

“Pledge Allegiance to the People”: The History of the Forgotten Black Power Movement in  
Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1968-1977

By

October Kamara

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of  
Public History

Middle Tennessee State University  
July 2022

Thesis Committee

Dr. Carroll Van West, Chair

Dr. Louis Woods

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the numerous people who made this project possible. First, I would like to thank my previous professor and mentor, Dr. Torren Gatson. Dr. Gatson has supported my interest in public history since I first took a class with him at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2018. He helped with getting my first undergraduate research projects with *Unsung Heroes* and the *People Not Property* project. He also recommended I apply to Middle Tennessee State University and introduced me to the Center for Historic Preservation. His wonderful guidance and continuous support has impacted the way that I practice public history and made this project possible.

I would also like to thank my thesis chair Dr. Carroll Van West. His feedback was invaluable to my project and paper and I could not have completed this thesis without his guidance.

I owe a massive thank you to my colleagues at the Roberson project particularly Dr. William Register, Dr. Tiffany Momon, and Dr. Hannah Huber. They have been a wonderful wealth of support during this project. They also greatly informed the way that I practice public history and digital humanities and provided to me the training and resources I needed to help build the digital archive that I made for this project.

Finally, many thanks to my family and friends who were my emotional backbone. When I wanted to give up, they encouraged me and without them I know I wouldn't have been able to finish this master's program. I particularly want to thank my mother, Vivian Bergen, for all the sacrifices she made as a single mom to ensure that I could get an education. I also want to shout out Endia Purdie, Amber Bidwell, Kiara Hickman, and Milan Novakovic for their love and support and listening to me ramble and spiral. You all are my lifelong friends, and I am so happy that you were with me on this journey.

## ABSTRACT

Much of what is currently written about the Black Power movement in America focuses on organization going on in the West and North in major cities such as Oakland, Chicago, New York, etc. Very little scholarship has examined what Black Power organization looked like in the Southern United States. The goal of this thesis is to add to the geographical diversity of the historiography on Black Power movements in the United States by analyzing the different Black Power organizations and leaders in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Public history interpretation and memorialization of Black Power organizations and leaders is also severely lacking in scholarship. This is especially true in the Southern United States as Black Power organization has been largely erased from the public landscape as commemoration of non-violent Civil Rights organizations and leaders is proliferated in the South. Many of these Black Power and Civil Rights organizations and leaders would have existed at the same time and even worked together on issues. Therefore, to try to help combat the erasure of Black Power history in the South, this thesis will also address some ways that Black Power organization can be preserved and commemorated in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Understanding the Black Panther Party.....	1
Chapter 2: Chattanooga Black Knights.....	19
Memphis Roots.....	19
Chattanooga Black Knights Inc. ....	22
Chapter 3: The Model Cities Program.....	28
Chapter 4: Student Movements.....	42
Brainerd High School.....	42
UTC Student Conversations.....	61
Chapter 5: Chattanooga Black Panther Party.....	66
From Black Knights to Black Panthers.....	66
Extortion Trial.....	67
Key Women in Chattanooga’s Black Power Movement.....	80
Chapter 6: Memorialization and Public Memory.....	86
Erasure in Chattanooga Public History.....	86
Omeka S Archive.....	87
Google Story Map.....	89
Conclusion.....	91
Bibliography.....	93

## Chapter 1: Understanding the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was a revolutionary group of young, displaced, and oppressed people who fought for Black self-determination and community empowerment. Started in October 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale<sup>1</sup>, this small Oakland, California based duo created a mass movement that quickly spread throughout America's major cities and even had international ties and chapters. Inspired by thinkers like Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, and Che Guevara, and unsatisfied with the non-existent effect that the middle-class Black movement of civil rights was having on the poor, the BPP set out to make change for the brothers on the block and followed Malcolm X's principle to obtain freedom "by any means necessary"<sup>2</sup>. Skewed by a mass media that demonized and criminalized them in order to maintain the status quo of capitalism and racism that thrived off the oppression of Black bodies and minds,<sup>3</sup> much of what is seen today about BPP in public memory is either one of violent radicals with no cause but to cause violence<sup>4</sup> or the glorification of an ultimately failed revolution.<sup>5</sup> Public historians in large part have ignored the movement outside of its Oakland roots. However, historians and scholars of the Panthers tell a different narrative where the Party was successful in helping Black communities take charge of their education, health care, and politics. Though the BPP did end

---

<sup>1</sup> Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Jana Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York and London: The New Press, 2007), 310.

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 311.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

due to a loss in support because of negative media attention, they did successfully mobilize and radicalize thousands of black people and create a movement that aided positively to the longer arch of civil rights.

Historians agree that Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam (NOI) heavily influenced the Black Panthers. Malcolm X was a Muslim minister and human rights activist who converted to Islam while in prison and was heavily involved in the Nation of Islam after his release. Malcolm X eventually left the NOI due to its lack of involvement in helping civil rights workers and conflicting ethical beliefs with his mentor Elijah Muhammad.<sup>6</sup> Historian Paul Alkebulan in *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* called BPP the “Heirs of Malcolm,”<sup>7</sup> who were inspired to convert his message of self-defense and Black self-determination into action for their communities’ social, political, and economic destiny. Alkebulan argued that Malcolm X inspired the BPP with four foundational beliefs: that arms could be used for political aims; individuals can achieve “spiritual and mental rejuvenation” by being a part of the movement for Black self-determination; that Black people should be receptive to alliances with other racial and ethnic groups as long as there is mutual respect; and that the civil rights movement was a part of a larger, international fight against racism and capitalism.<sup>8</sup>

Historian Donna Jean Murch agreed with Alkebulan, arguing that Malcolm X and the NOI influence on the BPP can be seen throughout their Ten Point Program created when the BPP was founded as a party platform. Murch emphasized that the BPP Ten Point program was structured in the same way that NOI Muslim Program was with “We want” statements that

---

<sup>6</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 8.

express what the Party demands from the American government followed by “We believe” statements that explained the importance of this demand and how this demand aligned with party beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

In *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*, Murch argued that the college leaders who created the Panthers were migrant children of Black people who moved from the South to the West and North for better opportunities in jobs, housing, and education.<sup>10</sup> Murch states that in 1940, 77% of the total Black population lived in the South, but by 1970 50% lived outside of the South.<sup>11</sup> Between 1940 and 1950, 1.6 million Black people migrated to the North with another 1.5 million following them between 1950 and 1960.<sup>12</sup> However, due to the loss of the WWII economy,<sup>13</sup> deindustrialization of Oakland in the 1950s,<sup>14</sup> and unfair housing segregation caused by white backlash and white flight to the suburbs,<sup>15</sup> many Black migrants did not achieve the Northern utopia they traveled for. On top of this, White fear and rage towards the growing number of Black people in the North was taken out on the Black children.<sup>16</sup> By considering how the modernization of policing led to police working hand-in-hand with school systems to punish young Black children,<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Murch, *Living for the City*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 37-40.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 24-26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 63-66.

Murch justified the BPP's focus on schools. The blurring of the line between the police and family services was especially dangerous to the new migrant Black youth, who were deemed as "socially maladjusted",<sup>18</sup> as it created a revolving cycle from schools to juvenile detention centers to eventually jail or prison. Black teachers and faculty, who resented the newer Black population for causing problems for the older Black population with the White population,<sup>19</sup> contributed to the trend of demonizing Black children. Murch better contextualized the BPP and other nationalist movements of its kind compared to the limits of earlier works on the Panthers. Murch's generational migrant explanation helped scholars understand the BPP's fuller history and its place in the long arch of civil rights rather than just an isolated movement and a party on the margin that suddenly appears and disappears.

Historians agree that the BPP went through multiple ideological and tactical changes with its messaging and platform throughout its sixteen-year life span. In *Survival Pending the Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party*, Paul Alkebulan splits the Black Panther Party reign up into three eras. From 1966-1971 the Black Panthers are focused on political, economic, and social autonomy for Black America. Heavily inspired by Malcolm X and encouraged by his message of taking up arms, the Black Panther Party during this era emphasized patrolling the police and protecting community members from police brutality.<sup>20</sup> This era ended, according to Alkebulan, when Huey P. Newton was released from jail in 1970. After being arrested and convicted of manslaughter for killing a policeman in 1967, Newton was reluctant to continue with militant tactics as he started to doubt the effectiveness of an armed

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, xiii.



struggle against the American government. Instead, after his release, Newton began to focus on using the BPP community programs to organize the Black community.<sup>21</sup>

In 1969, the BPP experimented with community service programs, such as free medical clinics, free breakfast programs for children, and liberation schools in order to help provide for the immediate needs in the Black community. Alkebulan argued that the next era, from 1971-1974, focused on expanding these programs and using BPP resources to allow BPP members to run for local politics. Bobby Seale ran for mayor of Oakland and Elaine Brown, the new minister of information for the BPP, ran for Oakland city council. In order to fund these campaigns, the Panthers closed some of their offices to redirect resources.<sup>22</sup> After both Seale and Brown lost, the BPP lost members as some became disillusioned with the Party for straying from their militant strategies that had encouraged many members to join. Some members also left due to disillusionment with politics being a valuable way of creating change since BPP members couldn't even win in their birthplace.<sup>23</sup>

This local politics era ended after Newton was forced to flee to Cuba after being accused of murdering a prostitute. Not only did his leaving cause major image problems for the Panthers, but also a huge shift in party leadership. Alkebulan argued that this last era, from 1974-1982, women began to assert themselves in the leadership, with Elaina Brown become the head during Newton's absence, JoNina Abron becoming the editor of the newspaper in 1978, and Erika Huggins and Brenda Bay becoming the directors of the Oakland community school.<sup>24</sup> Though

---

<sup>21</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, xiv

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

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

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

Huggins made major strides through education and rebuilding the relationship between the BPP and the Black church, eventually the BPP closed its doors because of the negative reputation it garnered from Newton's multiple conflicts with law enforcement, including charges of drugs, embezzlement, and murder.<sup>25</sup>

Most historians and scholars accept Alkebulan's timeline. However, some disagree with him about the shift from armed resistance to social and community programming being a deradicalization of the Party. Historian Mary Potori, in "Feeding the Revolution": The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival", describes this shift in Party tactics as the BPP broadening its definition of institutional violence to include all state-sanctioned systems that "weaken or destroy Black bodies".<sup>26</sup> Potori's view on this shift is more convincing than other historians who simply argue the BPP shift marks a turn from revolution to integration into American politics. Potori's view better fits with a larger definition of self-determination for Black communities since the BPP used these programs to place control over education, health care, and distribution of food and wealth into their own hands.

Biological sociologist, Dr. Alondra Nelson, emphasized this larger understanding of radicalization and self-determination. In *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*, Nelson points out how the community programs were not only used to help fulfil the needs of the Black community, but also to radicalize and politicize the community. Nelson supported this claim through a perspective she coined "social health".

Considering the free clinics that the BPP established throughout American cities, Nelson argued

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 120-125.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Potori, "Feeding the Revolution": the Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival", *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no. 1 (March 2017): 87, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=f65521b6-f42a-4b45-9835-2f3971d2dfb2%40sessionmgr4008>

that activists went outside of just physical wellbeing and also looked at social wellbeing. These clinics not only provided free preventative medicine and health screenings, but also housing,<sup>27</sup> food banks, employment assistance, and political education classes.<sup>28</sup> The BPP's strategy recognized that the history of racial discrimination and current social oppression had a profound effect on the physical wellbeing of the Black community.<sup>29</sup> "Serve the people body and soul" was a popular saying in the BPP that reflects this ideological perspective that the Panthers applied to their clinics and other social welfare programs.<sup>30</sup>

Due to the popular public memory of the Black Panther Party being militant men defending their rights through the use of guns<sup>31</sup> (this image of the BPP was made popular by media that wanted to criminalize the BPP<sup>32</sup> and later by 1990s Black male artists who glorified the Panthers in order to reclaim a feeling of pride while being discontent with the current economic and political future of Black America<sup>33</sup>), the female narrative and contributions to the Party tend to be downplayed and ignored. But recent scholarship has questioned the marginalization of women's roles and leadership in BPP history.

---

<sup>27</sup> Alondra, Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Nelson, *Body and Soul*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Antwanisha Alameen-Shavers, "The Woman Question: Gender Dynamics within the Black Panther Party," *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 36, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/stable/pdf/10.2979/spectrum.5.1.03.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A874bdfb9c4d6e5dbef9b48c4639d38c8>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 19.

Most historians agree that the early militant period of the BPP consciously created a victim role for Black women. Robyn Spencer in “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California”, argued that the BPP self-defense patrolling strategy put men on the front lines, defending the Black community, mainly Black women, against White police violence.<sup>34</sup> Both Black men and women at the time accepted such an approach since in the past Black men had been continuously degraded in society as not being able to protect Black women from rape and violence from White men<sup>35</sup> and Black women were not considered respectable and worth protecting.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the BPP’s strategy was allowing Black men to fulfill their roles as head of the household and Black women to be seen as feminine.

Alkebulan argued that women supported strategy, as reflected in numerous multiple essays where women who identified themselves as Black revolutionaries called for women to not question their Black men because to do so would be questioning their masculinity and power. Instead, these women called for Black women to be supportive roles in Black men’s lives. They should “assist in the rebirth of the Black man’s mind<sup>37</sup>” and “should try to be “everything” to a man and seek out his needs to fulfil them”.<sup>38</sup> Alkebulan argues that these philosophical roles for women in the BPP did not change until the BPP members realized that this ideology was inconsistent with their inspirations, especially those who wished to emulate Malcolm X and their

---

<sup>34</sup> Robyn Ceanne Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California,” *Journal of Women’s History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 93, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/article/233236/pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 100-101.

<sup>36</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 93.

<sup>37</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

international ideological models such as Cuba, Vietnam, and China where equal rights for women had greater acceptance.<sup>39</sup>

While Alkebulan described this shift in philosophy as forced, Spencer argued that the call for Black women to join the BPP was voluntary and by women willingly answered. Spencer believed, in comparison to other nationalist groups like the Nation of Islam, the BPP lacked a strict hierarchy based on gender roles and did preach female subordination.<sup>40</sup> Although women did face some criticism from the Black community by picking up guns and joining men on the front lines, Spencer asserted that this role of the female protector can be seen throughout the Black female tradition including women like Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Mary “Stagecoach” Fields. Spencer also argued that women widely accepted this call in Oakland because of their ties to the Southern traditions. It was not uncommon for women in the rural South to be taught how to protect themselves and be expert marksmen.<sup>41</sup> Spencer, supported Murch’s conclusions about children of southern migrants having a heavy influence for how and why they revolt. She stated that women were inspired to join the BPP because they believed in the use of arms and self-defense, not just to stand by their men who did.

In “The Woman Question: Gender Dynamics within the Black Panther Party”, Africana culturalist Atwanisha Alameen-Shavers accepted Spencer’s argument, asserting that even though the Party was not created with women in mind and was more focused on recruiting men on the streets, leaders within the BPP such as Heuy Newton and Bobby Seale both spoke out about openly including women into the Party.<sup>42</sup> Alameen-Shavers included speeches from Heuy P.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 94.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>42</sup> Alameen-Shavers, “The Woman Question,” 41.

Newton where he connected women's liberation to Black liberation and argued that the enemy for both was the same-- the fascist United States and the police. Therefore, Newton argued, women should be a part of the Black liberation movement because they were fighting the same fight and men who prevented women from joining the cause were warped in their thinking and should accept women as equal partners in the cause.<sup>43</sup> Alameen-Shavers also considered Bobby Seale's writing. Seale stated multiple times in his work published during the reign of the BPP that there should be "absolute equality" between men and women and that male chauvinism is tied to class oppression and racism, therefore they are all a part of the same fight for human liberation. Seale took a definitive stance claiming that the BPP "disagreed with any belief system that promoted male domination and the oppression of Black women" and instituted Party rules so as to try to establish equality for women in the Panthers, like rules against sexual violence towards women.<sup>44</sup>

While historians and scholars disagree about whether the BPP shift to include women was based on political force or genuine ideological belief, they do agree that women still faced sexism and male backlash within the party. A major example is Eldridge Cleaver, who served as the Minister of Information for the BPP from 1966-1971.<sup>45</sup> Cleaver was the main spokesperson for the Party while both Seale and Newton were arrested for separate charges in 1967.<sup>46</sup> Best known for his book *Soul on Ice*, which was a collection of writings he did while in prison, Cleaver admitted to raping both Black and White women and using Black women to practice and "refine

---

<sup>43</sup> Alameen-Shavers, "The Woman Question," 40.

<sup>44</sup> Alameen-Shavers, "The Woman Question," 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle," 96.

his techniques” before raping White women. He believed that raping White women was a way of getting revenge on his true oppressor-- the White male.<sup>47</sup> Cleaver asserted that part of America’s political warfare was a battle between Black men and White men for the sexual control of each other's women. The victor of this battle would control society and women were meant to be the passive prize for the victor.<sup>48</sup> This idea that Black men could reclaim their masculinity lost during slavery through sexual domination of women was accepted by many male BPP members and Cleaver’s blatant sexism and misogyny did not stop his climb among the ranks of the Party leadership.<sup>49</sup>

Cleaver did have a change in ideology and later advocated for the ending of male chauvinism in the party (he especially called for women to be seen as equal after the arrest of Ericka Huggins who he saw as evidence that women were just as revolutionary as men<sup>50</sup>). The Party turned a blind eye to Cleaver’s abuse towards his wife, Kathleen Cleaver, who was a major public figure and leader in the BPP. These silences around female abuse by male leaders in the Panthers is another form of sexism that women in the party had to grapple with.<sup>51</sup>

Historians and scholars recognize that as male leaders of the BPP were arrested and/or killed by police, women began to rise in the formal party leadership hierarchy to fill those roles.<sup>52</sup> Three women in particular should be recognized as they are important to the history of the Panthers and historiography of women leadership in the BPP.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>48</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending the Revolution*, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 97.

<sup>50</sup> Alameen-Shavers, “The Woman Question,” 42-43.

<sup>51</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 100.

<sup>52</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 91.

Scholars identify Tareka “Matilaba” Lewis as the first woman to join the BPP. She was a student leader at Oakland Technical High School and one of the first students to demand a Black history club. She would often cut class to attend courses and race discussion at Merritt College. One day, she walked into a BPP office near Merritt’s campus and asked to join and to carry a gun. Seale allowed her to join the Party and she went on to become a widely respected member.<sup>53</sup>

Activist Ericka Huggins left school and joined the Huey Newton Defense Committee with her husband John in 1967. She was inspired by the Party’s willingness to do more than just wait for the government to change Black oppression. Ericka and John moved to Los Angeles and joined the Southern California chapter of the BPP. In 1969, John was murdered during a shootout at the University of California Los Angeles campus. Ericka fled southern California with her infant daughter and moved in with her in-laws in New Haven, Connecticut. She established a breakfast program and liberation school there and became the first woman to head a BPP local chapter. She was later arrested with Bobby Seale on conspiracy charges and spent two years in jail until her charges were dropped due to lack of evidence. Huggins' arrest and the abuse she received while in jail proved to many people in the party, including Eldridge Cleaver, that women were as revolutionary as men and that they experienced the same state oppression. After her release, Huggins moved to Oakland and became a teacher at the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI). She became the director of the IYI in 1974 until it closed in 1982. Most scholars consider the IYI, later called the Oakland Community school, as the longest running BPP institution in the Bay area and one of their most successful.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle,” 94-95.

<sup>54</sup> Murch, “Living for the City,” 176-178.



Kathleen Neal, later Kathleen Cleaver, was a former SNCC activist recruited by Eldridge Cleaver to help organize Newton's case after his 1967 arrest. She began to help re-organize the Party which had fallen into disarray. There was "no office, no newspaper, no meetings" as the BPP was in crisis mode having lost both of their leaders to arrest. Cleaver became the Communication Secretary as she became the BPP publicist and press contact person. She also helped manage the Free Huey movement. Cleaver also became the first woman to ever serve on the Panther Central Committee.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, most historians and scholars agree that the BPP experience key ideological shifts and tactical changes during their time. The difference is that some scholars interpret the changes as deradicalization in the Party while others believe the Party expanded on their radical views and broadened their scope outside of police brutality to meet other needs of the Black community such as education, hunger, and health care. Most historians also agree that women's roles in the Party changed over time, although they disagree on whether or not these changes occurred because they had to politically or if the support of female liberation was always a part of the Party's goals and just wasn't emphasized until later. While the current historiography on the Black Panther Party is quite extensive, more contextualization of the BPP within the Civil Rights Movement is missing. Donna Murch addressed part of the issue by looking at the generational influences of the south on northern nationalist movements. She didn't consider the relationships that the BPP had with the south beyond that or the reaction that the southern migrant community had to the BPP and whether or not they worked together.

To often scholarly discussion about the BPP is separates it from all the other changes that were happening during the 1960s and 1970s when in reality these movements were happening

---

<sup>55</sup> Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle," 97.

simultaneously and building off of each other. Another gap is a lack of scholarship on how LGBTQ+ people were involved, if they were, in the movement. How far did the BPP influence extend? What is its impact for example on the Chicano movement, AIM, and LGBTQ+ movements?

Also, as earlier mentioned, public history is largely mute on the BPP. Jana Rhodes looked at their public memory within the context of mass media and subculture, but more work is needed on how we can commemorate and teach this historic and important movement to our future generations. Violent revolution tends to be accepted for White history (such as the American revolution, French revolution, etc.), but it tends to be criticized when done by non-white people. How we can combat that bias so histories like the BPP (and the NOI, Black Power movements, Haitian Revolution, etc.) can be told through public interpretation and education needs to be addressed in scholarship. Overall, the Black Panther Party is a part of Black history that needs greater interpretation. Hopefully further research would allow more people to see past the violent, criminal, and “unjustified” chaos that the Panthers are shown to be and see the socialist, revolutionary, and community empowering movement the BPP was.

Besides the gap in public history about the Black Panther Party, and Black Power movements in general, I wish to address the lack of geographical diversity, especially what Black Power organization looked like in the South. What has been written on in terms of Black political organization in the South focuses exclusively on Civil Rights movements and non-violent organization. Although the Black Power movement and the Civil Rights movement is happening at the same time, many historians have chosen to limit the scope of the Civil Rights movement to the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, which automatically excludes analysis on Black Power since that movement started in the late 1960s and continues on until the end of the

1970s. My goal with this thesis is to add to the geographical and temporal scope of the historiography on Black Power by focusing on its history within Chattanooga, Tennessee, from 1968-1977.

The only meaningful secondary source that I could find on Black Power organization in Tennessee was *Black Power in the Bluff City: African American Youth and Student Activism in Memphis, 1965-1975* by Shirletta J. Kinchen. Kinchen does a wonderful job at looking at Black Power in Memphis, Tennessee by examining student movements at LeMoyne-Owen College and the University of Memphis. She also takes a deep dive look into the history of the Invaders which later became the Memphis branch of the Black Panthers. I hope that my thesis will add to the conversation that Kinchen has started on Black Power movements in Tennessee by looking at the history of the Black Panthers and other Black Power movements such as student led movements in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In addition to uncovering the history of Black Power in Chattanooga, I was also particularly interested in the memorialization of Black Power leaders and organizations in Chattanooga since that pattern can add to the public interpretation of the movement.

Most of the primary sources related to Black Power organization in Chattanooga was centered in newspapers. However, Chattanooga newspapers are only digitized within historical newspaper databases like newspapers.com until 1963. Therefore, a majority of the newspapers that I had accessed to came through newspaper clipping folders within the local history archives at the Chattanooga Downtown Public Library. Thus the sources were not only limited to what White main-stream media felt it important enough to write about, but also what White archivists felt was historically important enough to preserve. Since I am fighting against these two institutionally racist lenses, I am sure that there are sources and perspective that were not

preserved that could add to this research of Black Power in Chattanooga. In order to try to overcome this as best as possible, I will often be reading against the grain and acknowledging the racial bias within my sources. I also try to incorporate sources from Black people as much as possible. Within my research I was able to find six preserved copies of the Black Power newspaper called *The Black United Front* (previously *The Black Fist*) that I reference heavily to analyze of ideology and philosophy of the Black Power groups within Chattanooga. I also reference the *All People's Community Organization (A.P.C.O) News* when relevant.

The *A.P.C.O News* was launched on February 14, 1970 with the purpose of becoming a community newspaper and providing a “service that the Black and poor community so badly needs and richly deserves.”<sup>56</sup> Reverend Herbert H. Wright, a local Chattanooga civil rights activist, founder of the Action Coordinating Council (ACC), and pastor of Wesley Chapel Christian Community Church started the newspaper and served as its publisher.. Moses Freeman Jr. acted as the A.P.C.O editor. Cottie Morrison was the managing editor. Johnny Holloway was the associate editor. Willie L. McCledon was the production manager. Napoleon Alexander was the advertising manager. James Moreland was the circulation manager. Their goal was “to report the news, carry messages of importance, provide editorial comments, and reflect community life with all the honesty and clarity demanded of a good newspaper.”<sup>57</sup>

Civil rights activists founded the newspaper and one of their main goals was to create a community forum for the Black residents of Chattanooga. Some of the opinion pieces within this paper help highlight the way that the community was thinking about and interacting with Black

---

<sup>56</sup> “Message From the Publisher,” *The A.P.C.O News*, February 14, 1970, APCO News Box #1, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

power ideology and philosophy. *A.P.C.O News* also subscribed to the Liberation News Service (LNS), which was a New Left underground press service founded by Marshall Bloom and Raymond Mungo, that would send out bi-weekly news articles and photographs on topics such as American politics, anti-Vietnam War effort, and national and international liberation movements.<sup>58</sup> *A.P.C.O news* would often reprint LNS articles that had to do with the Black Panther Party chapters in New York, Oakland, Chicago, etc. Although this is not a discussion about local Black power organization, it does show that there was a local interest into the BPP and the ideology of Black power. I wanted to specifically highlight this paper source since it is one of the few that privileges Black voices on the topic of Black power in Chattanooga.

With these resources I was able to find that Chattanooga has a rich history of Black power organization. There was a Black Knights Inc. chapter that actively served the Chattanooga community through community programming and added to the conversation of Black Power through their weekly newsletter. The Chattanooga chapter of the Black Knights Inc. evolved to become the Chattanooga chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP). The BPP in Chattanooga continued to be active within the community through survival programs such as free breakfast, prison bussing, and sickle cell anemia research. The Black Knights/Black Panthers were heavily involved in protesting the urban renewal program called Model Cities in Chattanooga. They also often protested grocery stores that resided and served Black neighborhoods in Chattanooga with the goal of improving their food quality and pricing for Black residents. These grocery store protests gave the Chattanooga government an opportunity to attack the Black Panthers through

---

<sup>58</sup> "Liberation News Service Records," Robert S. Cox Special Collections & University Archives Research Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst, accessed May 24, 2022, <http://scua.library.umass.edu/liberation-news-service/>

the legal system, leading some Panthers to be arrested and charged with extortion because of their picketing.

There is also evidence of a student movement at Brainerd High School where Black students were working with the Black Knights/Black Panthers and/or had their support in trying to change the Confederate symbols within their school. The University at Tennessee in Chattanooga also had a history of having conversations around Black power, which can be seen in their student newspapers.

These events and places can serve as foundation for future public interpretation. This thesis will conclude with suggestions on the future public history of the Black Panther Party in Chattanooga, Tennessee and the South.

## Chapter 2: Chattanooga Black Knights

### Memphis Roots

Three days after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4th, 1968 in Memphis, Memphis barber and business owner Warren Lewis founded the Black Knights Inc.<sup>59</sup> Lewis started the Black Knights as a welfare organization that would help provide training for trade jobs such as sewing and barbering and to help improve housing in Memphis.<sup>60</sup> The Black Knights did community service work such as park cleanings<sup>61</sup> and holiday drives.<sup>62</sup> They also hosted community social events such as holding a city-wide talent show for Black entertainers.<sup>63</sup> The Black Knights met weekly at Warren Lewis' business, Warren's Beauty and Barber Shop at 887 Thomas Street.<sup>64</sup> As one *Commercial Appeal* journalist put it, the Black Knights "is a negro self-help organization dedicated to tearing down racial barriers by helping negroes help themselves."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Warren Lewis, interviewed by Thomas Faist, October 4, 1983, transcript Everett R. Cook Oral History Collection, Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee.

<sup>60</sup> "Black Knights Point Way for Negro Self-Help," *The Commercial Appeal*, July 18, 1968, 20.

<sup>61</sup> "Minipark Springs From Negro Effort," *The Commercial Appeal*, June 17, 1969, 10.

<sup>62</sup> "Season Drive on By Holiday Appeal," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 20, 1975, 73.

<sup>63</sup> "Young Entertainers Given Boost," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 6, 1974, 128.

<sup>64</sup> "Black Knights Point Way," 20.

<sup>65</sup> "Minipark Springs," 10.

The Black Knights also worked within the Memphis public education system through a federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) grant. This grant gave the Knights \$29,860 to put create theatrical productions that focused on Black history, Black culture, and Black and White relations.<sup>66</sup> The Black Knights also received a similar grant from the Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP) which was a fund that aids in desegregation efforts. These plays later received considerable White backlash, particularly the one held at Northside High School on December 8th, 1971, in which some White teachers, school administrators, and parents complained that it used too many curse words and portrayed anti-White themes. The unidentified play consisted of poems by Langston Hughes and Ben Caldwell, the song Peace Be Still, and two student written skits. In response to the backlash, Tony Thomas, the administrator and Black Knights member who helped with the production of the play, commented that the work was meant to give Black students a voice in Black and White issues as an aid to desegregation. Thomas remarked: “One of the problems we have identified in the school system is that especially in schools with a predominantly Black student body and teachers that are predominantly White, things aren’t dealt with honestly... What we are trying to do is to deal with some of these things honestly as they are.”<sup>67</sup>

The Black Knights reached out repeatedly to work with local government and the police in Memphis. In 1968, after the arrest of Dr. Vasco A. Smith, vice president of the Memphis NAACP, the Black Knights reached out to Mayor Henry Loeb about creating a civilian police review board. This was in response to the lack of meaningful charges and the mass protest that

---

<sup>66</sup> “Black Knights Set Up HEW-Aided Workshop,” *The Commercial Appeal*, May 6, 1971, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Jimmie Covington, “Northside Play Raises Complaints,” *The Commercial Appeal*, December 9, 1971.



occurred after Dr. Smith's arrest. Mayor Loeb declined, but the Knights promised to continue following up in order to work with the local government on how to improve police relations and racial tensions.<sup>68</sup> This dedication to working with Mayor Loeb on police brutality can also be found in the Chattanooga branch of the Black Knights newsletter from May 1970. The article shows that two years later, the Memphis Knights were still taking meetings with Mayor Loeb and the director of Fire and Police to discuss the issues of police brutality.<sup>69</sup>

Although the Memphis Black Knights started as a self-help organization, the *Commercial Appeal* in August 1968 reported that the Black Knights had announced during a news conference that they were switching to a militancy stance. Chris Turner, the executive vice secretary of the Knights was quoted saying: "We want to go on the offense. . . . When a White man won't hire a Black man, we don't want to force the White man to hire the black man. We want to make the White man wish he had hired the Black man"<sup>70</sup>. The article did not detail what this new militancy ideology would look like for the Memphis Black Knights, and I could not find any future mention of violent tactics within Memphis newspapers. According to Lewis, in his oral history, he described the organization as "a non-violent organization that fired back in self-defense."<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> "Boycotter and Police Argue; Court Decision Is Due Today," *The Commercial Appeal*, August 2, 1968, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., "News From Memphis Chapter," *Black United Front*, May 9, 1970, MS-083-06-07-05-004, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/26/rec/5>

<sup>70</sup> "Knights Reverse Moderate Stand: Negro Group Announces Switch to Militancy," *The Commercial Appeal*, August 15, 1968, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Warren Lewis, interviewed by Thomas Faist, October 4, 1983, transcript Everett R. Cook Oral History Collection, Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee.

Although their military stance is unclear, the Black Knights sought to empower the Black community of Memphis through social welfare programs and to teach Black history to inspire pride in Black identity. Thus, they can be classified as a Black power organization within my research. According to Warren Lewis' oral history, the Black Knights spread to one other branch being founded in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This Chattanooga branch would evolve into the Black Panther Party branch in Chattanooga. The Memphis Black Knights remained separate from the Invaders and the Memphis BPP. Lewis states that the Knights peaked in the early 1970s and began to decline towards the 1980s. By the 1984 interview, the Knights had not officially disbanded, but no longer met weekly and had very few members.<sup>72</sup>

### Chattanooga Black Knights Inc.

Ernest Wilkins started the Chattanooga chapter of the Black Knights in July 1969.<sup>73</sup> The Chattanooga Black Knights Inc. focused on being a "community organization for self-help among the poor" by providing community service programs such as free school breakfast programs and clothing donations.<sup>74</sup>

The Chattanooga Black Knights created a weekly newsletter called *The Black United Front* (BUF) that they used to spread their message and fundraise as they sold every issue for 10 cents. Black Knights member Ralph Moore was the editor of the BUF. Mike Wilkins was the editorial assistant and Black Knights administrator. Leonard Hemphill was in charge of

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Black Knights Launch Drives: Organization Here Seeks New Members and \$10,000 in Funds," *Chattanooga Times*, September 25, 1969, Associations B, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

circulation and was the Black Knights Inc. treasurer.<sup>75</sup> According to an issue from December 1969, the BUF “is the official organ of the Black Knights, Inc. with the purpose of bringing news pertinent to the Black community of Chattanooga; to be a means of communication between the organization and the Black community; and to be used by the people of the community as a means of bring to the open the many problems plaguing them”.<sup>76</sup>

This mission of creating a forum where Black Chattanooga residents could express themselves and publicly address the issues in their community is evident in the columns featured in the BUF. People published poetry, stories, and op-eds. For example, the Christmas 1969 issue featured a short story, “Santa Claus Go Straight to the Ghetto”, about two boys having a conversation about how Santa Claus does not visit the ghetto and the economic disparities between Black and White homes during the holidays.<sup>77</sup> Another example can be found in the April 25, 1970 issue, which includes a poem called “My Thought” by Molapa Mphadi. The poem talks about how Mphadi’s thoughts tell them that Black culture was worthy, that Black people have a beautiful history outside of “barbarism and slavery”, and to rise up and liberate Black people.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “The United Front,” *Black United Front*, December 25, 1969, MS-083-06-07-02, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/6/rec/2>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Unknown, “Santa Claus Go Straight To The Ghetto,” *Black United Front*, December 25, 1969, MS-083-06-07-02, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/6/rec/2>

<sup>78</sup> Molapa Mphadi, “My Thought,” *Black United Front*, April 25, 1970, MS-083-06-07-03-002, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/12/rec/3>

The BUF also preached a Black nationalist political and economic philosophy, which is evident in their eight-point program, which demanded freedom, jobs, education, housing, political and economic power, control over communities, and an end to racism. The Black Panther Party ten-point program created by Heuy P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966 heavily inspired the Black Knights' eight-point program. The similarities can be seen in the formatting of the plan, which follows the BPP plan by having a bold *We Want* statement followed by an explanation of how and why this should be implemented in black communities. The content is also very similar with both programs calling for freedom, jobs, education, and housing. The Knights' eight-point program called for political self-determination and economic power within the Black community similar to the BPP ten-point program. The Knights' eight-point program was less radical in its rhetoric since it did not call for the creation of a separate Black state as the BPP advocated. The Knights also took a less radical stance on Black imprisonment. The BPP called for the immediate release of all Black prisoners so they can be retried by a Black jury, which they argued was the only way for a Black person to receive a fair trial in the United States. The Knights addressed this approach in point seven: "We believe that all so-called Black "criminals" in jails and prisons were put there because they rebelled against the real criminals who uphold and perpetuate a system which exploits and systematically brutalized the black people of this country."<sup>79</sup> This statement acknowledged the discrimination that Black people received in the American justice system that the BPP highlighted in their platform but did not make any demands for mass release of Black people in the prison system or call for retrials.

---

<sup>79</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., "8 Point Knights Program," *Black United Front*, April 25, 1970, MS-083-06-07-03-001, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/16/rec/3>

Besides their eight-point plan, which they frequently published in different issues of the BUF, the Knights also regularly commented on their political philosophy. In a 1969 issue, they urged for a re-education of the Black community in politics so that “he will know what politics is supposed to bring to him in return.”<sup>80</sup> They argue that a ballot is like a bullet and should not be wasted or thrown away on politicians who will not benefit the Black community.<sup>81</sup> This common Black nationalist metaphor of the ballot as the bullet dates to Malcolm X’s “Ballot or the Bullet” speech given in April 1964 at a Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>82</sup> This awareness of and interaction with Black nationalist leaders and theory is a common thread in the BUF. This intercourse with other Black nationalists can also be seen in the BUF history lessons column, “History this Week”, which featured significant events in the national Black power movement that happened in that week in a previous year. For example, a 1970 issue highlighted events such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) being founded on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1957; a massacre in Orangeburg, South Carolina where four black students were killed by police during a peaceful protest on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968; and a Zulu African king defeating a British Army in 1844.<sup>83</sup> The editors also published a biography of Malcolm X calling him “one of the greatest leaders and spokesman of and for the Black people America that the world has ever

---

<sup>80</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “Political Philosophy,” *The Black Fist*, October 1969, MS-083-06-07-01-001, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/0>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “The Ballot or the Bullet by Malcolm X, April 3, 1964, Cleveland Ohio,” Social Justice Speeches, EdChange Multicultural Pavilion, accessed May 3, 2021, [http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm\\_x\\_ballot.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html)

<sup>83</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “History- This Week,” *Black United Front*, February 14, 1970, Associations B, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

witnessed.”<sup>84</sup> These opinion columns indicate that not only were the Chattanooga Black Knights Inc. engaged with national issues surrounding Black power but that they wanted to pass this education on to their readers.

The BUF also documents examples of the Chattanooga Black Knights being in communication with other chapters of the Black Knights Inc. For example, a 1971 issue included an update from the Memphis Black Knights chapter and comments on a meeting the Memphis Knights had with the Mayor of Memphis, Henry Loeb, in which Loeb denied that police brutality existed in Memphis.<sup>85</sup> These engagements with national and local Black power organizations, leaders, and theories reflect a consciousness of the larger Black power movement and its influence on local movements in the South. Although Southern chapters of the BPP are not commonly included in BPP historiography, it is obvious that Black power movements did exist here and that they were engaged with the national level movement.

Based on their tactics of nonviolence and their work with local school systems on desegregation, I would categorize the Memphis Black Knights as being less radical than their Chattanooga counterparts and the BPP. These two groups often argued for Black separatism in a way that the Memphis Black Knights did not. This difference is not necessarily a negative, since I have found more positive press coverage in White newspapers of the Memphis Black Knights than I was able to find for more militant groups of the same time period. The difference,

---

<sup>84</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “Malcolm X,” *Black United Front*, February 14, 1970, Associations B, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>85</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “News From Memphis Chapter,” *Black United Front*, May 9, 1970, MS-083-06-07-05-004, *Black United Front newsletters*, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877col120/id/26/rec/5>

however, points to a possibility of these groups being able to avoid public and federal attack in a way the BPP could not.

### Chapter 3: The Model Cities Program

Not only did the Black Knights Inc. use their newspaper to connect with the Chattanooga community locally and the Black power movement nationally, but they also used it to highlight the issues the Black Knights were fighting. One such issue was housing in Chattanooga. The Black Knights staunchly resisted of the Model Cities Program (MCP). United States President Lyndon Johnson created the MCP as part of his War on Poverty initiative in 1966 and it ran until 1974.<sup>86</sup> The goal of the MCP was to give federal funding to local governments to help them achieve plans that would substantially improve the “quality of life of people living in blighted city neighborhoods”.<sup>87</sup> The plan could include elements such as “education, health, housing, income and social services, employment, and economic development, crime and delinquency, transportation, the physical environment”, etc.<sup>88</sup> Local governments had to submit a seven part application that included discussions of the scope of their problem, the goals of their project, their local strategy, and how their citizens would participate in the project. If approved for the project, the local government could receive up to 80% of federal funding to carry the plan.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> D. Bradford Hunt, “Model Cities”, *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed April 29, 2022, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/832.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Model Cities Administration at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, “CDA Letter no 1.”, October 30, 1967, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>88</sup> Springer Gibson, “Aims of the Model Cities Program Are Described to the Commission”, *Chattanooga Times*, February 1, 1968, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



Chattanooga was one of the 150 locations approved for the MCP<sup>90</sup> and one of four programs in the state of Tennessee (the others being Cookeville, Nashville, and Smithville).<sup>91</sup> The city of Chattanooga applied for the MCP in April of 1968, requesting \$268,232 of federal aid. The section of Chattanooga that they highlighted in the grant application included an estimated population of over 44,000 people with 60 percent of those people being Black. The application focused on solving issues such as unemployment and underemployment, transportation, education, health, and crime rates.<sup>92</sup> The Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the Chattanooga MCP grant application in September of 1968. Although they applied for \$268, 232, they were only approved for \$131,000. The city treasury also committed to putting \$32,000 towards the program.<sup>93</sup> This grant approval meant that the City of Chattanooga had one year after the official contract was signed to develop a comprehensive five-year strategy to solve the issues they outlined within their original grant application.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup>Jason T. Bartlett, "Model Cities," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, accessed April 29, 2022, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/model-cities/#:~:text=In%20its%20final%20form%20Model,a%20mere%20%24900%20million%20dollars.>

<sup>91</sup> Division of Regional Medical Program, *Model Cities Planning Grant Awards* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning and Evaluation, 1969), [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Model\\_Cities\\_Planning\\_Grant\\_Awards/5J9PYQq6E88C?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Model_Cities_Planning_Grant_Awards/5J9PYQq6E88C?hl=en&gbpv=0)

<sup>92</sup> Springer Gibson, "Commission Votes to Seek Funds to Plan a Model Cities Program Over Older Belt of Chattanooga: \$268,232 Asked Wide Area is Covered in Request for Federal Assistance," *Chattanooga Times*, February 12 1968, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>93</sup> Springer Gibson, "Federal Agency Approves Funds for Model Plan: HUD Allocates \$131,000 for City to Map Strategy– Kelley Sees Major Gains if Implemented," *Chattanooga Times*, September 7, 1968, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>94</sup> Springer Gibson, "Model Cities Program First Major Objective When Bender is Mayor: Oath Thursday City Must Develop Plan in 12-Month Period After Pact Signed," *Chattanooga Times*, December 31, 1968, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

Mayor Austin Letheridge “Chuck” Bender officially signed the Model Cities contract on May 29, 1969.<sup>95</sup> After the signing of the contract, the MCP operated relatively smoothly. Mayor Bender appointed Dr. John A Dyer, who helped write the grant when he was the executive director of Chattanooga Progress Inc., to be the coordinator of Chattanooga's federal programs and acting director of the MCP.<sup>96</sup> Keeping to the promise of including diverse citizen participation, a steering committee was put together through community nominations and elections.<sup>97</sup> The majority of the steering committee members were Black. The steering committee's main focus was to canvas the proposed MCP neighborhood to register eligible citizens to vote for the fifty-member Community Administration Board. During this canvas, community members were also encouraged to run for the board since 50% of the board needed to be made up community members from the MCP area.<sup>98</sup> The MCP commitment to Black community input can also be seen in their diverse hiring. Dr. Dyer, as acting MCP director, hired James Mapp, the director of the Chattanooga chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to be the training and information specialist for the MCP. Black community members such as Moses Freeman Jr., who was hired to be a program analyst, and Johnetta Manning, who was hired to be a MCP secretary, filled other agency

---

<sup>95</sup> “Bender to Sign Contract Today: Model Cities Pact Sent Back in Virtually the Same Form”, *Chattanooga Times*, May 29, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>96</sup> “John Dyer Named to Model Cities: CPI Official to Serve as Acting Director of Program Here”, *Chattanooga Times*, March 20, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>97</sup> Margaret Leonard, “‘Critical Stage’ for Model Cities: Nominations for Steering Committee Will Be Made Tonight”, *Chattanooga Times*, June 16, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>98</sup> “3,000 Register in Model Cities”, *Chattanooga News Free Press*, July 15, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

positions.<sup>99</sup> However, Black employees were paid less than their White counterparts for the same positions.<sup>100</sup> Despite the pay gap, it seems that the Chattanooga MCP did make a conscious effort to incorporate Black community members into their planning and had the support of local Black leaders and the community based on the 300,000 people who came out to vote and participate in the program.

This high level of support was short-lived. Mayor Bender, with the approval of the Chattanooga city commission, appointed a White man, Quentin Lane, to the position of director of the MCP in August of 1969. Lane, a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, was a high school teacher and guidance counselor for several years before becoming principal of Elbert Long High school. Then in 1964, he became the Tennessee Education Association public relations director for three years before becoming the director of staff personnel services for the city schools in 1967.<sup>101</sup> Immediately following Lane's appointment, the Chattanooga NAACP began to protest Lane as director. The executive panel, which included MCP training specialist James Mapp and Community Development Admiration Board Elect Tommie Brown, sent out the following statement to the Chattanooga City Commission, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (the federal office in charge of award the MCP grants), and the Model Cities Administration office in Washington, D.C.:

The executive committee of the Chattanooga branch of the NAACP deplores the action of Mayor Bender and the City Commission in naming a white director of the Model Cities program inasmuch as the model neighborhood area is predominantly Negro. Such action will affect the total success of such a needed program for the city of Chattanooga.

---

<sup>99</sup> Bill Cooley, "Model Cities Job to Mapp: Will be Program's 'Training Specialist,'" *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, July 23, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Margaret Leonard, "Lane is Director of Model Cities", *Chattanooga Times*, August 6, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

The local branch will take its protest to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Model Cities Administration program in Washington, D.C. We further ask the support of the citizens, both Negro and white, in joining us in protesting this flagrant violation of the very concept of the Model Cities philosophy, that is to uplift the citizens and the community which are so affected.<sup>102</sup>

After the NAACP position of protest was published, Black community leaders Rufus Hawkins, Reverend Charles Ashley, and T.B. Kennedy gathered the Community MCP board. The meeting turned out to be pretty split as many Black board members were upset by the appointment and most of the White board members respected the City commissions decision due to Lane's qualifications.<sup>103</sup> In the end, most of the board members agreed that they, as the Community Board, should have been consulted before a director was named and that many qualified locals (since Lane accepted the position while finishing his doctorate at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville) were overlooked for the position.<sup>104</sup>

As the mayor and the city commission ignored the calls for recognition, the protests against Lane's appointment ramped up. On August 14th, 1969, a week after the announcement of Lane's appointment and the NAACP protesting response, three of the seven districts within the MCP area signed a resolution that demanded the City Commission rescind Lane's appointment as MCP director. The resolution stated that "the people of the area have been politically

---

<sup>102</sup> Unknown, "City's NAACP Executive Panel Protests Appointment of Lane," *Chattanooga Times*, August 6, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>103</sup> Les Seago, "Lane's Selection for Model Cities Post Finds CDS Board Split on Racial Lines," *Chattanooga Times*, August 8, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>104</sup> "Naming of Lane Draws Protest: Model Cities Board Wants Voice in Appointments of the Program," *Chattanooga Times*, August 10, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

manipulated and exploited by the mayor and the commissioners.”<sup>105</sup> The resolution also declared that the appointment of a White man as director of a program that would be serving a population that is 80 percent Black as an insult saying this “insults our integrity as Black people having leadership forced upon us that is not representative of us and totally endangers the next four years of the Model City Program.”<sup>106</sup> Protest against Lane and the call for a Black MCP director only grew as a group called the Black Activist released a four point statement addressing their support of the communities request for a Black director:

It is obvious to the black people of this community that the majority of the city commission does not believe that there are black people with leadership abilities. . . This is merely another attempt to manipulate the poor and underprivileged. The Chattanooga City Government is seemingly (inadvertently or not) undermining all the efforts for equality and first class citizenship that other groups are desperately working to obtain. . . Black and poor people will not continue to sit back and betrod upon; they will bitterly oppose any further attempts at manipulation.<sup>107</sup>

It is not recorded who this Black Activist group is, but they stated that they speak on behalf of residents within the MCP area.

The other major group to join in the protest was the Chattanooga Action Coordinating Council (ACC), which is Chattanooga’s local branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The founder of the ACC, Reverend Herbert H. Wright, reached out to prominent SCLC leader, Dr. Charles Kenzie Steele, who joined him in Chattanooga to help lead

---

<sup>105</sup> “Three Districts in Model Cities Protest Appointment of Lane,” *Chattanooga Times*, August 15, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Clarence Scaife, “Black Activists Hit Appointment of Lane to Post: Attack Failure to Name Negro as Director of Model Cities,” *Chattanooga Times*, August 18, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

protests for the appointment of a Black MCP director.<sup>108</sup> Rev. Wright was born in 1930. Not much was documented about his early life, but he became Pastor of Wesley Chapel Christian Community Church in the 1960s and served there for over 40 years until he retired in 2012.<sup>109</sup> Throughout his career and retirement he was a civil rights advocate who fought against police brutality, public housing, and for the election of Black representatives into local government.<sup>110</sup> Dr. Steele was the first vice president of the SCLC. He became a pastor in 1935 and led different churches in Alabama and Georgia before moving to Tallahassee, Florida where he served as president of the local NAACP and helped direct the bus boycotts with Florida A&M University.<sup>111</sup> Rev. Wright and Dr. Steele stated that the ACC would circulate a petition to block the continuation of the MCP program if Lane's appointment was not recalled.<sup>112</sup> Two more MCP districts also sent letters to Mayor Bender about the removal of Lane as director, bringing the total of districts opposed to Lane to five of the seven.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> "Negro Group Threatens to Fight Model Cities Unless Lane Quits," August 21, 1969, *Chattanooga Times*, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>109</sup> "Rev. Herbert H. Wright," Find A Grave, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/220226326/herbert-h-wright>

<sup>110</sup> Yolanda Putman, "Civil Rights Pioneer Rev. H. H. Wright Dies at 84," last modified October 29, 2014, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2014/oct/29/rev-hh-wright-dies-at-84/270689/?bcsbid=1e68e880-fd49-4904-8daa-8418ba824944&pbdialog=reg-wall-login-created-tfp>

<sup>111</sup> "Steele, Charles Kenzie," Stanford The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute Encyclopedia, accessed on May 3, 2022, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/steele-charles-kenzie>.

<sup>112</sup> "Negro Group Threatens to Fight Model Cities Unless Lane Quits," *Chattanooga Times*.

<sup>113</sup> "Panel asks Lane to be Replaced: District 5 Council of Model Cities Wants Reconsideration," *Chattanooga Times*, August 20, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

Mayor Bender didn't respond to these demands because he was vacationing in Florida<sup>114</sup> and Lane refused to comment on the protest and denied any rumors that he would withdraw from the appointment while residing in Knoxville since he was still on leave from his job.<sup>115</sup> Once the mayor returned from his vacation, he held a City Commission meeting with a couple of the Black representatives from the MCP community board where he refused to reconsider Lane's appointment.<sup>116</sup> Lane also finally commented on the protest saying, "I certainly hope and believe that doing an effective job as director. . . will solve any problems that may be present"<sup>117</sup> and that he still planned to take the position starting on September 3rd.

With their written protest being ignored and dismissed, the community took to protesting in the streets. The first march happened on August 24, 1969, with about 50 to 75 residents participating and was led by Rev. Wright, Dr. Steele, and MCP staff member Moses Freeman. Before the march, in a mass meeting of about 200 community members at Wesley Chapel Christian Community Church, Dr. Steele said "if the revolution is not one of love and nonviolence, then it will be one of love and violence."<sup>118</sup> The march started in Avondale and ended at the MCP headquarters on McCallie Avenue. It's obvious that the Black Knights were

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> "Lane Will Retain His Appointment: Denies Rumors He May Not Accept Model Cities Job," *Chattanooga Times*, August 13, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>116</sup> Springer Gibson, "Black Residents Speak— Mayor Indicates Decision Stands," *Chattanooga Times*, August 27, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>117</sup> Margaret Leonard, "Lane States He'll Prove Capability as Director," *Chattanooga Times*, August 27, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>118</sup> Tim Elledge, "Lane Protest... Model Cities Appointment Precipitates Brief March," *Chattanooga News Free Press*, August 25, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

involved in this march as the protesters left signs that said “Black Power” and wrote “Let Rap Rap” (which was a common phrase used to demand the release of BPP leader H. Rap Brown) in chalk across the project office door. Copies of the *Black Fist*, which is what *the Black United Front* was called in its first few editions before the Black Knights changed the name of the paper, were also left in front of the MCP office.<sup>119</sup>

The next community protest march happened August 29, 1969, three weeks after Lane’s appointment. It was reported as a crowd of about fifty people. This time Ernest Wilkins, as the founder of the Chattanooga Black Knights, was listed as a leader of the march along with Rev. Wright and Rev. Charles Ashely Sr., who was also on the MCP Community board. The marchers started at the Avondale Community Center and ended at City Hall chanting “Lane has got to go” as they marched. A statement was signed by Wilkins, Wright, Ashley, and others that stated “We shall continue to march and protest against this appointment until a Black director is named” and they were marching to show “the growing unity among Black in Chattanooga in the common struggle against poverty and mass starvation .”<sup>120</sup>

Regardless of these rallies and protests, the Black community’s call for a Black director continued to be ignored by the Mayor, the City Commission, and by Quentin Lane. With Lane scheduled to start as director on September 3rd, the community response once again intensified. Starting September 2nd, Rev. Wright and other community members picketed the MCP office on McCallie Avenue. About eight to ten people were gathered outside the office at eight in the

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Margaret Leonard, “Negro Marchers Protest Naming Lane as Director: 40-50 Demonstate at City Hall Over Action on Model Cities”, *Chattanooga Times*, August 30, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.



morning with signs that said things like “Say it loud– I’m Black and I’m proud” and “Wanted: Black soldiers to fight for somebody else’s freedom when their brothers are slaves at home”.<sup>121</sup> Despite the picketers, Mayor Bender went with Quentin Lane and other MCP staff to try and reopen the MCP office on September 3, 1969.<sup>122</sup> This effort was in vain, however, as many staff members refused to cross the picket line and they locked the office and left at 9:00 am.<sup>123</sup> The picketers again arrived on September 4 to protest Lane but Rev. Wright called them off after Mayor Bender threatened to fire any staff members who refused to cross the picket line.<sup>124</sup> This action would have cost many people, especially the Black leader and community members who were hired or elected into their roles by the community, their MCP positions. Therefore, Lane took office on September 4, 1969 and he stated that he refused to let the opinion of the board to force him to resign: “I was appointed and my responsibility is to the mayor and the City Commission. . . I also have a responsibility to all the citizens, but as far as employment is concerned, that is to the mayor and the City Commission.”<sup>125</sup> Reverend Wright and community members considered pushing for the community board to try to vote out Lane but the half of the board that was made up of business owners and White administered social programming services ignored them.

---

<sup>121</sup> Steve Johnson, “Model City Pickets Honored by Staff,” *Chattanooga Post*, September 2, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>122</sup> Unknown, “Bender to Help Lane Reopen Building This Morning,” *Chattanooga Times*, September 3, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>123</sup> Margaret Leonard, “Eight Staff Workers Refuse to Cross Protest Line,” *Chattanooga Times*, September 3, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>124</sup> Margaret Leonard, “Post Is Assumed by Lane; McKeldin Was 1st Choice: Director’s Dismissal Will Be Sought, Wright Says,” *Chattanooga Times*, September 4, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

In October 1969, protestors of the Model City project hurled a firebomb through a window at the project office. The current mayor of Chattanooga, Austin Letheridge “Chuck” Bender offered a \$500 reward for information on the protestors. In response to this, the Black Knights made the main headline of their one of their October newsletters “\$500 Reward for Information Leading to the Arrest and Conviction of Punk Bender Responsible for the Model City Sham”. In this newsletter the Knights responded:

The Model Cities’ staff office burned last week. The people of the black community have spoken. Quentin Lane must go! And pig mayor “Punk” Bender has the nerve to offer \$500 reward for the capture of the revolutionist brothers who took positive action against the Model City sham. . . The people know that the houses they rent are rotting away and falling down; they know that sidewalks are needed in Churchville and Bushtown and Avondale; they know that the streets have bumps and holes. And they know that the racist white leadership in Chattanooga has gone all these years and fixed up white communities without giving black communities a second thought. . . Now the black community is determined to have some say-so on what happens to their neighborhoods and lives. . . The Good Lord made this green earth for all men. But the white men have taken it all for himself, they have our share. Now it’s up to us to take our share back— by any means necessary! And we mean just that!<sup>126</sup>

The *Chattanooga Times* reported that the Molotov cocktail was thrown at 2:30 am and caused \$1,000 in fire damage to “further jeopardize the success of the federally funded program.”<sup>127</sup> The *Times* also reported that employees of the Electric Power Board saw two Black teens fleeing the scene. The *Times* quoted Mayor Bender response: “We cannot permit 10 or 12 persons to destroy the city's image and the city’s efforts to bring improvements to a large number

---

<sup>126</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “Model City Burns,” *The Black Fist*, October 1969, MS-083-06-07-01-001, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/0>

<sup>127</sup> Harry Austin, “Firebomb Hurlled Through Window of Model Cities,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 9, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

of our people”.<sup>128</sup> This comment seriously ignored how the Lane appointment upset many Black community members and the amount of protesting that happened to get Lane removed from office. The Knights responded to the *Chattanooga Times* article:

The racist hypocrites, the “Chattanooga Times” called the burning of the Model Cities Office “a vicious act.” “The groups protesting operation of the program, especially appointment of a white director, have a pointed obligation to condemn such vicious violence in strong terms.” Are you kidding? The people, have peacefully protested the appointment of Quentin Lane for the past two or three months, persistently. And pig ears were to deaf to the sound of the people. They turned their funky snouts the other way and did what they wanted to do. And the people kept marching and meeting and demonstrated until their feet ached. They talked until their tongues hung out. But the racist were not moved. What does it take? Whatever is necessary. The Black Community is slowly waking up in Chattanooga, and when it completely awakes, the whole town will tremble.<sup>129</sup>

As the city government continued to ignore the demands of the majority of the community, community support and participation in the MCP declined. Three staff members (Jerry Welsh, Robert McAuley, and Moses Freeman) of the eight person team resigned stating ineffective leadership as their reason for leaving the program.<sup>130</sup> Director Lane blamed the decline of the MCP on “a small group of people trying to destroy a program which can benefit the lives of thousands of men and women, children and youth.”<sup>131</sup> Lane, once again, diminished the number of upset citizens despite knowing, based on a community

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “Model City Burns,” *The Black Fist*, October 1969.

<sup>130</sup> “Quentin Lane Says Group Trying to Destroy Model Cities Program: Moses Freeman 3rd Staffer to Resign”, *Chattanooga News Free Press*, December 23, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

survey done by the Model Cities staff, that 40% of community members within the Model Cities area objected to the program as it was currently operated.<sup>132</sup>

Despite all of these issues and pushback from the community, no changes were made to the model cities program structure. Ralph Moore, editor of the *Black United Front* wrote a special opinion article of the state of the MCP in the Christmas 1969 issue. Moore stated that the program is being run “by three blind mice— federal government, Mayor Bender and director Quentin Lane.”<sup>133</sup> Moore criticized the federal government for approving the city government to run this project when it had only shown “selfish interest concerning the Black communities of Chattanooga”. Moore accused the three blind mice of being so blind that they failed to realize that the community had rallied behind Rev. Wright and the ACC, which in turn, have “grown into a force of power (Black Power) which is determined to prove its strength.” Moore closed by saying that the Model Cities Sham needs to give into the demands of the people or else “the cornerstone of this democracy (government for the people, by the people, and for the people is a white (man’s) lie. And the phrase, “majority rules,” is a myth.”<sup>134</sup>

On the Model Cities Program in Chattanooga, the Black Knights Inc. were united and worked together to protest the appointment of a White director for a program that was supposed to help majority Black residents. This unity is contrary to popular belief that Black

---

<sup>132</sup> Heard Matthews, “Lane and Wright Debate on Model Cities Dispute,” *Chattanooga Times*, December 20, 1969, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>133</sup> Ralph Moore, “The Black Fist,” *The Black United Front*, December 1969, MS-083-06-07-02, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/7/rec/2>

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Power movements and Civil Rights movements were separate entities that didn't interact. The Black Knights worked closely with Civil Rights leaders such as Rev. Wright and Dr. Steele and in turn these leaders were not opposed to violent means once White leaders ignored their protesting and picketing. This movement in Chattanooga shows that Black Power and Civil Rights leaders could and did work together and that Black Power should be included in the Civil Rights movement narrative, instead of separated and rarely mentioned the way it is now.

## Chapter 4: Student Movements

### Brainerd High School

Plans for Brainerd High School (BHS) started in November 1956, with the Chattanooga city school board requesting the City Commission for 40 acres of land to build a new high school.<sup>135</sup> The City Commission bought 105 acres off of North Moore Street for \$65,000 in May of 1957.<sup>136</sup> A year later, in May 1958, the Chattanooga city school board approved of a \$1.75 million building plan for the school. Designed by architect Selmon T. Franklin, BHS was designed to be all one floor and to be able to accommodate a maximum of 1,000 students.<sup>137</sup> The school officially opened in fall of 1960 and, despite the *Brown v. Board* ruling 6 years prior, they had an all-white student body. The school remained segregated until 1967 when they enrolled its first class of African American students.<sup>138</sup> The first Black students at Brainerd entered an environment surrounded by racist and Confederate symbols such as the Confederate flag, Brainerd's "Rebel" mascot, and the Dixie anthem being played at all major school events.

After two years, the Black students had enough and began to protest. The instigating event occurred mid-way during a Brainerd football game on October 3, 1969. During this game,

---

<sup>135</sup> "High-School Site is Brainerd Plan: Board of Education is Due to Ask City Commission for 35-40 Acres," *Chattanooga Times*, November 9, 1956, Schools, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>136</sup> "City Purchases Brainerd Tract For High School: \$65,000 Is Paid for 105 Acres— Architect Told to Start on Plans," *Chattanooga Times*, May 21, 1957, Schools, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library

<sup>137</sup> "Board Adopts Preliminary Plans for \$1.75 Million Brainerd High," *Chattanooga Times*, May 5, 1978, Schools, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library

<sup>138</sup> Kelly Reed, "From Hallways to the courtroom: struggle for desegregation in Chattanooga, Tennessee 1954-1986" (Honors Thesis, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2016), 24.

about thirty to forty Black Brainerd students set the Confederate flag on fire in the middle of the field. This bold act of “defamation” to a symbol of “white southern pride” angered the White students, parents, and faculty in the crowd who then flooded the field and began attacking the Black students. Police were called to remove the Black students from the field. The next day’s headline of the *Chattanooga Times* blamed the Black students for disrupting the game and featured a picture with a Black girl being pinned to the ground by a police officer.<sup>139</sup>

After this protest, the Brainerd human relations committee, a committee made up of White and Black students, suggested some minor changes to the Confederate symbols that the Black students were protesting. The committee suggested that the Confederate flag be abandoned and that a contest be held for a new school flag design. Members also suggested that a new school fight song be chosen by medleying a couple of bars of Dixie be mixed with another song. Finally, they suggested keeping the Brainerd “Rebel” mascot, but changing his colors to be the Brainerd school colors. The entire student body had to first approve before any changes would have been made. Before the suggestions could even be voted on, 400 White students walked out to protest the suggestions made by the human relations committee on October 8, 1969. Principal Ray Coleman reported that most students returned to class after 15 minutes of protesting, but about thirty to forty students left campus and continued to protest by parading in their cars and waving Confederate flags. The parade went from BHS to Kirkman Technical High School and protested at the athletic field steps for half an hour before a school board meeting began there.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> “400 Students Walk Out at Brainerd High School,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 9, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

This school board meeting involved a group of around 550 concerned parents who gathered to explain their concerns to Superintendent Jack Lawrie, Commissioner of Education and Health Dean Peterson, and other members of the Chattanooga city school board.<sup>141</sup>

McClellan Cook, the assistant vice president of the Volunteer State Life Insurance Co., read a statement on behalf of a majority of the Brainerd parents:

We appreciate the contributions you have made toward making Brainerd High School one of the very finest in the country. It has produced many outstanding graduates and many fine, responsible citizens. The standards of the school have been high. Its traditions have been noble *and have been remarkably free of bias and prejudice. It has accepted minority groups and social change.* (emphasis added) Many Members of minority groups have shared in its bestowal of honors, recognition, achievement and election to offices of responsibility and prestige.<sup>142</sup>

Cook then praised the White students at Brainerd for accepting Black students into the school, blaming the current race relation issues solely on Black students:

The acceptance by white students of black students at Brainer has been a credit to the school, the parents, and the community. They have accepted black students as individuals on their merit as individuals. The black students who cooperated to help build a better school won the acceptance and respect of the white students. This is a remarkable achievement of which we should all be proud. *This acceptance and spirit of cooperation has now been changed solely by the change in the attitude of a large number of black students. Their attitude has changed from cooperation to one of hostility and hate.* (emphasis added) We are vitally concerned when events and attitudes develop that threaten to destroy an excellent school.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Springer Gibson, "Concered Patrons, Supporters of Brainerd Hlgh Demand Restoration of Law and Order at School", *Chattanooga Times*, October 9, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>142</sup> "Text of Cook Statement", *Chattanooga Times*, October 9, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



Cook especially condemned the flag burning at the Friday football game, calling the protest an act of terror and praising the White crowd for keeping their composure:

We condemn and reject the use of terror tactics and the behavior of the black students at last Friday nights football game. These are not legitimate means of handling grievances. They are terror tactics that any civilized society must reject. ***Those who incite such riots should be punished as the law provides in order to deter repetition of the tactics. Please do not whitewash or deal lightly with the instigators of this terrible incident. This incident threatened the safety of hundreds of women and small children.*** To overlook such a flagrant violation of the law encourages others to adopt the same methods. We do not want the majority of the minority to use such methods— this will destroy a civilized society. The restraint of the white student body and fans Friday night was unbelievable. I would not have thought it possible that thousands of whites would have endured such raw aggression, provocation, insults, and obscenity as the black students unleashed. ***You should be proud of their restraint. It is not realistic to expect such self-control to be maintained again because it is almost beyond human endurance.***<sup>144</sup> (emphasis added)

Cook finished his statement by claiming that Black parents also want order and control over the Black students and that the “proper authorities” need to make this their number one focus.

This statement from the White Brainerd parents completely sidelined the conversation around the removal of racist Confederate symbols from the school and blamed the entire issue of racial unrest on the actions of the Black students, without making any attempt to condemn the white students for their walk out protest that happened earlier in the day or the violence at the game. One protester was later reported to be partially paralyzed<sup>145</sup> because of the violent reaction to the students burning of the flag— which is a completely legal form of freedom speech. Cook’s statement gives valuable insight into how the White parents and students see the integration of Brainerd High School. They made integration sound like a burden that the White students,

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Springer Gibson, “Concerned Patrons, Supporters of Brainerd High Demand Restoration of Law and Order at School”, *Chattanooga Times*, October 9, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

facility, and community had to overcome while also oddly praising themselves for being free of prejudice and open to change despite the fact that desegregation was forced onto their school 13 years after *Brown v. Board*. In the end this meeting's "call for peace" was nothing more than a complaint session used by White parents to slander Black students and did very little to stop the escalation of violence on both sides of this racial argument.

The next day, the president of the White Citizens Council, Dr. John P Hoover was arrested on Brainerd's campus for trespassing. Dr. Hoover was leading a parade of 13 cars that were decorated with the Confederate flags. Some white Brainerd parents were reported to be in some of the cars within the parade. Principal Coleman and Detective James Mallett asked Hoover and everyone else within the parade to leave. Hoover told the detective, "I don't give a damn who you are. I'll leave when I get ready and come back when I get ready." Dr. Hoover was arrested while waving a Confederate flag, but then later released that day without being charged based on an order from the Fire and Police Commissioner, James "Bookie" Turner. Commissioner Turner claimed to have released Hoover because "it is not against the law for White people or Black people to demonstrate."

Since Black students were being denied accurate representation within major White newspapers like the *Chattanooga Times*, some began contributing to the Chattanooga Black Knights Inc. newspaper. After the release of Dr. Hoover, a Black student wrote a piece for *the Black Fist* called "Brainerd Rots of Racism." The student said:

The honkies, from the hard-core racist to the perfume-sweet liberal, from Nigger-hating Commissioner of Education to KKK leader John P. Hoover to the "Chattanooga Times," are trying to justify the old south slavery symbols cherished by the white students at Brainerd High School. . . . A "Chattanooga Times" editorial stated: "Black students proclaiming sensitivity to the Confederate flag. . . need to understand white sensitivity to the black glove and clenched fist." The "Black Fist" challenges this bullshit comparison

with the questions: Has any black person or black group ever advocated placing or keeping white people in slavery? Has any black militant group ever come in a mob to lynch, mutilate, or castrate a lone, helpless white man for sport? Has any Black Activist group ever had the sanction of law and police to raid white neighborhoods, burn white churches and all forms of terrorism? That's what the old Southern traditions mean to black students at Brainerd High School. And black students cannot bring themselves to cherish such symbols, no more than the Jewish people cherish the Nazi Swastika and Hitler. . . The black students cannot relate to your old South traditions because the honkie, North and South, won that Civil War. The black man gained nothing and today the black man still has nothing but the same second-class citizenship he had at the end of the Civil War. . . John P. Hoover, the president of the racist White Citizens Council went on the Brainer School grounds with his Rebel flag. Detective James Mallett identified himself and asked Hoover to leave, and quoted Hoover as saying: "I don't give a damn who you are, I'll leave when I get ready and come back when I get ready." The detective arrested the racist, Bookie Turner and the City Commission voided the arrest, tore up the bond papers and let the pig go. This is an example of what white people mean when they holler, "law and order." The laws were made for white people like Hoover. Bookie Turner, in a press release lied and said Hoover did not use any "foul or abusive language," Detective Mallett arrested Hoover because he did. We're hip to you Bookie. And we're hip to the racist honkies running our schools. And the funk has set in.<sup>146</sup>

This article shed light on the perspective that is missing from the White mainstream media coverage of the Brainerd incidents: the Black Brainerd student. You can see the frustration and anger that students had over the continuation of racist symbols within their place of education.

This article also shows that some students found an outlet for this frustration in the Black Knights newspaper.

Racial unrest at Brainerd continued. In 1969, the student vote on the removal of some of the Confederate symbols was never held because Superintendent Jack Lawrie called off the

---

<sup>146</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., "Brainerd Rots of Racism," *The Black Fist*, October 1969, MS-083-06-07-01-001, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/0>

vote<sup>147</sup> without letting Principal Coleman know before he announced it to the press.<sup>148</sup> Dr. Lawrie believed the vote was no longer “appropriate” as the problem now involved the entire community and not just the Brainerd students. Instead of the vote, Lawrie continued to have talks with the parents and students of Brainerd and tried to resolve things through open discussion. The next day, after a Saturday night football game, Black Brainerd residents reported incidents of violence towards Black citizens. Moses Freeman from the *Black Activist* reported that they heard gunfire and harassment from groups of White people with Confederate flags on their cars who were parading up and down the streets of the Black neighborhoods in the Brainerd area. Freeman and other concerned Black parents demanded that there be more of a police presence within the neighborhood to protect Black residents and youth.<sup>149</sup> Despite these reports of incidents of harassment and violence from White drivers, police only arrested Black residents on charges of loitering. A *Chattanooga Times* article reported that six Black residents were arrested because they attacked the passing cars with rocks and BB guns after they drove down the street because they were celebrating Brainerd’s win at the football game.<sup>150</sup> The article mentioned none of the Black residents on reports of harassment from these cars and blamed all of the violence on the Black residents.

---

<sup>147</sup> Springer Gibson, “Vote at Brainer on Symbol Issue Will Not Be Held: Lawrie, Education Board Call It Off- Climate Not Proper,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 11, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>148</sup> “School Principal Shocked by Cancellation of Vote,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 11, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>149</sup> “Black Residents Need Protection, Activists Report,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 12, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>150</sup> Bill Carbine, “Incidents Stir Brainerd Area: Rock-Throwing, Reports of Gunfire Occure Late Saturday,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 12, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

This incident is one of the many examples of media bias in the coverage of the issues at Brainerd. This distorted coverage led to Black Brainerd parents to officially announce their support of their children's activism. Three parents (Mrs. Albert Barnett Jr., Mrs. Thomas E Lloyd, and Mrs. Nolan Ashberry) signed the statement on behalf of many Black parents. They strongly expressed their support of the Black students:

A committee of concerned black parents of Brainerd Senior High School would like for the Chattanooga community to know that we support our children in their fight for what they believe and we believe is their right. We condone their activities and commend them for the fine way they have conducted themselves and the restraint they have exercised in the past weeks. . . We agree that the symbols of our school are offensive to our children and feel that any symbol that disrupts the normal processes of our education system should be abolished so that all of the students can receive the education we all want for them in an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.<sup>151</sup>

The Black parents addressed how the Black students had made their grievances known to the school administration before and received no support:

We strongly feel that our children sought to be heard. This is not a new problem. Parents and students have made contacts with Mr. Ray Coleman, principal, about the general atmosphere at the school and about specific unrest. The concerns of parents and students have fallen upon deaf ears.... The black students, a small minority, have made concessions and have attempted to conform to the expectation of the school since 1965. Their desire, as is normal, is to be a part of the school. These students have been subjected to harassment and baiting statements but realizing that many outside elements would like nothing more than to initiate violence, they have swallowed their pride and accepted name calling and insults and other harassment.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, they asked for fair coverage and the protection of Black students:

If fear does exist it is because of the one-sided reports and news coverage up to this point. We feel the inflammatory statements freely published have contributed to the harassment of black communities by whites. We urgently request, for the protection of our black students and communities, that more black policemen be assigned to Brainerd High

---

<sup>151</sup> "Parents Back Black Students, Say News Coverage Distorted," Chattanooga Times, October 12, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

School without further delay. . . *We ask our fellow citizens to join with us in helping to make real for all the slogan, “Chattanooga, the All-America City.”*<sup>153</sup> (emphasis added)

Black parents clearly supported the removal of Confederate symbols from Brainerd. This statement stood in stark contrast to Cook’s and the white parents claims that Black parents’ goals for Brainerd aligned with the White PTA goals.

Unfortunately, the Black parents' call for peace was ignored. The very next day there was another clash between Black and White residents at Brainerd after another school football game. Because of the incidents that happened after the last game, Chattanooga city police had warned drivers not to parade or they would be arrested for “disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace.”<sup>154</sup> This warning went ignored and the 500 to 600 White Brainerd students' parents paraded in Brainerd Village, honking their horns, waving Confederate flags, and singing Dixie. Some Black youths began to throw rocks and bottles at passing cars in retaliation to “all the cars loaded with whites waving Rebel flags, firing guns, and throwing firecrackers,” which had been harassing Black residents on Gillespie Road and Midland Pike.<sup>155</sup> Mayor Bender had to personally help police disperse this crowd and threatened to enforce a curfew in order to “maintain law and order.”<sup>156</sup>

After this tumultuous weekend, Mayor Bender enforced a curfew the following Monday on October 13, 1969. The curfew ordered that anyone under the age of 21 had to be off the

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Bill Carbine, “Mayor Appeals for Restraint in School Furor: Unrest Continues in the Brainerd Area—Boycott Rumor Circulates,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 13, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

streets from 7 pm to 7 am and banned parading of two or more cars and the gathering of six or more people on public streets.<sup>157</sup> The city commission and Principal Coleman supported the curfew.<sup>158</sup> Principal Coleman reminded students that it was their “responsibility to help us maintain the outstanding reputation of this school.”<sup>159</sup> He pleaded “don’t be a part of anything that would bring disgrace upon you, your school, your parents, or your community.”<sup>160</sup> The curfew lasted five days and was lifted October 17, 1969, with Mayor Bender considering the curfew effective. In a statement announcing the lift of the curfew he thanked the “many responsible parents, students, and dedicated school officials” and the Chattanooga police for the success of the curfew.<sup>161</sup>

Mainstream news didn’t report on Brainerd High School again until April 1970, although issues between White and Black students<sup>162</sup> and Black students and White faculty<sup>163</sup> continued. Student writer Eula Clay reported on events in the *A.P.C.O. News*. Sometime between October of 1969 and April of 1970, Brainerd had gotten a new principal, Dr. Billy Von Schaaf. On April

---

<sup>157</sup> Springer Gibson, “Persons Under 21 Must Be Off the Streets 7 P.M. to 7 A.M.,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 14, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>158</sup> “Council Accepts: Efforts of Parents, Both White and Black, Held Seeking Normalcy,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 14, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>159</sup> Ray Coleman, “Principal Coleman’s Statement,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 14, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Springer Gibson, “Curfew is Ended, Held Effective,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 18, 1969, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>162</sup> Eula Clay, “Brainerd High,” *A.P.C.O News*, April 4, 1970, APCO News Box #1, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>163</sup> Eula Clay, “Brainerd Racism,” *A.P.C.O News*, March 21, 1970, APCO News Box, Chattanooga Public Library.

10, 1970, Principal Von Schaff released school early “as a precaution against an outbreak of racial trouble.”<sup>164</sup> Dr. Von Schaff claimed that tensions started the day before when Black Brainerd students complained that there is no way for Black students to fully participate in Brainerd because no Black students were nominated for Mr. and Miss Brainerd. Then, the morning of the early dismissal, a fight broke out between a Black girl and a White girl who were both sent home after being separated. Then Principal Von Schaff had to break up a fight between a White teacher and a Black student who were arguing over access to the auditorium. At that point, Von Schaff decided to gather all of the Black students at Brainerd into the auditorium to discuss their issues. While this talk was happening, someone defaced the portrait of former principal Ray Coleman that was hanging in the hall. As some White students saw this, they began to angrily congregate in the hallway. This mountain tension is what led to Principal Von Schaff to dismiss classes early.<sup>165</sup>

Dr. Von Schaff's temporary solution only worked for Friday, however, because the following week Brainerd High had nine students arrested. On Tuesday, April 14, 1970, after school was dismissed for the day, Black and White students got into a heated argument outside of the school while waiting for the buses. Police arrived on the scene to break it and ended up arresting nine students; 8 were charged for disorderly conduct and the 9th was charged with disorderly conduct and public profanity. The arrests were racially disproportionate as seven of the nine arrested were Black.<sup>166</sup> Black students writing for the *A.P.C.O News* also recall the

---

<sup>164</sup> Springer Gibson, “Tension Mounts, Brainerd Sends Students Home: Classes Released Early to Avoid Possible Racial Conflict”, *Chattanooga Times*, April 11, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Bill Casteel, “Racial Scuffle at Brainerd High Draws Police; Nine Are Arrested”, *Chattanooga Times*, April 15, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.



events very differently from what was written in the *Chattanooga Times* saying that fights started because a White male student attacked a Black female student which turned into a school wide fight as more Black and White students joined. Black students also wrote that they principal only came to break up the fight when Black students came to defend the Black girl being beaten up—not when White students joined in to help.<sup>167</sup>

Because of this incident, the next day about forty Chattanooga city policemen were surrounding the school when students arrived on campus. An estimated 30 Black students refused to go to class to protest policemen being at Brainerd. Because of this protest, all students were dismissed at 12:40 pm. Some 20 Black students refused to leave and continued to protest the police. There were claims by these students of police hitting and assaulting them that the police denied. In the end two students were detained but not charged and eventually the protesting Black students left the campus. Due to this incident on Wednesday, Brainerd High School was closed all day Thursday<sup>168</sup> and Friday.<sup>169</sup>

Following the incidents with the police and the school closing, James Mapp and the Chattanooga NAACP released a statement criticizing the use of ill-tempered police officers that the NAACP claimed did more harm than good to keeping the peace at Brainerd. Mapp also

---

<sup>167</sup> “Brainerd Again,” *A.P.C.O News*, April 18, 1970, A.P.C.O News Box #1, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>168</sup> Springer Gibson, “Brainerd High Is Closed Today After More Strife Wednesday,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 16, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>169</sup> Springer Gibson, “Brainerd Classes Off Again Today,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 17, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

demanded that “socially geared clubs, symbols that polarize attitudes, and activities that are not open to all students on an equal basis should be suspended immediately.”<sup>170</sup>

Brainerd reopened for Monday and Tuesday of the following week before closing indefinitely on Wednesday after classes were dismissed early on April 21, 1970. The incident happened after a rumor went around the school that two White male students had been beaten up in the boy’s bathroom. The rumor said that 15 Black male students jumped the two White students and their injuries were so bad that they needed to be sent to the hospital. In reality, Principal Von Schaff later reported that the two boys were in a fight in the men’s room, but no one was sent to the hospital since their injuries were not major and the boys didn’t know how many other boys were in the fight. As tensions were rising because of the rumor, Dr. Von Schaff decided to send students home early. As Black students were trying to get on their buses, White students began to chant on the school lawn “Blacks gotta go” and tried blocking the buses from leaving campus. Von Schaff had to call for police escorts in order for Black students to be able to board their buses and leave safely. One White student threw a rock at the Black buses as they were leaving campus. He missed and hit an officer by accident, and was then arrested.

Even after the police escorted the Black students off campus by, White students remained behind and protested on the lawn and across the street from school. They refused to leave saying they wanted something done about the students who were beaten up and demanded that classes continue without the Black students present. Eventually the principal convinced them to leave.<sup>171</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> “NAACP Criticizes School Policies: Abolish Symbols, Social Clubs, Statement Suggests,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 16, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>171</sup> Springer Gibson, “Brainerd High Is Closed For An Indefinity Period After Disorder, Massing Restroom Fight: 2 White Students Beaten by Blacks– Property Damage Occurs,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 23, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

It is especially telling that the Black students were escorted out while the White students were allowed to stay an hour after school closing— even though the White students were the ones who were protesting and attacking Black students.

The administration had a meeting with White students the next morning after the incident to talk about inequities between Black and White students. Some White students expressed racist complaints throughout the meeting. The *Chattanooga Times* quoted White students saying: “Brainerd High was a damned good school until they came”; “Let them work for positions in the school. They want to be equal, then let them work for it”; “They’ve got their own schools. Let them go to them”.<sup>172</sup> All of these statements imply that Black Brainerd students were “intruders” to a White school. The administration also made the effort to formally meet with White students but did not do the same for Black students. The latter instead protested at City Hall until they got a closed meeting with the Mayor and some of the City Commission.<sup>173</sup>

Brainerd High remained closed for the Thursday and Friday after the incident. Saturday April 26, 1970, Black and White parents and community leaders came together to have a meeting about reopening the school. The PTA, composed of mainly White parents, read a statement that urged for an immediate reopening of the school and recommended that Dr. Von Schaff should remain the head of the school. This recommendation was in response to superintendent Lawrie coming to help with the reopening meetings. Some parents felt he was

---

<sup>172</sup> “White Students, Staff Have Talk: Correction of Inequalities for Races at Brainerd under Discussion,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 23, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>173</sup> J.B. Collins, “Negros Meet At City Hall: Confer With Mayor On Brainerd Issue,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, April 23, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

overstepping Principal Von Schaff. James Mapp spoke on behalf of Black parents and the NAACP, saying that Black student grievances still had not been listened to or considered and argued that these grievances needed to be addressed before the school could reopen peacefully.<sup>174</sup>

The Monday after that two-hour meeting, the school board announced that they were voting against the PTA plan for immediate return to classes. Instead they would gradually have students come back to campus with Seniors coming Tuesday morning, juniors coming Tuesday evening, and Sophomores coming Wednesday morning. Everyone would have half a day “orientation” before the first full day of classes with all students happening on Thursday.<sup>175</sup> Dr. Von Schaff also sent out an announcement to all parents and students that set forth guidelines that needed to be followed in order for classes to begin again at Brainerd. These guidelines prohibited destruction of school property, violence or threat of violence against Brainerd staff, and the use of “vulgar” language towards Brainerd staff.<sup>176</sup> Dr. Von Schaff warned that

---

<sup>174</sup> “Brainerd high Parents Support PTA Proposals on School’s Reopening: 1,200 Turn Out Discipline is One Issue Discussed—Fairness, Order Are Urged,” *Chattanooga Times*, April 27, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>175</sup> J.B Collins, “Seniors Only to Report Tomorrow for Classes: Juniors, Sophomores Follow in Order,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, April 27, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>176</sup> “School Board’s Guidelines”, *Chattanooga Times*, April 28. 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

immediate minimum 5-day suspension would occur for any student who did not follow these rules.<sup>177</sup> Brainerd High reopened on April 30 without incident.<sup>178</sup>

Two days after Brainerd reopened, the Black Knights published a piece about Brainerd on the front page of the *Black United Front* newsletter. The piece featured a drawing of a mob dressed in Ku Klux Klan style robes and hoods with a “Brainerd Rebels” sign above the mob. The title “There Can Be No Compromise” was underlined beneath the drawing. The article stated:

There is an effort to cool the disturbances and to re-open Brainerd High School by the powers that be. There has been a request by the white-dominated Brainerd PTA to bring in the National Guard to maintain order (and Governor Donald Duck Ellington has promised them if necessary). But there has been no effort or request to end the rampant racism at Brainerd School. Racism, nurtured from Mayor Drop-out Bender down to the redneck parents, is the real problem at Brainerd, and the black students there can never get at least held to a minimum. The white people involved, including Von Schaaf, the faculty, the students, all must admit their racist tendencies before the Brainer crisis can be smoothed out. **The problem is not the burden of the black students;** for racism existed at Brainerd before they were admitted to the previously all-white school. White people created the problem and white people must solve the problem, but the black students must make them aware of the problem, and **force them** to seek a solution.<sup>179</sup>

This article addressed that the mainstream media ignored the Black Brainerd students' demands of removing racist Confederate and solely focused on the violence happening at Brainerd, violence that the White media often blamed solely on Black students.

---

<sup>177</sup> “Von Schaff Gives Parents Statement on Reopening”, *Chattanooga News Free Press*, April 27, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>178</sup> Springer Gibson, “Brainerd High Reopens Today”, *Chattanooga Times*, April 30, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>179</sup> Chattanooga Black Knights Inc., “There can be no Compromise,” *The Black United Front*, May, 2, 1970, MS-083-06-07-04-001, Black United Front newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll20/id/22/rec/4>

Craig Radden's "The Black Problem" went further. Radden understood that the issues at Brainerd are "not unique, but commonplace in this racist society we live in."<sup>180</sup> He argued that the issues at Brainerd were just another way for White people to try to find a loophole out of school integration and cheat Black students out a quality education "in a school that should be as much theirs as it is the white students in this 'All American City'."<sup>181</sup> Radden concluded by saying that the meetings weren't doing anything but determining the time and place of the next meeting and that they were not the way to achieving peace at Brainerd. The only solution was for White faculty, parents, and students to realize their racism and change the racist flag, song, and school nickname ("Rebels"). These two BUF articles are a good indicator of how the Black community perceived the tension at Brainerd. The Black United Front was one of the few publishers that highlighted and preserved Black voice.

After classes resumed at the end of April, the Chattanooga school board decided to appoint a committee to study Brainerd High School and make suggestions on how to better the school for White and Black students. The Chattanooga Board of Education chose a nine-person committee. Six committee members were White and three were Black (Bennie J. Harris; a city judge, Rueben Strickland; President of the Franklin-Strickland Funeral Home; and Robert C. Walton from Mueller Co.).<sup>182</sup> As this committee was doing its study, White parents formed a group called the Concerned Parents of Brainerd High School which was chaired by a man named Al Brown. In May 1970, Brown and the Concerned Parents of Brainerd High School presented a

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> "Brainerd Forms Advisory Group: Committee will Examine Problems of School, Report to Board," *Chattanooga Times*, May 17, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

petition with over 900 names to the chairman of the Chattanooga Board of Education, City Commissioner Peterson, that called for the “Rebel” nickname and the Dixie song be kept at Brainerd.<sup>183</sup> This parent group would also later call for the resignation of superintendent Lawrie and five members of the Chattanooga school board without success.<sup>184</sup>

About six weeks later, the Brainerd High Advisory Committee submitted their official statement and list of suggestions to the Chattanooga school board. The unanimous report was made after interviewing about 200 people who were students, parents, and faculty members at Brainerd. Their suggestions included creating a student’s rights and conduct code, an academic program that helped students who were going to college and those who weren’t, and extra tutoring classes. In terms of the school symbols, the committee advised that the school keep the “Rebel” nickname and to keep the Dixie song but suggested that it not be played any more frequently than other band music.<sup>185</sup> The committee recommended the keeping of the Rebel nickname because “it was properly and officially selected” by Brainerd students.<sup>186</sup> Despite reporting that they found “an abundant evidence of racism,” the committee's only firm suggestion that helped to solve the issues of racism and Confederate symbols at Brainerd was to take out the Confederate flag from all printed and displayed school materials. In the end, the

---

<sup>183</sup> “Keep Symbols, Petition Urges,” *Chattanooga Times*, June 1, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>184</sup> Ronnie Moore, “Group Asks Resignation of Lawrie, 5 of Board,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, July 3, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>185</sup> Springer Gibson, “Committee Gives Its Conclusions on Brainerd High: All Nine Members Agree to Report on Factors, Recommendations,” *Chattanooga Times*, July 5, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

Chattanooga Education Board followed all of the advisory committee's suggestions and the Rebel name and the Dixie song was kept.<sup>187</sup>

After eight months of protesting and three years of waiting after integration, Black student effort did result in the removal of the Confederate flag. The students eventually got their logo and name change a decade later in 1981. According to the 1982 Brainerd Yearbook, the students voted on the name and mascot change and the Panther was a clear favorite after several rounds of voting. The 1981-1982 yearbook staff chose the theme Year of the Panther, which symbolizes "strength, courage, and endurance," to commemorate the first full year of the mascot change.<sup>188</sup> Although there is no memorialization of Chattanooga Black Panthers within this yearbook, on school property, or within the school's official history, I would argue that it's no coincidence that Brainerd students chose the Panthers as their new mascot. Not only were students involved in the local chapter of the Panthers throughout their protesting of the Confederate symbols and used the *Black United Front* as a platform to speak their mind on school issues, but the Panther was nationally known as a Black Power symbol because of the Black Power movement. This change in mascot, which has now been the Brainerd logo for over 40 years, is one of the many examples that unknowingly shows the forgotten history of Black Power within Chattanooga.

---

<sup>187</sup> "Education Board Accepts Changes at Brainerd High: School's Advisory Group Is Praised— 'Rebels' Nickname Kept", *Chattanooga Times*, July 9, 1970, Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping Folder, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>188</sup> Editors Page, Brainerd High School Yearbook, 1981-1982, Chattanooga Public Library.



## UTC Student conversations

Although there is currently no evidence that the Chattanooga Black Panther Party recruited on local college campuses like the chapters in Oakland and Memphis did, there is evidence of a conversation around Black Power happening at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) during the late 1960s and 1970s. This evidence can be found within the *UTC Echo*, which was the student written and produced newspaper that ran from 1888 to 2016.<sup>189</sup>

The earliest mention of campus conversations about Black power in the *UTC Echo* is in May 1968. UTC senior history major student Ray Brantley gave a talk where he defined two different types of racial discrimination: individual and institutional. He argued that institutional racism could be “conquered through change of law.”<sup>190</sup> Within this talk Brantley defines Black power as a “genuine effort by some of the Negroes or Afro-Americans, of this country to instill pride in their racial brothers in all aspects of existence from personal appearance to education to concern for others of their race”.<sup>191</sup> During the question and answers session after the talk, a attendee asked how could national Black Power leaders such as Stokely Carmichael tie into the definition that Brantley gave when they seemed to be Anti-American. Brantley answered that “the goals, I am fully convinced are the same” but “the methods and general policy are

---

<sup>189</sup> “About this collection,” University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Digital Collections, University of Tennessee Chattanooga Library, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9>

<sup>190</sup> Elaine Walton, “Brantley Speaks on Civil Rights Discrimination,” *The University Echo*, May 22, 1968, LH1-C75-1968-05-22-67-25, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/5726/rec/2>

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

different.”<sup>192</sup> This talk was sponsored by and given to the Ad Hoc Committee to Discuss Things which was founded by Dr. Larry Ingle<sup>193</sup> who was a history professor at UTC for over 25 years (1969-1997).<sup>194</sup>

The next recorded instance of campus dialogue around Black Power was in March of 1970. The UTC Black Student Association (BSA) sponsored and hosted its first ever Black Week. This was a week-long series of events that focused on celebrating Black history and culture. Black Week in 1970 included a poetry reading with Black authors, a blues concert by the Smith Thompson Blues Band, and a lecture on the history of Africa by UTC graduate student Solomon Oleba.<sup>195</sup> Another event during this week was a panel on Black life in America where Ralph Moore, as chairman of the Chattanooga Black Knights, came and spoke.<sup>196</sup> Moore’s speech was about how the Nixon administration was stripping Black people of their freedoms the way that the Hayes’ administration had done to Black people after the Reconstruction era.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Tom Hughes, “Faculty Spotlight: Doctor Ingle Sees Auto as an evil,” *The University Echo*, January 21, 1975, LH1-C75-1975-01-21-74-17, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/7681/rec/3>

<sup>194</sup> Shawn Ryan, “UTC professor emeritus wins international writing award,” UTC News, last modified May 1, 2019, accessed June 7, 2022, <https://blog.utc.edu/news/2019/05/utc-professor-emeritus-wins-international-writing-award/>

<sup>195</sup> “Black Week to Stress History,” *The University Echo*, March 18, 1970, LH1-C75-1970-03-18-69-17, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/6074/rec/1>

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Veronica Higgins, “First Black Week Termed a Success,” *University Echo*, March 25, 1970, LH1-C75-1970-03-25-69-18, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/6087/rec/1>

Moore was on the panel with Moses Freeman who spoke on the importance of education and Howard High School History teacher Mrs. E.O. Martin who spoke on the importance of Black women's contributions to America.<sup>198</sup> The fact that Moore was invited to speak shows that UTC students were aware of the local Black Power movement in Chattanooga and was interested in learning more about and engaging with Black Power philosophy and tactics.

Another event held during this week that conveyed UTC students' interest in Black Power was the Black Art Show. The show included work from student artist James Lebron Jones who drew a series of political cartoons that were anti-police and pro-Black Power. The student critic Glenn Mitchell described them as something you would see in a Black Panther Party newspaper.<sup>199</sup> Two drawings of Malcolm X by student artists Georgetta Stokes and Ernest Varner were also included within the show.<sup>200</sup> These pieces show that students were engaging with Black Power ideology and activists within their work in a meaningful way that would have added to the conversation about the Black Power movement on UTC's campus.

The last event that was recorded in the *University Echo* that points to Black Power conversations happening on UTC's campus is Stokely Carmichael's visit. Carmichael gave a speech in the Chattanooga Room on March 14, 1977 to a crowd of several hundred. His talk mainly centered on the need to overthrow capitalism and to create a more socialist government in America. He spoke of violent resolution and Black Power, predicting that power will be obtained

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Glenn Mitchell, "Black Art: Disappointing," *University Echo*, March 25, 1970, LH1-C75-1970-03-25-69-18, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/6087/rec/1>

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

by Black people “most likely through armed conflict”.<sup>201</sup> The Black Student Association had invited Carmichael. While some White students decried Carmichael’s anti-capitalism stance,<sup>202</sup> his appearance showed the students’ interest in learning more about Black Power philosophy.

Aside from the events held by Black students on campus, the *UTC Echo* also would report on incidents dealing with the national Black Panther Party and its prominent leaders. The *UTC Echo* subscribed to the United Press International (UPI) which is an international news agency founded in 1907 by Edward Willis Scripps that sent photos, articles, audio, and film to thousands of newspapers, magazines, radios, and television stations.<sup>203</sup> The *University Echo* would reprint the UPI coverage of major Black Power activists within their paper such as updates on Angela Davis trial<sup>204</sup> and Oakland seven trial and appeals.<sup>205</sup> These reprintings show that students were engaged in what was happening nationally with the Black Power movement.

---

<sup>201</sup> “Carmichael Denounces Capitalism,” *University Echo*, March 18, 1977, LH1-C75-1977-03-18-76-23, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/8355/rec/1>

<sup>202</sup> Bill Walker, “Carmichael Evasive,” *University Echo*, March 18 1977, LH1-C75-1977-03-18-76-23, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/8355/rec/1>

<sup>203</sup> “UPI History”, 100 Years of Journalistic Excellence, last modified 2007, accessed June 8, 2022, <https://100years.upi.com/history.html>

<sup>204</sup> Robert Strand, “Angela Davis to Defend Herself,” *University Echo*, January 8, 1971, LH1-C75-1971-01-08-70-23, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/6448/rec/3>

<sup>205</sup> “Panther lawyer Garry Says U.S. Courts Racist, Deny Justice,” *University Echo*, October 23, 1970, LH1-C75-1970-10-23-70-10, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, <https://digital-collections.library.utc.edu/digital/collection/p16877coll9/id/6515/rec/1>

Although UTC students had limited interaction with the local Black Power movement in Chattanooga, there is evidence that shows that they were interested and engaged with the philosophy of the Black Power movement and that they cared to keep updated with the national party's leaders and landmark trials.

## Chapter 5: Chattanooga Black Panther Party

### From Black Knights to Black Panthers

At some point in late 1971 to early 1972, the Black Knights Inc. became the Chattanooga chapter of the Black Panther Party. I have been unable to find any sources on why the change in name occurred. In a 1972 issue of the *Chattanooga Times*, Moore emphasized during a question-and-answer session that the Chattanooga Black Panther Party was not associated with the national party since it did not receive monetary support from it, and the Chattanooga BPP did not pay any dues to the national party. Moore described the Chattanooga BPP as one that “formulates its own policies and programs following the general philosophy of the party's survival program.”<sup>206</sup> I was unable to find any information on why the Chattanooga BPP members refused to associate with the national party while still using their name, symbols (such as the panther logo), and philosophy. However, based on the way that they created their economic and political platform when they were the Black Knights, it seems as if they wanted to continue to keep control over what aspects of the Black Panthers philosophy would work best for the Chattanooga community. Although they were more radical than the Memphis Black Knights, they didn't advocate for a separate Black state the way the national party did. Using the famous Black Panther branding and name would drive home their goal of creating Black Power and pride in Chattanooga, but they refused to automatically adopt all of the national Black Panther's ideology.

---

<sup>206</sup> Clarence Scaife, “Gun Philosophy’ Denied By Panther Leader Here,” *Chattanooga Times*, July 13, 1972, Associations B, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

## Extortion Trial

The Chattanooga Black Knights Inc. advocated for improving the quality of grocery stores in low income and Black neighborhoods. In a 1969 issue of the *Chattanooga Post*, Ernest Wilkins argued that grocers were taking advantage of their clientele by selling food past their shelf life and not providing a clean store. Compounding the lack in quality, the Black Knights found that these stores were overcharging for their products because many of their customers needed to use credit to buy food and therefore could not go to other stores who did not offer credit.<sup>207</sup> The Black Knights Inc. first tried to talk to the grocers about improving their stores. If the grocery owner refused to work with the Black Knights, they then went to the health department to report the store and began picketing and boycotting the store. In some cases, because of the Black Knights activism, these grocery stores would be forced to temporarily close, like Project Supermarket on 35th street.<sup>208</sup> When the Chattanooga Black Knights morphed into the Chattanooga branch of the Black Panther Party, members continued this work of improving grocery stores.

Extortion accusations began against the Chattanooga Black Panthers in June of 1972<sup>209</sup> after they successfully picketed the Pruett's Food Town store on June 2, 1972.<sup>210</sup> Chattanooga BPP members Ralph Moore and Jerry Edwards stated that they decided to boycott and picket the

---

<sup>207</sup> Anne Hart, "Dirty Grocery Stores: Credit Keeps Them Going," *Chattanooga Post*, December 4, 1969, Associations B, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> "Coercion Illegal, Davis Declares," *Chattanooga Times*, June 9, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>210</sup> Clarence Scaife, "Boycott of Store Laid to Panther," *Chattanooga Times*, June 4, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

store because the store had failed to donate \$15 a week to support the Party's programs, which the owners had pledged to do. BPP solicitors were also ordered to leave the Pruett's Food Town property despite early agreement from management that the BPP would be allowed to ask for donations from mostly Black customers. Both Moore and Charles Baker, the store manager, agreed on air at the WNOO radio station that the BPP and the store management had come to a new agreement and that the two institutions would continue to work together.<sup>211</sup>

Despite this peaceful resolution, Hamilton County Attorney General Edward E. Davis, told the *Chattanooga Times* newspaper on June 9, 1972:

I would like to take this opportunity to advise every person, firm, company or corporation, in Hamilton County, that they are not required to contribute any sum of money to any person or group of persons, or organization that they do not directly wish to contribute. Any solicitation of funds for any purpose by any person, group of persons or organization which is accompanied by a threat of physical harm or damage to the person or property of the person solicited, or threat of harm or damage to the business of the person solicited, **by picket line, so called boycott**, or physical damage to the premises is in direct violation of the extortion statute set above. . . Those incidents which have already taken place are being fully investigated by the Chattanooga Police Department and a full report of such investigation will be given to this office. If it appears from the proof that a criminal offense has been committed, under this statute, or any other, then I can assure that there will be full prosecution of those committing such acts.<sup>212</sup> (emphasis added)

Flyod Lawter, a City Commission member who was on the finance committee, agreed with Davis. According to Lawter, the City Commission “deplores and condemns coercive acts against certain local merchants and businessmen by gangs of Blacks in attempts to extort money”.

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> “Coercion Illegal, Davis Declares.”



Lawter also called the Chattanooga BPP's local paper, the *Black United Front*, a "filthy thing" that made "vicious attacks" on Chattanooga's local government members.<sup>213</sup>

The Black Panthers responded to this criticism by appearing on a local tv show called "Point of View," which was hosted and produced by African American musician and UTC professor, Booker T. Scruggs II.<sup>214</sup> Party members Jerry Edward, Ernest Ross, Debra Ponder, and Brenda Greene explained that the picket was a "legal boycott" that had the support of the Black community.<sup>215</sup>

Less than two months after their TV show appearance, on August 10, 1972, four Black Panthers members were arrested during another grocery store picket. This time nine people were outside of Red Food Store with signs that said "Boycott. Don't shop here. Red Food Store must support and donate every week a small minimal amount to our community." Each sign highlighted a different survival program that the Chattanooga Panthers operated including free breakfast program, free day care program, and sickle cell anemia testing. Five (three Black women, one White woman, and young Black male) of the nine picketers left after Police Commissioner Roberts warned them that police were in route to arrest the boycotters. The four: Ralph Moore, Madonna Storey, Gerald Edwards, and Ray Lindsay, who refused to leave were arrested on charges of extortion. Margaret S. Johnston, a White woman, paid their bail. She

---

<sup>213</sup> J.B. Collins, "Extortion Attempts Blamed on Blacks," *Chattanooga New Free Press*, June 16, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>214</sup> "Well-Known Chattanooga Musician, TV Personality Booker T. Scruggs Dies at 74," *The Chattanooga*, last modified June 5, 2017, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2017/6/5/349286/Well-Known-Chattanooga-Musician-TV.aspx>

<sup>215</sup> "Black Panthers Say No Threats Have Been Made: Pruett Food Town Boycott Was Done by Community, Ernest Ross Avers," *Chattanooga Times*, June, 26, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

presented a \$10,000 cashier's check with another white woman named Cottie Morrison.<sup>216</sup> On August 18, 1972, Chattanooga city Judge Jess Parks sent the case to Hamilton County grand jury after hearing a preliminary case from Attorney General Davis and the Panthers' defense attorney John Alley. Alley was a Tennessee native who was born in Nashville in 1935. He graduated from the University of Tennessee Law School in 1966 and, at the time of the Panthers' trial, he practiced at Witt, Caither, Abernathy, and Wilson. He went on to open his own practice in 1974 in Hixon, Tennessee, where he continued his legal practice for 40 years. He passed away at 79 on April 1st, 2015.<sup>217</sup> On October 4, 1972, the Hamilton County grand jury formally charged Moore, Edwards, Lindsey, and Storey<sup>218</sup> and their trial began in March of 1973. Moore was also facing charges of assault and battery as Augustus Bickerstaff the III accused Moore of following him and calling him a racist and hitting him after he refused to give money to the Black Panther programs.<sup>219</sup>

The extortion trial against the Panther's began with controversy after Judge Tillman Grant declared a mistrial. The stated reason for doing so was because a new jury needed to be formed after one jury member was sent to the hospital after suffering from epileptic seizures and other members of the jury stated they were "scared to death" of the Black Panthers since supposedly BPP members were taking the names and addresses of the jury at the back of the

---

<sup>216</sup> "Four Blacks Arrested on Charges of Extortion Outside Food Store," *Chattanooga Times*, August 11, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>217</sup> "Obituary: John Lee Alley," Dignity Memorial, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/hixson-tn/john-alley-6386050>

<sup>218</sup> "Panther Leader is Indicted Here: Battery, Extortion County's Grow Out of Drive for Money," *Chattanooga Times*, October 5, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>219</sup> "Judge Delays Decision on Panthers," *Chattanooga Times*, August, 17, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

courtroom. Because of this accusation, Hamilton County officers went out into the street to pick up new prospective jurors and the jury selection began over again and the case was postponed until May 30th.<sup>220</sup> Ray Lindsey never showed up to court so his bond was forfeited and a warrant for his arrest was issued. Moore said that Lindsey had left the party about two months prior and was no longer a member of the BPP.<sup>221</sup>

Moore and Edwards responded to this accusation against the Black Panthers by holding a sidewalk press conference at 8th and Market Street, which would have been two blocks down from the Hamilton County Courthouse at 600 Market Street. During this press talk, Moore and Edwards said that this mistrial was a deliberate attempt by Judge Grant “to prejudice not only the jury but the entire city of Chattanooga” against the Black Panther Party.<sup>222</sup> Moore and Edwards also denied that they, or any member of the Chattanooga BPP, were intimidating jurors. Moore said “If anyone was doing that we would be opposed to it ourselves. It would mean that we couldn’t get a fair trial.”<sup>223</sup> Moore finished the sidewalk press conference by saying that despite the court’s deliberate attempt to make the BPP look violent, that the Party would continue their people’s survival programs.<sup>224</sup> Moore and Edwards sold copies of *The Black Panther* newspaper during this sidewalk talk; Cottie Morrison asked people to sign a petition to get the defendants

---

<sup>220</sup> Tom Griscom, “‘Recruited’ Juror Stricken Ill, Extortion Case in ‘Mistrial’,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, March 30, 1973, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>221</sup> Charles Pennington “Judge Criticized in Panther Trial,” *Chattanooga Times*, March 31, 1973, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>222</sup> “Panthers Charge Grant on Mistrial,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, March 31, 1973, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>223</sup> Pennington, “Judge Criticized in Panther Trial”.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

extortion case dropped. Morrison said that since December somewhere between 1500 to 2000 people had signed the petition.<sup>225</sup>

The case was finally held on May 30, 1973. The manager of the Red Food Store, Joe Miller, never testified that he felt threatened by any of the Panthers, but the Assistant Hamilton County attorneys general Dave Rotroff and Tom Evans told the jury that the picketing of the business was the illegal attempt to coerce the business into making the donations and counted as extortion. Moore was the only defendant that took the stand during the trial and he was denied the right to talk about the Black Panther survival programs as the state objected claiming the merits of the programs has nothing to do with the case. Alley argued throughout the trial that the picket and boycott were not illegal and that the defendants were on trial not because of what they had done, but because they were Black Panthers.<sup>226</sup> He had made the same argument during the preliminary trial in August of 1972, arguing that if housewives were picketing then no arrest would have been made. He pointed out that when *News-Free Press* strikers were not arrested when they were protesting their economic grievances with the newspaper company.<sup>227</sup>

At the end of the trial, the jury deliberated for an hour and half and only found Moore guilty of extortion. Storey and Edwards were acquitted. Although the jury found him guilty, they gave Moore the lowest possible sentence of two years in prison and unanimously recommended that he try to file for clemency (which is when a person convicted of a criminal offense is

---

<sup>225</sup> "Panthers Charge Grant on Mistrial," *Chattanooga News Free Press*, March 31, 1973, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>226</sup> William K. Warren, "1 of 3 Found Guilty in Panther Trial," *Chattanooga Times*, May 31, 1973, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>227</sup> "Judge Delays Decision on Panthers," *Chattanooga Times*, August, 17, 1972, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

relieved from their court order sentence). Moore and his defense attorneys followed the jury's recommendation, but Judge Grant denied clemency in July 1973. Judge Grant also overruled three other motions by Alley for a new trial. Alley claimed that the judge had "abused his discretion" by failing to listen to the jury.<sup>228</sup>

After his bid for mercy was denied, Alley and Moore filed for an appeal with the Tennessee state court of criminal appeals on the basis that Tennessee's extortion statute is unconstitutional due to its broad and vague nature and that Moore was practicing his constitutional right to free speech. The appeal was denied in August 1974, in a 2 to 1 vote, with the court denying that the picketing was an exercise of constitutional rights to free speech. Judge Robert K Dwyer stated in the majority opinion that "not every constitutional right may be used as a shield to protect illegal activity."<sup>229</sup> Judge Dwyer also said that Moore's argument that he was convicted because of his affiliation with the Black Panthers was refuted by the acquittal of Edwards and Storey. Judge J. Russell concurred. The court decision was divided with Judge W. Wayne Oliver writing a dissenting opinion. Judge Oliver said that there was no proof "that the defendant or any of his co-defendants demanded or received anything whatever from the Red Food Store" and that evidence shows "that no contributions of any kind were made to any of them by the store or by anyone connected with it."<sup>230</sup> Based on these facts, Judge Oliver's opinion was that extortion was not committed. Oliver also disagreed with Dwyer and Russell on

---

<sup>228</sup> "Mercy Bid Lost by Extortionist: Grant Declines to Accede to Jury's Request for Panther Leader," *Chattanooga Times*, July 20, 1973, , Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>229</sup> Fred Travis, "State's Supreme Court Sustains Ralph Moore's Extortion Sentence," *Chattanooga Times*, February 11, 1975, , Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>230</sup> "Moore v. State, 519 S.W.2d 604 (1974) Aug. 23, 1974 · Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals 519 S.W.2d 604", Caselaw Access Project, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://cite.case.law/sw2d/519/604/>

the picketing being constitutionally protected saying that “reasonable peaceful picketing lawfully urging boycott of a business establishment, which does not improperly interfere with the public’s right to safe and convenient use of the streets and other facilities, nor violates proper statutes or ordinances, . . . is constitutionally protected right of free speech and free assembly and is not unlawful.”<sup>231</sup>

When the Tennessee state criminal appeal court denied his appeal, Moore’s attorneys applied to the Tennessee Supreme Court. However, after waiting for six months, the State Supreme Court refused to hear his case and therefore automatically upheld the majority decision from the appellate court. After Hamilton County was made aware of the State Supreme Court’s decision, Moore was moved to the Hamilton County jail where he waited to be transferred to Tennessee State Prison in Nashville.<sup>232</sup>

Four days before the Supreme court rejected to hear his case, Moore qualified to run for public office and announced that he was running for commissioner of public works. Moore’s platform focused on helping the poor and unemployed. Moore talked about wanting to work on providing people’s “basic needs” such as bettering housing and bringing in more jobs.<sup>233</sup> Because Tennessee state law prohibits anyone convicted of a felony from holding public office, Moore was forced to drop out of the race when the Tennessee Supreme Court dismissed his case. While being held at the Hamilton County Jail, Moore released a statement that was issued by the

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> “Moore Jailed After Bid For Appeal Unsuccessful,” *Chattanooga News Free Press*, February 6, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>233</sup> “Panthers Leader Ralph Moore Will Seek Public Works Post,” *Chattanooga Times*, January 31, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

Black Panther headquarters which had moved to North Highland Park Avenue. Moore asserted that ending his campaign was not “an acknowledgement of defeat” but “rather it is the beginning of a fight to transform electoral politics in Chattanooga from an institution which serves the elite to a tool which the people will use to realize their aspirations— an institution which serves the people.”<sup>234</sup> Moore then announced his intent to run for city elections in the next election round in 1979 and encouraging his supporters to vote for the other two Black candidates saying “The more blacks we have in city government, the more chance we have of representation in city government.”<sup>235</sup>

After a couple of months of serving his two year sentence in the Hamilton County Jail, Moore and Alley’s next attempt to get the ruling appealed was to file a habeas corpus petition that demanded Moore’s immediate release from jail under the allegation that the extortion law he was convicted under is “unconstitutionally vague and unconstitutionally applied.”<sup>236</sup> In a brief written in support of Moore’s habeas corpus, Alley said that Moore’s picketing is only being considered illegal “because he is a member of an organization that is attempting to further organize the most feared minority in America today. . . the young black male.”<sup>237</sup>

Throughout all these various legal battles and setbacks, Moore retained the support of the Black community in Chattanooga. A Ralph Moore Defense Fund was created to help pay for

---

<sup>234</sup> “Ralph Moore Resigns From Campaign Here,” *Chattanooga Times*, February 14, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> “Panthers’ Moore Files Habeas Corpus,” *Chattanooga Times*, May 3, 1975, , Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>237</sup> “Moore Attorney Files for Write, Cites others,” *Chattanooga Times*, June 11, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

Moore's legal fees.<sup>238</sup> Various events were held to help raise money for the defense fund such as a Black Panther rally which was held at Cosmopolitan Community Church.<sup>239</sup> The Fund's steering committee also held a slumber party at the Henry Branch YMCA. So many people came out to support the event that several dozen people had to be turned away after the building reached capacity. Mrs. Lucille Moore, Ralph Moore's mother, was the co-chairman of the Ralph Moore Defense Fund. At the slumber party, Mrs. Moore remarked: "I am grateful for the support the community is giving to help my son. He is not a criminal. He is a veteran of the Vietnam war and a person who is willing to do something to help others even if he has to suffer for it. He believes in justice and hates injustice of every kind."<sup>240</sup>

Alley, while waiting to hear back about the habeas corpus, also filed a motion to have Moore's sentence suspended to Criminal Court Judge Joe DiRisio that postponed ruling on until September. Judge DiRisio said he would most likely deny Moore's bid because "the defendant's history and background indicate that he is susceptible to impetuous conduct in connection with what he deems to be political activities."<sup>241</sup> Judge DiRisio would only consider parole for Moore if he were to stop soliciting funds for any cause, stop picketing and boycotting, find full time

---

<sup>238</sup> "Moore Defense Fund Gets Big Boost," *Chattanooga Times*, May 20, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>239</sup> "Panthers Plan Moore Benefit: Funds Sought for Expenses for Appeal of Term on Extortion," *Chattanooga Times*, May 1, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>240</sup> "Moore Defense Fund Gets Big Boost," *Chattanooga Times*, May 20, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>241</sup> Dick Kopper, "Moore's Bid for Suspended Term Denied by Criminal Court Judge," *Chattanooga Times*, June 14, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.



non-political employment or enroll and attend an educational institution, and stop participating in any political organizations of any kind for at least 6 months.<sup>242</sup>

This deal would basically have Moore stop participating in any Black Panther Party activities in order to be released from his prison sentence. The Chattanooga Black Panthers released a statement about these unfair conditions that was republished in the national Black Panther Intercommunal News Service. The statement said: “We see this (DiRisio’s offer) as not only an attempt to destroy the Black Panther Party in Chattanooga, and a means to stifle the Black community’s struggle for self-determination, but it confirms our belief that the only crime Brother Ralph committed was his being a member of the Black Panther Party. This is a violation of his Constitutional rights.”<sup>243</sup> The Chattanooga Black Panthers statement also included a message from Ralph Moore denying Judge DiRisio’s conditions for parole:

Judge Di Risio and the people who are holding his strings are denying me the right to serve the people, which is all we’ve done since our beginning here in 1971. And at the same time, they’re saying that the people have no right to survive, because that what the Black Panther Party has done— provide programs to help the people survive the economic depression we are in. What Kind of government is it that will attack, tooth and nails, an individual or organization whose only activities have been that of serving free breakfasts to needy school children; giving thousands of full bags of groceries to the poor communities; providing free child care for mother who work to make ends meet; being the first to introduce the problem of Sickle Cell Anemia and the first to do mass free testing for the disease; providing free new clothing for people in need, and providing free transportation for people to go see their friends and relatives in prisons? What kind of court system is it that would deny me the right to participate in such programs? I cannot accept Judge Di Risio’s deal because I refuse to sell out the people. The people have been denied life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The people have not seen any freedom, justice, and equality. You’ve got to give the people what they want. It is my belief that to make this sacrifice for the people is heavier than ten Lookout Mountains, but to give in to

---

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> “Ralph Moore Rejects “Deal” Offered by Judge,” *The Black Panther Intercommunal Newspaper Service*, June 23, 1975, The Black Panther Newspaper, Marxist history publications, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/black-panther/13%20no%2018%201-28%20jun%2023%201975.pdf>

and appease the powerful people who are misusing the people is lighter than a canary feather. I'll take my stand with the people. There will be no justice in American courts until the people are the judges. All power to the people.<sup>244</sup>

Despite rejecting Di Rizio's parole conditions, Moore was released from the Hamilton County Jail on June 23, 1975 on his own recognizance, which meant that Moore was released on a written promise that he would appear in court when required, without having to post bail. Moore would attend court on September 3rd when Judge Di Rizio would officially rule on the motion of his suspension.

A few days his release, Moore lost his habeas corpus bid. U.S District Judge Robert Taylor of Knoxville stating that Moore's picketing "was not constitutionally protected conduct and therefore was properly convicted."<sup>245</sup> Judge Taylor also said that Moore was not only arrested for his picketing, but also for his malicious threats which was why he was the only one of the three original co-defendants in this case to be convicted. Judge Taylor decided this case in place of Judge Frank Wilson, who was unable to take the case because he was ill.<sup>246</sup> On July 21, 1975, Alley and newly added attorney Charles Corn, who began to help represent Moore on behalf of the Tennessee chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, filed an appeal to Judge Taylor's ruling.

Judge DiRizio granted Moore a suspended term on September 3, 1975. Moore changed his mind about DiRizio's parole conditions and agreed to refrain from engaging in any political activities for six months. He also got a job at the United Taxi Co. and enrolled at the University

---

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Dick Kopper, "Panther Loses Habeas Appeal: Judge Taylor Rejects Bid— Says Moore Convicted Properly Under Law," *Chattanooga Times*, June 28, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) as an English major to fulfil the judge's requirements of getting a non-political job and/or enroll and attend an educational institution. It is unclear what changed Moore's mind after vehemently denying the parole conditions just three months earlier in June. By agreeing to DiRisio's terms, Moore ended up serving four months out of his two-year prison sentence and was put on parole for the next five years.<sup>247</sup>

Moore did not hear back about his habeas corpus appeal until almost two years later in February 1977. The U.S 6th Circuit Court of Appeals denied his appeal. The court held that "If this court had jurisdiction to review state court decisions, we would be inclined to reverse the conviction of Moore for the reasons stated in the dissenting opinion of (retired Judge W. Wayne) Oliver."<sup>248</sup> The court decided not to overturn the decision because of U.S Supreme court rulings that found that "State courts are the ultimate expositors of state law."<sup>249</sup> The appellate court says that the only way they could have ruled on Moore's case was if his conviction was unconstitutional, but the court denied Moore's argument that the state extortion law was unconstitutionally vague and ruled that Moore's conviction was not against his right to free speech. In the end, despite five court appeals and five years of fighting, Moore's extortion conviction was never overturned. Therefore, this felony would be forever on his record and would stop him from being able to run for and hold office and make the changes in city government that he advocated.

---

<sup>247</sup> "Moore is Granted Suspended Term: DiRisio Grants Petition Under Terms— Will be on Parole 5 Years," *Chattanooga Times*, September 4, 1975, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>248</sup> Dick Kopper, "Court Upholds Ruling On Panther's Conviction, Ralph Moore Had Sought Release From Prison Term on Habeas Corpus," *Chattanooga Times*, February 11, 1977, Civil Rights Folder #1, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

## Key Women in Chattanooga's Black Power Movement

Women and their contributions to the Black Power movement are often excluded and/or minimized in our public memory of Black Power in America. Therefore, I wanted to take a section of this paper to highlight the women that I have been able to find within my research of Chattanooga's Black Power history.

### Lucille Cook Moore

Lucille Cook Moore was the mother of Ralph Moore, the leader of the Chattanooga Black Panthers and previous chairman for the Chattanooga Black Knights. Ms. Moore was born in Georgia in 1922 to Ernest Cook and Lillie Cochran. She moved to Chattanooga sometime before 1940. In the 1940 census, she is listed as living with her mother who was now Lillie Thompson as she had remarried a man named Raymond Thompson sometime before 1930. The 1940 census reports that Lucille was 18 and her husband, Richmond Moore, was also living with Lucille's parents on Cleveland Avenue in Chattanooga. Lucille and Richmond's newborn, Ralph Moore, also lived with them and Lucille's parents. By the 1950 census, Lucille was divorced and remarried to a man named Marvin Cousin (also listed as Couson and Conson in other census records). They lived together in Chattanooga with Lucille's son Ralph Moore and Richard Moore who were listed as Marvin's step-sons. At some point before 1975, she started to go by Mrs. Moore again although it is unclear if she officially remarried Richmond Moore. She also had a third child, Rickey Moore sometime, after 1950.

After Ralph Moore was jailed in the Hamilton County jail in 1975 for his earlier extortion charge, Mrs. Moore became the co-chairman of the Ralph Moore Defense Fund and helped to host events to raise money for her son's legal fees. Mrs. Moore's contributions were a common occurrence in the Black Power movement as women would often had to step up into leadership positions after male Black Power leaders were arrested. Although her affiliation with the

Chattanooga Black Panthers is unknown, it is not unreasonable to assume that Mrs. Moore would have worked regularly with other Black Power leaders such as Jerry Edwards who were also helping with raising funds for Ralph Moore's defense.

### Debra Ponder

Debra Ponder was born either in 1953 or 1954 to John W. Ponder II and Lurlene Ponder. She had six siblings, five brothers and one sister. She graduated from Chattanooga High School in 1971. Her earliest mention of being a part of the Black Panthers was in 1972, suggesting that she joined while in high school or very soon after she graduated. In July 1972, Ponder is the only female BPP member photographed in a meeting the BPP took with the Jaycee Foundation. The Jaycee Foundation is an international charity organization with chapters all over the United States. The Chattanooga chapter at the time was heavily involved in helping provide low income housing to senior citizens in Hamilton County. Ponder, Moore, and other BPP members are documented in a meeting with the Chattanooga Jaycee President Tom Walker about the Chattanooga Black Panther's goals and community survival programs.<sup>250</sup>

Ponder was also one of the two female BPP members who went onto the "Point of View," a local talk show hosted by Booker T. Scruggs Jr. Ponder and other BPP members appeared on the show a couple months before Ralph Moore was arrested for extortion. She and other BPP members pleaded their case that all of their boycotting and picketing was legal and community supported. (The other women, Brenda Greene, is not mentioned in this section because I was unable to find her mentioned anywhere else and was unable to locate her in Chattanooga census and city directory records.) While on the show, Ponder talked about the

---

<sup>250</sup> Ronnie Moore, "Panthers' Allegiance Pledged To People, Local Leader Says," *Chattanooga News Free Press*, July 13, 1972, Associations B, Black Panthers, Clipping File, Chattanooga Public Library.

success of their survival programs such as the free breakfast program that fed 200 to 300 children.<sup>251</sup> These two public appearances show that Debra Ponder was a visible member of the Chattanooga BPP and helped shape what little positive media the Black Panthers received by the mainstream Chattanooga press.

### Madonna Storey

Madonna Storey was the only woman to be arrested during the Panther's extortion charges. Storey was arrested with three male Panther members (Ralph Moore, Gerald Edwards, and Ray Lindsay) after she refused to leave with other picketers when the Chattanooga Police commissioner announced the possible arrest of the boycotters outside of the Red Food store. BPP leader Ralph Moore declared that Storey was not a member of the Chattanooga Panthers. He identified her as a community worker. She and Edwards were acquitted from all in May 1973.

Storey was reported to be 19 at the time of her arrest which would make her estimated birth year 1953. Due to her young age, I wasn't able to find Storey in Chattanooga census records and she wasn't listed within the Chattanooga city directories. Her address at the time of her arrest was 738 Vine Street, which all the defendants listed as their address at time of arrest because it was the location of the Chattanooga Black Panther's headquarters. Therefore, it's unknown if Storey was actually residing there.

Although Storey was not a BPP member, she was a staunch ally of the Panthers—enough to get arrested with them while supporting their boycott. She also was represented by the same attorney and legal team meaning that she was willing to publicly align herself with the Panthers throughout her trial.

---

<sup>251</sup> "Black Panthers Say No Threats Have Been Made".

### Cottie Morrison

Cottie Morrison was a White woman who was involved in the Civil Rights movement and Black Power movement in Chattanooga. I have been unable to find any mention of a Cottie Morrison in Chattanooga city directories or census records; therefore, this was either a nickname of hers or an alias. Since she is never referenced by her full and/or legal name, I have been unable to find much background information on her.

Morrison first appeared in the *A.P.C.O news* in 1970. She was a founding member of the paper and served as Managing Editor for a few months when the paper first started. She wrote an article in the *A.P.C.O News* about Women's Liberation. Morrison speaks about a number of topics about women's rights in this two-page article from women in the workforce, women work during World War II, birth control, and abortions. She argued that Black women and White women need to come together in order to liberate women "from the kitchen, from the washing machine, from oppressive husbands, from economic exploitation, and from jail."<sup>252</sup> At the end of the article, Morrison included a call for women to join a discussion on women's liberation. The time and location of the meeting was kept a secret by having women call a Chattanooga number in order to get the details. This controlled access ensured opponents to women's rights would not pose a danger to the women who attended this meeting. It further indicated that Morrison was doing women's liberation organization outside of the A.P.C.O and was probably an important early organizer of the women's liberation movement in Chattanooga.

Morrison appears up again as one of the two White women who showed at the Chattanooga city jail to bail out Ralph Moore, Madonna Storey, Gerald Edwards, and Ray

---

<sup>252</sup> Cottie Morrison, "Women Liberation", *A.P.C.O News*, March 14, 1970, A.P.C.O News Box #1, Chattanooga Public Library.

Lindsay when they were arrested on extortion charges in August 1972.<sup>253</sup> Morrison is also reported to have been at the “sidewalk press conference” that Moore and Edwards held in March 1973. The *Chattanooga News Free Press* reported that Morrison was soliciting signatures for a petition to free the defendants from the trial. At the time Morrison is quoted as saying that the 1500 to 2000 signatures were on the petition.<sup>254</sup>

Although very little is known about who Cottie Morrison was, what sources we do have shows that she was an ally to the Black Panthers and advocated for their freedom after they were arrested. She contributed to both the Black Power and the Civil Rights movement in Chattanooga and she was a leader within the Women’s Liberation movement in Chattanooga.

#### Margaret S. Johnston

Margaret Johnston was the other white woman that came to the Chattanooga city jail to bail out the four people arrested in the Panthers’ extortion case. The *Chattanooga Times* reported that Johnston and Morrison showed up with a cashier’s check of \$10,000 with Johnston’s name printed in the top left hand corner of the check.<sup>255</sup> It is unknown if the bail money was exclusively paid by Johnston or if they were presenting money accumulated by the Black Panthers or community members. I was unable to find Johnston in census records or the Chattanooga city directories and therefore did not find any background information. She is also not reported on again in conjunction with the Panthers. However, we do know that she was an integral part in getting the Panthers released on bail after their extortion charge and that she was an ally to the Black Power movement in Tennessee.

---

<sup>253</sup> “Four Blacks Arrested on Charges of Extortion Outside Food Store.”

<sup>254</sup> “Panthers Charge Grant on Mistrial.”

<sup>255</sup> “Four Blacks Arrested on Charges of Extortion Outside Food Store.”



In the conclusion, I only found scattered bits of information on the women who were a part of or allies to the Black Panther Party in Chattanooga. The omission begins with the records. When these women were reported on in mainstream media, they were usually only referenced by name. Newspapers had not only a racial bias in their reporting, but also a gender bias by reporting more information on men within the Black Power movement than their female counterparts. Despite the limited primary sources on these women, the sources we do have shown that women were an integral part to the Black Power movement in Chattanooga.

## Chapter 6: Memorialization and Public History

### Erasure in Chattanooga Public History

“I didn’t know there was a Black Panther Party here” quickly became a common statement whenever I would talk about my research to a Chattanooga. People who had lived in the town their entire lives would be astounded when I told them about the information that I had found. Its easy to see why they did not know because the history of the Black Panthers has been completely erased from the landscape of Chattanooga. There is not a single marker that preserves or recognizes the work the Black Panther community has done. Even the school named after a famous Black Power symbol doesn’t acknowledge the ways in which the Chattanooga Black Panthers are tied to their school history. What can be found of their history is buried in the Chattanooga Public Library archives.

This is in stark contrast to the abundant Civil Rights memorialization that is in Chattanooga. Ninth street was renamed to M.L. King Boulevard. A giant civil rights mural commemorating national and local leaders and movements was painted on all sides of the AT&T building on MLK Blvd.



Local NAACP President James Mapp also had a street named after him and many local Chattanooga artists have created public art honoring Civil Rights leaders throughout town. The Black Panthers have been intentionally and unintentionally excluded and erased from these memorialization efforts. To try to help combat some of this erasure, I have created two digital public history projects that will highlight Black Power organization and leaders in Chattanooga.

### **Omeka S Archive**

In order to highlight the stories of Black Power groups in Tennessee, whose history has been erased from the landscape and excluded from the memorialization of the Civil Rights era, I decided to create an Omeka S archive called the Tennessee Black Power Archive (TNBP). The goal of the archive is to tell the history of these different organizations, their key historical actors, and highlight their different ties to their respective communities. I also wanted to centralize some of the primary sources that I had found throughout my research which are scattered throughout college and public archives and libraries in their respective cities.

Omeka S has a feature that allows you to create resource templates, which are saved customized sets of metadata fields that you can use for different types of items in order to make item creation more uniform. Therefore, I created three different resource templates for TNBP. I created one for people that would capture the biographies of the historical actors. This resource item includes metadata fields for the person's name, date of birth, date of death, and their biography. Omeka S also gives you the ability to link related items within the metadata of another item. Therefore, I used this feature within the person item by adding a metadata field for organization. Once you attach the organization item to the person item, this then becomes a linked open data field where the two items are hyperlinked to each other. On the front end of the site, this allows for the researcher to now see every person who is a part of an organization and

search for people that way. For example, if someone wanted to know just about the people who were a part of the Chattanooga Black Knights, they could click on that item within the archive and see all of the relevant people who are hyperlinked under relevant sources.

I also wanted to include people who were not Black Power activists, but that are important to the history of Black Power movements in Tennessee such as Civil Rights activists who worked with Black Power activists; Black Power and Civil Rights antagonists who fought against Black Power and Civil Rights activists; and white allies who supported Black Power activists. In order to distinguish these people within the archive, I created another linked open data field within the person resource template called Connection to the TNBP. This metadata field will tag a historical actor as either an ally, Black power activist, civil rights activist, or antagonist. This field then hyperlinks that person to that tag and the tag itself is also a linked open data field that will allow a researcher to search by those parameters. For example, if a person is interested in seeing all of the people who were Black power antagonists, they can click on that field and all of the people who were tagged with that will pop up under related items.

Next, I created a resource template for newspapers, since that was the majority of my primary sources. This template allows me to include the pertinent articles that talk about Black Power organization in Chattanooga and Memphis within the archive. In addition to uploading newspapers and other primary source material, I wanted to use Omeka S open linked data features to connect people and organizations to the primary sources that were relevant to their stories. To do this, I created metadata fields within the primary source template that allows you to add the person or organization item(s) that is mentioned within the article. This allows the researcher on the front end of the archive to then be able to click that person item and see all of the newspapers that are connected to that person or organization. I also added a publisher field

that works as a linked open data resource so that if researchers were interested in seeing all of the newspapers by one publisher (i.e. the *Chattanooga Times*) they could do so.

Finally, I created a place template so that I could add the important locations that Black Power organization was happening in Chattanooga and Memphis to the archive. The metadata fields I decided to include in this template was the address, a physical description of the location, and historical context where I will have a brief summary of why this place was important to Black power movements in Tennessee. In order to tie people, organizations, and primary sources back to a specific location, I also created a linked open data field within the place template called related items so I could hyperlink related people and events to the location item. These hyperlinks that I designed within the database allow for items to “speak” to each other so that researchers who come to the archive can better examine the resources within the archive.

I also wanted the researcher to be able to find things by topic. So, I used a feature within Omeka S called exhibits where you can make custom pages and group items together in an item showcase around whatever topic you chose. I chose to make specific exhibits around the historical topics that I used within this paper such as the Chattanooga BPP Extortion Trial, the Brainerd protest, and the Model Cities Program.

My hope is that this digital archive shows anyone who visits it that Black Power organization was alive and well here in Tennessee despite how their contributions to the Civil Rights era have been erased by the state’s public memory.

### Google Story Map

While the Omeka S software was wonderful for building a digital archive, I found its current mapping functions lacking. I wanted to create a map that would allow researchers to explore locations by topic easily. So, I decided to create a custom google map. I color coded the

locations by type with regular meeting locations and offices being purple; places of protest being red; legal location such as where trials and arrest occurred are brown; and student activism being blue. Each location includes a link that will take the viewer to that location's item within the TNBP archive so that way they can learn more about the history of the location and see all of the people and newspaper articles that are attached to that location. I have also embedded the map into the home page of the TNBP archive so that these two public history projects work together in telling the story of Black power movements in Tennessee.

## Conclusion

I titled this paper “Pledge Allegiance to the People” in reference to a quote that is credited to Ralph Moore in a *Chattanooga News Free Press* article. Moore’s commented: “We pledge allegiance to the people, not the flag. The flag is only a symbol. People are starving, not flags.”<sup>256</sup> I find that this quote fully encompasses the intent behind the Black Power Movement, not just in Chattanooga, but through out America in the 1970s. Frustrated by how little tangible results the Civil Rights Movement provided to poor Black people, Black Power activists sought a way to help people in their communities survive. The Chattanooga Black Panthers wanted to help feed and care for their neighbors. However, because they advocated for socialist policies , threatening capitalism, and preached for Black political self-determination, their movement was targeted by the Tennessee state legal system. Because they cared more about people than the symbols of the American myth, they were labeled as criminals and attacked by the Chattanooga white mainstream media.

Yet despite the fierce opposition, the Panthers continued to provide support programs such as free breakfast, prison bussing, clothing and food donations, and sickle cell anemia testing to their community. They established their own newspaper and created a forum that provided support to Black student movements like Brainerd, published advertisements for local Black businesses, and a platform to accurately tell their own story when mainstream media wouldn’t. They made connections with the local Civil Rights leaders and organizations to create joint efforts when protesting unfair urban development with the Model Cities Program.

The Chattanooga Black Panthers overcame many obstacles within their time as an organization and contributed to the betterment of the Chattanooga community. Their history

---

<sup>256</sup> Moore, “Panthers’ Allegiance Pledged To People, Local Leader Says.”

deserves to be remembered as much as their Civil Rights counterparts and I hope this thesis, archive, and story map helps to combat some of the erasure that the Chattanooga Panthers have gone through in Southern and Tennessee public and collective memory.

The Chattanooga Black Panthers are just one example of the many movements and organizations that could be lost to history if more Black Power scholars do not begin to widen the geographical scope of the Black Power historiography. The southern chapters of the BPP and other non-national Black Power movements (like the Black Knights Inc. in Memphis and Chattanooga) can add to the Black Power historiography and are important to understanding the diversity of Black Power organization in the United States.

The Chattanooga Black Panthers also show that Black Power historiography and Civil Rights historiography do not have to, and should not be, divided. The Chattanooga Panthers supported and worked with Civil Rights leaders and organizations in Chattanooga and their history can only fully be understood when interpreted together—not separately. I hope that this will be an example to future scholars that the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movements are historically tied because they were happening simultaneously and therefore are influencing and building off of each other. Therefore, both Civil Rights and Black Power historians should be examining and interpreting these histories together instead of separately. I would like to see this among public historians as well, who need to do a lot of work at publicly interpreting these movements together in order to combat the erasure of Black Power from our collective public memory and memorialization.



## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources**

APCO News Box #1, Chattanooga Public Library.

Associations B, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

Black United Front Newsletters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Civil Rights #1, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

Civil Rights, Brainerd, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

Schools, Brainerd, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

Urban Renewal, Clipping File, Historical Collection, Chattanooga Public Library.

United States Census Bureau.

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Echo Student Newspapers, Special Collections,

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

### **Newspapers**

*Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1968-1975. Memphis, Tennessee.

*Chattanooga Free Press*, 1969-1975. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

*Chattanooga Times*, 1969-1977. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

*Chattanooga Post*, 1969. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

*The University Echo*, 1968-1977. University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

*The Black Fist*, 1969. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

*The Black United Front*, 1969-1970. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

*All People's Community Organization News*, 1970. Chattanooga, Tennessee.

## Secondary Sources

Alameen-Shavers, Antwanisha. "The Woman Question: Gender Dynamics within the Black Panther Party." *A Journal on Black Men* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 33-62

Alkebulan, Paul. *Survival Pending Revolution: the History of the Black Panther Party*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

Kinchen, Shirletta J. *Black Power in the Bluff City: African American Youth and Student Activism in Memphis, 1965-1975*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016.

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

Nelson, Alondra. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Potorti, Mary. "'Feeding the Revolution': the Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival." *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no.1 (Spring 2017): 85-110

Rhodes, Jana. *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*. New York and London: The New Press, 2007.

Spencer, Robyn Ceanne. "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California." *Journal of Women's History* 20, no.1 (2008): 90-113