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# The Northern Civil Rights Movement: How The Brothers Fought Housing, Employment, and Education Discrimination and Police Brutality in Albany, NY

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The Northern Civil Rights Movement: How The Brothers  
Fought Housing, Employment, and Education  
Discrimination and Police Brutality in Albany, NY

By

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History Senior Thesis  
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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### Twentieth Century Education and Housing Discrimination in Northern United States

## Origins of Racism in the United States

The United States has a history of institutional racism that originated from its founding and has continued into contemporary culture. White Europeans enslaved and killed indigenous Americans in their conquest for land, and imported slaves from Africa as a labor source to support the American economy. As nonwhites were either eliminated or rendered subhuman property, racism became historically embedded in American society. The presumed difference between the North and South stems from slavery, as slave labor was largely concentrated in southern states, whereas the North was industrialized. After the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 granted freedom and equality to all American citizens, meaning anyone born in the United States. Most perceive the North as liberal and equal because it did not have a history of slavery, though it silently practiced segregation and white supremacy. White southerners embraced Jim Crow, furthering the South's reputation as racist and oppressive. Twentieth-century statistics in education, employment, and housing, point to institutional racism in all areas of the United States. Northern racial discrimination is more unassuming, but perpetuated through these institutions, closing off opportunities for blacks and ensuring white privilege. Southern discrimination is notoriously distinct, with less systematic purpose and more hate bred from centuries of presumed inequality from the slavery era<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cole, Mike. "The United States." *Racism: A Critical Analysis*, pp 96-100

The Civil Rights Movement took place in the heart of discrimination, the South, as racial turmoil overflowed after decades of hate crimes against blacks and minorities. The most famous protests took place in Alabama, while the rest of the country watched in awe as black and white clashed together like never before. Southern blacks finally cultivated a voice loud enough to make a difference, unafraid of white oppression. While history tends to focus on the heroic story of the Southern Civil Rights Movement, there was a simultaneous lesser-known movement in the North. Several historians have analyzed northern discrimination and the efforts blacks have made to defeat systematic racism, and how it compares to the southern movement. In this chapter, I will look at northern discrimination in housing and education and the struggles against them. Among those historians writing on this subject are Thomas Sugrue in *Sweet Land of Liberty* and Jason Sokol in *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. There are several case studies of perceived and actual discrimination.

### **Discrimination in Education**

“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom”

–George Washington Carver

Educational discrimination against blacks mainly formed because white parents did not want their children attending integrated schools, and wanted to keep blacks economically and occupationally subordinate. Both races understood education was a form of liberation from oppression, as higher occupations required formal education. Whites likely wanted to maintain the cycle of filtering uneducated blacks into lower-paying, menial jobs, as whites seized greater occupational opportunities. Aside from having an agenda for oppression, simple racism kept

blacks from integrating into white-dominated schools. Whites did not want to intermingle, and believed blacks were intellectually inferior. This stereotype came from the slavery era, where whites justified slavery because they believed blacks were lesser race both mentally and physically. Preventing blacks from being properly educated reinforced this stigma, causing them to seem less capable. In this section, I will analyze ways in which educational segregation was continued, and how blacks attempted to break this barrier.

Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us* dedicates a chapter to educational discrimination in Massachusetts, a Northeastern state that prides itself as the center of progressivism, liberalism, education, and equality. While Massachusetts maintained this facade, some residents recognized segregation and inequality within their communities. John Granrud of Springfield, Massachusetts, created "The Springfield Plan" to integrate schools, teach children to accept all races and backgrounds, and help blacks find employment. After graduating from Columbia Teachers College, he came to Springfield in 1927, and was eager to mirror the theories of intercultural education that Columbia faculty had promoted. After becoming superintendent of Springfield schools, he began hiring more black teachers, and eventually appointed the Committee on Education for Democracy in October 1939; "it studied ways to teach democracy in the schools and to curb racial and religious prejudice"<sup>2</sup>. The committee understood that children were not born with prejudice, but it was taught at home, on the street, and sometimes in church.

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<sup>2</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, pp. 24

World War II heightened prejudice around the world, and a city in one of the most progressive areas in the country aimed to combat this with the Springfield Plan. To eliminate tolerance and create equality, “Granrud continued his reforms in hiring. From the school administration to the classrooms and on down to the maintenance workers, he hoped students would encounter a crazy quilt of races, religions, and ethnicities”.<sup>3</sup> Courses were structured around inclusion and understanding that everyone should have equal civic, economic, educational, and social equality. Some required fieldwork where students interviewed immigrants, and ceremonies hosted around holidays included all religious celebrations. While the Springfield Plan did not completely transform the city, it showed remarkable improvement in school diversity, attitudes of acceptance within the student body, and improved the hiring process to include quotas for all races and religions.

After showing signs of success, the Springfield Plan was proposed to the Boston City Council in hopes that they would approve its statewide distribution. However, Boston’s city councilors struck it down saying it “implies the existence of discrimination in Boston”. This was an implication they could not stomach. Boston would not wage war against racial discrimination, for Boston officials denied discrimination’s very existence”<sup>4</sup>. This was a fundamental issue with discrimination in the northeast; several states chose to pretend it did not exist, perhaps out of pride, or fear of being hypocritical. Kenneth Clark conducted his infamous “Doll Study”, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and Springfield, Massachusetts, proving the psychological harm of segregation, and that it was still very much practiced in

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<sup>3</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, pp. 25

<sup>4</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, pp. 32



Massachusetts. “Springfield blacks suffered more self-hate than Pine Bluff children; they were more tormented in their racial identities, their personalities more profoundly scarred”<sup>5</sup>. While he originally chose Springfield for its reputation as a racially progressive city, he quickly realized it was just as segregated as Pine Bluff, and northeastern black children harbored much more self-hatred and in some cases, denial of their race.

Clark’s study was used in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court case that overturned Jim Crow, to help prove that “separate but equal” is unlawful. However, Clark, and members of the NAACP, chose to leave out the Springfield results, as Massachusetts was not a Jim Crow state, even though Springfield showed more harmful psychological affects of segregation. This was several years after the death of the Springfield Plan at the end of the war. The plan gained national recognition, as it reached the West coast and even some Canadian cities. Springfield’s reputation for equality promoted black in-migration, but newcomers struggled to find employment and housing. The life and death of the Springfield Plan, and the results from Clark’s study, show how difficult it was to break northern segregation. Progress could be made, but sooner or later, racism would prevail and blacks would return to their state of oppression.

Thomas Sugrue’s *Sweet Land of Liberty* also explores northern segregation in educational institutions. He begins with the story of Anna Arnold, a highly educated black activist, raised in an all-white Minnesota town. As a black woman, teaching was one of the only professions open to her, so she moved to Springfield, Ohio in the

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<sup>5</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, pp. 29

1920s to pursue this occupation. Like its counterpart in Massachusetts, Springfield, Illinois was known as a racially tolerant city. Yet, its struggle with integration would exemplify how the fight for national educational integration would be received throughout the twentieth century. Arnold witnessed white resistance to integrated education not only within the community, but also the school board.

The Springfield school board president, a member of the KKK, illegally established an all-black elementary school, and the local court ruled it unlawful. However, there was no legal action taken to undo it. “The Springfield school controversy was a foreshadowing of how divisive the issue of race and education would become in the North”<sup>6</sup>, as it showed segregation could illegally be enforced with no repercussions. Some blacks, like NAACP founder W.E.B. Du Bois, allowed for segregation to give black teachers employment opportunity, while most saw the greater issue of inequality. The progress of integration had made little improvement since the 1920s;

At the end of World War II, when NAACP investigator Norma Jensen visited twenty-two school systems in the Northeast and Midwest, she concluded that ‘the integration of Negroes, both pupils and teachers, into our public schools in the North is a very spotty affair’<sup>7</sup>.

Ending segregation was harder than anticipated, as housing clauses forced blacks into their isolated communities with their own school districts. When blacks lived amongst whites they were threatened into attending black schools, and school

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<sup>6</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 11

<sup>7</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 171

board directors reshuffled school boundaries when neighborhoods began to integrate<sup>8</sup>.

Integration mainly took place when blacks and whites shared a town border, and even so, whites would quickly transfer to white-dominated schools. “It would not be long before northern activists came to see the folly of the neighborhood school strategy in a region where most school segregation resulted from the rigid color line in housing markets”<sup>9</sup>. To maintain segregation, blacks were labeled as less intelligent, and placed in classrooms for the mentally disabled and handicapped. Even in white schools, they were not educated. W.E.B Du Bois recognized this issue, “There are many school systems in the North where Negroes are admitted and tolerated, but they are not educated, they are crucified”<sup>10</sup>. This not only psychologically affected black students, as studies showed they perceived themselves as less capable and unintelligent, but also perpetuated stereotypes that whites used to justify segregation.

Between the 1940s-1960s, a majority of civil rights activists demanded an end to separate schools for a variety of reasons. White schools were perceived to provide a better education, as whites maintained higher occupational status than blacks. Black schools were underfunded and in poor condition, visually demonstrating that separate meant unequal. Integration was a step toward ending racism; by starting this process in schools, young minds could be molded to be accepting and view blacks as peers. This was the goal of Massachusetts’ Springfield

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<sup>8</sup> Formisano, Ronald. “Not Little Rock But New Orleans”. *Boston Against Busing*, pp. 1-21

<sup>9</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 181

<sup>10</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 172

Plan. Some activists were concerned with the psychological effects of segregation that implied racial inferiority<sup>11</sup>. Voicing these concerns and motives, black activists used protest, litigation, and advocacy to end segregation in schools<sup>12</sup>.

Civil rights activists used relentless protesting with organized group efforts, data, and lawyers to make an effective argument to propose legal action for desegregation, but law enforcement was also necessary to make a difference. “Grassroots activists, however, quickly learned that state laws were not self-enforcing”<sup>13</sup>, as their counterparts found in the Springfield, Ohio school system in the 1920s. Surprisingly, small suburban towns had the highest rate of activism because it was where blacks and whites were in closest proximity. Town meetings were held, announcements were made in church, and posters were hung. Parents also filed several complaints and lawsuits to allow their children access to white schools, but this progress hardly stuck. When blacks were granted approval, whites began to move out of these schools, and blacks continued to move in.

The main issue of unequal education was that it severely limited black occupational opportunities and class mobility. In an article in *Journal of Black Studies*, Albert W. Niemi analyzes occupational differences between black and white males and how they find careers that align with their education. He calculates discrimination against black males: “The coefficient of discrimination has been calculated for black and white males in the United States as a whole for 1960 and

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<sup>11</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 183

<sup>12</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 174

<sup>13</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 178

1970 and in the major census regions for 1970”<sup>14</sup>. The results show that in both 1960 and 1970 blacks with higher education (17+ years) obtain a large share of jobs that require such, but blacks with a four year college degree struggle to find occupations compatible with their educational experience. During the 1960s educated blacks were shown to improve in occupational opportunities, however, undergraduate degree did not help blacks obtain careers that matched this level of education. This allows us to assume that these positions were likely granted to undergraduate whites. Majority of blacks remained in low-skilled occupations, which required little education.

Niemi’s results are surprising because on the surface they contradict many statistics Sokol and Sugrue provide. For example, there appears to be very little occupational/educational discrimination against blacks in the Northeast in Table 2, which shows the discrimination coefficients for major regions in 1970. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973: table 294)<sup>15</sup>. These coefficients show that the Civil Rights Movement significantly improved job discrimination, allowing blacks greater opportunity to obtain high-status professions. However, there are several factors of discrimination that are omitted, including the number of how many blacks attended a four-year college. Blacks were given significantly greater occupational freedom in the North compared to the South, but these statistics may blur the reality of discrimination that northern blacks encountered.

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<sup>14</sup> Niemie, Albert W. “Occupational/Educational Discrimination Against Black Males” *Journal of Black Studies*, pp. 88

<sup>15</sup> Niemie, Albert W. “Occupational/Educational Discrimination Against Black Males” *Journal of Black Studies*, pp. 90

Observing how education discrimination has affected the employment status of blacks, Castellano B. Turner and Barbara F. Turner conducted a study to determine the relationship between the number of blacks in higher occupations and individual perceptions of discrimination against blacks in those occupations. It was noted that there were “two types of handicaps facing blacks: first, rejecting and discrimination based on race; and second, disadvantages reflecting earlier discrimination.”<sup>16</sup> The paper argues that blacks are underrepresented in high status occupations because of past and present discrimination, being that blacks were not exposed to educational opportunities to allow them to advance to such careers. Studies have shown that social environments can limit black aspirations, as blacks begin to face discrimination while transitioning into adulthood, lowering their self-esteem and aspirations. This study highlights the notion that Kenneth Clark observed in his “Dolly Study”; when black youths experience discrimination, they tend to feel inferior, and in some cases accept the occupational status quo in their adulthood. In turn, when blacks recognize that their opportunities to obtain high-status occupations are limited, they are less willing to invest in education and resources that would prepare them for such positions. Rosenthal and Jacobson suggest these factors have an effect on how whites view blacks; their fewer numbers in higher occupations and educational institutions often leads whites to assume they are less capable and unmotivated.

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<sup>16</sup> Turner, Castellano B. Barbara F. Turner. “Racial Discrimination in Occupations Perceived and Actual” pp. 323

## Housing Discrimination

Education and housing discrimination were intermingled issues for blacks, as public school districts drawn relative to town lines. Like educational discrimination, housing discrimination limited mobility and closed off employment options, making it difficult to move near or commute to more dynamic areas of employment. Blacks were forced into undesirable locations with poor living conditions, where landlords were less attentive to issues of sanitation and overcrowding. Housing discrimination was arguably the biggest factor in northern hiding of discrimination, as blacks were forced into their own communities and hardly encountered whites in day-to-day life. The northeast had a small black population, which made it easier to ignore them. Because whites rarely encountered blacks, they were able to deny that discrimination existed. Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us* demonstrates that all blacks, even the famous and talented Jackie Robinson, struggled with housing discrimination, and Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* describes the legal and social battles taken to combat housing discrimination.

Sokol observes the blissful ignorance most northern whites maintained on housing discrimination. He begins with the irony of discrimination in Boston:

Boston was not an easy city for African Americans. Many neighborhoods were insular places where racism was deep-seated. But Boston still nursed an old abolitionist activism. It had the sense of itself as a beacon- as a place where a racial breakthrough was not only possible but also right.<sup>17</sup>

Bostonians struggled with their liberal traditions; they did not want to integrate with blacks or acknowledge their racist tendencies, but felt a sense of responsibility to uphold their abolitionist reputation. This identity struggle was evident in Jackie

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<sup>17</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 41

Robinson's tryout experience, as he was allowed to tryout for the Red Sox, but was never called back; the Red Sox were the last Major League Baseball team to list a black player on their roster. While Robinson made the Brooklyn Dodgers roster, Brooklyn struggled with integration as well. Though the following quote references race relations in Brooklyn, it summarizes how housing discrimination continued in all northeastern states:

There was little interaction between the races, owing to the small black population in the North, the physically isolated black neighborhoods, and the lifestyles that required few maids and cooks. This could produce among white northerners an actual ignorance as well as a willful blindness.<sup>18</sup>

Many northerners believed they did not have a race problem because they were unaware of the other races around them.

While Jackie Robinson's achievement was historic for blacks, it proved how much progress was needed to achieve equality. Robinson was at the frontier of integration, and, "The coming years would show, painfully and repeatedly, that the ideals of inclusion and integration did not always- if ever- mean racial equality".<sup>19</sup> Robinson recalled feeling welcomed, loved and supported in Brooklyn despite living in cramped quarters. However, when the Robinsons left to move to a white neighborhood in Flatbush, "The white (and mostly Jewish) neighbors objected to the idea of African Americans on their block" and "even among the supposedly liberal Jewish population, the prospect of one black homeowner excited fears and incited

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<sup>18</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 47

<sup>19</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 48



action”<sup>20</sup>. He could play amongst white men, but he was not welcome to live in their neighborhoods.

Robinson’s moving struggle was notable because most assume that his fame would make him an exception, but his family experienced the same housing discrimination as all blacks living in Brooklyn. At the same time, his reputation blurred the color lines in public places. Rachel Robinson, Jackie’s wife, found that they received special treatment due to Jackie’s fame: “Until or unless it came out that I was Jackie Robinson’s wife, whites would be as rude to me as they were rude to other blacks’. Those everyday encounters revealed the depths of prejudice in Brooklyn”.<sup>21</sup> Reverend Gardner Calvin Taylor recalls segregation in housing and in public facilities that ordinary blacks experienced:

Residence was strictly...segregated...only menial jobs were available with very, very few exceptions. At Ebbets Field, nearly all of us sat in the outfield bleachers. In government, there was as yet no opportunities at all”. In jobs and housing, in the taverns and restaurants that banned even the most decorated of black war veterans, Brooklyn blacks faced discrimination<sup>22</sup>.

In a state that did not practice Jim Crow, every aspect of life was segregated.

In *Sweet Land of Liberty*, Sugrue summarizes the state of northern housing discrimination, emphasizing violence kept blacks from moving into white neighborhoods:

In the 1920s, blacks faced growing hostility in the North. Throughout the region, restrictive covenants- clauses in home deeds that forbade blacks and other minorities from purchasing or renting homes- proliferated. Nearly every new housing development was closed to blacks. Those who attempted

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<sup>20</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 59

<sup>21</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 60

<sup>22</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 57

to breach the invisible color lines that separated neighborhoods faced violent reprisals<sup>23</sup>.

Sugrue's term "invisible color lines" speaks to northern racism at large. Though Jim Crow laws were not enforced in Northern states, towns and public accommodations were racially divided through housing clauses and social pressure. Anna Arnold recalled her experience living and teaching in Springfield, Ohio: "There were no signs 'colored' and 'white,' she recalled, 'but the wall of separation was as vivid in the minds of Negroes and whites as though the signs were present'.<sup>24</sup> Like Jackie Robinson, Arnold was an exception to the norm, and served as an example of how some liberal cities allowed blacks access to traditionally white schools and neighborhoods. Her level of education and experience of once being accepted amongst whites made later discrimination hard to grapple with, but allowed her to be a role model for both black and white civil rights activists as she identified with both cultures. She proved that blacks were capable educators and leaders when given the opportunity. Individual accounts of black success, like Arnold and Robinson's, contributed to the presumed notion that the North was and is not segregated, but notoriously liberal.

Postwar metropolitan areas were racially segregated through legally enforceable restrictive covenants, federal housing policies, and real estate agents. Whites balanced their reason for not wanting to integrate neighborhoods between economic concern and racism:

Whites had economic reasons to resist the 'Negro invasion,' as they called it. Their ability to secure mortgages and loans was at risk. But their motivations

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<sup>23</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. pp. 6

<sup>24</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 12

were not solely economic. Intertwined with concerns about property values were fears of black predation. Above all, whites-both north and south-recoiled at the prospect of miscegenation.<sup>25</sup>

As hard as blacks worked to try to integrate, whites tried harder to maintain segregation. When all else failed, fear tactics were the most effective: “Cross burnings, arson, window breakings, and mobs greeted black newcomers to white neighborhoods in nearly every major northern city between the 1920s and the 1960s”.<sup>26</sup> Similar to the fight against school segregation, grassroots activists in the NAACP used litigation strategy to challenge the constitutionally-backed restrictive covenants. The NAACP called on “state action”, or governmental enforcement of private contracts. Second, NAACP lawyers developed “a social scientific case-drawing from cutting-edge work in urban sociology and economics- about the negative consequences of restrictive covenants, including overcrowding, poor health conditions, and crime”<sup>27</sup>. Fortunately, their efforts were successful in the highest court, as the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in 1948 that racially restrictive covenants were unlawful. Though this was an overwhelming legal success, it had little impact, as covenants continued to be socially enforced.

### **Northern and Southern Discrimination**

The record of education and housing discrimination reveals that the North practiced segregation much like the South. However, the means by which discrimination was enforced was the main difference between the two regions. Both Sokol and Sugrue note comparisons between the North and South throughout their

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<sup>25</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 204

<sup>26</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 205

<sup>27</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 208

texts, highlighting ways in which the North silently approved and perpetuated segregation, which the South proudly embraced Jim Crow. While the North denied the existence of discrimination, the South felt it was their duty to maintain segregation. Northern and southern blacks also differed in their approach to civil rights; radical northern blacks challenged systems that kept them subordinate, whereas southern blacks attempted to provoke sympathy from whites by addressing the immorality of segregation.

Northerners realized segregation was wrong, yet were unable to admit its existence because doing so would violate the liberal northern reputation and elevated self-image. Sokol notes the irony of northern segregation:

Racial conservatives and progressives shared a vast middle ground. They could agree that they were more advanced than southerners, that African Americans could rise high in the North, and that African Americans ought neither move next door nor enroll their children in majority-white schools.<sup>28</sup>

Blacks were allowed opportunities like a college education, employment, or running for office, but were not allowed to integrate. Racism was accepted in the North, as long as it went unspoken. When running against Edward Brooke in the 1960 campaign for Massachusetts secretary of state, Kevin White used a hurtful play on words as his campaign slogan: "Vote White".<sup>29</sup> The message was clearly twofold. White could argue that the slogan simply referred to his last name, but the message of discrimination is clear. Even in its blatancy, White's slogan could still be defended as misinterpreted, demonstrating the passiveness of northern racism.

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<sup>28</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 19

<sup>29</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 97

Sugrue stresses the way in which discrimination had no beginning or end, but was practiced everywhere. When public establishments began to accept blacks, it caused racial tension, discouraging blacks from attending formally all-white establishments. Racial discrimination “was woven into the fabric of everyday life in the North”.<sup>30</sup> It didn’t matter if blacks were legally allowed to be somewhere, as social segregation took precedence. Furthermore, most northerners had a misperception of true equality. Anna Arnold recalls her experience in New Jersey: “Good Christian white people who thought of themselves as ‘liberal’ if they invited a Negro speaker to their meetings’ turned blind eyes to workers pushed into the lowest paid and most menial jobs”.<sup>31</sup> Northern whites were often socially supportive of blacks, but were unwilling to take responsibility for the issues blacks faced. Whites either failed to recognize they were perpetuating institutional racism, or they ignored it. Sokol summarizes the awkwardness of northern white guilt: “the unease resulting from whites’ attempts to unify two opposites, to stride toward racial progress even as they nursed vicious stereotypes and policed the boundaries of racial segregation”.<sup>32</sup> Though whites felt an obligation to integrate, they could not overcome their inherent racism.

Revisiting the idea of invisible color lines in the North, Sugrue states the difference between northern and southern segregation:

The visible manifestations of Jim Crow- separate drinking fountains and bathrooms, lynch mobs, white-only elections- these were rare in the mid-twentieth- century North. In the land of Dixie, segregation was intentional.

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<sup>30</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. pp 162

<sup>31</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. pp 12

<sup>32</sup> Sokol, Jason. *All Eyes Are Upon Us*. pp 12

Southern whites, from ordinary folks to elected officials, were responsible for Jim Crow.<sup>33</sup>

He continues by stating that southern government and law enforcement created Jim Crow, and felt an honor in defending white supremacy. Southern racism was fueled by pure hatred, while northern racism was fueled by ignorance. He continues, “In the North, by contrast, public officials claimed that the separation of races was just a fact of life, not mandated by law or controlled by the state”.<sup>34</sup> In order to keep a white northern conscience clean, segregation was believed to be optional for blacks.

The North and South shared a commonality in segregation, but the blatancy of racism differed. According to Sugrue, northern and southern blacks had different cultures and behaviors due to the education discrepancy. As violence threatened and killed southern blacks, they began to relocate to the North. The black community then faced an internal conflict: “The Great Migration gave a real sense of urgency to advocates of racial uplift. Established northern blacks- the “old settlers”- recoiled at the influx of southerners, many of whom arrived with few skills, little education, and little familiarity with urban life”.<sup>35</sup> While seeing the difference of northern education and acceptance through their southern counterparts, northern blacks felt a great responsibility in aiding the newcomers and fighting for civil rights throughout the United States.

Many northern whites were supportive of blacks during the civil rights movement, as long as their integration efforts remained concentrated in the South. Ronald Formisano analyzes this double standard in *Boston Against Busing*, where

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<sup>33</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. pp 184

<sup>34</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. pp 10

court-ordered desegregation of Boston's public schools in 1974 forced crosstown busing of both black and white pupils. The first day of desegregation brought "Wild, raging mobs of white men and women confronted armies of police, while youths in their teens and younger hurled rocks, bottles, and racial epithets at buses carrying terrified black youngsters to school."<sup>36</sup> Both blacks and whites participated in the violence, and resistance to desegregation continued for three years. It took a full decade for the racial climate in Boston to calm down. Though the white reaction to desegregation gave Boston a reputation as a racist city, "The travail of many decent whites caught in a whipsaw of decent intention and negative experience is a story that has not been told."<sup>37</sup> Formisano argues that the antibusing movement was not solely racially based, but ironically caused whites to feel their rights were being taken away.

While Boston is labeled as a racist city for its reaction to desegregation, other northern cities reacted to forced desegregation similarly. Though it did not gain equal recognition, residents in Canarsie, New York in the early 1970s strongly opposed school desegregation, as Jonathan Rieder described it as "a disorderly affair"<sup>38</sup>. Boston whites were fearful of blacks, specifically poor ghetto blacks, and their feelings of injustice and powerlessness fueled their hostility toward blacks. Antibusers mirrored black civil rights activists as they fought for their rights and voice.

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<sup>36</sup> Formisano, Ronald. *Boston Against Busing*, pp. 1

<sup>37</sup> Formisano, Ronald. *Boston Against Busing*, pp. 2

<sup>38</sup> Formisano, Ronald. *Boston Against Busing*, pp. 3

## Revolutionary Groups

Several revolutionary groups formulated during the civil rights movement, and strategized efforts to overcome discrimination in politics, housing, education, and employment. Groups including black trade unions, the National Black Political Assembly, The Black Panther Party and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) gained national attention for their activism and support of the Black Power Movement. While these organizations targeted different goals throughout the civil rights movement, they were originally interested in political and racial reform through improved relationships with whites, but typically found that whites were unsupportive. Historians Manning Marable, Yohuru Williams, Jama Lazerow, and Clayborne Carson, discuss the evolution of black nationalism through black trade unions, the National Black Political Assembly, The Black Panthers, and the SNCC, and how growing tensions between blacks and white locals, government administrations, and police forces caused the downfall of these organizations.

In *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, Manning Marable traces the political, social, and moral reform in black America from World War II to present day, but focuses largely on the Second Reconstruction, a term he uses to describe the increase of blacks in politics during the Civil Rights Movement, and the whites response to this. He credits the black working class with being the force being the civil rights movement, as they fought for guaranteed jobs, housing and health care, with ideas moving toward democratic socialism. Trade unions notoriously excluded blacks, sometimes through mandatory policy, which inspired blacks to form their own unions in several northern cities, starting in 1967 Detroit. Radical, militant black



workers in Detroit launched a newspaper, *Inner City Voice*, and the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) to attack Dodge management's racist hiring politics, unequal pay between blacks and whites, and other long standing issues. They inspired black unions to form in other companies including Ford, Eldron, Harvester, Black Panther Caucus, General Motors, and more. Blacks also fought union discrimination in court; "Using Title Seven of the Civil Rights Act, black ILA members in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Galveston-Port Arthur, Texas successfully sued their union in federal court in the 1970s"<sup>39</sup>. The organized revolutionary groups formed for the purpose of providing employment combined with their support of the Black Power movement, and received harsh backlash from whites.

The white response to Black Power and black unionization was, as expected, unsupportive. Black workers were beaten at work sites in their union hall, and whites actively fought "affirmative action" policies that would increase the number of minorities in unions. These were the same working class whites that protested forced desegregation in public schools. Marable draws on the ignorance of racism, as whites did themselves a disservice by fighting against union integration:

The bitter irony of labor's racist and pro-corporate positions was that they crippled the overall trade union movement; they alienated minorities and women from taking part in unionization efforts; and they diminished the ability of the working class to affect meaningful and federal and state legislation which would benefit all of labor<sup>40</sup>.

From 1969 to 1975, union unemployment rates increased overall because of the focus and effort toward maintaining segregation.

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<sup>39</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, pp. 115

<sup>40</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, pp. 117

Black Power found its way in electoral politics, which majority of revolutionary groups believed was the primary way for blacks to elevate their societal and economic status. “The Voting Rights Act of 1965, combined with the registration campaigns of SNCC, CORE and the NAACP, dramatically increased the numbers of black potential voters. Thus the number of black elected officials continued to climb at an unprecedented rate”.<sup>41</sup> While this is an undeniable victory of civil rights, most black elected officials came from the elite or middle class and did not identify with the struggles of the working class. The largest black political convention, the Gary Convention March 10-11, 1972, brought several civil rights ideologies from revolutionary nationalists, moderate integrationists, cultural nationalists, and Black Capitalists.

The convention established a political formation, the National Black Political Assembly, which would help elect black mayors, congressional representatives, and other officials, as well as mobilize poor and working-class blacks at neighborhood levels around key issues of concern.<sup>42</sup>

While the convention represented the height of black nationalism and the entire black movement during the Second Reconstruction, instances of failed black administrations, like Cleveland’s Carl B. Stokes, resulted in a decline in black votes and participation in politics.

The Nixon Administration played on white fear of blacks in their mission to destroy the Black Power movement. “By the late 1960s, Nixon and his conservative supporters, in both Republican and Democratic parties, employed the rhetorical slogan ‘law-and-order’ in their campaigns for office in order to instill reactionary

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<sup>41</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, pp. 117

<sup>42</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, pp. 121

anxieties among whites”.<sup>43</sup> The administration insisted that black urban unrest and Black Power groups were responsible for the breakdown in civil order, citing statistics like doubled murder rates between 1965-1975, doubled reported incidents of rape per 100,000, and increased aggravated assault as evidence. However, they excluded the fact that these crimes were intra-racial and not black-on-white. The FBI also added anti-Black Panther Party propaganda in the media. The government played on white anxieties by portraying blacks as violent rapists who needed to be controlled or eliminated, worsening race relations and continuing racist rhetoric that had occurred since the slave era.

*Liberated Territory* describes the origins of the Black Panther Party, and the evolution of their goals in civil rights activism. *The New York Times* described the formulation of the group in late summer 1966 as “an amalgamation of militant, youth oriented Negro groups’ who were gearing up to demands the hiring of more black teachers, the elevation of blacks to positions of authority in the schools, and the addition of courses relevant to the black experience”.<sup>44</sup> Similar to the other revolutionary organizations, the Panthers believed that African Americans would need to “harness political power through institution building and forging alliances with other parties and interest groups dedicated to improving conditions in communities with large numbers of black residents”. Panthers often wore black berets, which became a national symbol recognized throughout civil rights. They members from a variety of groups, including ghetto youth in need of political direction, college students, political organizers, activists, theorists, ex-soldiers, and

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<sup>43</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, pp. 124

<sup>44</sup> Williams, Yohuru. *Liberated Territory*, pp. 1

men and women scholars. Eventually causing their demise, Panthers believed in using violence for self-defense, which made them targets for police and the national government.

Clayborne Carson describes the rise and fall of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in *In Struggle: SNCC And The Black Awakening of the 1960s*, which originated as a nonviolent movement but later adopted Black Power rhetoric. Initially, northern whites supported SNCC peaceful protests and ideas of how to overcome black struggles. Stokely Carmichael, leader of the SNCC, had a tendency to speak at northern, predominantly white colleges to raise awareness of black oppression and encourage support for the organization.<sup>45</sup> Carmichael was a member of the Black Panther Party, and shifted SNCC's narrative from political, economic, and urban concerns to promotion of Black Power. His fiery speeches often backfired, as, "the publicity given to these statements also further undermined white support for progressive racial reforms".<sup>46</sup> Some blacks interpreted Carmichael's promotion of Black Power as permission to use violence in the fight against oppression, which resulted in a rapid decline in white support. The lack of outside support, internal disorganization, and pressure from the FBI led to the downfall of the organization.

### **Conclusion**

Both Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us* and Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* begin by deconstructing the common belief that segregation and racism were not practiced in northern states. While there was a stronger liberal presence in the northeast, white liberals failed to acknowledge that segregation enforced by

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<sup>45</sup> Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC And The Black Awakening of the 1960s*, p. 245

<sup>46</sup> Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC And The Black Awakening of the 1960s*, p. 244

societal pressure was equivalent to segregation enforced by law. Sokol recognizes the history of northern discrimination, but his overall tone takes a positive, idealist perspective on black and white relations by highlighting the role of white activists in desegregation. In *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, Sokol focuses on educational, occupational, and housing segregation in New England, and white reception to black integration in politics. Sokol acknowledges the push-and-pull relationship between black achievements and how whites responded to them. Most notably, Edward Brooke's 1966 victory as the first black senator of Massachusetts encouraged blacks to move north and pursue political opportunities, but this ultimately intensified housing discrimination and racial tensions in the Boston area. Instances like these contributed to the illusion of equality in American history. However, Sokol ends on a positive note by recognizing that progress has been made; Deval Patrick was elected as the governor of Massachusetts in 2006, and in contrast to Brooke's victory, progress did not unravel afterward. Two years later, Barack Obama was elected as the first black President of the United States, with strong backing among white voters.

Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* explores the unrecognized northern Civil Rights Movement in great detail, focusing on documented circumstances of discrimination, and strategies blacks used to become proactive in challenging oppression. He depicts northern racism in a way that has rarely been described before, telling stories of discrimination from the viewpoint of affluent, influential, and lesser-known northern blacks, and evaluating the twofold white response to black activism. Whites either completely rejected desegregation, as Sugrue notes

staggering statistics of northern whites joining the organized white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan, or they aided blacks in fighting for integration. However, the primary issues of housing and educational discrimination are continuously addressed. In *Sweet Land of Liberty*, Sugrue encompasses the black experience during the twentieth century, and concludes that segregation was a national issue perpetuated in the North through silent approval, and accepted in the South through overwhelming racism.

The Northern Civil Rights Movement leaves behind a troubled legacy, as it took place in a region known for progressivism and racial equality, but quickly revealed that whites desired segregation and practiced racism when attempts were made to integrate and elevate blacks. Acknowledging that segregation existed, Boston began forced desegregation and racial turmoil erupted in the Boston Busing Crisis. The Northern Civil Rights Movement showed an unraveling of preconceived white and black unity; northern whites were not accepting or supportive of integration, and black revolutionary groups began to change their motives and beliefs once they discovered this. Black unions and the National Black Political Assembly used legal rights to achieve employment and a political power, but consistently faced violence and oppression from whites. The Black Panther Party and SNCC began their movements with the intent to form alliances with whites and other groups to support blacks politically, economically, and socially, but reverted to the ideals of the Black Power movement to call on blacks to support themselves by whatever means necessary. This violent narrative further separated northern whites from the civil rights movement, and fueled police brutality against blacks.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Brothers: Overcoming Housing, Employment, and Educational Discrimination in Albany, NY 1965-1975**

## **Introduction**

This chapter will explore the multi-facets of racism in northern cities during the mid twentieth century, and the history of Albany, New York as a center for the Northern Civil Rights Movement through the efforts of the Brothers, an organization of black men who strove to improve their community by creating housing, employment, and educational opportunities. Statistics show racial discrimination during the twentieth century in both Albany and New York State as black neighborhoods were segregated, unemployment and poverty rates were high, and high school graduation rates consistently lagged behind whites. The history of public housing explains the discrimination in Albany. While the Brothers explored several ways to create equality for blacks, they largely focused on housing discrimination and dismantling the political Machine in Albany, which used corruption to keep blacks subordinate and transfer city funds away from their neighborhoods in Arbor Hill and the South End. *The Albany Liberator*, a newspaper published by the Brothers, candidly describes their journey to overcome oppression as they improved housing conditions, employment rates, and educational institutions in Albany.

## **History of Public Housing**

After The Great Depression, and later WWII, the United States suffered a housing crisis that forced federal and state governments to fund reasonable, low-rent housing projects. Northern cities faced a variety of obstacles, including blight, suburbanization, a severely eroded tax base, and an expanding black ghetto due to in-migration from southern states. Manufacturing firms began to relocate to the



suburbs, though businessmen and investors were in favor of urban renewal and modernization of downtown areas. While urban renewal and public housing rose with the black population in cities like Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Cleveland, blacks were typically excluded from public housing and lived in overcrowded, segregated neighborhoods. To avoid threatening private real estate interests, public housing was initially reserved for the white middle-class because they needed the least amount of aid, but suburban migration opened public housing to poor whites and eventually blacks.<sup>47</sup>

President Roosevelt started public housing and slum clearance through the New Deal, while Herbert Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) allowed federal funding for state limited-dividend companies, such as City and Suburban Homes, in 1932. New York City's first federal-funded public housing project, Knickerbocker Village, was the only of its kind due to a state law on limited-dividend companies. Investors accepted a limited dividend on company money, typically between 5 and 7 percent, to keep rents low.<sup>48</sup> Funding from the Public Works Administration inspired city planners and architects to design desirable, limited-dividend housing, though plans were overwhelmingly rejected. After both Philadelphia philanthropists and the RF rejected the Mackley project, it received funding from Kohn and the Housing Divisions as the Juniata Park Housing Corporation. The buildings provided sunlit rooms, a community swimming pool, grocery store, auditoriums, and much more, which attracted worldwide attention. Noting its success, the Housing Division approved the Mackley project blueprints

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<sup>47</sup> Vale, Lawrence. *Policy, Planning, and People*, pp. 287

<sup>48</sup> Vale, Lawrence. *Policy, Planning, and People*, pp. 24

after months of screening. Urban renewal continued throughout the postwar era, as The Housing Act of 1949 aimed to provide “a decent home in a decent environment for every American” through slum clearance. The NAACP and Urban League used this in their fight for multiracial housing.

*Policy, Planning, and People* analyzes the evolution of public housing and explains the relationship between Congress and the private sector. When creating urban renewal and public housing projects, Congress aimed to make low-income housing commercially profitable by creating new roles for the private sector. “Public housing initially became privatized by including private developers in urban renewal programs, followed by decades of programs that fueled the homebuilding industry, which provided new investment opportunities”.<sup>49</sup> Mary Tiece criticizes this, describing how the capitalist process of de/reindustrialization, regeneration, and increased privatization of city services and spaces displaced and excluded blacks.<sup>50</sup> New York Public Housing Authority resisted efforts by the federal government and fought to retain middle-income households in their developments, whereas most U.S. cities had a dramatic shift in occupancy by 1960 (Bloom 2008).

Philadelphia planners and redevelopers deeply considered the sociological impact of urban renewal, particularly the need to house displaced black families in integrated housing. Majority of blacks lived in poverty, as in-migrants were unskilled and unemployed; 78 percent of Philadelphia black families earned less than the \$4,000 deemed necessary to purchase and inexpensive house, which severely limited their housing options. From 1960 to 1970, blacks mainly worked in

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<sup>49</sup> Vale, Lawrence. *Policy, Planning, and People*, pp. 288

<sup>50</sup> Tiece, Mary. *Urban Renewal And Resistance*, pp. xii

low-wage manufacturing jobs, service and domestic employment, and in laundries and kitchens of major hotels and restaurants. In 1960, less than 15 percent of employed blacks worked in white-collar industries, though the percentage rose to 22.5 in 1970.<sup>51</sup> By 1950, Philadelphia's black ghettos were even less than that of New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and other cities. Studies show the cause-and-effect of suburbanization and segregation in mid-twentieth century, as the influx of blacks to northern cities paralleled with white migration to the suburbs.

Racially restrictive covenants, though ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelley vs. Kraemer*, were still practiced in the North. Whites were opposed to integrated neighborhoods and feared that their property value would go down. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York City built the massive Stuyvesant Town apartments with state redevelopment assistance, and excluded blacks "as a matter of business and economics".<sup>52</sup> Philadelphia public housing used statistics to show social and economic benefits of their developments, as they had lower crime rates and mostly family residents. However, when whites began to move out of public housing, poor blacks moved in. The property value decreased and the crime rate increased.

In *Urban Renewal And Resistance* Mary Trieste describes the racial conflict that developed through urban renewal projects across the United States, and explores the relationship between capitalism, urban development, and race. Urban renewal projects focused on generating economic growth and investment opportunities. The working class was displaced as their neighborhoods were

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<sup>51</sup> Bauman, John F. *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*. Pp 86

<sup>52</sup> Bauman, John F. *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*. Pp 96

reestablished for the middle class, and corporate America built high-rise offices, buildings, and luxury apartments. Not only did the government design these programs for private investment, but it also perpetuated racial divisions “by placing public housing in already poor urban areas and bankrolling white suburbanization through discriminatory housing subsidies.”<sup>53</sup> The Federal Housing Administration promoted white migration to the suburbs and excluded blacks through racist policies.

### **Albany 1960-1970**

The Great Migration between 1910-1940 brought an influx of southern blacks to Albany, New York, as they searched for better housing, employment, and education. The black population increased and continued to face prejudice on all fronts, prompting Albany to be active in the Northern Civil Rights Movement.<sup>54</sup> Activists developed effective strategies to combat recurring issues in black neighborhoods. In 1968, blacks made up 10 percent of the roughly 140,000-person population in Albany, but only 2 were employed by the city.<sup>55</sup> The Albany machine, a corrupt city government, kept blacks subordinate by excluding them from labor unions and city employment. Poor living conditions, high unemployment rates, and overcrowded schools plagued the black community. Discrimination was visible through the sectioned neighborhoods of Albany, as blacks consolidated in Arbor Hill and the South End after the construction of the Empire State Plaza in 1968, also known as the South Mall, which tore down black neighborhoods and forced them to

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<sup>53</sup> Triece, Mary. *Urban Renewal And Resistance*, pp. 7

<sup>54</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. “Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics”, pp. 40

<sup>55</sup> Grondhal, Paul. “Revisiting ‘60s black militants The Brothers”

relocate.<sup>56</sup> Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) statistics show poverty rates in the Capital Region were high, as the 1960 census data shows of the 264,752 people in Albany's metropolitan area surveyed, 37,526 (14.17%) fell below the poverty level. There were 129,726 people living in Albany in 1960, and most of the poor 37,526 were concentrated in the city. However, there was likely an increase in employment rates, as the 1970 census data shows an increase in the Albany region's residents at 278,319, but a significant decrease in residents below the poverty line at 25,045 (9%).<sup>57</sup> Carter Lowe, Director of the Albany Urban League 1967, cited that ninety percent of blacks lived in the most deteriorated, overcrowded sections of the city, and only 2 percent of blacks had annual incomes over \$7,000. Furthermore, only 3 percent of blacks in Albany had graduated college at that time<sup>58</sup>. While Albany was one of the most progressive cities in the northeast, these statistics show education, housing, and employment discrepancies between blacks and whites.

### **Education**

Both housing and employment discrimination are reflective of the public education system in black neighborhoods, showing a cycle of oppression and lack of upward mobility. Aside from racial prejudice, blacks faced higher unemployment rates due to inadequate education, and consequently lived in lower income housing. Weaker tax brackets barely supported public schools, bringing overcrowding, less qualified teachers, and fewer textbooks and teaching materials. With poor education and families in need of multiple incomes, seventy percent of blacks in New York

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<sup>56</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 46

<sup>57</sup> Census.gov, "Census Population by Poverty Status for Albany, NY"

<sup>58</sup> Vol. I No. 14. October 13-19 1967 pp. 2

dropped out of high school in 1960. US Census data shows that in 1960 only 30 percent of New York black men and women 25 years and over had high school diplomas, compared to 41.8 percent of whites. Despite being the highest-educated region of the country, the Northeast only had 27.6 percent black and 41.9 percent white high school graduates in 1960. Fortunately, both New York state and the Northeast saw a 10 percent increase of black high school graduates between 1960 and 1970; while white graduates saw a steady, but smaller increase. Racial educational discrepancy continued after high school: of the 30 percent of black New Yorkers who received high school diplomas, only 4 percent continued their education to receive a Bachelor's degree in 1960, and only 3.6 percent total in the Northeast. Whites were twice as likely to receive a college education: 9.3 percent of New York men and women received Bachelor's degrees, and 8.4 percent in the Northeast. By 1970, blacks showed a less than one percent increase in Bachelor's degrees, whereas whites saw a 3 percent increase.<sup>59</sup>

### **Employment**

The New York State Labor Department began recording monthly employment statistics in 1976, which included labor force, employed, unemployed, and the unemployment rate. However, race was not included race in the census, so information provided from primary sources help provide rough estimates of the percentage of whites and blacks in each category. In January 1976, New York State had a labor force consisting of 7,687,165 workers, 6,896,554 people were employed, and 790,611 or 10.3% were unemployed, which is the highest unemployment rate

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<sup>59</sup> Census.gov, "Percent of the Black Population (Men and Women) 25 years and over with a High School Diploma or Higher by Sex, for the United States, Regions, and States"

in New York's recent history.<sup>60</sup> More workers were in labor than any other occupation, which demonstrated the influence and importance of trade unions, however blacks were excluded by difficult entry requirements designed to work against them. After World War II, Albany employment diversified, bringing new inequalities between a growing professional class and skilled laborers. Blacks mainly worked in unskilled or low-paying jobs, lived in substandard housing, and had limited employment opportunities. Albany's corrupt political machine promised job opportunities to working and middle class whites, which was one of the many ways they stayed in control for so long<sup>61</sup>.

### **Housing**

Construction in Albany during the 1960s and 1970s improved housing conditions for whites, but worsened them for blacks. Though the black population grew from 3 to 12 percent after whites fled to the suburbs in the 1950s, blacks had lived in Albany nearly since it was founded. Black neighborhoods were concentrated in the downtown sections of Arbor Hill and the South End. Arbor Hill had previously been home to a mix of poor and middle class families, and even some prosperous blacks, but had become a ghetto in the 1960s. Segregated from public life, blacks created their own communities, which included churches, schools, stores, and local organizations. Albany's neighborhoods drastically changed after the construction of the South Mall, or the Empire State Plaza. Embarrassed by Albany's slums, Nelson Rockefeller wanted to rebuild the entire city. "In 1962, the state expropriated 98.5

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<sup>60</sup> New York State Labor Department "Smoothed Seasonally Adjusted" Employment Census, 1976-2018

<sup>61</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 44

acres in the city's center for building the Plaza (mostly private dwellings) and displaced 9,000 people (3,600 households), of whom 17 percent were black".<sup>62</sup> The Plaza was built in the center of the city, caused overcrowded conditions from displacement, and "further deterioration of the buildings contributed to social instability, crime, and racial tensions".<sup>63</sup> Located next to Arbor Hill, the Plaza acted as a buffer between the ghetto and newly constructed downtown areas.

Urban renewal and historic preservation did not benefit Albany's black community, as funds were usually directed to gentrify neighborhoods. The Albany County Urban Renewal Agency was not founded until 1960, making Albany one of the last major cities to seek federal funding programs, and the first housing project was not built until 1967.<sup>64</sup> While white middle-class neighborhoods benefitted from federal reconstruction programs, "poor neighborhoods had to deal with the negative consequences of urban renewal, which had created more problems for them than it solved: available but not affordable housing, crime, inadequate services, and few well-paid nonprofessional jobs".<sup>65</sup> Even historic preservation only improved white housing conditions, as it did not mandate that entire neighborhoods be restored. As a result, neighborhoods were divided between restored and neglected sections, as seen in Arbor Hill in the 1970s.

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<sup>62</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 46

<sup>63</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 56

<sup>64</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 47

<sup>65</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. "Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics", pp. 54



## Corruption

The Albany machine was in power for much of the twentieth century, and gained considerable recognition for the power of its corruption. “Boss” Dan O’Connell handpicked Mayor Erastus Corning as his successor, showing the machines control over the election process. Irish Catholics and Protestants ran the machine with different divisions of responsibility; Catholics controlled the party, and Protestants controlled city government. Patronage, police, and city nightlife were under party control. “The machine relied on more than loyalty, maintaining its power through corruption and election manipulation, for which it was notorious, and using the local police force to punish opponents”.<sup>66</sup> Albany residents were familiar with the corrupt election process, where tactics like the five-dollar vote, ‘registering the graveyard’, peeking in the voting booth to insure party loyalty, and intimidating any opposition was expected. Shockingly, “Whenever New York elected a Republican governor, the new administration would initiate an investigation of Albany’s government, compile evidence of its criminal actions, and almost always fail to prosecute anyone”.<sup>67</sup> Although the machine was corrupt and unfair to blacks, its ability to maintain control was impressive. Competition in local politics briefly threatened machine control of elections in the late 1960s, but it found new allies and prevented newcomers in politics.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. “Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics”, pp. 44

<sup>67</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. “Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics”, pp. 44

<sup>68</sup> Revrenovic, Gordana. “Albany, The Restructured City: State Government, Its Political Machine, and Neighborhood Politics”, pp. 48

Political corruption ensured white employment and forced blacks into the margins of society, causing the lack of diversity in Albany city employment and labor unions. Paul Grondahl's *Mayor Corning Albany Icon, Albany Enigma* encompasses the life of political machine Erastus Corning II, who served as Albany's mayor for the longest term in the city's history between 1942-1983. While Corning is best known for his duration in office, he left behind a legacy of corruption and few notable accomplishments. Shortly after he was elected mayor in 1942, Corning faced the newest Republican governor, Thomas E. Dewey, who launched an investigation on Albany City Hall, claiming its corruption to be comparable to the infamous Tammany Hall. Dewey found "flagrant violations" from Corning's election and "ordered twenty investigators from the State Department of Audit and Control to move into the comptroller's office in City Hall 'to examine the accounts and fiscal affairs of the city'".<sup>69</sup> Investigators found 1.6 million dollars missing in the city capital funds, and Corning was brought to court to explain these allegations. Throughout the hearing, Corning maintained his composure when explaining the whereabouts of this money, refusing to sign a waiver of immunity and swearing on the Bible instead, and continued to draw on wartime hysteria in the media to distract the public from the machine investigation. His ability to work around the truth and remain calm under pressure demonstrated his capability as a corrupt leader. Mayor Corning and the machine excluded blacks from city employment and politics, and neglected the needs of black neighborhoods. When unemployment, housing, and education

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<sup>69</sup> Grondahl, Paul. *Mayor Corning Albany Icon, Albany Enigma*, pp. 229

systems became unbearable, the Brothers organized a movement to overcome oppression and vote the machine out of office.

### **The Brothers**

In 1966, a black militant organization known as The Brothers developed in the Albany-Schenectady region. Led by Sam McDowell, the core group consisted of about 15 black men, though up to 75 people, including some women, identified themselves as members of the Brothers between 1966 to 1971.<sup>70</sup> To organize their objectives and reach the Arbor Hill and South End sections of the capital city, the group published *The Albany Liberator*, a newspaper from June 1967 to August 1971. The paper started as weekly, but shifted to biweekly and eventually monthly after a change in editors; it is difficult to determine the time frame of some events, as the papers were not given yearly dates. Furthermore, the writers are not listed under most articles. A new editor likely took over in 1969, as *The Liberator* depicts a more artistic format through stylistic change. *The Albany Liberator* illustrated the Brothers' success in combating discrimination in public housing, employment, and education, with police brutality and corruption posing as the two largest barriers to overcome. In addition to local issues, *The Liberator* also covered civil rights efforts in other regions of the country, black history, and offered guest columns to share thoughts and opinions. The Brothers organized public meetings at their headquarters for members of the community to gather and share their concerns, and the group proposed plans to overcome each challenge. Additionally, they

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<sup>70</sup> Grondhal, Paul "Revisiting '60s black militants The Brothers"

established committees for each area of oppression, such as the housing committee, which divided group responsibilities and targeted efforts for higher success rates.

The nationwide call for equality echoed throughout the 1960's, motivating black communities to come together at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. To have a lasting impact, activists needed to be organized, relentless, unafraid, and creative; all of which were qualities the Brothers possessed. They were the most qualified to lead the Albany Civil Rights Movement, as nobody knew what the community needed more than young black men who were in search of work and targeted by the police. In August 1966, the Brothers met for the first time at the Trinity Institution in the South End. Leon Van Dyke, a member of the Brothers, led a group of unemployed young black construction workers to the first meeting after watching hundreds of white workers hired at a union hall that morning. With the chants of their protest falling on deaf ears, black workers became determined to overthrow the Albany machine.<sup>71</sup>

The Brothers established their headquarters at Nebbies Shoe Shine Parlor, 170 North Pearl St., which attracted national black leaders passing through Albany. Like all black activist groups, the Brothers faced increasing racism and violence from whites in the area. Nebbies faced the brunt of some of these attacks, with shattered windows and racial slurs painted in graffiti along the walls. Scare tactics were ineffective, as they further demonstrated why blacks needed to work toward equality. When the Brothers showed no signs of slowing down their cause, the local and state police department took initiative to control the group by tapping the

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<sup>71</sup> Grondhal, Paul "Revisiting '60s black militants The Brothers"

headquarters' phones, taking photo surveillance, and unlawfully placing some Brothers under arrest on inflated charges. Both Mayor Corning and the police department kept routine tabs on the most active members, who posed the largest threat to corruption, and searched for ways to silence the organization.<sup>72</sup>

Occasionally, black Albany residents went to dramatic lengths to force their mistreatment into the spotlight. After failing to see results from picketing outside the offices of the city's most notorious slumlords, protesters "collected a jar of cockroaches from run-down apartments and dumped them on a stage where Mayor Corning was speaking, where they crawled off and disrupted the meeting".<sup>73</sup> This successfully caught the media's attention and made a public statement about deplorable public housing conditions. Mayor Corning faced pressure to improve living conditions for blacks, but his accountability was unlikely. The Brothers worked as mediators between local government and Albany blacks, as they went to city council and public housing offices to speak on behalf of the community and find solutions to their needs.

The first edition of *The Albany Liberator* paints a promising picture for Albany blacks, as a photograph shows two Brothers, Robert Gene Dobbs and Samuel McDowell, running for County Legislature and happily shaking hands with voters. The title reads "Brothers Enter Tuesday's Primary" with content including "Rally Saturday at Ten Broek St. Park" and "Residents of Arbor Hill Seek Trash Collection"; the cover page demonstrates The Brothers' attempt to become involved in local government, solve issues of public housing and trash in the streets, and unite black

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<sup>72</sup> Grondhal, Paul "Revisiting '60s black militants The Brothers"

<sup>73</sup> Grondhal, Paul "Revisiting '60s black militants The Brothers"

neighborhoods to accomplish these goals. The following page contains propaganda-like diction: “The first issue of the Albany Liberator presents the story of The Brothers’ challenge to the do-nothing Albany city government” under the column “Can They Lose?”. Subsequent pages address issues that white neighborhoods turned a blind eye to: house fires caused by excessive trash buildup, welfare, and homelessness.<sup>74</sup> As a whole, the first *Albany Liberator* demonstrated the level of organization, knowledge, and potential The Brothers possessed, showing parallels from their influences Malcolm X and The Black Panthers.

### **The Brothers: Combating Housing Discrimination**

While The Brothers fought discrimination in education, employment, health care, and public safety, their consistent focus was housing discrimination. They understood corruption was the root of their oppression, as the machine backed racial bias in unions or public housing. In one of its first issues, *The Albany Liberator* reads “Public Housing Authority Questioned Over Admission to New Homes”<sup>75</sup>, and explains how details of tenant selection were hidden from the public. As previously mentioned, New York Public Housing avoided federal integration efforts and maintained white-middle class tenants in developments far longer than other states. Officials fought to give whites priority housing and exclude blacks.

The Brothers inquired about discrimination in newly constructed public housing. The Brothers Housing Committee recalls: “When we asked for details on the priorities and waiting lists, she [office secretary] and Robert Bender, Housing

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<sup>74</sup> Vol. I No. 1 June 16, 1967

<sup>75</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 1

Authority director, declined to give more specifics”.<sup>76</sup> One woman denied entry into the projects bluntly stated “it’s who you know that gets you in” rather than providing equal housing for those in need. By averting questions and keeping housing selection details private, the authorities could unlawfully deny applicants; for example, one woman was declined housing for having two illegitimate children. Another woman was denied because of a misdemeanor that occurred three years prior. However, officials came under increasing pressure when their motivations were questioned and publicized.

Earl Thorpe, chairman of The Brothers Housing Committee, personally confronted the Albany Housing Authority director, Robert Bender, about discrimination in the new building projects. Bender claimed the housing projects held 40 percent Negro tenants mostly located in the Thacher sector. However, an occupant of the new homes on South Pearl recalled only seeing “a couple” black families. *The Liberator* criticizes Albany city government for the housing crisis: “The city has moved slowly on erecting more low income housing, even though a tight rental situation has existed since urban renewal began several years ago”.<sup>77</sup> Blacks were turned away from low income housing for obscure reasons. One woman shared her experience in an article “Woman Rejected by Public Housing Reasons Withheld”<sup>78</sup>, which claimed her rejection was based on some unpaid bills. After she accepted a higher paying job and was capable of paying her bills, they told her “there were still other reasons”, and she was never contacted again. The number of

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<sup>76</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 1

<sup>77</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 8

<sup>78</sup> Vol. I No. 6 July 21-27, 1967 pp. 1

women filing complaints suggests that these may have been single mothers, and the Housing Authority likely felt pressured to turn them away due to complaints from white tenants.

Building projects occurred throughout the 1960s in downtown Albany, particularly new public housing sites. *The Liberator* featured several articles describing city construction plans, one article titled “Arbor Hill Renewal Funded” declares: “New York State announced this week that it was granting 1.25 million dollars for Arbor Hill’s No. 1 urban renewal project. These funds are to match city funds under an urban renewal program that receives two-thirds of its financing from the Federal Government”.<sup>79</sup> While Arbor Hill, a poverty-stricken area of the city, was receiving major state and federal funding, the project had no start date or deadline. This indicates that building could be put off, and the machine could redirect these funds to avoid projects that would benefit those in need. The Brothers kept a watchful eye over the urban renewal project progress, as it is continuously referenced in *The Liberator*. For example, in an article “Housing Attitude”, the writer addresses how the urban renewal project must solve issues of discrimination and poor housing conditions:

Arbor Hill’s No. 1 urban renewal project contains plans for a public housing site with about 400 apartment units. It is time that persons be allowed to live in public housing in Albany on a basis of need instead of connections. It is also time that public housing buildings fit the minimum family needs of space, comfort, and privacy.<sup>80</sup>

The new housing projects clearly discriminated against blacks, which became obvious by the amount of complaints the Housing Committee received. To pressure

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<sup>79</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 1

<sup>80</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 2



the Albany Housing Authority, The Brothers suggested calling to inquire why they were turned away from public housing, picketing outside the office, and pursuing legal action.

While the Housing Authority was aware of that they could not legally turn away applicants because of their race, white tenants in the housing projects spoke freely about their desire to prevent intermingling. The article “Thacher Homes Problems Examined Racial Inbalance Heads Complaints” describes the hostility of whites toward the growing number of blacks moving into Thacher homes. An older woman said bitterly “I’m going to have to move...the nicest families are moving out” and “blamed the ‘lack of screening’ by housing authorities for what she called less desirable move-ins”.<sup>81</sup> The conditions of the building were poor, and a shortage of maintenance workers caused many problems to go unrepaired for extended periods of time. Robert Bender, Albany Housing Authority director, commented on the large, undisciplined child population in the housing developments and concluded that many of them come from fatherless homes. Given Bender’s stereotypical comments on black families, it is not surprising that many were being turned away from the newer developments.

The Brothers encouraged blacks to take legal action as much as possible when fighting discrimination. Throughout *The Liberator*, articles promoting the State Commission for Human Rights in Albany describe how officials would investigate cases of discrimination for free. After reviewing statistics that showed severe housing discrimination, both New York City Council and New York State

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<sup>81</sup> Vol. I No. 6 July 21-27, 1967 pp. 7

Legislature passed laws to prevent discrimination in both public and private housing. Initially, a bill proposed that criminal penalties be issued to those found guilty of discrimination, but dropped to substituted enforcement by civil suits and administrative enforcement by COIR after receiving severe backlash from the real estate industry.<sup>82</sup> The Commission on Intergroup Relations (COIR) superseded the Unity Committee, formally in charge of combating discrimination, became responsible for “investigating complaints and initiating its own investigations of discrimination based upon race, creed, color, national origin and ancestry” and was able to issue subpoenas and take testimony under oath.<sup>83</sup> They shifted efforts from fighting systematic segregation to processing individual complaints. COIR settled over half of the 939 sworn complaints of housing discrimination, and of those cases settled “the complainant was offered the apartment at issue 29.1% of the time and an alternative dwelling in an additional 24% of the cases. Eighty-one percent of all complaints were black and 8% were Puerto Rican”.<sup>84</sup> Majority of these people were defined as middle class.

Some followed this advice, particularly when all other efforts were ineffective. In the article “Agent Refuses Tenant Requests Five Families Plan Legal Action”<sup>85</sup> five families residing at 174 North Pearl Street filed for statements to the Local Rent Administration Authority of the New York division of Housing and Community Renewal, and prepared legal action in the form of a rent reduction order

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<sup>82</sup> Schill, Michael. “Local Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Discrimination in Housing: The New York City Human Rights Commission” pp. 1007

<sup>83</sup> Schill, Michael. “Local Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Discrimination in Housing: The New York City Human Rights Commission” pp. 1006

<sup>84</sup> Schill, Michael. “Local Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Discrimination in Housing: The New York City Human Rights Commission” pp. 1008

<sup>85</sup> Vol. I No. 5 July 14-20, 1967 pp. 1

because their building was overrun with roaches and in need of general repair. The Brothers' Housing Committee assured the residents that the building owner was responsible for these violations, and encouraged the tenants to take legal action against the Carney Agency because their rent contract had been violated. Legal action in general was successful, as a later issue of *The Liberator* describes under "Greater Rights For Tenants":

According to the panel sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Justice Department, and the Office of Economic Opportunity, tenants should be allowed to suspend entirely their obligation to pay rent in case of serious housing code violations.<sup>86</sup>

The panel described the laws as previously being heavily in favor of the landlord. Now under federal obligation, "Carney Agency Answers Tenants Requests After Housing Committee Pickets Office" states: "The John R. Carney Agency, picketed Friday by the Brothers and several of Carney's tenants, has agreed to pay for the extermination of roaches at 174 North Pearl Street".<sup>87</sup> The Brothers' Housing Committee was proud of this victory, as it demonstrated negotiating skills, proved legal action was effective, and reset the standard for landlords.

With the help of the Brothers, tenants successfully demanded their landlords uphold rent contracts and blacks were granted entry into new housing developments. An article "Residents Like Conditions at Ezra Prentice Homes" starts "The grime hasn't had a chance to dull the pastel colors of the Ezra Prentice homes, Albany's newest low cost housing development".<sup>88</sup> Aside from being in a high-traffic area, the conditions of the new development were pleasing to residents, establishing

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<sup>86</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3, 1967 pp. 8

<sup>87</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3, 1967 pp. 8

<sup>88</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3, 1967 pp. 5

a neighborhood-like feel. Landscaping and the bright, new playground allowed for children to play outside, which was not available in many black neighborhoods. Improvements in rent contracts were noticeable. Rent included heat, utilities, and garbage pick-up, but many tenants felt pressured to maintain upkeep and had to pay for repairs to avoid eviction. Federal programs also made housing improvements by repairing dilapidated housing.

Under the urban renewal project, Arbor Hill residents were encouraged to give their homes a facelift. F. Joseph Leone, director of Albany's Urban Development described the objectives: "The federal rehabilitation grant and loan program 'will pay for good gut stuff' in terms of repairs to houses and even businesses". Most residents were fearful of the project, as "Urban renewal in the past in the city has meant total clearance with relocation in most cases" Mr. Leone explained. He assured residents, "Now we'll probably see only a spot clearance of houses that no one can fix".<sup>89</sup> In some cases, urban renewal helped blacks make small improvements to their neighborhoods.

Urban renewal had its advantages, but the program had many drawbacks, especially for black neighborhoods. It not only caused issues of displacement and segregation, as Albany blacks were forced to move for the construction of the South Mall, but also destroyed cultural and social aspects of neighborhoods. Herbert Gans discusses the cultural, psychological, and social impact urban renewal had on Boston's West End in *The Urban Villagers*. Poor, Italian whites lost control over their communities as modernization replaced familiarity. Their experience compares to

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<sup>89</sup> Vol. I No. II September 8-14, 1967 pp. 6

those of Albany blacks, as both questioned the motives and genuineness of community leaders, and opposed the middle class for imposing their standards of society.

Housing issues extended outside the domestic space, as trash pick up and recreational centers were not available to Arbor Hill residents. *The Liberator* addresses the issue:

Some people blame the poor for trash-filled lots and backyards. But how can a woman on welfare who receives \$120 a month for herself and her two children pay weekly for trash collection? How can a man with several children pay for trash collection when his children need food and clothing?

Most families were incapable of paying the weekly trash fee, and felt the city should pick up the trash for free. The article continues: "In Albany the Machine and its so-called civic leaders are fond of having special cleanup days when everyone is supposed to fix up his own yard and basement".<sup>90</sup> Residents understood that the machine had no interest in dedicating city funds to collect their trash, but created "clean up days" to acknowledge the issue. Brothers Robert Gene Dobbs and Samuel McDowell encouraged all residents to leave their trash on the sidewalk every Saturday starting June 17, 1967 until Mayor Corning agreed to free trash removal. The Brothers went door-to-door to inform people of the trash experiment, hosted a rally, and posted weekly updates in *The Liberator* until everyone was on board. Their tactics were successful; the September 8-14, 1967 issue features an announcement for free city trash removal on Saturday's before 7am.

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<sup>90</sup> Vol. I No. I June 16, 1967 pp. 4

## **The Brothers: Combating Employment Discrimination**

Young black men in Albany typically worked in trades, as public school systems did not prepare blacks for college, which in turn would prepare them for a profession. Unfortunately, employment discrimination was practiced in every industry. *The Liberator* elaborates on this issue in an article titled “Brothers’ Training Program To Combat Job Discrimination”, which states: “In Albany black youth even have trouble getting into the building trades, especially when the job involves a union”.<sup>91</sup> William Gibson, chairman of the Labor Committee, explained union discrimination: “qualifications for entering these unions are stacked against most Negroes”. A strict age limit showed age discrimination, while the requirement of a high school diploma was established to exclude blacks, as they lagged whites in graduation rates. If a young black man met the requirements, he would be asked to take a test for an entry-level apprenticeship, but he would likely not hear back from the union. To further exclude blacks, an applicant had to be related to or know someone already in the relevant building trade union. The unions delayed state contracts, and found ways to assure maximum pay with minimum work. Knowing which obstacles to overcome, the Brothers designed a program to help blacks enter trade unions; “The Brothers will also try to train eligible young men to take the apprenticeship tests, according to Gibson. This training will include preparation for dropouts and instruction in taking the apprenticeship tests”. Increasing the black employment rate would become one of the biggest challenges of the organization.

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<sup>91</sup> Vol. I No. 4 July 7-13, 1967 pp. 8

*The Liberator* documented the efforts of local programs to improve employment rates. Hudson Valley Community College created a program, as described by the article “Urban Training Center Offers Job Opportunities”, to teach adults trades to make them hireable in local industries. It was created mainly for low-income blacks; “Students pay no fees for instruction and transportation, one way or another, is provided”. Some students were illiterate, and instructors tailored to their individual needs. The biggest concern for program directors was recruiting enough people to join. At the time the article was published:

The three centers in Albany, Schenectady, and Troy have had more than 600 persons attending classes. About 500 trainees are currently taking part in some kind of instruction—mostly vocational; some basic education—such as math or remedial reading—and some both.<sup>92</sup>

The program also included options for women, some of which were office skills and sewing techniques. A normal training course took about a year, and the program aimed to serve around 900 people at a time. Each center offered a variety of skills and trades. The Troy Center mainly offered courses in typing and shorthand, mechanical and machine tool trades, auto mechanics, welding, power sewing (operation and maintenance), and basic education instruction. Meanwhile, the Albany Center offered IBM programming, offset duplication, keypunch operations and other office skills. Those who found employment through the program averaged at \$75 per week, though it was expected weekly wages would increase to \$100. Based on a 40-hour workweek, these wages were above the 1968 New York State minimum wage, which was \$1.60 per hour, or \$64 per week. However, minimum wage was raised to \$1.85 per hour in 1970, which matches the weekly income for

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<sup>92</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3, 1967 pp. 4

program graduates at \$75 per week. Some men and women lacked motivation to complete the program, and instructors were focused on ways to avoid this issue. The article concludes with: “The way in which they attempt to solve this problem will be a real test of their influence on the community”, which was applicable to almost every program The Brothers established.

Vera Michelson’s article “White Power Structure Holds Key to Racial Issue Says Brother”<sup>93</sup> elaborates on the issue of white supremacy in employment opportunities, and illustrates the increasing frustration of blacks. At a panel discussion on “Black Power” black and white members of the community discussed the effectiveness of their current efforts. Lawrence Burwell, director of the Clinton Square Neighborhood House, suggested whites play a supporting role for blacks in their organizations, and “called present programs ‘band aids’”. Like trade unions, “He noted that most companies rely heavily on testing”. Furthermore:

Leon Van Dyke criticized training programs for not teaching people skills that would allow them to get out of poverty level income brackets. He said that ghetto schools are in such substandard conditions that a graduate of a ghetto high school attains an educational equivalent to ninth grade.

Poor education and testing for entry-level positions made it increasingly difficult for blacks to find employment. However, The Brothers were not discouraged, as an ad under the article states in bold letters: “Urban Center- Train Now For A Good Paying Job! Tuition Free Courses”<sup>94</sup>, which were run by State University of New York and operated by Hudson Valley Community College.

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<sup>93</sup> Vol I. No. 18 December 7, 1967 pp. 7

<sup>94</sup> Vol I. No. 18 December 7, 1967 pp. 7



## **The Brothers: Improving The Education System**

While the Brothers did not focus their efforts on education reform, they aimed to improve high school graduation rates among blacks, provide tutoring programs for children in need, and proposed the construction of new schools to city council. Sometimes their efforts to improve education coincided with raising awareness for employment discrimination, as they mention some black teachers and principles that were fired and replaced with less qualified whites. Furthermore, the Brothers acknowledged black college students and their fight against discrimination on campus, including occasional police brutality. Sections of *The Liberator* describe the Brothers attempted education reform as they asked city council for new schools, established an after school tutoring program, featured black history columns, collaborated with The Black Student Alliance, and raised awareness of issues black college students faced.

Shortly after students returned to school in 1967 Albany, the Brothers published an article describing the need for more schools. William Gibson, candidate for alderman in the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, pointed out the issue of overcrowding. "To prove the point with statistics instead of a first hand awareness, the Brothers' November hopeful asked for school enrollment data earlier this week"<sup>95</sup>. Gibson requested this information from Dr. James T. Hepinstall, superintendent of Albany schools, and asked him how many schools, how many children per school, and how many in each classroom there were. He notes that schools in Arbor Hill and South End are overcrowded, which is not conducive to learning. His inquiry was not racially

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<sup>95</sup> Vol. I No. 13 September 29-October 5, 1967 pp. 2

charged, as he did not mind the segregation as much as the lack of balance in classroom size.

The same issue of *The Liberator* advertised The Brothers Tutorial Program For School Year 1967-1968, which planned to help children become happy and strong members of the community. They wanted to help children improve academically by providing tutoring from student teachers from colleges in the surrounding area. Listen below the program description was a permission slip for parents to fill out, turn in, and wait to be contacted. The slogan below stated “The Brothers Education Committee says: Fight for Freedom with a better education”, included the Brothers’ headquarters address and phone number, and was signed by Chairman, Gordan Van Ness, and Co-chairmen, Maurice Newton and William Brooks.<sup>96</sup>

Sam McDowell’s article under the Negro History column, “Prudence Crandall-Education For All”<sup>97</sup>, describes the problem in black education beginning with the story of Prudence Crandall, a young white schoolmistress, who caused outrage when she admitted a black girl to her boarding school in Canterbury, Connecticut in 1831. Crandall established a separate school for blacks after white parents began pulling their children out of school. Local merchants would not sell her school supplies, the doctor would not treat sick black children, and she was insulted everywhere she went. The school building itself was stoned and burned, and she was jailed until she agreed to leave the state. Since 1830, black were told education was the only way to elevate their economic and social status. However in 1960, blacks still faced

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<sup>96</sup> Vol. I No. 13 September 29-October 5, 1967 pp. 7

<sup>97</sup> Vol. I No. 19 December 22-January 11, 1967-68 pp. 3

oppression in educational institutions, public schools did not teach black history, and the quality of education was poor. Black parents wanted their children to learn something of their heritage and be proud of being black.

*The Liberator* welcomed The Black Student Alliance (BSA), a black social and political group in local colleges, with Rowland Washington's article "A Voice To Be Heard"<sup>98</sup>. He describes increased awareness of black America's youth across college campuses, and uses anti-white rhetoric to encourage blacks to embrace their own culture. Attending predominantly white schools, blacks were often isolated; "Even with its tattered culture and 'non-existent' heritage, the black community still has social patterns that are considerably different from the white man's social cliques". The BSA requested that their university curriculums include black history and cultural programs, partly to build black confidence. The organization also backed militant black organizations and believed in using violence, preaching the slogan "freedom at whatever means necessary", which became an increasingly popular view among black students in the late 1960s.

Some black students were denied housing when they went to college, as "12 Fulmont Students Consider Withdrawal"<sup>99</sup> tells of twelve black college students, four from Albany, who threatened to leave Fulmont College in Johnstown, New York because of this. They did not take the situation lightly; "At the present time, the New York State Human Rights Commission is in the process of investigating a charge of discrimination against a Johnstown man which was filed by Shelton Bellamy of Albany". Because the college did not have dormitories, students had to find housing

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<sup>98</sup> Vol II. No. 2&3 February 29, 1968 pp. 4

<sup>99</sup> Vol I. No. 14 October 13-19, 1967 pp. 1

off campus. Landlords would deny availability to black students, but rent the rooms to white students afterwards. One family took in five black students who were denied housing, and many slept on the floors and couches. A landlord in Gloversville, a neighboring town, offered to rent a house to five black students, but the students would have to find transportation to and from Fulmont's campus after the busses stopped running at 5:30pm. Situations like these demonstrate why some blacks did not attend college.

### **Conclusion**

Through targeted efforts, the Brothers helped their community make some improvements in housing, employment, and education discrimination in a city controlled by corruption. By taking legal action, tenants demanded improved housing conditions from their landlords, like extermination of roaches and rats, and some blacks in need of public housing were accepted into the newer developments. Usually detrimental to black neighborhoods, urban renewal helped improve some buildings in Arbor Hill. The Brothers created training programs to help improve the black unemployment rate, and worked with local universities to instruct courses. Hundreds were hired as a result, though they typically made minimum wage. Additionally, Brothers went to city council to request more schools to alleviate overcrowding, and established an after school tutoring program to help students struggling in certain subjects. The Brothers fought tirelessly to improve their community and overthrow the Albany machine.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The Brothers: Police Brutality in Albany, NY**

## Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement heightened tensions between blacks and whites, which resulted in violent riots, lynchings, and police brutality. The stereotype of blacks as violent and dangerous, paired with their intent to fight for their civil rights, gave police a sense of entitlement to abuse their power when they saw fit. In this chapter I will focus on local stories of excessive police force, beginning with an analysis of recorded national lynchings in 1960-1970, comparison of median time in jail relative to race, and white and black incarceration rates in 1960 and 1970. The following section will address national accounts of police brutality during the civil rights movement. *The Liberator* describes several instances of unlawful arrests, inflated charges, and excessive force by the Albany police in a northern city without riots or excessive crime, and comparing the conditions to cities like Detroit and Birmingham, where brutality was far worse, where riots grabbed national attention and gave police permission to demonstrate excessive force.

Statistic from the U.S. Department of Justice show reported lynchings and incarceration rates in New York and nationally during the 1960s and 70s. Under Civil Authority (State and Local) in the 1960's, a total of 192 people were executed in the U.S. for murder, rape, or other crimes, including "offense unknown". One illegal lynching took place, and 99 of total 192 were nonwhite. However, Civil Authority only reported 3 lynchings for murder in the 1970's, and one was nonwhite. The term "nonwhite" in several of these tables includes all minorities. Table 2-2 gives statistics of "Illegal Lynchings by Race and Offense by Decade", stating that the only black illegally lynched was for an unknown cause between

1960-1962, and no lynchings were recorded after 1962. However, “The Regional Comparison of Nonwhite Persons Executed Under State Authority by Decade” reports that the Northeast had 10 known nonwhite executions in 1960, but none in 1970. Lastly, Table 2.6 shows “Illegal Lynchings by State and Race between 1882-1962”; New York had two illegal lynchings with one black and one white victim, whereas Mississippi had 578 illegal lynchings with 538 black and 40 white victims. Though racism and segregation were practiced in the North, these statistics demonstrate how dangerous life was for blacks down South. The tables show a general decrease in lynchings during the mid-twentieth century, coming to an end in the Northeast by the 1970s<sup>100</sup>.

Black and white incarceration statistics from the 1960s and 1970s do not show major discrimination, though nonwhites served longer sentences by about 4 months on average<sup>101</sup>. Surprisingly, both the 1960 and 1970 national censuses have a smaller percentage of black inmates than whites, though the statistics were taken from 25 and 20 percent samples. One interesting point shown in the same table is that of the 7,800 juveniles confined in jails in 1970, 51 percent were confined in NYC Reformatory and NY City Remand shelter. State prison and local jail rates rose from 1955 to 1965, and all states had similar incarceration rates in the 1960s, though the Northeast had the lowest number.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Department of Justice, Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States 1850-1984 pp. 10-16

<sup>101</sup> Department of Justice, Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States 1850-1984 pp. 61

<sup>102</sup> Prison Policy Initiative, “Tracking State Prison Growth in 50 States”

## Police Brutality in Albany

The Brothers witnessed and personally experienced police brutality, and took measures with local, frustrated youth to prevent them from being beaten, shot, or arrested by the police. By speaking with the police officers directly, guiding crowds away from conflict to their headquarters downtown, and encouraging young black men to join their cause, the Brothers avoided potentially dangerous confrontations with the police. During a time of national rioting, young blacks in Albany harbored anger and felt inspired to rebel against their oppressors. The national incarceration rate rose in 1960, likely as a result from protests.

The Albany and Schenectady police force were extensions of the machine and used police brutality to exercise control over blacks. The Brothers were often targeted, as members were arrested and incarcerated on inflated charges. *The Albany Liberator* highlights details of unlawful arrests and suggests police used corruption to cover their tracks. Mike Dunn's feature article "What's Happening at The Brothers Office" shared incriminating details of police brutality in Albany, including the officers' and victims names<sup>103</sup>. The title of the article does not correlate with the content, which may have been to divert attention from the machine and police force. Both black and white Albany residents were aware of the machines' power to arrest any potential threat on inflated charges. The first sentence in one of Dunn's articles exclaims, "Warning! Beware of your local police, they are armed and dangerous", and follows with a story of police brutality. Albany Patrolman Louis "L.A." Willis went to visit his girlfriend, Geneva Becuir, as she was

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<sup>103</sup> Vol 1. No. II September 8-14, 1967 pp. 4



hosting several guests, including two black men, Grant Daniels and Richard Mayo. When Becuir refused to leave with Patrolman Willis, he began insulting the men with racist terms. Daniels got into an argument with Willis, prompting Willis to draw his weapon and threaten to shoot Daniels. He proceeded to place Daniels under arrest without stating a reason, adding only: "I don't know, but I'll think of something". Both Willis and Detective Lt. Kenneth Kennedy of Police Division I threatened Daniels of the consequences of speaking the truth about the event, and used excessive force to detain him. Daniels was charged with resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

In other issues of the paper, the column continues to tell stories detailed of excessive force and unlawful arrests against blacks. Brothers, Gordon Van Ness and William Brooks, and Peter Pollak, editor of *The Liberator*, witnessed a black woman, Barbara Edmonds, "being dragged from a house by several policemen on Clinton Avenue". Van Ness saw the police carrying clubs, witnesses claimed she was beaten, and Pollak overheard an officer say "they ought to take her to the station and 'beat the shit out of her". All three men witnessed the woman dragged from the car and thrown into a paddy wagon. The woman's child was left alone as she watched her mother being arrested. While residents tried to reason with officers by using the young girl as leverage, the officers stated they "didn't give a damn" what happened to her.

One evening, Brothers prevented several young black men from being shot and arrested by Albany police. The articles "Youth Take To Streets After Police

Incident”<sup>104</sup> and “Brothers Prevent Major Conflict” tells of how the Brothers prevented “a full scale war” between Albany police and black teenagers. After a patrol car nearly backed into a young black mother carrying her child, an argument broke out between the officer and the woman. When the Brothers arrived at the scene, they observed growing tensions between teenagers and officers, and “were able to separate the crowd from the police by forming a human chain and driving the young people down the street”. They convinced 40 to 50 of the angry youths to attend an immediate meeting at the Brothers office around four blocks away. The police were prepared to start shooting at the time. Both Van Dyke and Robert Gene Dobbs describe the intensity of anger amongst black teens. Dobbs “spoke of the conditions in Arbor Hill, which is one of Albany’s two ghetto areas, and termed the teenagers feelings for whites as pure hatred”. Teens were tired of oppression, and tensions were on the verge of erupting. The Brothers warned the Albany machine that they might not be able to hold the kids back if the city failed to make improvements.

Like most incidents of police brutality, officers denied claims that they violated the law or used excessive force. The article “Police Deny Charges Fail To Avert Trouble”<sup>105</sup> informs us that four Brothers met with Police Chief Edward P. McArdle an hour before their meeting with the youth from the Arbor Hill incident. “Despite the personal testimony of the Brothers, the Police Chief did not accept their version of the incident. He especially denied that policemen had struck teenagers with their clubs and that they had their guns drawn”. The Chief said he would

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<sup>104</sup> Vol. I July 28-August 3, 1967 pp. 1

<sup>105</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3 1967 pp. 1

review the incident with his patrolmen, and the teens agreed to only testify to being hit with nightsticks if approached by the Police Chief. Conversely, the police charged the Brothers with inciting a riot as described by the article “Arrest Of Brothers Follows Peace Efforts”<sup>106</sup>. One Brother was arrested after meeting with the police, and another warrant was issued on charges of inciting to riot. “Leon Van Dyke termed the charges as ridiculous and said that both were just trying to keep the kids from getting shot”. “U.T. Hippie”, an opinion section written by an older, uneducated black man, writes about the alleged “riot” in “There Weren’t No Riot, Man”. He claims “No, there wasn’t no riot, but there could have been a little action, at least, if those do-rights Brothers hadn’t turned out to break things up before it could even get half-way exciting!”<sup>107</sup> The police were quick to draw their weapons and use physical force, even though the teens were unarmed and did not threaten police with violence.

The trial for Gene Dobbs, a member of the Brothers arrested for inciting the Arbor Hill “riot”, took place on November 9, 1967. Mike Dunn’s “What’s Happening At The Brothers’ Office: Brothers Tried; Dobbs Found Guilty”<sup>108</sup> explained the court details, which show that Dobbs’ arrest served as an investigation of the Brothers. Dobbs was convicted by jury trial with resisting arrest, and Court Judge Michael V. Tepedino found him guilty of disorderly conduct. He was sentenced to three months in Albany County Jail for the first conviction and fifteen days for the second. Dunn states the opinion of the Brothers: “We feel that it was obvious to anyone entering

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<sup>106</sup> Vol. I No. 7 July 28-August 3 1967 pp. 1

<sup>107</sup> Vol 1. August 18-24, 1967 pp. 4

<sup>108</sup> Vol. I No. 17 November 17-23, 1967 pp. 1

the court room that Robert Gene Dobbs had lost his case before the court session had even begun. As the trial progressed, it became more and more apparent that Robert Gene Dobbs wasn't being tried, but "The Brothers" were on trial". Very little was said about the facts pertaining to Dobbs' arrest, but District Attorney, Condon Lyons, mainly questioned him about his membership in the organization. The prosecutions questions shifted attention away from Dobbs' "crime" and toward the relationship between the Brothers and the police: "Do you ever discuss ways to harass the Albany Police Department in your office? Do you ever discuss the Albany Police Department at all? Are any of the people in this courtroom members of the organization known as 'the Brothers'? Are the Brothers an underground group?". He was held without bail from Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup> until Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, and during this period his wife had given birth to their son. During the reasonable doubt proceedings, Supreme Court Justice Isadore Bookstein noted: "I understand that some reference was made during the trial to whether The Brothers were an underground group...I must say, that it was not the proper place to discuss that matter". The inappropriateness and irrelevance of the questions asked implied that the machine was present in the courtroom.

Leon Van Dyke's "An Open Letter From The Brothers"<sup>109</sup> unapologetically blames the machine as the reason for Dobbs' conviction. Van Dyke explains that Dobbs' arrest further represents the purpose of the Brothers in their fight against corruption and oppression:

He [Dobbs] and the Brothers believe that any political party that is corrupt and indifferent to the needs of poor people, is a party to fight; that any administration

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<sup>109</sup> Vol I. No. 17 Nov 17-23, 1967 pp. 2

that uses the police department to harass, brutalize and falsely accuse and arrest people to perpetuate themselves in office, is an administration to fight.

After the Brothers organized efforts to fight the machine, 13 members had been arrested, though only 2 had previous records. The letter reassured readers that the Brothers would not give up their cause despite facing threats from Albany police and government.

“Urban Violence and Justice”<sup>110</sup> reflects on the increase in riots and police response across the United States. After the death toll reached 100, Lyndon B. Johnson appointed a committee to study the riots, and congressional investigations also began. City governments, including Albany, took steps to investigate riots and propose programs to solve the root of the conflict. A survey taken by a “community improvement” office was distributed throughout Albany to determine the city’s long-range needs. Congress avoided passing legislation to avoid “rewarding the rioters”, but looked for individuals responsible for starting the riots.

The article continues to discuss police brutality, telling a story of a black anti-poverty worker gunned down in Detroit for making milk deliveries before curfew. The writer expresses frustration with the acceptability of violence according to race, “The country has never treated black people according to laws- the country has taught us to live by violence and now when the black man has finally turned the gun on his oppressor, the white man yells ‘law and order’”. Though this sounds like a promotion of violence, the Brothers were a peaceful organization and did not use *The Liberator* to encourage radical black power movements. The article concludes with what the Brothers viewed as most effective ways of combating racism: “We

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<sup>110</sup> Vol 1 August 18-24, 1967

must elect black leaders. We must demand improvements in the city's care of our section of town. We must demand control of the schools our children attend. We must demand the justice this country has always promised, but never delivered". The Brothers encouraged blacks to keep their composure under frustrating circumstances, especially when dealing with police.

In addition to frustration with police violence against blacks, locals were unhappy with the governments' response to the riots. The local National Guard unit trained in a mock riot control program in Voorheesville, a suburb of Albany, and several people questioned why, as Albany had never had a legitimate riot. Most felt it was a waste of tax dollars, and were frustrated that blacks were only being let into the guard units after riots had taken place. Several issues arose from this; it resembled the history of blacks drafted into wars and put on the front lines with the highest death tolls, and showed that riots were needed to include blacks in a previously white space<sup>111</sup>.

Brothers, Simeon Golar and William Gibson, spoke at The Political Action Committee Rally about urban poor needs, police brutality and the Machine. Golar ruled out guerilla warfare in the cities as a reasonable tactic of struggle, as riots caused more harm than good for blacks. Gibson accused the Machine of silencing those who tried to speak out for the poor in the past, and reassured the audience that the Brothers were not afraid of going to jail, and would continue to speak out against corruption to help those in need. Gibson also addressed local police brutality, and contradicted Mayor Corning's praise of the local law enforcers stating

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<sup>111</sup> Vol I No. 13 September 29-October 5, 1967 pp. 3

that: “every vice in this city operates with the consent and complete knowledge of the police department”<sup>112</sup>.

Brothers tried to spread awareness of brutality through all available avenues. Leon Van Dyke visited Union College as a guest speaker in October 1967, to discuss the approaching Vietnam War, racism, and police brutality in the United States. He connected the two issues by saying that there was currently a war at home in American ghettos; the government’s oppression of the Vietnamese and drafting young men to fight was similar to the oppression blacks faced everyday, though they lived in fear of getting killed by the police instead of by enemies abroad. He claimed the link between Vietnam and American racism is the system of oppression in which profit is more valuable than people, order takes precedence over justice, and whiteness is considered superior to other races. Van Dyke continued to discuss the sincerity of whites in wanting to help fight oppression in both Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement. Union being a white liberal school, Van Dyke directly addressed the audience when he questioned:

What were white liberals saying when the NAACP started the movement by petitioning? We couldn’t hear. What were the white liberals saying while Blacks were being non-violent, being arrested, beaten up, and passive? We couldn’t hear. You’re saying ‘Bring back non-violence’ But are you sincere? Do you want an end to violence only because non-violence is so much easier to ignore?<sup>113</sup>

Van Dyke wanted to encourage the nearly all white audience to analyze their part in the Civil Rights Movement, as the talk was for students protesting the Vietnam War. He felt the current war at home deserved more attention.

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<sup>112</sup> Vol. I No. 17 November 17-23, 1967 pp. 3

<sup>113</sup> Vol. II. No. 6 May 9-22, 1968 pp. 4

Instead of rioting, some locals organized efforts to speak out against police brutality. On Thursday June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Faith Evans, a black community worker from Troy, NY, came across two Troy police officers arresting two teen boys. Evans attempted to talk to Detective Michael J. Pastore, who held a nightstick to his chest and said: “get outta here, you bastard, you’re not going to run over me”<sup>114</sup>. After Evans threatened to file a complaint against the detective, he was placed under arrest for disorderly conduct and interfering with government administration. He still attempted to file the complaint, even after he was pushed and hit over the head. Reverend John Lyons, director of Troy Community Ministers, went to police headquarters to ask why his employee had been arrested. Pastore ordered Lyons to leave the building, and then began to drag him. Lyons declared he was a clergyman before Pastore had the chance to push him down the stairs. Lyons also filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Public Safety and Troy Human Rights Commission. After hearing about the minister’s experience, 150 people organized a march sponsored by the Troy NAACP on June 30. Those who participated signed a petition given to Albert Prezie, Troy Public Safety Commissioner, protesting police brutality against Evans and Lyons. Unfortunately for the public, the complaint was sent to an interdepartmental hearing. The people of Troy still contacted the Human Rights Commission to suspend Pastore and prevent future incidents.

After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s death, the Brothers hosted an all night vigil that resulted in one Brother beaten by locals, and another arrested by the police. At around 4:30am, Peter Jones was returning to Academy Park with coffee for

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<sup>114</sup> “Demonstrators Demand Firing In Troy Police Brutality Case” Vol. II, No. 9, July 11-24, 1968



participants when he was jumped by four white teens. They beat Jones with a lead pipe, asking where Leon Van Dyke was, and stated: "We're going to show Leon some white power"<sup>115</sup>. Hours later, police arrested William Gibson at 7am for leaving a note on a police car that read: "King died for non-violence. Did you leave us a choice?". Gibson was charged with resisting arrest with a bail of \$500, which was unusually high, likely because he opposed the machine's candidate for the 7<sup>th</sup> ward alderman in November's election. The article notes, "Participants in the vigil indicated that the police 'had been waiting around all night to arrest someone". Gibson's trial by jury was set for May 15 in Albany Police Court.

Gibson's high bail reflected the inequality in America's jail system. As Bernadette Rabuy and Daniel Kopf argue in "Detaining the Poor: How money bail perpetuates an endless cycle of poverty and jail time", the money bail system only benefits the well off, while the innocent poor cannot afford to pay their bail and are detained until their court date. Though the statistics focus on the 1980s to present day, the system was the same during the civil rights era. The study compares the income of different races; "Black men in jail have a pre-incarceration median income 64% lower than that of their non-incarcerated counterparts", which is not surprising, as black men are notoriously targeted by the police and excluded from higher-paying job opportunities. Because people in jail are usually held for being unable to pay bail, they are poorer than those in prison, and are drastically poorer than their non-incarcerated counterparts. The money bail is intentionally set up so

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<sup>115</sup> Vol. II No. 5, April 18-May 1, 1968 pp. 3

that it fails, targeting the poor and keeping them incarcerated, and perpetuates an endless cycle of poverty and jail time<sup>116</sup>.

### **National Cases of Police Brutality in *The Liberator***

Police were not prosecuted for violating the law through excessive force when arresting blacks, and would threaten, intimidate, or frame blacks to avoid being investigated. "Liberator News Notes" was a section of short stories that informed readers of local and national movements, and covered a story of a man who claimed to have been framed by the police. "Frameup in Buffalo" explained how Martin Sostre, a black activist and proprietor of the Afro-Asian Bookstore in Buffalo's black ghetto, was imprisoned on inflated charges. His bail was posted at \$50,000. During a riot in Buffalo, police destroyed Sostre's store by turning a high-power water hose on the bookracks. Because the bookstore sold the works of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and other black activists, the destruction of property represents an attack on the idea of the civil rights movement and black power. The article ends abruptly without explanation of what happened, but implies that the police placed Sostre under arrest to cover up their destruction of property<sup>117</sup>.

A follow-up article, "Black Leader Sentenced", appears in a later publication of *The Liberator*, stating that Sostre, a leader of the Black liberation movement in Buffalo, was sentenced to 31 to 41 years in prison on narcotics and assault charges. Sostre insisted that he was being framed, and that his sentencing was "a racist attempt to make him a scapegoat for black rebellion". It is possible that police

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<sup>116</sup> Rabuy B., Kopf D., "Detaining the Poor", May 10, 2016. [prisonpolicy.org](http://prisonpolicy.org).

<sup>117</sup> Vol. I No. 13, Sept 29-Oct 5, 1967 pp. 8

planted evidence against Sostre, as he was penalized harshly in every circumstance of his arrest. Before his sentence, he was imprisoned for eight months after the black rebellion in Buffalo in June 1967, and held on bail for \$50,000 at first, but then his bail dropped to \$12,500. His bail was extremely high given the circumstances. The penalties continued after Sostre asked for an “unbiased judge” in his pre-trial hearing on March 14- he was granted a 30-day contempt of court sentence instead. Sostre claimed it was an unfair trial, and the judge ordered him to be gagged and handcuffed<sup>118</sup>. This case shows not only police brutality, but also brutality in the justice system. Narcotics and assault charges do not normally receive a sentence so high, nor should the cost of his bail be inflated that much- \$50,000 in 1968 is equal to \$363,604.72 today. Furthermore, a person being tried asking for a fair trial should not be silenced nor receive physical harm.

Sostre’s case gained national attention because many believed he was innocent. Warren Schaich and Diane Hope use Sostre’s prison letters to explore his case. There was little evidence to convict Sostre, and the facts of the case show a flawed justice system:

The only witness for the state, Arto Williams, a known drug addict, testified that he bought the heroin from Sostre. But in May of 1973, Williams admitted perjuring his original testimony, claiming a deal was made with police for his own release. His second testimony was ruled “unworthy of belief” and dismissed. Judge J. Curtin stated ‘there was no reason not to believe the police officers’ (Guardian, 1974).<sup>119</sup>

The police and media portrayed Sostre in a negative, sinister image to convince the public he was guilty. His bookstore made him a target, as he wanted to inspire the

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<sup>118</sup> Vol. II. No. 5. April 18-May 1, 1968 pp. 12

<sup>119</sup> Schaich, Warren. Diane Hope. “The Prison Letters of Martin Sostre: Documents of Resistance” pp. 281-282

black community politically and culturally, stating in a letter that the “revolutionary seeds could be planted in the consciousness of the youth” through literature. The Governor of New York had Sostre released from prison in 1975 after further investigation in his case.<sup>120</sup>

*The New York Times* reported on Martin Sostre’s case several times, deeming him the “symbol of the prisoners’ rights movement” as he worked to improve prison conditions during his fight for a new trial. The article was published the day before his appeal in 1974, and suggests that Sostre is innocent. While in prison, he taught himself law, organized prison unions, published a newspaper, and won a court victory against censorship of Inmate reading material. He also was awarded \$13,000 damages for cruel and unusual punishment. Prison guards and wardens disliked Sostre, and committed heinous offenses against him. Sostre had support from the public, as they rooted for his freedom; “If after all that, Martin Sostre can prove that he was wrongfully charged, convicted, and imprisoned, the irony will be rich but the shame of the state will only be compounded”. Blacks across the U.S. hoped that his case would expose the corruption of the police force and the justice system<sup>121</sup>.

Another “Liberator News Notes” section covered a Civil Rights Trial in Meridan, Mississippi, with an all-white jury of twelve men chosen for a case of 18 men who are accused of conspiring to “violate the civil rights” of a black man and two northern whites by murdering them in 1964. Though 17 of the 50 jury panel

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<sup>120</sup> Schaich, Warren. Diane Hope. “The Prison Letters of Martin Sostre: Documents of Resistance” pp. 285

<sup>121</sup> Wicker, Tom. “Iron of Martin Sostre”, December 8, 1974 pp. 267

members were black, none were selected to serve in court. The article explains the court case:

The Jury will hear evidence presented by the federal government that Neshoba County Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, and the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Sam Bowers, conspired with the 16 other men to kill James Chaney, a black man from Meridian, and two white students, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, both from New York<sup>122</sup>.

The three men disappeared while inspecting a black church that had been bombed, a hate crime often perpetrated against blacks. After the men's bodies had been found on a farm near Philadelphia, Mississippi, the U.S. Attorney General's office pressed charges under a federal civil rights law. The case drew national attention, and was criticized for being heavily investigated due to the white victims. This court case demonstrates the difference between the northern and southern civil rights movements, as even whites were killed for contributing to civil rights movements in the south.

An article from *The National Guardian* covers the details and statistics from Detroit's most violent race riot between July 23 and July 28, 1967. "Detroit Riot- An American Tragedy" describes Detroit as similar to most northern cities, being that blacks made up 35 percent of Detroit's population, but blacks did not have a place in city council. Detroit police were notoriously racist and violent, and the level of police brutality is shown through the statistics; "According to police department statistics it resulted in 41 deaths, 2,000 injuries, 1,500 burned buildings, 5,000 arrests, \$500 million in property loss and total economic losses of one billion dollars." President Johnson called in the National Guard to control the riots, but law enforcement was

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<sup>122</sup> Vol. I. No. 14 October 13-19, 1967 pp. 8

unorganized and believed that there were “snipers” in buildings ready to take out both police and National Guardsmen. Police overestimated the organization and skill of rioters, as its extremely unlikely that ordinary citizens were positioned as snipers in their apartment buildings. However, most arrested for “sniping” were white with unclear targets. Overwhelmed, several police accidentally fired at one another, and killed innocent people. Tragically, “One four-year-old girl was killed when nervous troops mistook the flash of a cigarette lighter for gunfire and responded with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, including 50 caliber machine gun bullets”, showing that even highly trained national guardsmen were ready to pull the trigger before knowing what they were shooting at. The extent of killing was unnecessary, as shown by federal troops, many of whom were black, “quickly established both respect and rapport in their assigned east side territory. With one disputed exception the federal troops neither sustained injuries nor did they kill anyone”. Detroit police removed their badges, taped over their license plate numbers of their scout cars and shot, beat, and arrested blacks without fear of repercussions. All constitutional protections were suspended, furthering the allowance for police brutality. Although over 5,000 people were arrested for violating the 9pm curfew or looting, lack of evidence ultimately resulted in few convictions<sup>123</sup>. *Detroit*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow, illustrates these facts from the 1967 riots, focusing on an instance in the Algiers Motel where police murdered three innocent black men.

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<sup>123</sup> Vol. I August 18-24, 1967

Gordon Van Ness, a Brother, visited Detroit after the riots, talked to locals, and wrote a column exploring the reasons for black unrest.<sup>124</sup> Some issues mentioned were similar to those in Albany: very poor housing conditions, landlords overcharging on rent and returning very little improvements, not enough places for the children to play and stay out of trouble, and overcrowded schools. Detroit previously had a reputation for excellent poverty programs, including federal-funded urban renewal. However, Van Ness said some houses in Detroit are like shacks compared to Albany. The constant oppression, from police brutality to deplorable neighborhood conditions, caused an inevitable uproar.

Joel Stone published a collection of historical articles in *Detroit 1967* to describe the origins, impacts, and legacies of the summer riots. Thomas Sugrue opens with an analysis of what happened on July 23, 1967, and the history of Detroit's racial segregation and police brutality that sparked one of the largest riots in U.S. history. He notes, "The police were especially brutal, beating arrestees and in one case vandalizing and fire-bombing a black-owned shop. Three police officers, responding to rumors of sniping, raided the city's Algiers Motel and executed three young black men on the premises, none of them participants in the uprising".<sup>125</sup> As Gordon Van Ness previously described, many observers were shocked to see a mass uprising in the Motor City because of its reputation as a "model city" in mitigating racial antagonism. However, those who were surprised were unaware of Detroit's long history of racial inequality.

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<sup>124</sup> "Detroit Riot For Real Reasons", Vol. I August 18-24, 1967

<sup>125</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Detroit 1967*, pp. ix

Sugrue describes the depth of segregation and racism in Detroit through housing, employment, and education. Whites actively prevented integration by vandalizing and threatening black homes in white neighborhoods, and formed neighborhood organizations to maintain segregation. Similar to Albany, “The gap between black and white incomes in Detroit remained substantial throughout the 1960s. About 19 percent of Detroit’s African American population lived beneath the poverty line”.<sup>126</sup> Blacks were excluded from working in skilled trades and unions were nearly all white. Schools were also highly segregated. After years of police brutality and systematic oppression, the riots were an inevitable reaction from the black community. Sugrue explains the relevance Detroit’s riot has on current racial politics:

Fifty years after Detroit’s uprising, the events of 1967 are sadly relevant. The protests in Ferguson, Missouri, after the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown; the burning and looting in Baltimore in the spring of 2015 after the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody; the anti-police brutality marches in violent Chicago in 2016; and the uprisings in Milwaukee and Charlotte and August and September 2016 are all reminders of the fact that many of the underlying causes of the long, hot summers of the 1960s remain unaddressed (xii).<sup>127</sup>

Police brutality against blacks remains an issue, and the riots and protests demonstrate years of unrest.

Detroit was not the only region where police murdered activists, as the article “Oakland Police Attack Panthers, One Murdered”<sup>128</sup> describes an altercation between the Black Panthers and California police. While Black Panthers were prepared to fight racism with violence, Bobby Seale, Black Panther Chairman, urged

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<sup>126</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Detroit 1967*, pp. x

<sup>127</sup> Sugrue, Thomas. *Detroit 1967*, pp. xii

<sup>128</sup> Vol II. No. 5 April 18-May 1, 1968 pp. 6



a crowd of 500 people at a Peace and Freedom Party rally to organize and refrain from sporadic violence. The group intended to organize a “direct confrontation against the oppressive power”, but were not targeting all white people. On April 5<sup>th</sup>, Oakland police surrounded nine or ten Panthers while sitting in two parked cars. Shooting began, causing most of the vigilantes to run into a nearby house. Police used tear gas, which ignited a fire in the house. After Panthers agreed to surrender, police forced them to strip naked. Bobby Hutton, an original member of the Panthers, was the first to exit the house and immediately shot 20 times. While he was the only one murdered, two more Panthers were wounded, and eight were arrested. The Panthers were unafraid to fight police brutality with violence, which made them targets. Police were quick to shoot any potential threat and were hardly questioned afterward.

Manning Marable tells of black rebellion, white fear of Black Power, and instances of police brutality against revolutionary groups. He writes about the Black Panthers, as they encompassed everything whites feared about the Black Power movement. Though they believed in violence for self-defense, they hardly exercised it against police:

On 4 December 1969, Chicago leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton were murdered by police in a raid on the Black Panthers’ headquarters. A federal grand jury ruled in May 1970, that “the police fired eighty-three shots into the apartment while only one shot was fired toward police.”<sup>129</sup>

Given the comparison of shots fired, the grand jury implied that this attack was simply intended to assassinate black revolutionaries. This was common occurrence

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<sup>129</sup> Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, pp. 124

for Black Panthers, as police were backed by the government's desire to eliminate the group.

### **Conclusion**

The extent of police brutality typically varied by region; Albany police mainly used the justice system and corruption to jail blacks or occasionally rough them up, whereas city police in Detroit, Oakland, and Meridan shot blacks in cold blood. However, blacks in every region of the country experienced police brutality. The Brothers worked with locals and the Human Rights Commission to control the level of police brutality. They hosted marches, and filed several complaints with Albany police headquarters when officers abused their power through physical force, or unlawful arrest. Though these tactics were sometimes effective, the Machine controlled the justice system and arrested or jailed Brothers who were too outspoken. Police across the United States used riots as an opportunity to abuse their power and violently target blacks. White officers in Detroit killed upwards of 100 people during the riots, whereas federal troops, many were black, killed none. Police brutality is still an issue today, as white cops are hardly indicted for shooting unarmed black men. Police brutality against the Brothers and other black organizations during the Civil Rights Movement resembles the relationship between police and blacks today.

## In Summary

The North has a conflicted racial history, as it disapproved of slavery and Jim Crow, but kept blacks segregated institutionally and socially. Blacks have been marginalized and excluded from housing, employment, and educational opportunities throughout history, and demanded equality during the Civil Rights Movement. Fighting systematic racism in the North posed greater challenges for blacks, as northerners denied the existence of discrimination, and segregation was not legally enforced. Revolutionary groups strategized ways to overcome oppression, but were targeted by the police, government, and local politicians to prevent them from succeeding. The Brothers, a black male organization in Albany, NY, used peaceful, effective methods to combat discrimination between 1967-1971. They ran for local office, scheduled community meetings, delegated with city council on neighborhood issues, established job training programs, helped locals improve their housing conditions through legal action, and created an after school tutoring program, all of which was described in their newspaper, *The Albany Liberator*. However, The Brothers faced increasing police brutality and pressure from the Albany machine, the notoriously corrupt city government. The machine excluded blacks from city employment, trade unions, public housing, and urban renewal. Years of oppression caused racial tensions to rise in Albany during the late 1960s, but the Brothers maintained that blacks would overcome systematic racism through entering politics, educating themselves, and using available resources. Though not nationally recognized, the Brothers were a model organization for blacks in the Civil Rights Movement.

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