.”<sup>753</sup> That July, when the “Nationality Day Parade” marched as part of the annual One World Day Cultural Gardens celebrations, several community groups sponsored a float in the parade to represent “Afro-American contributions to society” as

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<sup>751</sup> Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation, Executive Committee Meeting minutes, July 11, 1973, Container 1, Folder 6, WRHS, Interestingly, in a handwritten note in the margins of this section of the minutes is written “omit reading to general membership.” This planned omission of a discussion of potentially excluding the African American Garden for official recognition by the Federation perhaps demonstrates that the Federation was not keen on revisiting the fraught public debates that had taken place over a potential site selection in the previous decade.

<sup>752</sup> Richard Nevins, “Historical Negro Problems Wreck Plan to Dedicate Cultural Garden,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 3, 1976.

<sup>753</sup> “Cultural Garden Committee Blasts Councilman Madison,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 10, 1976; “None Existing Afro-American Garden Celebrated,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 24, 1976.

well as “a band and five black queens.” Yet, participation in the parade was bittersweet for many because it marked yet another One World Day without an African American Garden.<sup>754</sup>

Thwarted at the 931 East Boulevard Property, the committee shifted its plan to a site contiguous with the other gardens, located adjacent to the Romanian Garden, which had been established in 1967. Finally, in October of 1977, their efforts paid off when a crowd of approximately 200 people braved inclement weather for the cutting of a red, black and green ribbon to officially open the African-American Garden. Dignitaries from Ghana, Togo, Kenya, and Tanzania represented their respective nations at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Herbert Lyimu, the Consular for Political Affairs from Tanzania, spoke at the opening ceremony. Lyimu’s speech included a statement against South African apartheid, as well as his hope that “The dedication of this garden will be a bridge to connect the peoples of America with Africa.” An historic marker in honor of Garrett Morgan, a black Clevelander credited with inventing the traffic light and gas mask, was also unveiled.<sup>755</sup> Also slated for eventual inclusion in the garden were Bishop Richard Allen (a founder of the AME Church), Jesse Owens, John P. Green (an Ohio politician who sponsored the Congressional legislation that created labor day), Jane Edna Hunter (founder of the Phyllis Wheatley Association), and poet Langston Hughes.<sup>756</sup>

Prominent black Ohioans and Clevelanders were to be the focus of the African American cultural garden. While the inclusion of African dignitaries in the opening ceremony explicitly connected the space to Africa, the selection of permanent honorees mapped the African Diaspora quite locally in this public space. None of these proposed statues were ever placed in the park,

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<sup>754</sup> “Blacks Join in Cultural Garden Fete With Nothing to Celebrate,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, July 17, 1976.

<sup>755</sup> *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 29, 1977; “Garden Dedication to Memorialize Gas Mask Inventor,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 23, 1977; “Gardens Grow” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 24, 1977

<sup>756</sup> <http://www.culturalgardens.org/gardenDetail.aspx?gardenID=29#>, accessed September 23, 2013.

however. For the next three decades, a flag and a sign marked the space as the African-American Cultural Garden, but besides a few small flowerbeds no other improvements were made. The founding of the gardens in the late 1970s coincided with the period of sharp disinvestment in Cleveland parks and public spaces, and the Cultural Gardens “all but disappeared, physically and metaphorically, from the city’s consciousness.”<sup>757</sup> Able to finally establish a garden space, the African American Garden at Rockefeller Park stood essentially dormant for nearly three decades.

## Conclusion

Rockefeller Park and Cultural Gardens stood in the midst of the social upheaval that shook Cleveland’s east side during the late 1960s and 1970s. This iconic park landscape had long symbolized and celebrated the white-ethnic heritage of the industrial workforce that made up this city on the shores of Lake Erie. As a growing black population came to live in the neighborhoods that bordered this park, they demanded representation in this iconic landscape. Such demands for public space for black cultural expression were never monolithic. Some black Clevelanders lobbied City Hall or held fundraisers headlined by popular musicians to see their vision of black representation in the park realized. Some young black youth, who did not have the financial or political resources to take advantage of such strategies, instead armed themselves with cans of spray paint or sticks of dynamite in order to make their impression on this landscape.

When the Glenville rebellion burned the neighborhoods surrounding this park, the existence of this large open green space shaped both how the National Guard marshaled its

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<sup>757</sup> Tebeau, “Sculpted Landscapes,” 328.

response and how the rebellion itself unfolded. More studies of urban rebellions might consider how the material landscape of cities shaped such uprisings. It is also important to consider how the 1960s rebellions left altered urban landscapes in their wakes. When the Glenville Rebellion was blamed on a group of individuals who had allegedly received funding from Mayor Stokes's "Cleveland Now!" initiative it derailed a campaign that had showed great early promise. While it is doubtful that "Cleveland Now!" could have completely mitigated the impact of staggering industrial jobs loss, the demise of this program meant there was little standing between the city and financial ruin.

By the early 1970s Cleveland was losing 20,000 people year in total population.<sup>758</sup> In 1974, the financial crisis led City Hall to reduce trash pick-up to every other week.<sup>759</sup> In 1978 Cleveland had the ignominious distinction of becoming the first major city to default on its loans since the Great Depression.<sup>760</sup> From middle of 1979 through the end of 1983, the Cleveland metropolitan region lost a staggering thirty percent of its overall employment, a loss of \$2.4 billion.<sup>761</sup> Cleveland's once nationally recognized park system had become a trash-strewn, unkempt mess, and Rockefeller Park and its Cultural Gardens stood practically forgotten by all except the dedicated few volunteers who struggled to keep up the garden spaces. The city that had once touted itself as the "Best Location in the Nation," now had become a national punch line of the 'Mistake by the Lake.'

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<sup>758</sup> Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," 44.

<sup>759</sup> Porter, *Cleveland: Confused City*, 272.

<sup>760</sup> Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, 178.

<sup>761</sup> Hill, "The Cleveland Economy," 56. This figure is in 1982-1984 dollars.



And it is here that this history returns to where it started—back to the rent strike at Rainbow Terrace Apartments, a strike waged in part to provide recreation equipment for black youth. For it is only in the full context of Cleveland's economic devastation of the 1970s that the courage of the women who led this strike can be appreciated. Taking direct action to ensure the recreation opportunities of black youth, even in the midst of such perilous economic times, underscores the importance placed on such endeavors by those who took part in them. In waging this strike, these women became part of a long black planning tradition in Cleveland, a planning tradition often led by black mothers. The ten playgrounds they saw built were part of the legacy of black planning efforts in the city. It was a legacy shaped by the contours of racial oppression certainly, but one that nevertheless left its mark on the city's recreational landscape.

## **CONCLUSION: RENAMING AND RECLAIMING BLACK PUBLIC PARK SPACES**

Black Clevelanders contributed significantly to the public recreation landscape of their city, as did urban black residents throughout the United States. Although circumscribed by discrimination, the precipitous downturn of the local economy, and the ravages of a devastatingly sweeping urban renewal program, many of the recreation spaces conceived of, built by, or improved upon by black Clevelanders are still visited by thousands of people each year. These facilities provide their local neighborhoods spaces to gather and offer a wide variety of sports and cultural programs. They are integral parts of the fabric of neighborhoods and lasting spaces for the formation of collective memories and community identity.

These recreation spaces were shaped in important ways by the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and two urban rebellions. In turn these spaces contributed to these events. Black pride and achievement through sport, and in particular boxing, basketball, baseball, and swimming, became a political platform from which black residents called for full integration into civic life. Parks and public recreation spots became early targets of the nascent post-war Black Freedom Movement. During later years of the movement, there developed less of a call from black activists for integration and more demand for autonomous black public spaces, including recreation spaces. The community-led recreation initiative of the J“F”K House played a key role in this tactical and philosophical shift. Not all black Clevelanders abandoned the integrationist approach, however, a fact perhaps most readily symbolized by the dedication of the Booker T. Washington statue at the American Garden in Rockefeller Park during the era of Black Power.

Not all of the results manifested on the public recreation landscape during this time period were positive. A turn toward suburbanization and privatization of white recreation that

followed in the wake of Civil Rights desegregation efforts resulted in a declining municipal commitment to investment in public recreation infrastructure. Many of the once well-kept public recreation spaces abandoned by whites became garbage-strewn wastelands for more than two decades, and some of these spaces have still not recovered from these years of neglect.

It is also important to recognize that there was never a singular black vision or black experience of public recreation space in Cleveland. Age or generation factored significantly into one's experience of the public recreation landscape. Black mothers in the Central and Glenville neighborhoods often had very different opinions than their children about the proper way for young people to spend their free time. Young black swimmers who feared racism and violence were also sometimes reluctant to visit pools in white neighborhoods, despite efforts by black and white activists to desegregate the urban swimming landscape.

Gender also shaped access to the public recreation landscape. Young black boys playing basketball at PORC enjoyed the backing of some of the city's leading black businesses, while young black girls who played basketball at the same park often had to scrape by on limited funding, even while their achievements were celebrated by local residents. When young black men became increasingly marked as criminals in the aftermath of Sowinski they found their mobility through public park space sharply impeded by repressive, racially discriminatory policing. This erosion of mobility was policed at the intersection of the race, gender and class of these young men. At the same time, this community-wide focus on the "trouble" represented by poor and working-class young black men meant that programming for young black women continued to receive less dollars and attention.

Despite these differences a black recreation landscape was inscribed onto the cityscape. Black mothers might not have been able to persuade their children to stay away from dances or

lingering on street corners, or to put down rocks and disengage from skirmishes at local playgrounds, but they were able to get some of those playgrounds built and updated.

But this is not only a history of what was built, but also it is a history of what was destroyed. The Jomo “Freedom” Kenyatta House that was torn down, by its very absence, testifies to the limited ability of young, black males who held a revolutionary philosophy to actively contribute in a permanent way to the urban public landscape. Black mothers interested in providing recreation space for their children to play could (albeit often in limited ways) change the contours of their city. Young Black Nationalists were not so welcome to join in this process of building the public sphere. This matters. To make sense of the present-day organization of U.S. cities, we must recognize who was included and who was excluded from the project of making the urban landscape.

For example, Liberty Boulevard, the road winding through Rockefeller Park was renamed in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as were numerous roads and park spaces throughout the United States. Geographers Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman in their book *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* have noted the disparity between the lack of Black Power memorials and the multiple tributes commemorating Civil Rights leaders, especially King. For example, the house in Chicago where Black Panthers Mark Clark and Fred Hampton were killed has no sign to mark its significance, and in fact the building has been destroyed as part of local gentrification. The two geographers observe that “the condition of the site stands in mute contrast to the multi-million dollar shrines erected” commemorating King.<sup>762</sup> Dwyer and Alderman argue that the reason for this silence blanketing the public

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<sup>762</sup> Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory*, (Columbia College, Chicago, The Center for American Places, 2008), 13.

memory of Black Power is that it is not “in keeping with the selective appropriation of local history for economic development and public relations.”<sup>763</sup> It is important to recognize these names that are not written on our public landscapes. This is not to diminish the significance of King’s name being inscribed on the street that is part of Cleveland’s most iconic park landscape. Where once black presence was excluded from formal recognition on the cultural landscape, it is now commemorated, and this demonstrates a significant shift in how African Americans are recognized on Cleveland’s cultural landscape.

The renaming of Liberty Boulevard is not the only renaming to occur at the parks discussed in this dissertation. This process of renaming signifies that while these public park spaces were shaped by their history, the meanings of these spaces are not frozen in that history. For example, while Portland-Outhwaite still stands in its original location, it no longer bears the same name. The park and recreation center have been renamed after Lonnie Burten, Jr., a councilman representing a portion of the Central area. Burten became the councilman in 1975 unseating Charles Carr. Councilman Burten suffered a stroke while working on his house in the neighborhood, dying at the age of 40. The renaming of the park in his honor underscores how recreation space is always in part political, and marks another chapter in race pride being written onto the landscape at the intersection of Portland and Outhwaite.<sup>764</sup>

The Lonnie Burten Learning Garden is another new community initiative grown out of a vacant lot nestled between the Lonnie Burten Recreation Center and Outhwaite Homes. In Spring 2007, the site became the newest spot to be included in the Cleveland Botanical Garden’s Green Corps Learning Gardens. According to the project’s website “The site was dedicated in

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<sup>763</sup> Dwyer and Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials*, 77.

<sup>764</sup> *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s. v. “Lonnie, Burten L. Jr.”

September 2006 in memoriam for 16 year-old Lennard Pinson and 11 year-old Brandon Davis, both fatally shot in 2005.”<sup>765</sup> The boys were shot just outside the doors of Lonnie Burten Recreation Center by another neighborhood youth.

Throughout the United States black urban youth gun crime is an ongoing and growing community concern. Also, in many cities throughout the nation black urban activists are engaging in local grassroots initiatives to start community gardens to both beautify neighborhoods and to address inequities in fresh food availability in black enclaves. It should perhaps come as no surprise that when members of the Central neighborhood looked for a space to mobilize around both of the issues—gun violence and food security—they chose the park at the corner of Portland and Outhwaite. For seventy-five years this park has stood at the heart of this community. Through this new garden, the park will continue to contribute to the vernacular cultural landscape of this urban neighborhood. By naming the garden after the murdered youth, this space is a reminder of the violence that occurred at the site. But this naming is also a declaration that such violence will not go unanswered, that local youth are valued, and that the neighborhood will respond when a black child loses his or her life. Part of that response is a community garden that is meant to bring local young people together in a communal effort to contribute to and thereby change their local environment. The community spaces built through the hard work and dedication of black activists are continually re-imagined by the changing needs of black urban residents. Local events help to write and rewrite the meanings of these spaces.

Local residents are also in the process of rewriting the cultural landscape at the African American Cultural Garden in Rockefeller Park. In 2002 a local Glenville man, Cordell Edge,

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<sup>765</sup> <http://www.gcbl.org/food/gardening/city-fresh>, accessed September 23, 2013.

began to work toward improving the garden space. In 2007, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the African American garden, Cleveland's Mayor Frank Jackson established a taskforce to develop a site plan for this largely undeveloped space.<sup>766</sup> The design for the space was then unveiled in 2011, in a ceremony at the City Hall rotunda.<sup>767</sup> The planned two-million project would create an elaborate outdoor structure, with a form evoking the Egyptian pyramids. An animated three-dimensional rendering of concept can be viewed on Youtube, underscored by Miles Davis trumpeting his song "Prayer."<sup>768</sup> The landscape design concept includes three pavilions, and an editorial published in the World Architecture's Forum noted: "[T]he project will incorporate several components representing a shifting tapestry of time, looking at the past, present and future."<sup>769</sup>

Yet, not all Cleveland area residents are pleased with the planned development or with how cultural memory will be inscribed in this space. One resident of a nearby suburb wrote a letter to the editor for the *Plain Dealer*, complaining that the design reflected a "misunderstanding of the nature of these dedicated gardens. They honor countries, whereas Africa is a continent. And they honor these countries' great contributors to national culture, such as Gandhi, Shakespeare, Goethe, etc., and not hyphenated American nationals." Those involved with the project have not been swayed by such criticism, and remain determined to enact their vision of black history and culture on this iconic landscape. More than fifty years since

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<sup>766</sup> "Media Advisory," October 23, 2007, Office of Mayor Frank G. Jackson, "African American Cultural Garden" file, CPL.

<sup>767</sup> Cleveland City Hall to Unveil Design of Proposed African-American Culture Garden," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 3, 2011.

<sup>768</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQvMxSifxIw>, accessed on February 4, 2014.

<sup>769</sup> Tom Aston, "Unveiling of Designs for African American Cultural Garden Realizes a 34 Year Old Objective," Editorial, December 8, 2011.; [http://www.worldarchitecturenews.com/index.php?fuseaction=wanappln.projectview&upload\\_id=18287](http://www.worldarchitecturenews.com/index.php?fuseaction=wanappln.projectview&upload_id=18287), accessed on February 4, 2014.

Councilor Jackson first put forward his ordinance to build an African American Garden, the site remains a contested space.

While those looking to reclaim the long-dormant African American Garden are focused on building a new landscape, at Garfield Park black visitors enjoy many of the buildings and infrastructure put in place by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. While the swimming pool never returned to Garfield, the rest of the park has thrived under MetroParks management, which restored much the original stonework at the site and built a new nature center in 1987.<sup>770</sup> Today the area around the park is predominantly African American, and on sunny weekend hundreds of black families enjoy the park for picnics, reunions, and other celebrations. The park, which was once a site of oppression, is now part of black community life.

Local black residents have also transformed the vernacular meaning of Sowinski Playground by working with the city to rename it. The name of the first African American Cleveland City Council woman, Carrie Cain, pictured in figure 26, has replaced the name of the Polish general, Sowinski at this site. Such renaming does not erase previous meanings of Sowinski—the events surrounding the Sowinski Six are too indelibly written on the city’s collective landscape of memory to be so easily wiped out. Yet the renaming of the playground is a reclaiming. New playground equipment accompanied the renaming and the bright, colorful playspace now serves and almost entirely African-American neighborhood.

In their book, *The Production of Public Space*, editors Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith reminded: “Public space is mutable, subject to regular change in its form, use and

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<sup>770</sup> “Garfield Park Reservation”



definition. It has never been static.”<sup>771</sup> In considering the role of public spaces in Black Freedom Movement struggles and the urban racial turbulence of the mid-twentieth century, it is perhaps tempting to freeze these landscapes in time, to describe the historically constructed symbolic meanings of particular spaces as if such symbols were the spaces themselves. But the meanings of public space were not so static and were never wholly defined through newspapers, court cases, or politicians. The meanings of public spaces were, and are, shaped by those who use them and the local community leaders who fought for and continue to fight to claim these spaces. Today, children likely come to the Carrie Cain playground unaware of the past blood and ink spilled over this space. These children and their families are constructing their own meanings of this space and its role in their neighborhood.

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<sup>771</sup> Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds., *The Production of Public Space* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 12.

## FIGURES



Figure 1: This map of Cleveland is marked with the locations considered in each chapter. Chapter Two: Portland Outhwaite Community Center (1); Chapter Three: Garfield Park (2); Chapter Four and Seven: Rockefeller Park (3) Chapter Five: Sowinski Park (4); Chapter Six: Jomo “Freedom” Kenyatta House (5). The map also shows Cleveland’s neighborhoods.



Figure 2: Portland-Outhwaite Park Basketball Courts and Tennis Courts, 1937. (*Cleveland Press*, October 7, 1937, "Playground: Cleveland Area Before 1940," *Cleveland Press* Collection, SC-MSLCSU).

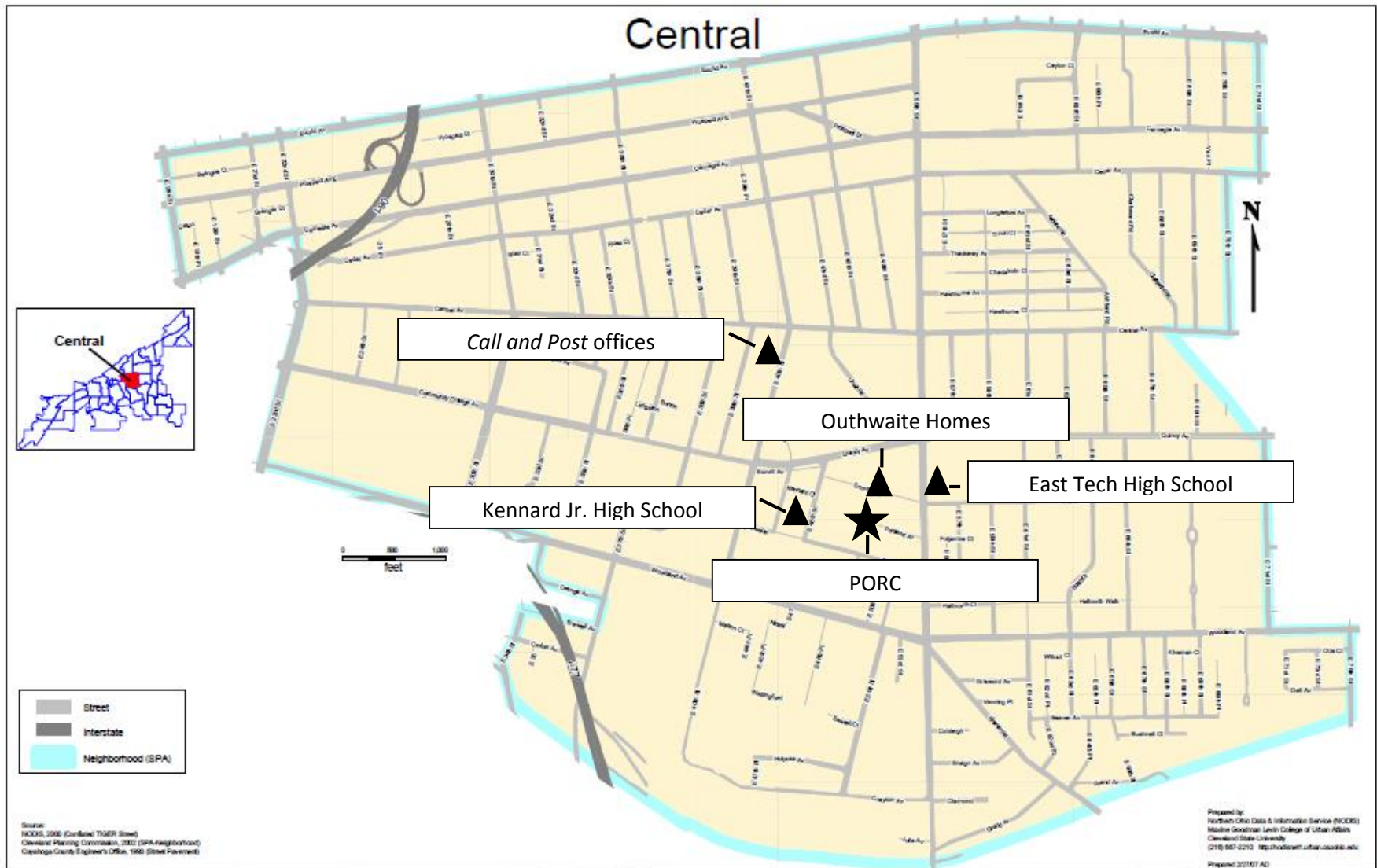


Figure 3: PORC (*star*) and important Central neighborhood institutions (*triangles*) that contributed significantly the meaning and reputation of PORC. (map by nhlink.net.).



Figure 4: “Mrs. Recreation,” Florence Fairfax, became a local authority on youth programs. The description of the photograph reads: “Bundy was a long-time employee of the Dept. of Recreation for the city of Cleveland. In May 1954, she became the Superintendent of Special Activities which focused on finding services and activities for inner city youth. Bundy was named Asst. Commissioner of Recreation in 1966. To honor her commitment to youth, a recreation center located at 2335 E. 82nd St. was named after her.” (“Florence Bundy Fairfax.” Undated, from Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland Memory Project).





Figure 5: In June, 1963 the Tennis Courts at PORC stood cracked and unusable. (Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University).

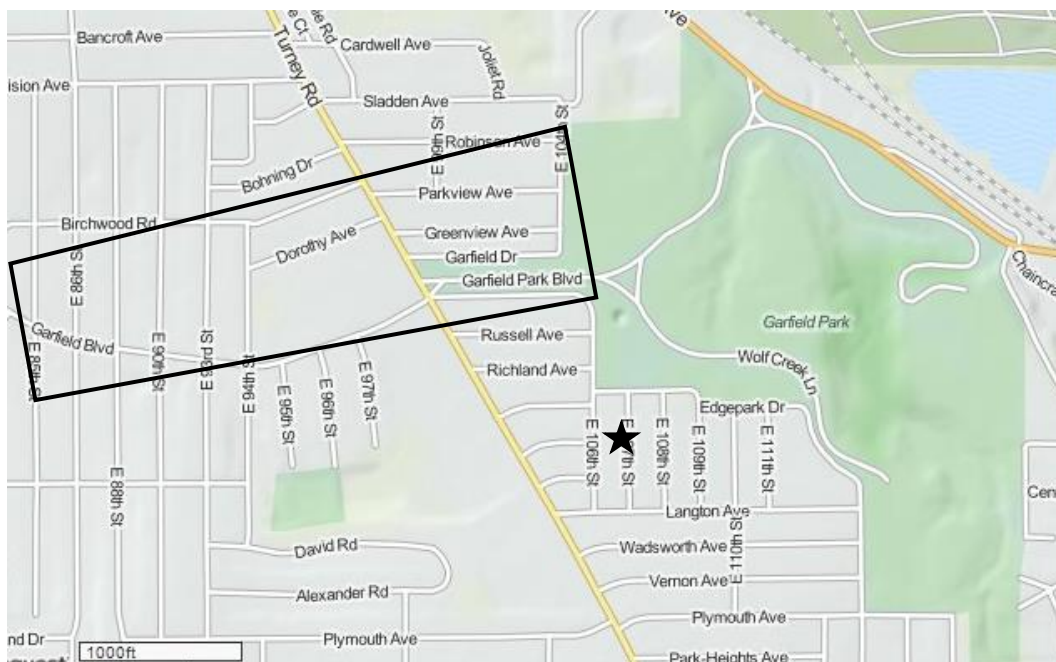


Figure 6: This map shows the streets surrounding Garfield Park. The suburbs' Polish population lived predominantly along Garfield Boulevard, on either side of Turney Road (*outlined*). Several wealthier Polish residents built “substantial brick homes” on Garfield Heights Boulevard, some with views of the park. (maps.google.com, made by author).



Figure 7: As this 1912 postcard demonstrates, the spring at Garfield Park had become part of the popular natural imagery and representation of this public recreation space. ("Mineral Springs at Garfield Park, Cleveland, O." postcard, ca. 1912, Cleveland Memory Project).





Figure 8: "Polish parochial school children in parade to the Garfield Park celebration" 1931.  
("Polish parochial school children in parade to the Garfield Park celebration" photograph, May 4, 1931, Cleveland Memory Project).



Figure 9: As this postcard illustrates, Garfield Swimming Pool had become a space integrated by gender but segregated by race by 1922 (“Swimming Pool at Garfield Park, Cleveland, O.” postcard, ca. 1922, Cleveland Memory Project).

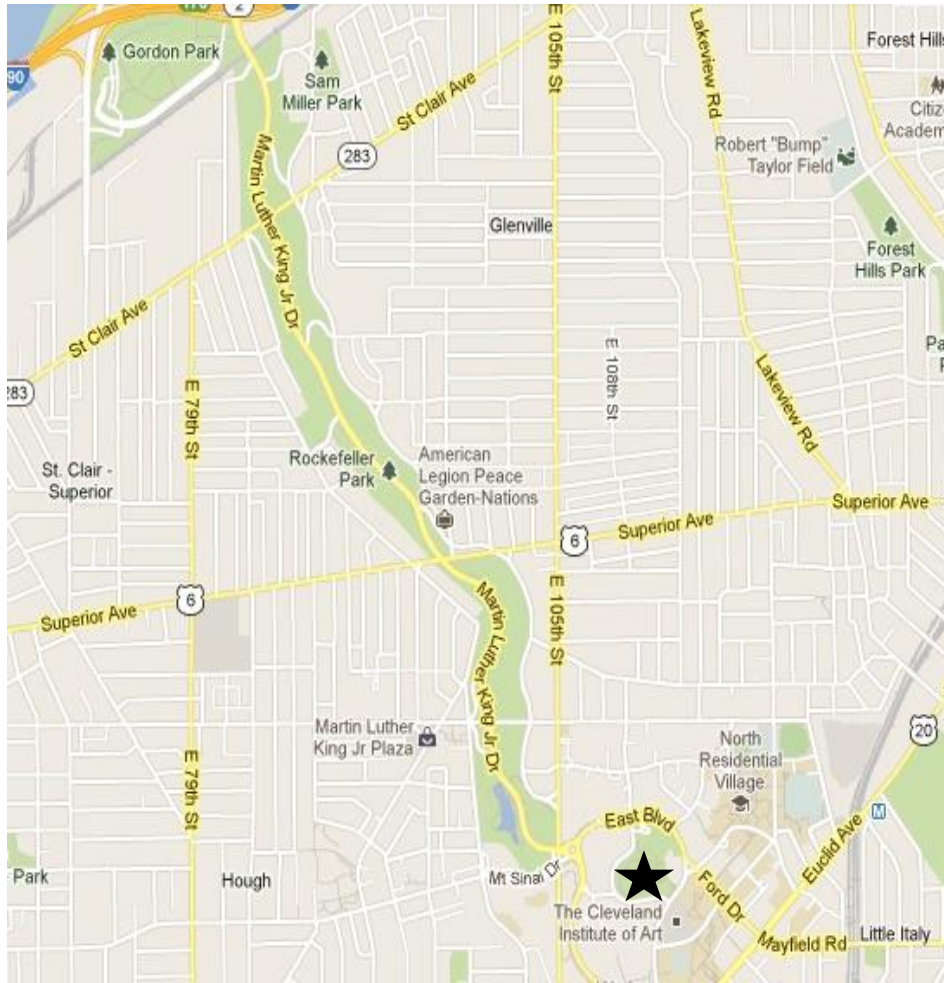


Figure 10: This map shows the long, narrow Rockefeller Park. The center of high-cultural institutions lies at the south end of the park, indicated on the map with a star. (maps.google.com made by author).

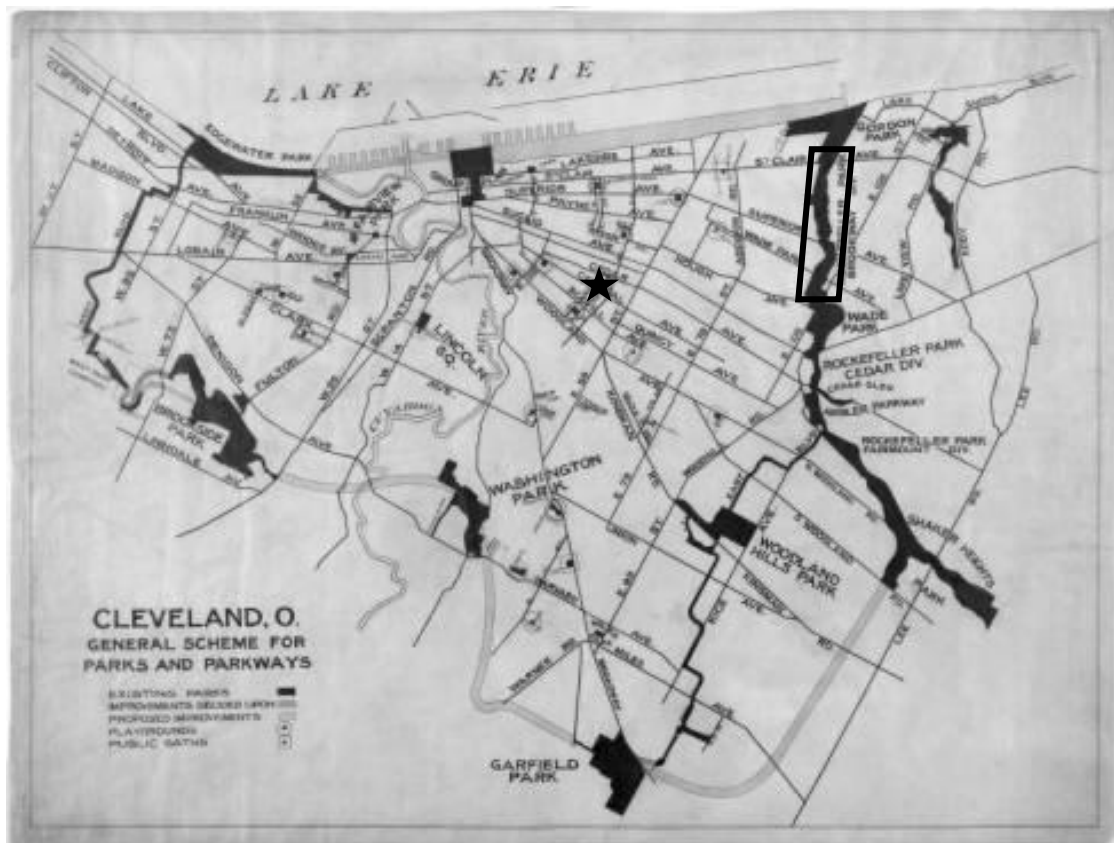


Figure 11: Entitled “General Scheme for Parks and Parkways,” this map created by the Department of Parks sometime between 1890-1910, shows that Rockefeller Park (*outlined by author*) was envisioned as part of a broader park system. This system included a series of parkways, or boulevards, that were intended to connect parks together. This system of parkways connected Garfield Park (*bottom of page*) to Rockefeller. Smaller parks located in the city center, such as Portland-Outhwaite (*star*) were typically not connected by parkways. (“Cleveland, O. General Scheme for Parks and Parkways,” Cleveland, Ohio Department of Parks, ca. 1890-1910, Cleveland Public Library map collection, CPL).





Figure 12: The Irish Cultural Garden is planted in the pattern of the Celtic Cross. (Photo taken by author).



Figure 13: Postcards such as this one of the Hungarian Cultural Garden helped to circulate images of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens across the United States, and beyond. The verso for this postcard explained the detailed symbolism embedded in this landscape: “The central feature of the Hungarian gardens is an ornamental wrought-iron gate, designed in Hungarian rural motifs. The top is formed to represent a pigeon coop. Two heart shaped designs, interwoven with tulips, oak leaves, and grapes, dominate the rest of the structure.” (Hungarian Garden, Rockefeller Park, Cleveland, Ohio, dated 1930-1959, publisher Geo. R. Klein News, Cleveland Memory Project).



Figure 14: This picture is from the Ukrainian Cultural Garden dedication in 1940, just one of many celebrations and programs in the gardens that regularly drew large crowds in the 1930s and 1940s. (1940, Cleveland Press Collection, caption, "Crowd shot of participants at dedication of Ukrainian Cultural Gardens in Rockefeller Park," Cleveland Memory Project).



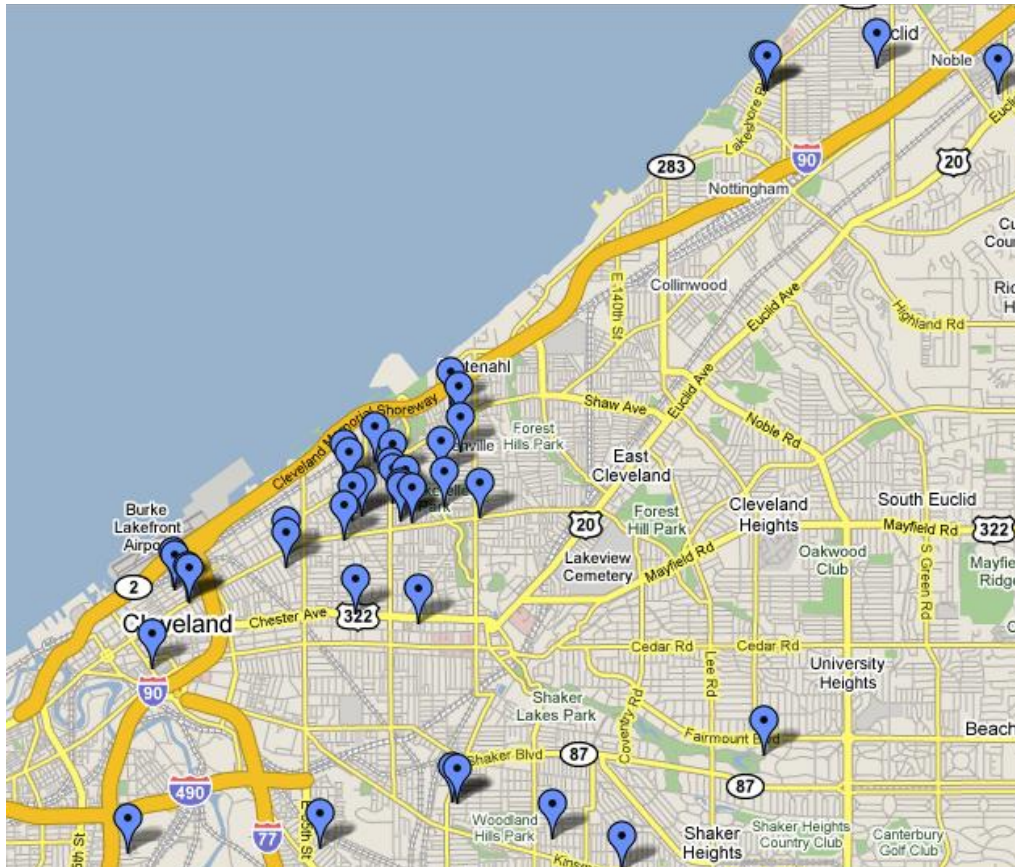


Fig 15: The blue markers indicate the home addresses of 43 of the 46 people arrested on the second night of the Sowinski violence. The playground is located in the middle of the large cluster of markers, but as can be seen by this map, participants in the violence were not restricted to those living near the park. Three additional men that were arrested lived so far away they could not be included on this map. (map created by author, "Names of 46 Arrested Listed," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 17, 1963).





Figure 16: This drawing appeared on the editorial pages of the *Cleveland Press* on June 14, 1963, a visual representation of public fears over the safety of the parks after the Sowinski attack.

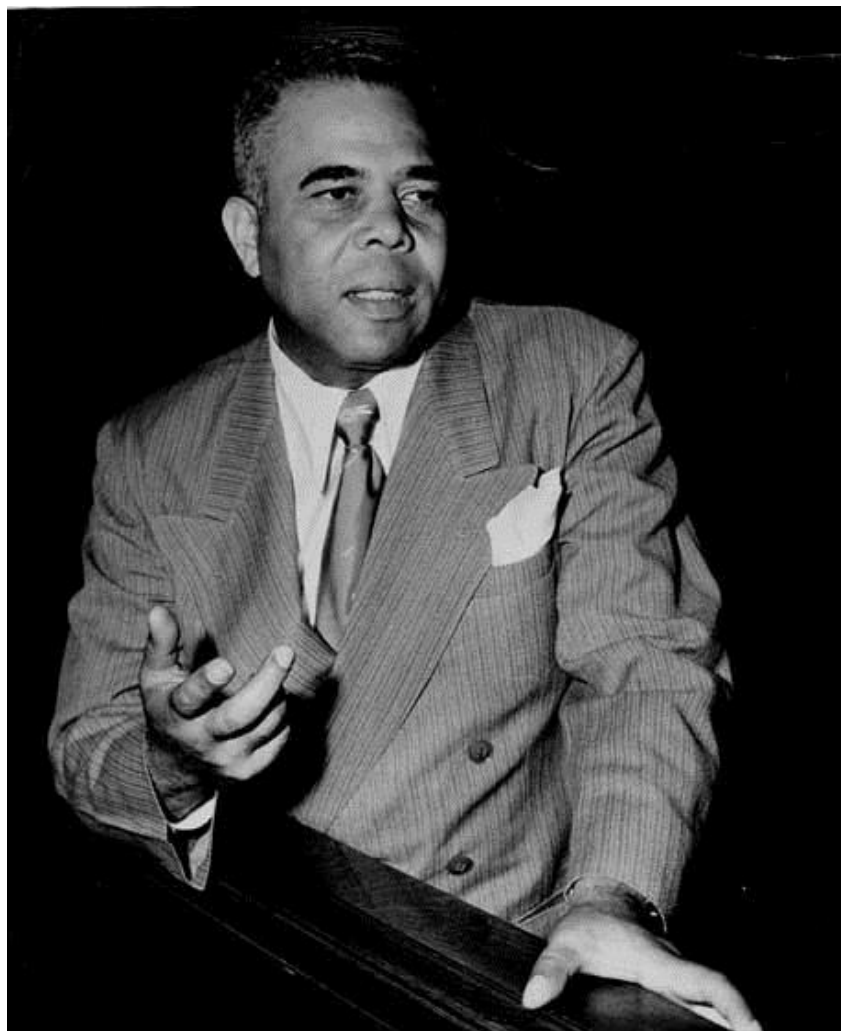


Figure 17: The Involvement of Norman Minor (*left*) as defense attorney for some of the “Sowinski Six” demonstrates the level of attention given this case. (“Minor, Norman S.” photo, 1949, Cleveland Memory Project, *Cleveland Press*, Notable Blacks of Cleveland Collection).



Figure 18: Pictured here at an unidentified rally in 1967, Lewis Robinson became one of the most active, and controversial, figures of the Black Freedom Movements in Cleveland “Robinson, Lewis G. (1929-),” Photo, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project).



Figure 19: The United Press International (UPI) newswire service also distributed this image of the outside of the J“F”K House, with a caption describing it as a “fire bomb school.” (Author’s private collection).



Figure: 20: Ahmed Evans, 1967. (Fred Evans ("Ahmed"), 11105 Superior, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project).





Figure 21: The Booker T. Washington Statue in the American Cultural Garden has withstood two attempts to destroy it. (Photo taken by author).



Figure 22: A photo taken by on July 24, 1968, of three of the black community members who kept the peace in Glenville the night after the shoot-out. (Captioned: Baxter Hill, Lewis Robinson, William Picard, peacekeepers, Superior Ave. & East 105th St., Cleveland Memory Project).

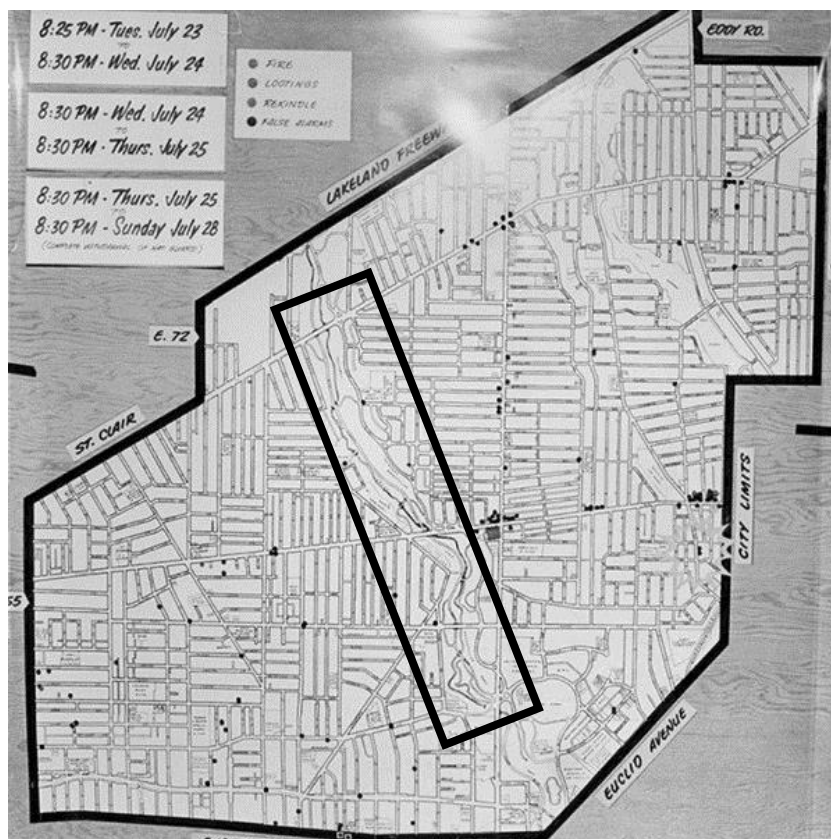


Figure 23: A map of the area cordoned-off after the Glenville shootout, with Rockefeller Park (outlined-by author). (Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland Memory Project).



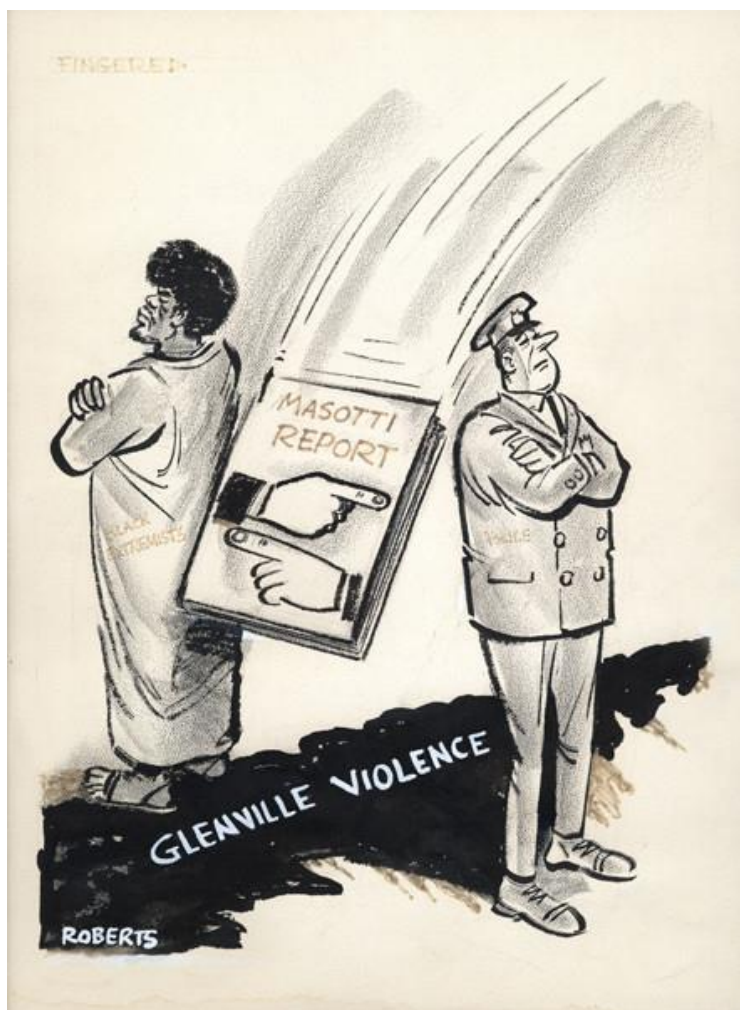


Figure 24: Editorial cartoon by popular *Press* cartoonist Bill Roberts. ("Glenville Violence" editorial drawing, no date, Cleveland Memory Project).



Figure 25: “Mayor Carl B. Stokes presides over the installation of a plaque at a playground, or “totlot” at E. 107th St. and Elk Ave. in the Glenville neighborhood. With Stokes is Michelle Watkins, 10, of 594 E. 107th St.” (*Cleveland Press* Collection, May 20, 1969, Cleveland Memory Project).



Figure 26: The City of Cleveland renamed Sowinski Playground in honor of City Councilor Carrie Cain, reclaiming the space for the local residents. (“Cain, Carrie (1910-1975.” photo, 1971, *Cleveland Press*, Notable Blacks of Cleveland Collection, Cleveland Memory Project).

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### List of Archive Acronyms

CAC	The County Archives, Cleveland
CCA	City Council Archives
CPL	Cleveland Public Library
CPL-PA	Cleveland Public Library, Public Administration
SC-MSLCSU	Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University
NA	National Archives
WRHS	Western Reserve Historical Society