

“In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades’ curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper’s swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat’s progress along it as he slips into the same window; the firing range of a gunboat which has suddenly appeared beyond the cape and the bomb that destroys the guttering; the rips in the fish net and the three old men seated on the dock mending nets and telling each other for the hundredth time the story of the gunboat of the usurper, who some say was the queen’s illegitimate son, abandoned in his swaddling clothes there on the dock.

As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira’s past.”

- Italo Calvino

## Introduction

In the tense months before the outbreak of violence in July 1967, Amiri Baraka launched his own offensive on the streets of Newark, New Jersey. The nationalist poet stenciled a single sign and slogan across walls and buildings: a black fist and “Black Power.” His paint was a tool of protest, his graffiti a guerilla maneuver: a dramatic reclamation of public space for those consigned beyond it. At the time, the definition of the slogan mattered less than its symbolism. “We had not completely focused on the meaning of the term,” he remembered, “but we knew it was correct and ours!”<sup>1</sup>

Baraka was neither the first nor the last to announce the arrival of Black Power in Newark. Between 1967 and 1974, the call for “Black Power” briefly united African-Americans in a struggle for “community control” of the city’s institutions. Both before and after the disorders of July 1967, which left 24 African-American residents and two city officials dead, organizations ranging from the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the United Community Corporation (UCC) to Black Muslims and the Committee for a United Newark (CFUN), a cultural nationalist group led by Baraka, demanded the transformation of Newark’s power structure. Black Power advocates achieved their most important victory in 1970 with the election of Kenneth Gibson, Newark’s first African-American mayor. But the coalition that had coordinated his campaign disintegrated when faced with the challenge of translating Black Power into policy. After 1974, Baraka abandoned cultural nationalism and turned to “Third-World Socialism,” bringing the era of Black Power in Newark to a close.

Over forty years after Baraka splashed black fists across empty walls, those who lived through the period give meaning to “Black Power” through memory. Stories they tell about the

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<sup>1</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeROI Jones* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), p. 345.

era weave the events of July 1967 into the history of the years that followed, revealing the multiple ways in which Black Power is understood in Newark today.

Two distinct definitions of Black Power correspond to divergent narrative memories. The first narrative defines Black Power as self-determination, an attempt on the part of African-Americans to take control of their lives and communities. Narrators remember the era of Black Power as a brief moment in which a politicized Black community emerged, seizing power and claiming the city. Veterans of CFUN and allies of Baraka, these narrators envision 1967 as a revolution that exposed the violence of racial oppression but also illustrated the power of collective resistance.

The second narrative defines Black Power as strategy, the mobilization of resources within the Black community to demand access to political institutions. The Black and Puerto Rican Convention in the months before the election of Ken Gibson is a central event in this narrative, illustrating how a diverse group of African-American could “close ranks” through careful negotiation. In contrast, these narrators describe the disorders as a misdirection of legitimate grievances, devastating the Central Ward and scarring the community.

Two alternative memories, 1967 as trauma and Black Power as struggle, challenge the visions of politics, power and collectivity that shape stories of self-determination and strategy. For some, memories of trauma emphasize the fragmentation of families and communities as a result of the violence of July 1967. In their stories, no power is seized and everything is destroyed. Other memories of Black Power emphasize division and confrontation, disrupting images of unity and cooperation. These stories reveal the fault lines within the vision of racial community that defined Black Power. But unlike narrators of trauma, those who remember

disunity craft their own conceptions of community: dreams that build upon Black Power but also represent a distinct departure from the nationalist frame.

Recovered through oral history, memories are rich but troublesome texts. Human powers of recollection frequently fail, making oral accounts unreliable sources for facts and dates. Moreover, oral histories are never complete. The questions of the interviewer and the interests of the interviewee determine what is told and what is not told. The same narrator might offer distinct narratives depending on the context of the interview and the identity of their interviewer. Unlike written sources, oral histories derive their meaning not only from the language employed but also from fluctuations in tone, symbolic gestures and the rhythm of speech. Consequently, stories that had clear meaning in the context of a particular interview might be understood differently in another time and place. Finally, memory is a product of the present as much as the past, as interviewer and interviewee join together in the act of reflection.

Even if this reflection distorts the “facts” of history, it reveals the shape of their meanings. Acts of remembrance require that narrators articulate not only their understanding of history but also their personal and collective identities, providing a perspective frequently inaccessible to academic historians and revealing the significance of history in individual lives and local communities. In his essay “What Makes Oral History Different,” Alessandro Portelli considers the uses of oral history, suggesting that literary techniques can be used to unravel the meanings of these sources:

The unique and precious elements which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure is the speaker’s subjectivity. If the approach to research is broad and articulated enough, a cross section of the subjectivity of a group or class may emerge. Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the

workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs. [...] The organization of the narrative reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationships to their history.<sup>2</sup>

What follows represents an attempt to uncover “a cross section of the subjectivity” of Black Power activists. The interviews selected were derived from two sources: the collections of the New Jersey Historical Society and eleven interviews I conducted between January and March of 2009. I initially contacted African-Americans who had been active in Newark politics between 1967 and 1974 and had remained in the city afterwards, but I also interviewed movement veterans who now live elsewhere, current residents who were not involved in politics but have clear memories of 1967 and young activists who live with the legacy of the era of Black Power. I asked my interviewees to reflect on their personal experiences, and I tried to keep the conversation focused on their memories and reflections rather than broader political questions. Their stories suggest the differing explanations of “what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.” Narrators relate to the history of the late 1960s and 70s differently, offering distinct analyses of the events that unfolded in the period.

Taken together, these memories represent more than a story of the past. They also reveal a language that is continually recreated in the present. The political language that defines discourse in Newark today is rooted in shared memories and common assumptions that can be traced to the era of Black Power. Exploring the intricacies of this language and the visions that give it life are central to the task of understanding memory. Competing narratives of the era dictate subtle but crucial differences in definitions of community, leadership and power. The city

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<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 50.

of Newark is a constant point of reference that gives shape to these abstractions: its spaces, real and imagined, illustrate the visions inscribed within Black Power.

“Newark,” one young woman told me with passion and pride, “is a Black city.” What is a Black city? How should it be built, who should build it, and who should live there? The search for answers to these questions animates memories of Black Power, and makes the history of the late 1960s and early 1970s relevant in Newark today.

### **I: Newark in the Era of Black Power**

*Newark is no art colony ... It is a grey steel and stone factory worker's town, the grim highway's end for those lovely southern men and women who came this way and mistook an "Ark" for a "York." It was a reality less caked with the unnecessary gesture.*<sup>3</sup>

- Amiri Baraka

The era of Black Power represents the height of militant Black activism in Newark. Beginning with the disturbances of July 1967 and ending in the mid-1970s with Baraka's “turn to the left,” this period is marked by a brief moment of political cohesion within the African-American community, a moment that centers on the election of Mayor Ken Gibson in 1970. However, the events that unfolded between 1967 and 1974 reflect a longer history of systematic underdevelopment and organized Black protest. Understanding the stories that are told about the era of Black Power then requires some knowledge of the history of the African-American community in Newark.

#### **The Underdevelopment of Black Newark**

Although African-Americans have lived in Newark since the city's founding, their ranks swelled as a result of southern migration beginning in the World War I era. The growth of the

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<sup>3</sup> Baraka. p. 460.

Black population accelerated as more workers arrived in pursuit of World War II manufacturing jobs. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of African Americans living in Newark tripled. By 1970, when Black Power politics reached its zenith, African Americans comprised 54.2 percent of the city.<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s alone, over one quarter of the city's census tracts shifted from white majority to Black majority.<sup>5</sup>

The growth of the African-American population was not simply the result of Black migration. In the decades following World War II, white residents moved out of Newark, relocating to the emergent suburbs that ringed the city. As Kenneth Jackson has shown, the federal government played an instrumental role in facilitating the rise of suburbs, building the highways that allowed workers to commute and providing low-interest mortgages to white, middle class families. The New Deal institutions that oversaw the implementation of federal housing policy, first the Home Owners Loan Corporation and later the Federal Housing Administration, favored development in middle-class neighborhoods populated by white families. Portending the common real estate practice of red lining, the HOLC and FHA developed an appraisal system that evaluated and ranked neighborhoods depending on the “useful or productive life of housing.” This life was assumed to correspond to the moral worth and racial stock of its inhabitants. Consequently, neighborhoods where African-Americans resided were consistently ranked the lowest. The HOLC and FHA systems provided the model for private investment in housing, with disastrous results for cities like Newark. Lenders who responded to a Federal Home Loan Bank Board survey in the late 1930s wrote that they did not make loans to areas identified as “red and ... yellow,” “C and D” or “Newark.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Curvin, *The Persistent Minority: The Black Political Experience in Newark* (PhD Diss. Princeton University, 1975), p. 14.

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

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New

These policies had two consequences for the city. The first was the out-migration of thousands of white families. In the 1960s alone, 100,000 white residents left Newark for the suburbs.<sup>7</sup> The second was the decline of Newark's housing stock, as the HOLC and FHA refused to invest in mortgages for homes in inner city neighborhoods. The Newark Housing Authority (NHA), formed in 1939 following the enactment of the Public Housing Act, did construct public housing projects in predominantly Black neighborhoods. But these projects, characterized as slum clearance by their supporters, displaced more families than they housed, resulting in an ongoing housing shortage. Moreover, the construction of public housing in certain neighborhoods concentrated working class African-Americans in the center of the city. Black Power activists would later cite this distribution of the African-American community when arguing that urban Blacks constituted an "internal colony."

The jobs that originally attracted African-Americans to Newark evaporated even as the "white noose" of the suburbs tightened. Although a downtown building boom in the 1950s seemed to promise a new era of economic growth, the manufacturing industries that had made Newark a commercial center abandoned their investments. Between 1947 and 1963, 20 percent of all manufacturing jobs disappeared as industry relocated outside the city.<sup>8</sup> Deindustrialization accelerated as the 1960s continued. By 1977, Newark had lost half of its manufacturing and trading sectors jobs, as well as 14% of its service sector employment.<sup>9</sup> The economic consequences of "white industrial flight" included not only a high unemployment rate among the urban poor, but also a shrinking tax base that limited the resources available to city government.

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York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Bierbaum, *The City of Newark: Its Past, Present, and Agenda for the Future* (Newark: Rutgers University, 1983), p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. iv.

Newark's political leadership failed to respond effectively to the deepening economic crisis. More importantly, the Italian-American political machine that dominated city politics was not structured to address the demands of the African-American community, even as a Black majority emerged. Italian-American politicians' domination of city government during the 1950s and 60s was interrupted only briefly by the reform administration of the Irish-American Leo Carlin. Newark remains a non-partisan city, and consequently politicians rely on the patronage networks they build within city government to provide the organizational and financial support needed to win re-election. Seemingly endemic corruption resulted. Hugh Addonizio, who served as mayor from 1962 to 1970, did appoint Black leaders to symbolic positions in city government, but Italian-Americans continued to control the institutions, including the NHA, the school board and the police, that dealt directly with African-Americans. Consequently, the "white machine" denied the Black community access either to the decision-making process or to social services necessary to alleviate urban poverty.

### **Challenging the Underdevelopment of Black Newark**

As the 1960s unfolded, a new generation of militant activists challenged these conditions, demanding a more equitable distribution of political and economic resources. These activists cultivated new leadership and established independent institutions that sustained their challenge. These political organizations became increasingly militant in their demands for jobs, housing and inclusion as the Addonizio administration remained silent, culminating in a call for "Black Power" and the "disorders" of July 1967.

Beginning in the early 1960s, African Americans struggled to combat the poverty that resulted from the deepening urban crisis. Like their counterparts in the South, this new generation refused to compromise with white leadership. Organizations like the NAACP had

worked to desegregate public facilities in the 1940s and 50s, but these leaders frequently worked within the political system, slowing the pace of change. But in 1961, local activists founded a branch of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in Newark. Initially focused on building support for the southern Freedom Rides, the organization began to address local issues of discrimination and employment under the leadership of Robert Curvin, a young graduate of Rutgers University.<sup>10</sup> CORE members negotiated with major employers to gain jobs for African-Americans, coordinating their discussions with corporate leadership with direct action protest. In 1963, the organization forced the city government and Rutgers to hire Black construction workers for ongoing building projects. After these initial successes, CORE opened an office in the central ward and began to work directly with working class residents, frequently protesting police brutality.

CORE was not the only organization that demonstrated interest in urban poverty in the mid 1960s. In 1964, the Great Society came to Newark in the form of community action, an attempt to combat poverty and expand opportunity by building local institutions responsible for the dispersal of federal resources. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 required that these institutions seek “maximum feasible participation” of the community in the planning and implementation process. In Newark, the United Community Corporation (UCC) formed area boards that debated community issues. Conflict between residents, city officials and federal bureaucrats meant that “maximum feasible participation” was never fully achieved. But as Mark Krasovic argues, the United Community Corporation “opened a space in which the poor Newarkers gained a political and cultural self-awareness, where they constructed a potent sense of peoplehood vis-à-vis the city government, and where they forced a political vision in which

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights and Riots in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 80-81.

economic disadvantage did not equal political alienation.”<sup>11</sup> Many activists who later turned to Black Power first articulated their demand for economic citizenship while working as organizers for Great Society programs. In his dissertation, Curvin argues that in addition to “the development of new political leadership,” the anti-poverty program provided the Black community with access to political and economic resources that further shrunk “the machine’s control over jobs and favors.”<sup>12</sup> The formation of the UCC coincided with the arrival of white activists from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Led by Tom Hayden, the group intended to build a working class union to fight poverty and secure political power for the poor, naming their program the Newark Community Union Program (NCUP). But SDS members realized that housing, rather than employment, galvanized the most support. Working closely with Black women in Clinton Hill and the UCC, the young students protested high rents and poor maintenance of rental property.

But neither the UCC nor NCUP could fully grapple with the peculiarly racial character of poverty and powerlessness in Newark. A new current of Black nationalism within the national Civil Rights movement resonated with the city’s African-American community,<sup>13</sup> and a group of local leaders who advocated for Black self-determination emerged. Although a small group of

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Struggle for Newark: Plotting Urban Crisis in the Great Society* (PhD Diss. Yale University, 2008), p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> Curvin, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> The emergence of Black Power as a national movement is traditionally dated from the Meredith March in June of 1966. At a rally, SNCC chair Stokely Carmichael declared: “This is the twenty-seventh time that I’ve been arrested. I ain’t going to jail no more. The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin’ now is Black Power!” (Joseph *Waiting ‘Til The Midnight Hour* 142). Black Power was loosely defined at the time, encompassing a range of distinct organizations and individuals including the cultural nationalist US, the revolutionary nationalist Black Panther Party and even upwardly mobile professionals like Nathan Wright. In general, however, Black Power represented a turn away from the rhetoric of citizenship that defined the campaigns of the early 1960s, demanding instead substantive equality and political power. A recent generation of young scholars has sought to revise this traditional history of Black Power, locating its roots in the “civil rights” struggles of the early 1960s and arguing that Black Power activism extended into the 1980s. For a concise summary of this new scholarship, see Peniel Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, or Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South 1940-1980*.

Black Muslims, under the leadership of Colonel Ahmed Hassan, was active in the city in 1967, the most important of these nationalist leaders was the poet Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). A native of Newark, Baraka became a key figure in Beat literary circles in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s. He established the Black Arts Theater/School in Harlem after the death of Malcolm X, hoping to inspire the uptown masses to revolution with street art and music. But the project failed, and Baraka returned to Newark at the end of 1965. Baraka founded a theater and arts center called the Spirit House in Newark, publishing a newspaper and showcasing various cultural events. In his autobiography, he described his homecoming as a revelatory political experience. Newark represented the “grey steel and stone” reality of Black working class life, forcing Baraka to craft a more pragmatic nationalist politics. Instead of demanding separatism, Baraka called for Black control of African-American communities. This rhetoric later translated into a push for governance of urban institutions and electoral power, culminating in the election of mayor Ken Gibson in 1970. Influenced by Hassan and Baraka, even supporters of nonviolence like Curvin came to describe the conflict between the local power structure and the Black community in racial terms. The phrase “Black Power” began to circulate.

Three issues in the year preceding the uprising of July 1967 highlighted the systematic discrimination perpetuated by the city government, resulting in escalating conflict between the new Black organizations and white ethnic politicians. All three reflected the exclusion of African-Americans from the political decision-making process. When an Italian-American member of the school board resigned, Wilbur Parker, the first Black certified public accountant, announced his candidacy. But Mayor Addonizio instead supported James Callaghan, a loyal city council member who had not graduated from high school. Despite the fact that 70 percent of the school population was Black, no African-Americans held leadership positions on the board.

Parents and activists, including Robert Curvin of CORE, mobilized in support of Parker's candidacy, employing the nationalist rhetoric of community control. But Addonizio persuaded the sitting member to rescind his resignation, ignoring the coalition's demands.

Conflict over an NHA proposal to build a new medical school on 150 acres in the Central Ward further exacerbated tension. NHA and city officials argued that the campus would improve Newark's health care system and provide jobs for inner city residents. But construction would displace approximately 25,000 people without providing new housing, aggravating a critical housing shortage. In protest, a range of community leaders, from NCUP members to Black Muslims, employed a classic two-pronged strategy: direct action tactics along with multi-party negotiations. The NHA eventually agreed to modify the plan, setting aside land for a community housing corporation and establishing a relocation review board. But these concessions came too late to prevent the outbreak of violence.

The power of the political machine was most forcefully illustrated by the prevalence of police brutality. Confrontation between young black men and a largely white police force came to symbolize a broader struggle for community control. CORE devoted special attention to the issue, lobbying for the creation of a community relations board within the Newark Police Department and pressing for enforcement of antidiscrimination law in the hiring of Black applicants.<sup>14</sup> When both Addonizio and police chief Dominick Spina refused to negotiate, activists embraced more militant tactics. In June 1967, CORE led a rally to commemorate the deaths of three young Black men at the hands of Newark police. For Curvin and other leaders,

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<sup>14</sup> Mumford, p. 116

police brutality represented more than an excessive use of force: the police department was “waging a class war against Negroes.”<sup>15</sup>

On July 12, two white officers beat John Smith, a Black taxi driver, after his arrest for a minor traffic violation. The beating forced simmering tensions to the surface, and a crowd gathered at the 4<sup>th</sup> precinct where Smith was held. The crowd included members of CORE, the UCC and NCUP. Curvin himself addressed the crowd, warning them of the futility of violence but proclaiming that the “police had declared war on the Black community.”<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, members of the crowd set a nearby automobile on fire and threw two Molotov cocktails against the precinct’s brick wall. The Newark “disorders” had begun.

### **Claiming Black Newark**

The events of the week of July 12-17 can be divided into two stages: “riot” and repression. Between Wednesday night and Friday afternoon, residents of the Central Ward looted white-owned businesses and burned abandoned warehouses, stores and homes. Tom Hayden later claimed that looters singled out businesses known to fix prices and weight scales, moving through the streets and chanting “Black Power.”<sup>17</sup> Addonizio dismissed the first night of looting as an isolated incident, but the small police force proved incapable of controlling the disorder. On Friday morning, the governor described the situation as “an obvious open rebellion,”<sup>18</sup> deploying the National Guard to restore order in Newark. The deployment coincided with the increasing use of lethal force by Newark police. Indeed, the first deaths occurred in the early mornings hours before Governor Hughes toured the city. Baraka himself was beaten and arrested late Thursday night, charged with the possession of firearms. He was later acquitted.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 29- 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37.

By Friday afternoon, the looting had largely subsided and the National Guard had begun to arrive in the city. The troops, overwhelmingly white and suburban, were not trained to fight in urban areas, nor were they experienced in crowd control. But this defense does not fully explain the violence of the repression. Between Friday and Monday, the police and National Guard killed more than twenty African-American residents.<sup>19</sup> Law enforcement shot some at close range in areas where looting had recently occurred. *Life* magazine photographers famously witnessed the death of Billy Furr, who was shot by National Guard as he exited a destroyed liquor store on Saturday afternoon. But many of the deaths appeared to be accidental. Responding to shots from “snipers,” police and National Guard opened fire on the upper levels of public housing complexes, killing and wounding residents who approached open windows. Indeed, city officials justified the continued presence of National Guard in the city by pointing to the evidence of sniper activity. But law enforcement never identified nor charged a single sniper.

By July 17, five days after the beating of John Smith, 24 African Americans and two white officials were dead, 1100 were injured, 1400 had been arrested and the Central Ward lay in ruins.<sup>20</sup> The conflict between a politicized Black activist community and white city leadership had taken a tragic turn, while the violence of the disorders made any compromise between the two impossible. Politics in the city would be marked by racial polarization for years to come. By the end of 1967, interracial organizations like NCUP had left the city, and militancy within the Italian-American community increased dramatically.

But racial polarization was matched by a growing sense of political cohesion among African-American activists, producing a brief but powerful moment of cooperation amongst

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<sup>19</sup> Only one Black victim was killed by another resident. A police officer and a fireman were also murdered on Friday and Saturday, although their killers were never apprehended. Law enforcement blamed “snipers,” while Black leaders suggested that their deaths were the result of “friendly fire.”

<sup>20</sup> Mumford, p. 125.

disparate organizations. Less than a week after the riots ended, the second National Black Power Conference, organized by educator Nathan Wright, was held in downtown Newark. The conference brought national leaders like Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and Floyd McKissack to the city, linking the events of the week before with the call for Black Power. Baraka capitalized on the momentum in the next year, founding the United Brothers in December and the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN) the following summer. CFUN coordinated the first Black Political Convention and subsequent voter registration efforts in preparation for the 1968 elections. The convention's candidates were defeated, but plans for the 1970 mayoral campaign began in earnest as the majority of African-American leaders united behind Ken Gibson, a 38-year-old civil engineer who had first run for mayor in 1966. A second Black and Puerto Rican Convention, chaired by Robert Curvin, convened in late 1969. Although Addonizio faced corruption charges, the election that followed in the spring proved difficult. Gibson eventually won the run-off, and three convention candidates, Earl Harris, Sharpe James and Dennis Westbrook were elected to the city council. The election was rightly celebrated as a major victory for Black Power activists.

However, signs of division had already surfaced. Baraka and Gibson had distinct visions of how Newark should be governed, and they clashed over personnel choices and development policy. Gibson himself faced stiff opposition within the City Council and failed to accomplish many of his major goals. As the relationship between Baraka and Gibson disintegrated, conflict came to define city politics. Two long teacher's strikes in 1970 and 71 led to violence between community activists and union members. Despite the alliance between Puerto Rican and Black activists in 1970, the relationship between Puerto Ricans and city government remained fraught. In 1974, Puerto Rican residents rioted, protesting against police brutality and the indifference of

city officials. Baraka became increasingly disillusioned, turning to the model of socialism and renouncing cultural nationalism. By 1976, his organizations had collapsed.

What does this decade of promise and polarization, conflict and community, mean to the people who lived through it? How do they make sense of its successes and failures? Memory suggests answers to these questions, giving meaning to the events that unfolded in Newark in the era of Black Power.

## II: Remembering 1967

*The spirit and feeling of the moment a rebellion breaks out is almost indescribable. Everything seems to be in zooooom motion, crashing toward some explosive manifestation.*<sup>21</sup>

– Amiri Baraka

Memories of the era of Black Power begin with the events of 1967. The five days of “rebellion” shifted the city’s physical and political landscape dramatically, setting the stage for seven years of militant political activity. But while historians frequently explain July 1967 by contextualizing it, suggesting the violence was a result of mounting political tensions in the years before or defining those five days as the arrival of Black Power in Newark, the memory of the events themselves reveals how those who lived through the “riot” understand Black Power. There are striking parallels between the stories narrators tell; they remember the entry of the National Guard, the detainment or arrest of friends or family members, and the shock of first seeing Springfield Avenue in the aftermath. However, these similar stories are used to illustrate very different visions of Black Power. Some describe 1967 as a revolution, exposing the city’s racialized power structures and politicizing the African-American community. Others depict 1967 as a burden, an illegitimate use of violence that, although rooted in legitimate grievances,

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<sup>21</sup> Baraka, p. 367.

shattered the community. For those scarred by the violence, 1967 is a traumatic event that they survived but cannot forget.

A word about language: the words used to describe the events of July 1967 carry with them loaded political meanings. “Riot” suggests irrational destruction and popular rage, while “rebellion” marks 1967 as a legitimate protest against political, economic and social inequality. Black Power activists insist that the latter be used as a descriptor. However, I have chosen to use the words that the narrators themselves employ to describe the events of 1967. Some explain their choice, others shift from one word to another, and a few challenge the relevance of the debate all together. When asked if she preferred the term riot, rebellion or civil disobedience, Mary Brown replied, “I don’t think you can use just one word. Everybody’s feelings were different but all those words indicate what happened. All those words strung together related to the chaos and confusion and in America in general as far as the races were concerned.”<sup>22</sup> The same is true of memories. To understand the meaning of 1967 in the era of Black Power and beyond, it is necessary to piece together conflicting accounts, examining the stories that emerged out of the “chaos and confusion.”

### **1967 as Revolution**

For those who define Black Power as self-determination, 1967 is remembered as a shared experience of brutalization that led to the emergence of a united Black community. Images of racial confrontation pervade these memories, as Black residents face down the gun barrels of white police and soldiers. This conflict is remembered as more than a violent encounter of urban African-Americans and white suburbanites: the movements of the National Guard in these memories provide physical proof of a white power structure that dominated an internal colony in

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Brown. Interview by Max Herman, December 14, 2001. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society. Newark.

urban Newark. But the colonized resisted, asserting their right to move freely in urban space, symbolically seizing control of their communities and embracing a politicized racial identity.

Elements of this memory appear in many accounts of the period, but the narrative is most clearly articulated by Mary Brown, Larry Hamm and Komozi Woodard. Brown, a life long resident of Newark who was only 14 years old in 1967, lived with her family near Clinton Avenue in the Central Ward. Hamm and Woodard, both teenagers at the time, also lived in the Central Ward, but actively participated in Newark politics during the era of Black Power. Hamm led the Newark Federation of High School Student Councils in the early 1970s and later served on the school board. Woodard's political involvement stretched back to the period before 1967, when he worked for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the city. After SNCC folded, he joined CFUN, eventually overseeing the organization's urban planning initiatives. Both developed personal relationships with Amiri Baraka, and their accounts recall the rhythm and rhetoric of his autobiography. Their memories then suggest that 1967 is remembered as a revolution both within Black working class communities and Black Power circles.

Memories of the National Guard action are common in stories of July 1967, but these narrators depict the forces of "law and order" as instruments of racialized state power. Military language punctuates their accounts. Both Brown and Hamm recall the shock of watching tanks roll down the streets of the Central Ward while remaining confined within their homes. From the porch of his house on Ridgewood Avenue, Hamm observed the movements of Guard unit that had established a post at the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue. "It was like military occupation," he remembers. "We could not leave the house."<sup>23</sup> Soldiers went from door to door

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<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Hamm. Interview by Emma Hulse, February 7, 2009. Newark. Transcript in the possession of the author. p. 6..

searching for “contraband,” establishing checkpoints where the contents of cars were examined. Those who ventured out of the residential side streets of the Central Ward depict the National Guard as an army at war rather than forces of occupation. Woodard rode the bus downtown to his job, sorting through records at Prudential Life Insurance. He saw tanks and bazookas lining Broad Street, the central thoroughfare of the city. “It was like military day parade,” he recalls. When he arrived at work, the guard told him to go home: “You must be crazy! There’s a war going on. We’re not open today.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Amina Baraka, the wife of Amiri, remembers running from her home on Sterling Street to the Martland Medical Center when she learned that her husband had been beaten by police and was under arrest. “When we got there, there was barricades, there was shooting going on in the street. I mean it was war,” she adds forcefully.<sup>25</sup>

The movements of the National Guard in these narratives map the structures that subjugate African-Americans, suggesting the configurations of power and powerlessness in urban space. Although only a few miles from the heart of the Central Ward, both Newark’s largest corporations and City Hall are located on Broad Street. When Phillip Hutchings, a SNCC organizer who worked closely with NCUP and coordinated the 1967 Black Power Conference, remembers immediately connecting Newark’s skyline with its social hierarchy upon his arrival in the city. “Well, I remember the first night I came ... you could see the power structure was by just looking at the different insurance companies and power companies that owned the buildings in Downtown Newark,” he says.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Woodard’s description of the tanks along Broad Street suggests both a protective perimeter, separating the center of business and government from the people in the community just beyond, and an alignment of power between local and

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<sup>24</sup> Komozi Woodard. Interview by Emma Hulse, January 29, 2009. Bronxville, NY. Transcript in the possession of the author. p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Amina Baraka. Interview by Emma Hulse, March 6, 2009. Newark. Transcript in possession of the author. p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Phillip Hutchings. Interview by Max Herman. Transcript courtesy of Max Herman.

federal governments and powerful economic forces. Hamm tightens this perimeter, emphasizing the image of occupation by describing the location of posts and checkpoints. The intervention of the National Guard serves not just to protect the powerful, but also to contain and colonize African-Americans. When recounting the arrival of the first tanks, he is quick to note “they built some of these highways so that these military vehicles could more easily get access into the cities.”<sup>27</sup> Hamm’s connection between highways and checkpoints implies that the occupation of the Central Ward was not an aberration; the forces that determine the shape and scope of the space inhabited by African-Americans are literally built into the landscape.

Memories of conflict, images of resistance in the face of occupation, are central to revolutionary narratives. Brown’s encounter with a young guardsman marks the climax of her narrative. Her story begins with her first glimpse of the arrival of the National Guard (not quoted), moves to her recollection of the arrest of her uncle, concluding with the encounter itself. Thematically, this chain of events leads from her observation of the machinery of law enforcement to her recognition of what law enforcement entails, ending with her confrontation with violence:

I remember walking to the store to get bread. The first thing I remember is my uncle [...] My uncle worked at night and we got a phone call from the police station that he’d been picked up. But during that time, the night of the riot, they just picked him up and beat him up and put him in a cell. And my Mom and Dad went down to get him. And I know my uncle is very quiet and peaceful and passive, and this hurt me that they had to go get him and that he’d been beaten and to know he never bothers no one. How the rage could just get to a point, it wasn’t just African American rage, it was combative, and it was just black against white, even if you didn’t know why. To just drag him coming home for work [...] There was just a massive crowd when he was coming home from work, and at 14 it just never left my mind. I saw him beaten, the picture just never left my mind, and I knew there was no reason, because he just wasn’t that type of person.

The tank has always stuck in my mind. I’d never seen one before. When I went out to the grocery store, the stores were kind of torn down, but we didn’t have fires like on

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<sup>27</sup> Hamm, February 7, 2009. p. 6.

Springfield Ave, windows busted, and a lot of looting. The National Guard were children, they must have been 18, and they were scared, you could see it. I was 14 and went to the corner store to get a loaf of bread, and the guard turned his head as I came around and put his rifle right in my face, and I looked at him and looked at the gun and just pushed it aside and said I'm just going for a loaf of bread. He looked like he was so sorry like I don't know why I'm here and I don't know why... but I could see his face still.<sup>28</sup>

This vivid image of a young Black girl facing an armed white boy posing as a representative of power suggests that in popular memory 1967 serves to dramatize racial conflict. Brown repeats the phrase “black against white” multiple times in the interview, emphasizing that 1967 transformed the nature of community life in Newark, bringing race to the fore. Like the guardsman’s gun, afterwards “suddenly everything was black and white [...] the whole issue was right in your face.” She particularly remembers the profound anger that resulted from the violence deployed against African Americans. However, Brown’s gesture is not a nihilistic expression of rage. She emphasized that students did not feel hopeless in the aftermath of the rebellion. “No,” she insists, “we returned (to school) with a sense of Black Power.” By pushing the gun away, Brown then symbolically rejected the guardsman’s authority and asserted her power, responding rationally to irrational violence. The guardsman could not confront such resolve, retreating in fear and surprise. Brown’s last mention of the guardsman is almost sympathetic.

Woodard expands the drama of resistance, reversing the image of occupation and depicting the rebellion as the reclamation of the city. After leaving Prudential, he remembers “walking up Springfield Avenue and there are tens of thousands of people in the street. And Springfield Avenue has stores on this side and the public housing projects over there, so basically it’s a major transfer of things, across that street up into the houses.”<sup>29</sup> He emphasizes

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<sup>28</sup> Brown.

<sup>29</sup> Woodard, p. 22.

that the people took necessities, food, diapers and furniture, and that they worked cooperatively. “Now the police were there, directing traffic,” he continues. “Afraid to pull their guns out because there were so many people out there. And so the first time I saw the power of people, that if you had that many people, the police wouldn’t do anything. If they were literally surrounded.” This confrontation between downtown and the projects, police and people, white and black, recalls Brown’s memorable encounter. When faced with “dignified resistance,” a collective assertion of power, the police, like the young soldier, are forced to stand down. This brief repossession of the city foreshadows the reclamation represented by Black Power.

Brown, Woodard and Hamm all remember a new sense of unity within the African-American community in the aftermath of the disturbances. When Brown describes the events that unfolded afterwards, she uses “we” in place of “I.” The “we” is understood to refer to the African-American community. In a discussion of her father’s opposition to looting, she emphasizes that he “felt it would hurt *us* more within *our* own community, and *we* were hurting but ourselves, even though we were trying to make a point.”<sup>30</sup> Brown certainly did not participate in the riots, and she makes it clear that no one in her family did either. But yet she is careful to defend the purpose behind the actions of those who did, just as she insisted that “*we* returned with a sense of Black Power.” 1967 may have led to anger and conflict, but in Brown’s memory it is also associated with a positive sense of individual and collective identity, a community capable of righteous courage in the midst of conflict.

Woodard and Hamm emphasize that 1967 represented not just the emergence of a new collective but also the politicization of that collective, linking the rebellion to the events that followed. Woodard suggests that the growth of racial consciousness began in the midst of the

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<sup>30</sup> Brown.

uprising, when he began to question the existing power structure. He juxtaposes his new understanding of the possibility of resistance with his disillusionment with authority, opening his narrative with a reference to Addonizio's public statement that there was no violence in Newark, and closing by telling his mother that the mayor lied. Both Woodard and Hamm remember 1967 as a pivotal episode in their political evolution. Woodard compares the scene on Springfield Avenue to the French Revolution. "This is a scene that changed my life," he says.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Hamm names 1967 as a "paradigm shifting development" in his life.<sup>32</sup> "It was like I had been on 33 and somebody moved my thinking on to 78 ... It was accelerated," he says, employing the metaphor of a record player. Moreover, he connects both the evolution in his thinking and events in Newark with the cultural and political upheaval of the late 1960s, identifying racial oppression as its ultimate source. This suggestion of a dialectic between the individual, the local and the national, catalyzed by the collective experience of rebellion, recalls the structure of Baraka's autobiography, which weaves reflections on art, society and self together to track his transformation from Beatnik to Black radical. Like Baraka, Woodard and Hamm then link 1967 directly with their own involvement in Black Power, envisioning the rebellion as a "revolution" that raised the curtain on a new era of politics.

But while 1967 is understood as a necessary means toward the end of Black Power in these memories, there are also moments of tension that complicate the narrative of revolution. In a later interview, Hamm abruptly returned to 1967 in the midst of a discussion of conflict on the school board, reflecting on the legacy of the uprising for the city. "The rebellion had been so catastrophic," he says.<sup>33</sup> He recalled walking down Springfield Avenue shortly after the

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<sup>31</sup> Woodard, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Hamm, February 7, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Hamm, February 14, 2009, p.13.

departure of the National Guard. “I was in a state of shock,” he remembers, “every store- the windows was broke, it was tore up, glass was all over.” The smell of burning buildings still hovered over the neighborhood. “Know how some people see something as good and some people see it as bad?,” Hamm explained. “Well the radicals all see how great the rebellion was: “it wasn’t terrible, it was fine. Well it was terrible. It was terrible, and it was fine.” Even in triumphal accounts of 1967, the consequences of destruction and repression cannot be forgotten.

Woodard also acknowledges terrible memories. The National Guard detained his father, who returned bruised and beaten. Like the guardsman who confronted Brown, “they put the gun barrel in his eyes.”<sup>34</sup> But this account does not end in triumph; Woodard blames the Guard for his father’s progressive blindness after 1967. “And so I was very angry about that, obviously, and I thought that white people had blinded my father.” The sense of anger Woodard describes resembles the hopelessness Brown so explicitly rejected He continued: “But all this talk about revolution and stuff like that, I looked at what happened and I wanted to get as far away from Newark as I could get.” Woodard’s story of brutality then stands in stark contrast to Brown’s. Despite the image of collective power that dominates his memory of 1967, Woodard left to attend college in rural Pennsylvania, anxious to forget the events of the summer.

Brown suggests 1967 was a pyrrhic victory; even as African-Americans reclaimed public space, many of the places where they lived and worked were destroyed. Recovery proved elusive, and Brown recalls deep frustration as her neighborhood continued to disintegrate in the aftermath. While acknowledging the political successes of Black Power, she insists that African Americans lacked the resources to reverse decay. “You got African-American books, and black police, but you didn’t get the corner store rebuilt or the Food Town or the drugstore or movie

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<sup>34</sup> Woodard, p. 23.

never opened back up,” she says.<sup>35</sup> The memory of 1967, Brown suggests, still haunts the city today. “Your community was steadily going through this back and forth... the wound never closed. And it’s still open, you still see signs, if you’re my age, you know where it’s coming from.”

### **1967 as Burden**

The haunting recollections that emerge within narratives of revolution suggest another memory of 1967. This memory lacks the clear political narrative that defines Woodard, Hamm and Brown’s stories. Instead, narrators share vivid images and short anecdotes that reveal a set of assumptions about the meaning of the riot. Unlike narratives of 1967 as revolution, which focus on the violence deployed against the African-American community, memories of 1967 as burden center on a different kind of violence: the devastation wrought by those who participated in the riot. This is not to say that these narrators equate the damage done to property with the loss of life as a result of police action. Rather, these memories reject the riot as a legitimate form of political protest, citing the consequences for the community itself.

For Robert Curvin, the burden of 1967 is the failure of politics. Curvin was the chair of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in Newark. Over the course of the decade he led initiatives against employment discrimination and police brutality, frequently opposing the policies of the Addonizio administration. Like “revolutionary” narrators, he depicts the riots as the outcome of systematic poverty, dislocation and oppression, explaining that rapid demographic change and deepening economic crisis generated legitimate grievances that city officials did not address.<sup>36</sup> The first failure of 1967 is then the failure of government, the inability

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<sup>35</sup> Brown.

<sup>36</sup> Curvin. p. 16.

of political institutions to solve the problems facing the Black community. It created the “fuel for combustion” that set the Central Ward alight.<sup>37</sup>

In narratives of 1967, Curvin himself is a central character present at the moment of combustion, but he emphasizes that he did not light the match. On the night of July 12, he was called to the fourth precinct to calm the crowd that had gathered to demand the release of John Smith. He climbed on top of a police car in front of the building to speak to the assembly. Curvin’s memories of that night are reflections on violence as a political tactic rather than narrative recollections of the events that occurred:

A lot of times I’ve tried to think about why did it have to be me to get on top of an automobile to try to stop this, at the risk of my own life, as well. And partly it had to do with the reality that in CORE we had committed ourselves to do everything we possibly could to avoid having a disturbance. In fact, when—and during that summer, in that period, we often would have almost spontaneous street rallies. We would decide we were going to meet on a particular corner in the black community, as a way of educating people about the problems and mobilizing people ... We had a very interesting strategy mapped out where we would never leave a demonstration or close down a demonstration without leaving a few people behind to manage the leftovers of the crowd, to make sure that there was still communication with people and in case any kind of disturbance occurred that we would be there to try to maintain it, to control it. ...

But I really did believe that, if given a fair shot, that I could probably get people to organize themselves. In retrospect, it was an impossible job but I would say maybe a third of the crowd actually lined up and was ready to march before the rocks started flying. And then the second time we went out, we actually went back into the precinct. ... But in the precinct, when we convened with all of the people from the community who had then arrived after I had, the police tried to urge us to go out and tell the people to go home, which was absolutely as futile as my effort to tell them to go downtown. Or more futile actually. They would have said, “Are you kidding?” But all of the others, the folks that were there from the community, said, “We have to do something. You just can’t tell people to go home.” But I was the one they turned to and say, “Well, who’s going to do it?”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

Curvin's account suggests that the rejection of nonviolent protest represents the second failure of 1967. However, this failure is remembered as contingent on the first. The indifference of the Addonizio administration had compounded anger within the Black community at the same moment that a succession of riots in major urban areas brought a national debate on race and poverty to the fore. In such a climate, the riot appeared as a viable form of protest. Indeed, Curvin remembers the violence as inevitable. He even notes that the Molotov cocktails that were thrown at the precinct walls could not have been made at the protest, indicating some kind of coordination.

But this assessment contrasts with Curvin's recollection of the assumptions behind his actions. Even in the moment before the riot was unleashed, he thought it might be possible to harness the anger of the crowd, organizing outrage into an ordered demonstration. Curvin describes this insistence on nonviolence as tactical rather than philosophical. For example, he remembers warning that violence would only lead to defeat: "we're angry (but) we're outnumbered here ... we can't win. You know we only could end up getting hurt." The inevitability of violence, suggests Curvin, did not make it viable. In fact, his depiction of the crowd as a force that needed to be managed and controlled sharply distinguishes between the discipline of protest and the disorder of riot, even as Curvin repeatedly reaffirms the validity of the grievances behind the violence. This account contrasts with Woodard's memory of looting as an orderly redistribution of resources, a legitimate seizure of power by a united community.

Residents who lack Curvin's knowledge of politics and activist experience are even more skeptical of the efficacy of violence. The events they describe parallel narratives of revolution, but lack their political resonances, particularly their use of military language. Instead, these stories share a common emotional thread of shock and surprise, tinged with fear. Like Mary

Brown and Larry Hamm, Newark residents George Thomas and Bernice Hall were in their teens in 1967. They recount the arrival of the National Guard with a mixture of alarm and fascination. All four remember the first time they saw tanks in the streets. “I knew something was really happening in the city,” says Thomas, “when I looked out the window one day and I saw a convoy of Newark police cars, army tanks, National Guard tanks, State Police cruisers, coming down South 17<sup>th</sup> St.”<sup>39</sup> Bernice Hall’s memory is remarkably similar, although her tone is much more fearful. “I’ll never forget peeking out the window one day after they brought the National Guard in and that was what was really frightening. I saw a tank in the middle of the street,” she says with disbelief, revealing that the shock remains real more than forty years later.<sup>40</sup>

These images do not serve to illustrate racialized conflict or the power of the state aligned against the Black community. Nor are they a prelude to accounts of individual or collective politicization. Another story told by Thomas reinforces the distinction between narratives of revolution and depictions of the riot as burden when it comes to memories of the National Guard. He describes returning to his neighborhood by bus during the riots. “I remember coming from downtown, shopping with my mother, and we stopped on Springfield Avenue, at 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue and South 10<sup>th</sup> St,” he says. “I remember a jeep, a National Guard jeep sitting right there at that junction with a machine gun mounted on the back of the jeep, and the gun was pointed down Springfield Avenue.” This memory recalls Mary Brown’s encounter with the National Guardsman: the pedestrian shopping trip, the soldiers at the intersection, the gun on the jeep facing the boy as he descends from the bus to the sidewalk. There is even an echo of Hamm’s characterization of the National Guard as an occupying force; Thomas’ mother tells him that the soldiers sought to contain the violence to the Central Ward, preventing it from spreading to the

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<sup>39</sup> George Thomas. Interview by Max Herman, April 8, 2005. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark.

<sup>40</sup> Bernice Hall. Interview by Emma Hulse, February 21, 2009. Newark.

suburbs. But Thomas recounts the story as a curiosity rather than a confrontation. The fact that these vivid memories are not used to illustrate broader political visions suggests how narratives of revolution recast collective experience as stories of oppression and resistance.

However, these memories do indicate a shared belief that confronting the Guard either verbally or violently was both dangerous and futile. One narrator explicitly discusses the possibility of resistance when relating his memories of the checkpoints maintained by the Guard. Clement Moorman, a musician who lived in Newark with his wife and family in the late 1960s, acknowledges the power imbalance between the soldiers and residents in passing, but suggests that he had no choice but to comply. “I had to show my license and maybe a credit card (to get in),” he recalls.<sup>41</sup> “They were very courteous but you just had to be careful what you said. Just do what they tell you, exactly what they tell you. And they’re standing there. If you see a man standing with a rifle and he’s official, what are you going to do?” Moorman’s memory of passing through the checkpoint echoes his earlier answers to questions about the relationship between the police and community. “You can’t win with the police,” he says. “How are you going to win? You could be as right as you want to be, but if he says you’re wrong, he’s the police.” Asked if rioting is ever justified, Moorman responds “you don’t get anywhere you make it worse ... It gets worse for the rioters once the police are after them.” Resistance, Moorman suggests, is untenable; respect and compliance is necessary to one’s safety and survival.

Indeed, many conclude that the riots simply made things worse. If memories of occupation and resistance are central to narratives of revolution, memories of destruction and decay figure prominently in memories of 1967 as burden. Descriptions of the damage done to Springfield Avenue, where the rioting began, represent a reflection on its devastating

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<sup>41</sup> Clement Moorman. Interview by Kimberley Siegel, June 4, 2005. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society. Newark.

consequences for the African-American community. Narrators who relate these stories frequently begin by recounting their memories of the community before the riot. Edith Churchman was a student at Arts High in 1967. Her family had recently relocated to the suburb of Montclair, but Churchman was raised on Bergen Street in the Central Ward, where her family owned a funeral home. She still runs the family business today. Images of shopping with her grandmother comprise Churchman's earliest memories of Newark: "I used to go to the Neighborhood House and then go on Prince Street with my grandmother. And at that time Prince Street was a street that was just full of merchants. So there was a meat store, then there was a vegetable store, and then there were corner stores ... I remember going to a corner store ... that actually had sawdust on the floor, a barrel of pickles by the door."<sup>42</sup> More than one narrator describes Springfield Avenue as "loaded up with stores."<sup>43</sup> "On Bergen Street," Churchman says, "you could just walk two blocks out to Springfield Avenue ... you could get anything ... that you could get in Downtown Newark."<sup>44</sup> These vibrant memories contrast with almost horrific descriptions of the Central Ward after July 1967. Churchman's family drove down Springfield Avenue on their way to and from church:

I remember going up and down Springfield Avenue ... and just seeing the storefronts with glass missing. ... The supermarket that I maybe went to with my grandmother was no longer there. And so many of the structures that were affected during the riots, that were burned, that were looted, that windows were knocked out just remained that way for years. They were just empty shells. And they weren't quickly repaired, they were just like scars on the city, sores that just (pause) ... And you probably could still go up and down Springfield Avenue and still see a little evidence. Places that were just never rebuilt and people that I think just felt differently about other people.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Edith Churchman. Interview by Emma Hulse, February 6, 2009. Newark.

<sup>43</sup> Moorman.

<sup>44</sup> Churchman.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Churchman is only one of many narrators who dwell on the image of Springfield Avenue. Bernice Hall remembers returning to the thoroughfare after the riots ended. “It was like a war zone. It was horrific,” she says soberly. Like Mary Brown, these narrators emphasize that the Central Ward was never rebuilt. Practically, the failure to rebuild made life more difficult for residents who lacked even the basic amenities available before 1967. “It was more than 25 years,” notes Churchman, “before Newark had a supermarket again.” The failure to rebuild also meant that the memory of 1967 remained a part of daily life, as Newarkers confronted the specter of the past each time they drove down Springfield Avenue. In memory, then, the damaged storefronts are transformed into “scars” or sores,” as the street itself becomes a symbol of the consequences of violence, a *lieu de memoire* that runs through the Central Ward.

These narrators identify other scars of 1967, scars invisible to the eye. Narrators link the damage done to the built community with the disintegration of the human community in the aftermath of the riots. Churchman identifies two sources of this breakdown. The first is the memory of fear and horror that haunts African-American residents who lived in the city during the National Guard action, a memory occasionally revealed in her conversations with friends or customers. But she also notes that the violence resulted in deep rifts within the community. Like narrators of revolution, Churchman remembers the emergence of a new sense of racial collectivity in the aftermath of the riot. However, she says that racial polarization rather than collective empowerment was the result. “I think the riots caused people to think about race in a different way,” she reflects. “I think it really created a “we” versus “they” mentality.”<sup>46</sup> She particularly emphasizes the plight of storeowners, noting that many of them were Jewish immigrants. Having lost their livelihoods, they subsequently left the city. Community activists

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<sup>46</sup> Churchman.

accused storeowners of exploiting their customers, charging higher rates for basic goods. Churchman dismisses these claims, countering that race obscured common experiences of poverty and oppression that should have provided a foundation for community. Hall echoes Churchman's account. "I mean the sense of community that we had (was lost)," she says. "How did the storeowners feel that serviced the community, to come back and see that it was the people who lived here, who you did business with that came and robbed you? ... It really changed the whole area," she concludes.<sup>47</sup> Hall is unusual in that she describes looting as a criminal, rather than a political, act, not acknowledging the grievances behind them. However, these narrators share a sense that until 1967, the racial lines within Newark were not so sharply drawn.

Churchman and Hall conclude that ultimately, 1967 is an event that should be forgotten, not celebrated. "It wasn't something that you were proud of," Hall says.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Curvin agrees. He discusses the importance of 1967 to the political events that followed, noting that the consensus within the Black community led to the election of Ken Gibson in 1970. But he does not support efforts to commemorate the riots. "I have trouble feeling that that's something that is important to preserve in our history," he reflects.<sup>49</sup> "Maybe some people believe that this was a great moment for Black progress but I don't find that to be the case. ... It is a reality of social change, violence is sometimes unavoidable and so on, but it's not what I would want to define a city by." 1967, he concludes, should not be remembered as a foundational moment, either for the history of the city or for the history of Black Power. "I think Newark has a richer and more compelling history than to define it by a riot. And that's the burden of Newark. That it's something white people have defined the city by, either violence or corruption."

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<sup>47</sup> Hall.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Curvin, p. 24.

## 1967 as Trauma

Some memories of 1967 have nothing to do with politics. The violence that united some African-Americans fractured the lives of others. Edith Churchman recalls a conversation with an elderly woman who lived in the projects during the riots who remembered hiding under her bed for days in fear. “There’s still a generation of people who can still tell these stories,” Churchman added.<sup>50</sup> The families of the 24 residents who died are surely among them. Their accounts of 1967 are neither narratives of resistance nor meditations on the utility of force. Instead, they are stories of upheaval, grief and trauma that complicate the task of writing a collective history of 1967.

Moise Abraham was 16 in 1967.<sup>51</sup> In 1961, His family moved up the hill from the Hayes Homes on Court Street, relocating into a small home on Blum Street. “My world was sandlot baseball, playing tops,” he remembers. Moise describes the years before 1967 as a lost golden age, marked by the delivery of coal and milk and the weekly ritual of Sunday night TV. He has no memories of racial tension before that July. When asked to describe his relationship with a local white storeowner, Moise recalled buying candy on credit without asking his parent’s permission, insisting that his father would “pay on Friday.” His father did not see the joke.

Moise’ mother, Rosa Lee Abraham, appears as his provider and protector. “Me and my mother,” he reflects, “were like two peas in a pod.” A migrant from South Carolina, Rosa Lee worked as a domestic, cleaning homes in the wealthy suburbs of Springfield, Short Hills and Millburn. Moise remembers her arriving home from work: “I would see her coming down the street. She would get off the bus on Springfield Avenue and I remember she would bring home

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<sup>50</sup> Churchman.

<sup>51</sup> Moise Abraham. Interview by Max Herman, December 10, 2004. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society. Newark.

these little checks ... And they would give me polo shifts that I could wear.” His mother’s regular return reflects the sense of stability and security that defined his childhood. Towards the close of the interview, Moise came back to this image when describing the challenges he faced as an adult, imagining how his life might have been different if his mother had lived: “No longer was she coming down the street after work with those quarters in my pocket, handing them to me.”

For Moise, July 1967 represented a violent coming of age, demolishing his world of sandlot baseball and secret quarters. He remembers seeing disturbances on the news, but thought of them as a “different part of the world that had absolutely nothing to do with us.” Consequently, the outbreak of violence was sudden and shattering. Official records place his mother’s shooting late on July 14, the third night of the disorders. Late in the evening, Moise left the house on Blum Street to look around, disobeying his mother’s request that he remain inside. She came to find him, and was hit by a ricochet bullet fired from a police weapon. In contrast with the impressionistic quality of his early memories, Moise’s account of the events that followed is painfully precise, yet ultimately unspeakable. He relives the experience as he tells the story, even employing the present tense at a critical moment of recognition (see italics). The result is a narrative of shock, horror and grief that is best read in its entirety:

MH: So the day that things erupted, your mom said “something’s going on out there, I don’t want you to go outside.” What did she say was happening? How did she describe it?

MA: I don’t remember all the words. I just remember the last ones. “Don’t go out cause something might happen to you, I don’t want anything to happen to you.” I remember those words. I don’t remember the words before that. Just the last words. [...]

MH: So you’re out at night, watching all of these people coming out of the stores with clothing and boxes... so when did you start making your way home?

MA: She came out looking for me. And she found me. I was down on the corner. Blum and Springfield. She found me. “Come on let’s go!”

MH: Was she upset that you disobeyed her?

MA: I don't recall. I remember her saying "Come on, let's go back home. Come on, let's get in the house," but I don't recall the tone. I remember going back, walking down the street. I remember her crossing the street, cause she had a friend who lived around the corner, I think her name was Ms. Laura. And she went to talk to her. And I proceeded on up the street, and as I got almost to the house I heard the shooting.

I looked around and saw her crossing the street, coming back towards the house. She got on the sidewalk, and when she got closer to the...she started to melt. And she just looked like she was trying to make it. I went and I grabbed her and got to the porch, and *she collapses on the porch*. [...]

I had a sense that was so positive about the whole thing, cause I didn't see any blood. I thought it would be all right, you know. If I could have bet my life on her surviving, I would have. That's how positive I was.

I remember taking her. There was a guy Mr. Bennett down the street. I guess somebody had found somebody with a car. Picked her up off the porch in to the car. And I was in the back seat, and I just remember running lights, just go. And I remember her her in the back of the car, "I feel like I'm dying." And I remember her eyes going half way in the back of her head. And I got that sinking feeling, but I still remained positive that she was gonna make it. We got to the hospital. I believe it was 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Bergen Street. I remember we came down Bergen...down across Camden Street right into the Hospital bay, 13<sup>th</sup> Ave and Camden Street, by the emergency part on the side of the hospital. When they put her on the gurney, the doctor asked me what was her name. I couldn't get it out. She told them her name. [...]

That situation there...That's when, uh, it gets hard. My words, I can't find them. I can not find the words. All I have now are feelings, no words. When I think of it...it's uh..depressing you know..a feeling of help..helplessness (stutters). I wish I could turn back the hands of time and bring her back. I still have dreams. I still have dreams of her, you know. The thing that plays over and over again, is her crossing the street and me running to grab her when she was beginning to struggle to walk. That's the moment that stays in my head. That very moment. I'm just lost for words.

MH: Who told you that she had passed away?

MA: There was a telephone booth, a couple of houses down, cause our telephone wasn't working. My sister took the call. I remember her going to the phone booth and I remember the cry. And that was it. There was no words. She began to cry, inside of the phone booth. When she opened the door and came out, I knew.

The phantasmagoric images of his mother falling slowly, the streets flashing by and his sister crying give Moise's story a cinematic quality, a sense that the listener is witnessing the events as they unfold. Moise includes unexpected details: the name of neighbor his mother stops to greet, the identity of the man who owned the car, the location of the emergency room. But yet he is

“lost for words:” Moise still stutters when he tries to describe his grief. Just as he cannot “turn back the hands of time and bring her back,” so he can never give voice to the experience of trauma, still vivid and sharp in his mind.

Moise’s life has been scarred by his struggle with the unspeakable. His mother’s death exacerbated tensions within the family, and his relationship with his father deteriorated. Moise left Newark to serve in the army, eventually securing a position as a counselor at a veteran’s hospital. He returned to the city only after he purchased an apartment in the new Society Hill townhouses, almost thirty-years after 1967. But Moise has also battled alcoholism and depression. While one of his sisters became a devout Jehovah’s Witness, the rest developed addictions to drugs or alcohol. Two are dead, and another is in a nursing home as a result of complications from AIDS. The central image of his mother stumbling across the street then acquires special significance. In contrast with Moise’s memories of Rosa Lee returning from work as the family’s protector and provider, his vision of her final journey down Blum Street foreshadows the disintegration of her children’s lives after her death.

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Ultimately, Moise remembers 1967 not as a political event, but rather as a moment of irrevocable personal loss. Moise does not identify the date, but his account strongly suggests that Rosa Lee was wounded on the first night, July 12. This temporal shift transforms the death of his mother into a symbol of the destruction of July 1967. Moise does not mention other victims or describe the sequence of events that comprise the “riots.” He does not envision himself as a member of a community that faced the violence together and ultimately emerged triumphant. In fact, Moise distances himself from the looting he witnesses just prior to the shooting, observing the participants from the corner of Blum and Springfield. He admits to feeling excitement,

identifying a sense of “power or control” in the crowd. But he describes this illusion as “naïve.” Images of isolation are more frequent in his narrative: his most powerful memory of 1967 is not the crowds or the tanks, but the image of standing alone on the sidewalk, grasping his dying mother.

Trauma continues to define Moise’s relationship with Newark. His mother died in the Newark City Hospital, located on Bergen Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In 1979, the construction of the medical school that had contributed to the growth of discontent in 1967 was completed, and the hospital moved to the new structure, facing the intersection of Bergen Street and 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Moise now lives a block away from the medical school, in a townhouse not far from the entrance to the new emergency room. He remembers this facility as the location of his mother’s death, marking new buildings with old memories. The sound of sirens, ambulances entering and leaving the hospital, tortures Moise. “Yesterday, I’m sitting down, talking at my kitchen table,” he said, “and the sirens start ... If I could describe the feeling of .... Internal crying, a great deal of stress. I don’t want to go through this. Here come the sirens again. Here comes that monster. Leave me alone. Go away. That’s the feeling.” For Moise, the events of 1967 have not faded into the past. The horror is re-enacted each day at his kitchen table, in the hospital outside his door, in the streets of his city.

### **III : Remembering Black Power**

*What the Black Man must do now is look down at the ground upon which he stands, and claim it as his own. It is not abstract. Look down! Pick up the earth, or jab your fingernails into the concrete. It is real and it is yours, if you want it.*<sup>52</sup>

- Amiri Baraka

The stories narrators tell about 1967 are consistent with their memories of the years that followed. In fact, narratives of the era of Black Power connect political activism directly with

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<sup>52</sup> LeRoi Jones, Home. (New York: Morrow, 1966), pp. 238-250. Cited in Curvin. p. 196.

the events of July 1967. A vision of Black Power as self-determination depicts Black nationalism in Newark as an expansion of the process of collective politicization that began in 1967, reclaiming the city in the aftermath of occupation. In contrast, a narrative of Black Power as strategy defines post-1967 activism as a disciplined demonstration of organization and mobilization, an effort to secure access to political institutions and the resources necessary to rebuild the community. Both narratives center on memories of political unity and community control of urban spaces and powerful institutions.

The third memory of the period challenges this assumption of unity, depicting the period beginning in 1967 and ending in 1974 as one of intense, occasionally internecine, conflict among activists. This narrative of struggle raises some important questions about the vision of community defined by nationalists and strategists, suggesting that coming to terms with the Black Power in Newark requires an alternative definition of community.

### **Black Power as Self-Determination**

Memories of the seizure of power and the reclamation of space in Newark define narratives of self-determination, depicting Black Power as a long rebellion that expanded the struggle of 1967. Narrators link stories of self, city and nation, recounting the formation of a unified political community that claimed the right to shape the future of Newark. The vision of self-determination articulated by Amiri Baraka marks these memories. “It was very difficult,” Larry Hamm says, “not to be sympathetic to Baraka because he was trying to represent the aspirations of Black people. The real aspirations, not the interpreted aspirations. Because there are people who interpret our aspirations and then there are our self-determined aspirations, the

hopes we really have.”<sup>53</sup> These narrators never question that the cultural nationalist thrust represented the self-determined aspirations of the Black community.

Memories that define Black Power as self-determination are especially notable for their narrative style. In his essay “The Death of Luigi Trastulli,” Alessandro Portelli describes the “imaginative and symbolic quality” of the memories of striking workers in the Italian city of Terni.<sup>54</sup> These narrators recount their tales with evocative detail and rhythmic language that transforms oral history into oral poetry. The events they remember seem to have unfolded in recent memory rather than the recent past. The same holds true for nationalist narratives, which at times have the performative quality of spoken word poetry. Images and symbols are essential to their meanings, as individual stories of political transformation are used to illustrate the process of collective politicization. “The result is narratives in which the boundary between what takes place outside the narrator and what happens inside,” Portelli writes, “between what concerns the individual and what concerns the group, may become more elusive than in established written genres, so that personal “truth” may coincide with shared “imagination.”<sup>55</sup> As Portelli admits, epic narratives are not necessarily reliable as sources for “factual” accounts, but they provide rich insight into a nationalist vision of Black Power.

Komozi Woodard and Larry Hamm both root their accounts of Black Power in the emergence of their political identities, giving their life stories the resonance of epics. Although they engaged in different arenas of political action, Woodard and Hamm are similar in that they were young activists, raised in the Central Ward, who rose to positions of relative prominence in political circles. Hamm led the Newark Federation of High School Student Councils during the

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<sup>53</sup> Hamm. February 14, 2009. p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Portelli, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* p. 49.

turbulent years of the early 1970s. The federation was actively involved in the contentious teacher's strike, although Hamm emphasized that the group did not oppose the teacher's demands. He was appointed to the school board by Gibson in 1971 and served for three years, during which time he also led a radical student group and associated closely with the Congress of African Peoples. He spent a semester at Princeton, but chose to remain on the school board rather than continuing with his studies. Hamm has a unique speaking style that makes the epic quality of his narrative explicit. He moves from personal memories to discussions of the local political landscape, referencing shifts within the national Black Power movement and broader cultural shifts, before returning to the original story, illuminating it with new meanings. Amiri Baraka employs a similar, almost dialectical, narrative in his autobiography.

Woodard was involved with a range of radical political organizations, including the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Student Organization of Dickinson College before joining the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN). He also references early exposure to Malcolm X and the writings of 60s-era liberals, emphasizing the myriad influences that shaped his political development. Although he joined CFUN while still enrolled at Dickinson, Woodard was not actively involved in the organization until he returned to Newark to live in 1971. Appointed the head of housing and economic projects, Woodard led community development initiatives as well as planning for the ill-fated Kawaida Towers. He eventually became the editor of CFUN's newspaper, *Unity and Struggle*. Like Hamm, Woodard explores broader political questions within his own history, but the political meanings of his memories are implicit in the stories contained within his account.

Nationalist visions of Black Power, particularly those inspired by Amiri Baraka and the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN), deeply inform Woodard and Hamm's narratives.<sup>56</sup> CFUN was not the only Black Power organization that emerged in Newark in the aftermath of July 1967. But until its final collapse in 1976, CFUN members played a central role in city politics. Amiri Baraka led the organization from its inception, and his understanding of Black Power defined CFUN's political work. Baraka was an original thinker who melded beat poetry with Swahili, the liberationist philosophy of Frantz Fanon with the pragmatism of Charles Hamilton, to develop his own distinctive political language. Instead of insisting upon the withdrawal of African-Americans from the political system, Baraka claimed Newark itself as the "New Ark" for a Black nation. To determine the direction of the New Ark, the Black majority had to control political institutions. Maulana Karenga, the LA-based head of the cultural nationalist group US, also influenced Baraka. Popularly known as the founder of Kwanzaa, Karenga developed a seven-principle system named Kawaida designed to build an autonomous Black culture distinct from the values and traditions "imposed" by a slave society.<sup>57</sup>

CFUN was itself established as an umbrella organization to coordinate efforts for the 1968 municipal elections, building the organizational infrastructure necessary to realize community control. Both the Black Political Convention of 1968, organized by the United Brothers, the precursor to CFUN, and the Black and Puerto Rican Convention of 1970

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<sup>56</sup> Hamm and Woodard offer subtly different definitions of Black Power. They both focus on the meaning of self-determination, but Woodard de-emphasizes racial politics. He even notes that he recruited a white man to join CFUN. In contrast, Woodard defines Black Power as the empowerment of the working class. His description associates CFUN with SNCC rather than US, although he admits that the group's rigid hierarchy leadership worked against transparent decision-making. In contrast, Hamm discusses racial identity and racist oppression openly. He argues that Black Power should be expanded beyond race today, but he still defines Black Power as the political and economic self-determination of African-Americans. However, the principle themes within their narratives remain the same.

<sup>57</sup> In devising Kawaida, Karenga drew upon anthropological studies of African communities, treating them as authentic accounts. As a result, Kawaida reproduces Western distortions of African culture, a fact revealed most clearly in his vision of polygamous family structures and appropriate gender roles.

represented an attempt to build a political base for Black Power, unifying disparate political organizations, nominating a slate of Black candidates and establishing a platform reflective of community concerns. After Kenneth Gibson's election to the mayor's office in 1970 and Baraka's break with Karenga in the early 1970s, CFUN continued to define itself as a "nation-building" organization, engaging in extensive community development efforts and Afro-centric cultural organizing. Baraka was also active on the national state, leading efforts to coordinate the national Black political conventions held annually in the late 1960s and early 1970s. CFUN itself became a chapter of the Congress of African Peoples (CAP), a nationalist group led by Baraka formed at a conference in Atlanta in 1970.<sup>58</sup>

Hamm and Woodard both argue that CFUN's vision of liberation captured the culture of Black Newark in the late 1960s, providing the collective that emerged in the aftermath of 1967 with a political voice. Woodard remembers CFUN as an empowering experience that gave community residents practical political knowledge and faith in their own capabilities. He emphasizes the unity of purpose and action within CFUN: "We had all these talented people. We had members who were talented and then we had allies who were coming in giving us all kinds of great ideas."<sup>59</sup> He remembers that CFUN members were confident that Black Power would be successful, that the city could be reclaimed. "I didn't know what victory was going to look like," he says, "but I knew that ... we would model some ways of solving poverty in the inner city through the programs we were doing, and then we would figure it out step by step."<sup>60</sup> Woodard credits Baraka with cultivating this unity, providing the vision that shaped the organization's work. He recalls one trip to a housing conference in Atlantic City:

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<sup>58</sup> Because most narrators refer to CAP as CFUN even when describing events that took place after 1970, I have decided to refer to CFUN/CAP by its original name.

<sup>59</sup> Woodard. 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

“We drove down in the middle of the night to Atlantic City and we got to this hotel and I was in one room and he was in the next room, and we heard the typewriter pulled out. And we went to sleep listening to him type. The next morning he had written this big paper about the history of cities: The Rise and Fall of Civilization according to Ibn Khaldun and why Black people were destined to revive American cities.<sup>61</sup>

This anecdote depicts Baraka as a visionary, a leader capable of crafting a complete explanation of “what victory was going to look like” in only one night. Woodard, Hamm and James Johnson, the head of the Congress of African People (CAP) in Camden, all emphasize the role that Baraka played in their intellectual development.

But Baraka’s legitimacy derived from more than his comprehension of the “self-determined aspiration” of Black people. Baraka is also credited with articulating these aspirations, politicizing “Black” culture in order to unify the Black community. Woodard had worked with radical groups critical of cultural nationalism, and so was initially skeptical of Baraka’s approach. “But then Baraka brought Sun Ra to Newark, so I went ... And it was me in the beginning and some winos out there; some homeless guys,” he continues. “... And I saw these homeless people dancing in the street. And that was a revelation to me. I said okay, this is not just for middle class people.” He remembers the concert as proof of the power of culture as an organizing tool. Soul Sessions, weekly meetings on Sunday nights at CFUN headquarters, are also remembered as examples of Baraka’s cultural organizing. The meetings alternated between cultural events, including music and dance, and political lectures. Soul Sessions were open to the community, and served as both a recruitment strategy and a forum for community building. Johnson connects the cultural programming at the Soul Sessions with his memory of growing up in South Philadelphia, an African-American neighborhood. He remembers his childhood as “a rich cultural kind of experience ... Going to the uptown theater and seeing nearing every rhythm

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

and blues act out there, from Motown to Stax, Otis Redding to Jackie Wilson and James Brown and just everyone.”<sup>62</sup> The Soul Sessions, he says, were “emotionally satisfying and intellectually satisfying” in the same way, comparing Baraka’s charisma with that of James Brown. These memories suggested that Baraka’s charisma, his “authentic blackness,” was central to the politicization of the Black community in the early 1970s.

In narratives of self-determination, demonstrations and protests that filled public spaces serve to illustrate the scope of politicization. Hamm vividly describes the student takeover of part of the Gateway Hotel in the midst of the Teacher’s Strike. He remembers the initial walkout at Arts High: “About 10:45, 10:50, man, them doors came open and every student came out. I mean, if there were any left, it was only a handful ... Those doors came open and them students started pouring out and they didn’t stop pouring out.”<sup>63</sup> Moving out of the school and into the streets, the students marched to the Gateway. “And we took it over,” he says, emphasizing each word. “We took over those two floors.”<sup>64</sup> Students controlled access to the space, even physically expelling reporters who refused to leave. “And everybody was on the same page,” he adds, stressing the unity of the protestors.<sup>65</sup> Mayor Gibson came to talk with the students, inviting Hamm to join the school board soon after.

It is no accident that these memories recall Woodard’s account of 1967, illustrating the power of a united community against authority. Hamm’s description of the Gateway Hotel suggests that the protest represented more than a demand for renewed negotiation between city officials and the union: it represented an assault on the city’s power structure that brought the confrontations of July 1967 to the heart of downtown. Located between Prudential and City Hall

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<sup>62</sup> James Johnson. Interview by Emma Hulse, February 8, 2009. Phone interview.

<sup>63</sup> Hamm, February 14, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

near the intersection of Broad Street and Market, the Gateway is “built like a fortress. ... It looks like a military installation it does not look like a hotel,” he continued.<sup>66</sup> Hamm adds that some schools shared the military aesthetic. “This was in direct response to the uprising, how they designed and built those buildings,” he concludes. Hamm’s story of the Gateway takeover reverses his memory of occupation during the rebellion, instead suggesting the growing power of the community in the era of Black Power even as the power structure fortified itself. Furthermore, the act of takeover implies that the people themselves own the city, possessing the right to claim both public and private spaces.

School board meetings are also remembered as moments in which community members, led by activists, took over public spaces to assert the right to community control. Parent-led struggles for decision-making power in schools across the country drew upon Black Power rhetoric, and Newark was no exception. “They used to have a little auditorium on the third floor, second floor, where the Board meetings would be held” at the police headquarters at 31 Green Street. “And we would turn so many students out, they would have to move the Board meetings from Green Street to City Hall Chambers, where they could seat 400 or 500 people.”<sup>67</sup> The students, he emphasizes, “wanted to go down there and speak.” He returned to memories of the board meetings multiple times throughout the interview. The search for a new superintendent “was a big fight because the community knew- everybody knew- what’s going on. ... I mean,” he continued, “one time they had to move the Board meeting from the City Council chambers to Symphony Hall because so many people- this is how it was back then- so many people were coming to the Board meetings.” Vicki Donaldson was another young member of the school board who was also appointed because of her student activism, particularly her involvement in

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<sup>66</sup> Hamm. February 7, 2009. p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Hamm. February 14, 2009. p. 10.

the Black Organization of Students at Rutgers and the takeover at City Hall. Donaldson was never a member of CFUN, but her account parallels Hamm's :

School board meetings were the most widely attended meetings in the city. School board meetings would start at 7 and could end at 2:00 in the morning. They would be packed. We would always have problems with the Fire Marshall because the rooms would be overcrowded and we would have 50 or 60 speakers. ... It was a very activist community. ... People felt they had a stake. They had a voice. And everyone wanted to speak. And so we were obliged to let them speak for hours and hours. You might have 30 speakers on one item. But that was the right of the people.<sup>68</sup>

In these memories, the seizure of space reflects a collective attempt to claim a place within the political process. The descriptions of the meetings and protests themselves are epic in scale, forcefully illustrating what self-determination might mean for political institutions in Newark.

Reclaiming the city also required the reconstruction of Newark. Given the configurations of power and inequality built into the urban landscape, this project had deep symbolic significance for advocates of Black Power. Spaces shaped by urban renewal and suburbanization figure prominently in Woodard's narrative. As a child in the 1950s, Woodard struggled to chart safe routes home from school. One fateful day, he was alone when he was followed by a group of teenagers. When he returned home beaten and bruised, his mother called the police. Assuming that Woodard was involved in gang activities, a Black police officer beat him again, demonstrating correct technique for his white partner. This event marks the beginning of Woodard's political development, as he subsequently sought protection and community first in gangs and later within radical organizations. But most importantly, his narrative of the encounter suggests the oppressive emptiness of the urban landscape; he is caught as he tries to cross a "big public housing field." Woodard understands urban renewal as a product of the disenfranchisement of African-Americans. Consequently, the event is richly symbolic of the

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<sup>68</sup> Vicki Donaldson. Interview by Emma Hulse, February 26, 2009. Newark.

need for powerful political communities capable of “filling space,” ending the isolation of the urban poor.

In Woodard’s accounts, references to spatial arrangements figure within his descriptions and assessments of economic inequality. Just as he notes the distinction between Broad Street and Springfield Avenue in his account of 1967, so Woodard remembers watching the landscape shift from city to suburb when commuting to Weequahic High School. “As I rode that bus from the corner of Bergen and ... Rose to Weequahic, it’s gray,” he remembered. “On the whole trip, on Bergen Street. And then suddenly, every day, it would get green suddenly when you passed a certain street. And every day I’m coming back and I kept wondering, “why is (it) that it’s gray, gray, gray and then suddenly there’s green?”<sup>69</sup> The lawns and spacious houses contrasted with the tiny apartment he shared with his family on Huntington Avenue in the Central Ward. After he left for college, his home on Huntington was claimed for another urban renewal project. Ironically, the cleared land was never used by the Housing Authority, but was later acquired by CFUN. Woodard himself took charge of the development, literally rebuilding his own community.

The project of rebuilding urban neighborhoods then symbolizes the concrete construction of new community as well as the symbolic dismantlement of the power structure, bringing the green of the suburbs to the gray of the Central Ward. “Baraka had this urban vision of revitalization, renaissance in the cities,”<sup>70</sup> Woodard says, comparing the CFUN’s economic development plans to *Ujamaa*, the model of Tanzanian socialism. The organization began work on two housing projects: NJR-32, a swath of land in the Central Ward that had been cleared by the Newark Housing Authority for high-rise public housing, and Kawaida Towers, an apartment

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<sup>69</sup> Woodard, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37.

complex planned by Baraka. Kawaida Towers had special significance, as it was designed to include a range of community services and institutions, including a theater, a public kitchen and a day care center. Woodard depicts Kawaida Towers as an experiment in “direct rule.” “There was a lot of rhetoric about revolution and stuff like that,” he explains, “and what we said was, ‘Hey, revolution is people changing their community.’” He emphasizes that this vision resonated with community residents, noting that women in the organization had already selected the apartments they wanted to own. “My mom had been lukewarm to the movement, but (she) had Kawaida Towers posters in her house,” he remembers. “So I began to realize that this housing thing, out of all the stuff we were talking about, they understood that best. And it was big symbol.”<sup>71</sup> In Woodard’s vision, community development represents the final phase of Black Power in Newark: the construction of a Black city in which urban renewal and economic inequality would exist only in memory.

Many of the elements of narratives of self-determination appear in Hamm’s account of the Black nationalist flag controversy. At first, Hamm only mentioned the story in passing, emphasizing instead the school board’s debates on policy and personnel. But when asked about the issue directly, he responded at length. In the fall of 1971, Hamm introduced a proposal to fly the red, green and black flag in every classroom where Black students were in the majority. He says that the idea first emerged in a student protest at the school board as young people read off the 101 demands of the Newark Federation of Student Councils. The demands called for greater student involvement in the school system; placing the flag in public schools was not originally included among them. He emphasizes that an anonymous student introduced the new demand spontaneously. Hamm says he put forward the motion “on the spot,” and that it passed

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38

immediately. “The whole board passed it,” he repeats. “It was passed by the whole Board!”<sup>72</sup>

Hamm is right to claim that all the Board members in attendance voted for the proposal, but *The New York Times* subsequently reported that the other four members, including at least one Italian-American officeholder, were not in attendance.<sup>73</sup> However, Hamm’s account suggests that Black Board members who normally disagreed supported the display of the flag, suggesting the convergence of interest within the African-American community when it came to certain “self-determined aspirations.” “Because no one saw this as anything malevolent,” he continues. “It was innocuous [...] All it said is that students be able to bring this flag to school, (that) the flag be used as a teacher’s tool.”<sup>74</sup> He argues that the public display of the flag represents a positive assertion of cultural identity for African-Americans.

In Hamm’s account, the right to fly the flag links individual liberation with control of the city of Newark. He recalls attending the annual Columbus Day parade, a celebration for the city’s Italian-American community. He remembers seeing carts stocked with American and Confederate flags on the street. “I was a kid and quite frankly, not knowing anything, I used to ask momma “Can I have one?” Because it was different, you know.” His fascination with the flags illustrates the alienation that results from oppression, the ignorance of history that makes its perpetuation possible. The Black nationalist flag symbolically counteracts alienation by providing a symbol of a shared past and the promise of a common future. The confederate flags also suggest the opposition of the political machine to the advancement of African-Americans. “Only now can I really see the dynamics involved here,” he says. “I mean, in the ’63 Columbus Day parade, the Civil Rights Movement was at its height. So what are people doing selling the

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<sup>72</sup> Hamm, February 14 2009. p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> The New York Times. “School Trustee Sues Over Flag.” December 1971. Accessed through Proquest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>74</sup> Hamm, February 14 2009. p. 18.

Confederate flag? On the streets of Newark?“ Implicit in Hamm’s memory is the suggestion that ending white rule in Newark would free African-Americans from psychological oppression. Indeed, Hamm remembers arriving in Gary, Indiana for the 1972 National Black Political Convention, the “zenith” of the Black Power movement, where Mayor Richard Hatcher had hung red, black and green flags on every lamppost. “Now in reality,” he laughs, “that probably didn’t mean a whole lot to the poor people of Gary but to me, I was like in Black nationalist heaven.”<sup>75</sup> For Hamm, the flags reflected the focused political activity at the convention. Convinced of the power of the nationalist vision, Hamm asked that Baraka give him an African name upon his return.

But despite the symbolic significance of the flag within Hamm’s narrative, he de-emphasizes the importance of the proposal, insisting that it was not intended as substantive policy. This is perhaps because of the opposition the plan encountered. Italian-American board member John Cervase, one of the four who were absent at the time of the vote, challenged the decision, eventually blocking its implementation. Hamm never mentions the defeat, instead juxtaposing the unity among African-Americans with the outrage expressed by outsiders. *The New York Times* ran an article titled “Board of Ed Adopts Black Flag.” “And you know what the black flag is. When they say black, that’s like the flag of piracy; it’s like the flag of death.” Such coverage obscured the critique of power articulated by Hamm and Baraka, associating Black Power with empty rhetoric and meaningless militancy rather than serious solutions. By downplaying the defeat of the proposal and its centrality to the nationalist agenda, Hamm seeks to defend the relevance of Black Power in Newark. “It wasn’t an issue on its merits,” he repeats,

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<sup>75</sup> Hamm. February 7 2009. p. 7.

“it was something, which I believe, was totally innocuous that was made into an issue. And that right wing seized upon this to really club, ideologically and politically, club us to death.”

Hamm’s defense corresponds with explanations that narrators of self-determination offer for the demise of Black Power in Newark. Both Hamm and Woodard explain the collapse of CAP as a result of increasingly virulent opposition and the violence of police repression. Woodard begins his narrative of decline with the defeat of the Kawaida Towers project. The location of the development in the Italian-American North Ward angered community members and politicians, who successfully lobbied the City Council to rescind the tax abatement that made the project possible. Woodard remembers this moment as both a symbolic and a strategic defeat: the organization had invested heavily in the project, and the dismantling of Kawaida Towers symbolized the collapse of his vision for Newark. He describes the “turn to the left,” the intensifying interest within the organization in Third-World Socialism, as a response to this defeat, commenting that “we became much less careful with our politics.”<sup>76</sup> Many Black Power advocates, including Hamm and James Johnson, would disagree with this assessment, arguing that the turn was in large part drawn from the model of African liberation movements.

However, all would agree that the fierce opposition to Black Power eventually shattered their personal resolve and weakened CFUN. The sources of this opposition are hinted at but never clearly named. Hamm comments on “the powers that be,” including “the Black powers that be,” that conspired to end “Baraka’s political domination.”<sup>77</sup> In Woodard’s pivotal memory of defeat and disillusion, he cannot even see his attackers:

I was bundling newspapers one night, around two o’clock in the morning I heard this car- I don’t know how I knew that they were going to shoot in this window- but as soon as I heard this car screech, I hit the floor- bababababa, through this

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<sup>76</sup> Woodard. p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Hamm. February 7, 2009. p. 6.

glass. All these bullets came. And the only weapon I had was a baseball bat. So I weighed the situation. They are outside there with these guns, trying to come through the steel door. We had this double lock on this door. And so we had this safety net. You called one person, they called another person, then 25 people would come and rescue you. And this had always worked in the past, okay? But now we're in a crisis situation, so my first phone call was to Baraka. So I called Baraka up and I say, "Amiri, I'm surrounded by the police, make the phone call, and what should I do in the meantime?" And I listened on the phone and I hear someone snoring. The next thing I know, the phone clicks and he hangs the phone up. So I said, "Amiri, don't do this to me. Don't do this to me now." How can you fall asleep on me? So, I said, you know, I'm not going to do this Black Panther thing . . . . And I said I'm abandoning my post. And I left (through the back door.) And that's why I'm still here.<sup>78</sup>

Woodard laughs as he tells the story, but its placement in his narrative foreshadows his abandonment of CFUN and the disintegration of the organization. This recollection also illustrates what Woodard describes as Baraka's exhaustion and increasing doubt about his own skill as a leader in the face of mounting opposition. The scene contrasts sharply with Woodard's memory of 1967, when community residents surrounded police on Springfield Avenue, preventing them from enforcing their authority. Instead, Woodard himself is surrounded and isolated, unable to act or call upon his means of support. When he resigned from the organization in 1976, he remembers feeling a similar sense of isolation, of alienation from community: "I walked down the streets of Newark and realized for the first time since I was a kid, I was not a member of a large organization and I had to watch my back for myself."<sup>79</sup> These painful recollections of defeat are a powerful undercurrent in memories of self-determination, shading triumphal accounts of the politicization of the community and the reclamation of the city.

Hamm and Woodard's subsequent careers show evidence of their attempt to come to terms with these tense memories, their insistence that Black Power should not be forgotten. Gibson did not reappoint Hamm to the school board when his term ended in 1974, and he

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<sup>78</sup> Woodard. p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

subsequently lost a race for city council. Exhausted and frustrated, Hamm decided to return to Princeton. He eventually became involved in campus anti-apartheid work. Since his return to Newark in the early 1980s, Larry Hamm has served as the director of the People's Organization for Progress (POP), an organizing group that builds on the legacy of Black Power. POP has coordinated campaigns against police violence, and the organization hosts an annual march to commemorate the anniversary of 1967. Woodard has also worked to maintain the memory of Black Power. He worked as a machinist in Newark before returning to grad school at the University of Pennsylvania. He now teaches at Sarah Lawrence, and has written the only existing history of CFUN. His work has made him one of the principal scholars of the "New Black Power Studies," a group that uses the idea of a "long movement" to link Black Power and Civil Rights, breaking down standard dichotomies in the historiography of 1960s social movements. For Woodard, writing the history of Black Power is an extension of the movement itself: "We've been trying to serve the people now by writing history, doing oral histories and making sure that – and the most important is to have children interview their grandparents to find out who they were and what they did."<sup>80</sup>

For those who define Black Power as self-determination, remembering "nation time" in Newark then represents a form of resistance, a radical consciousness of history in aftermath of defeat, in the age of Reagan. These narrators might agree that Black Power is not enough, that an expansive vision of social change that transcends race is necessary. But they insist that even in the wake of Barack Obama's presidency, Black Power has something to say about racial and economic inequality.

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<sup>80</sup> Woodard. Page 52.

After our first interview, Hamm offered me a ride back to Penn Station. We walked across Broad Street and past the Prudential building to the parking lot. He stared up at the skyline. “Forty years of Black Power,” he said, “and there is still a whole lot going wrong.”

### **Black Power as Strategy**

Black Power activists shared assumptions about the causes of racial inequality, but they frequently did not agree as to how these causes should be confronted. Indeed, Black Power in Newark produced another tradition that envisions the term not as a collective vision of liberation but rather as a strategy for obtaining access to and opportunities within political and economic institutions. The memories are defined by an interest in the process of politics. Instead of the rich imagery and epic plots that define memories of Black Power as self-determinations, narratives of strategy are structured around discussions of organizational structures, resource mobilization and political negotiation.

The definition of Black Power offered by Robert Curvin, the former head of Newark’s CORE chapter, exemplifies Black Power as strategy. “To me, Black Power meant unifying and bringing to reality the enormous potential of the Black community, in the interest of its own community as well as the larger interest of the community in society,” he explains.<sup>81</sup> Curvin’s definition recalls the underlying pragmatism of Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton’s *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. The book opens with an extended discussion of racism as the product of a colonial power structure, moving into a discussion of the need for “self-identification” or “self-determination” within African-American communities.<sup>82</sup> However, they emphasize the need for “political modernization,” an effort to build new “political

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<sup>81</sup> Curvin. p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). Page 47.

structure(s) to solve political and economic problems” and “broadening the base of political participation to include more people in the decision-making process.”<sup>83</sup> In essence, “political modernization” is a call to reshape the political institutions that determine policy affecting African-American communities. This political strategy rests on a fundamental, famous premise: “before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society,” it must first “close ranks,” uniting as a community and mobilizing its collective resources to assert its claim.<sup>84</sup> Carmichael and Hamilton cite the model of European immigrants who built political machines in major cities. Curvin references the book, making the same connection with the model of ethnic politics.

At first glance, this definition of Black Power might not seem particularly different from Black Power as articulated by Baraka and CFUN. Both emphasize the need to claim political institutions, and Curvin agrees with the nationalist assessment of the urban power structure. But Curvin distinguishes clearly between Black Power as an end in itself, as a way of building a Black nation that determines its own destiny within the larger society, and Black Power as a means to another end. Curvin defines this end as “integration and advancement:” access to political institutions and increased opportunities for African-Americans. Carmichael and Hamilton speak out strongly against integration in *Black Power*, but Curvin would never agree with their definition of the premise of integration: “there is nothing of value in the black community and that little of value could be created among Black people.”<sup>85</sup> Rather, by integration he means that African-Americans deserve an equal measure of power, a voice in American politics and society. He is critical of the separatist thrust on the basis that both state

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53

and private resources are necessary to address urban poverty: “it would be, I think, foolish, counterproductive to think that you could isolate yourself ... and create the resources and strategies and infrastructure and programs and delivery systems in order to reach the quality of life that you are seeking to achieve by separating yourself from the larger society.”<sup>86</sup> The challenge, then, is to mobilize resources within the Black community to secure this access.

Curvin’s pragmatic definition of Black Power translates into a vision of politics as a process of organization and negotiation rather than individual and collective transformation. Curvin’s approach to organizing emerges in his descriptions of CORE’s campaigns in the early 1960s, particularly those designed to provide African-Americans with access to jobs in local industry. He recalls attending an Urban League dinner in the midst of a campaign to change hiring practices at a Western Electric plant outside the city. The personnel manager for the plant was the keynote speaker at the event, focusing his address on the need for increased social responsibility on the part of industry and corporations. Sensing an opportunity, Curvin assembled 50 CORE members to demonstrate at Western Electric. CORE members arrived at the plant at 6 AM the next morning, and by late in the day CORE leaders had been “invited” to meet with the manager, leading to “very serious discussions and negotiations.” Curvin remembers these campaigns with pride, emphasizing the importance of providing access to closed spaces: “It’s the record of CORE that I am personally most proud of,” notes Curvin. “We opened up opportunities for Blacks and Puerto Ricans that just would not have been there in that time.”<sup>87</sup>

This story centers on the strategic logic that guided Curvin’s actions: the opportunity presented by the public statement, the rapid mobilization of members to capitalize on the opportunity, the negotiations to secure hiring commitments from the company. The purpose of

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<sup>86</sup> Curvin. p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

the demonstration in this narrative is distinct from those described by Hamm and Woodard. Activists do not occupy the space, but rather remain outside of it, publicly associating the company with exclusion and asserting their right to participate in the process. Protests are then only useful as a tactic within a broader strategy. This understanding of the relationship between protests and politics explains Curvin's rejection of rioting a legitimate act: demonstrations must remain disciplined and orderly if they are to serve their strategic purpose. The riot was a demonstration that became a disorder. The destruction that followed, Curvin suggests, served no strategy, destroying community resources and making inclusive coalitions more difficult to organize, further limiting the resources available to the African-American community. But Curvin would agree with Woodard and Hamm that a new sense of political cohesion emerged in the aftermath of the riot that made the election of Ken Gibson possible.

However, this cohesion did not represent collective politicization so much as the recognition that the city government failed to respond to existing grievances and could not control the riots once they began, instead calling in the National Guard. "There was a ... shared conclusion about the ineptness and the corruptness and the insensitivity of the Addonizio administration," he explains. "Therefore there [was] a stronger, deeper, more broadly-felt consensus that one step toward a better future was to get rid of this administration and have an African-American mayor."<sup>88</sup> It was assumed that a Black mayor would make political institutions accessible to the community, ensuring the equitable distribution of services and opening up opportunities to residents within city government.

Curvin argues that the Black and Puerto Rican Convention, held in Newark in November 1969 and chaired by Curvin himself, built on this consensus, creating the organization necessary

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

to sustain Gibson's campaign. His description of the goals of the convention corresponds to the strategy articulated by Carmichael and Hamilton. Although the model was originally conceived by Baraka in 1968, Gibson asked Curvin to chair the event in 1970 in an effort to "mobilize the broad swath of opinion and views in the Black community."<sup>89</sup> Curvin remembers subsequently drafting a memo explaining the purposes of the gathering. First, organizers sought to ensure that there "was not too much competition among the candidates that would therefore dissipate the strength of the Black community." Second, a convention would provide a way to "marshal resources to support the candidates that were selected, so that we could raise funds (based upon) the legitimacy of the committee." Third, organizers thought the convention could hold elected leaders accountable to the community.

But African-American activists would have to "close ranks," uniting within the framework of the convention, if the strategy was to succeed. Curvin remembers reaching out to a range of moderate individuals, including the leadership of the Urban League and the Urban Coalition and Black professionals and businessmen. David Barrett, a CFUN member, headed the community organizing committee, and Curvin describes Baraka's supporters as the "foot troops" responsible for communication. Representatives from Puerto Rican organizations were also invited. Curvin remembers the convention as a success. "At least 3,000 people or so participated over the course of the weekend," he says. "We had 300 delegates who actually represented unions, churches, community-based organizations, or ... notable officials that were invited on the basis of their reputation and their standing in the community."<sup>90</sup> Baraka recruited Shirley Chisolm, Richard Hatcher, Ozzie Davis and Dick Gregory to speak at the convention, and Curvin gives Baraka credit for inviting more artists and activists to Newark in the months

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

leading up to the election. This strategic unity extended outside the Black community. Curvin admits that white suburbanites did not participate in the convention, but he notes that they provided crucial financial support. He even adds that the Newark Chamber of Commerce contributed. The unity was sustained through the election, providing the resources necessary to ensure Gibson's victory. Curvin appears as a master negotiator in this narrative, working quietly to unite disparate interests to accomplish a set goal. In Curvin's memory, then, the language of political strategy and collective interest, not Black culture, serves as a unifying force that undergirds organization.

Curvin remembers this negotiated unity as short-lived. The relationship between Gibson and Baraka disintegrated rapidly after the election. Nationalists explain this breakdown as an attempt to halt the radical upsurge of Black Power. But Curvin locates the origins of the split in the convention, the moment of unity itself. Unlike Gibson, who denies his close cooperation with Baraka,<sup>91</sup> Curvin acknowledges CFUN's contribution, noting that CFUN members led community organizing efforts and that Baraka brought important national resources to Newark. However, he concludes that the vision of politics articulated by Baraka was fundamentally incompatible with the "very moderate, careful, go-slow, appeasing, conservative politics of Ken Gibson."<sup>92</sup> Ultimately, he suggests, Baraka lacked the political skill necessary to unify the Black community. This assessment emerges in Curvin's description of the failed 1968 Convention. "Those who participated in the campaign from the Black community," Curvin recalls, "felt that the convention had been so nationalistic and so interested in proselytizing that it was not effective in really rallying and mobilizing the broad swath of opinion and views in the Black

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<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Gibson. Interview by Adele Oltman, July 15-29, 2003. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark.

<sup>92</sup> Curvin. p. 26.

community.”<sup>93</sup> Curvin cites Baraka’s tactical mistake, deploying nationalist rhetoric in a setting in which it was inappropriate, as Gibson’s reason for asking him to chair the 1970 convention. This critique corresponds to a sharper criticism of Baraka: “The artist was, I think overly optimistic [... in Woodard’s book] he’s quoted as making this comment about how the election of Gibson really was the opening to a similar take-over ... in major cities ... which was kind of a short-term and somewhat idealistic view of what the possibilities were.”<sup>94</sup> Reversing the nationalist critique of Gibson as a leader disconnected from the community, Curvin suggests that Baraka lacked a strategic understanding of the political context in Black Power operated. Gibson was in fact the pragmatic thinker. Curvin then blames nationalists for the dissolution of the Black Power coalition.

Was the strategy of Black Power correct? Curvin cites the proliferation of development projects in the city since 1967. “You go back to post-1967,” he says, “the inner city was dotted with burned out buildings and a lot of neighborhoods were so bad off that people from outside the city used the neighborhoods as dumping grounds.”<sup>95</sup> “But all that has been cleaned up and is gone,” he continues, “you have a very substantial new housing supply in the city.” Although he admits that these reconstruction efforts are flawed, he credits the leadership of the Black Power generation with rebuilding the city after the riots. But Curvin also acknowledges that Black Power failed to address the deeply entrenched economic challenges that face Newarkers. The promise that access to political institutions and the resources connected with them could open the door to new opportunity for African-Americans proved false, and the politicians first elected to

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

office in 1970, particularly Gibson and James, left in disgrace. Black Power, Curvin suggests, sought to relieve the burdens of Newark, but it ultimately proved incapable of bearing the load.

### **Black Power as Struggle**

Black Power is not always remembered as a reclamation or reconstruction of community in Newark. Some stories center instead on the collapse of community in confrontation and conflict. The memories of Amina Baraka track the emergence of division within the ranks of radicals, revealing the tensions within Black Power. In her narrative, Baraka reflects on the value of nationalism through the lens of her current political beliefs. She also reckons with the personal costs of Black Power, describing the damage done to her relationships with friends and family as a result of the battles of the era. Baraka's memory then exemplifies what Alessandro Portelli calls "ironic style": "two different ethical (or political, or religious) and narrative standards interfere and overlap, and their tensions shapes the telling of the story."<sup>96</sup> The processes of making meaning out of political and personal experience are interconnected in her account, and the pain of remembrance gives Baraka's story its narrative force and emotional weight.

Amina, who is married to Amiri Baraka, was raised in Newark by her grandparents, a construction worker and a domestic servant. She met her husband when he returned to Newark from New York in 1966. Baraka subsequently became active in nationalist circles, first in the Spirit House and later in CFUN, where she oversaw the work of the United Sisters- a women's discussion group, coordinated a daycare and cafeteria for members of the organization, and supervised the African Free School, an Afro-centric academy. The women of CFUN expanded their efforts, convening a coalition of Black women's groups known as the Black Women's United Front. But Baraka resigned before CFUN dispersed. She eventually joined the

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<sup>96</sup> Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1991). Page 53.

Communist Party. Baraka's struggle to come to terms with her time in the movement is evidence of her political transformation in the aftermath of Black Power. Her rejection of separatism, for example, flows from her understanding of socialist ideology. "I understand how ... you can only distinguish friends from enemies by their ideology and not by the complexion of their skin or the texture of their hair," she said.<sup>97</sup>

Despite her critique of Black Power politics, it is important to note that Baraka, like other disillusioned activists, remains committed to its vision of liberation. The images of unity and victory that give stories of self-determination their dramatic resonance appear in narratives of struggle as well. "I long for those days back again," Baraka said excitedly, "When we was all in the office together, collating papers and singing songs. Oh, we used to make up songs and sing ... and marching together and Black Power and "the people united will never be defeated."<sup>98</sup> She thrust her fist into the air as she reminisced, a symbol of empowerment that recalls the stencil her husband once graffiti-ed on empty walls. Whatever the failings of the organization, Baraka is clear that the movement was an extraordinary learning experience. With pride, she recalls the women's leadership in education, child care and health services, emphasizing the democratic character of their decision making process. She cites the role of women in anti-colonial movements around the world as a model and source of inspiration for African-Americans fighting oppression and state power. "In the main, I think we were valid in terms of trying to defend ourselves and our future, our children, and our grandchildren," she concludes.<sup>99</sup> Amina Baraka suggests that socialism and Black Power share a moral core: a promise that all peoples have the right to determine their own destinies. The realization of this promise is central to her

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<sup>97</sup> Amina Baraka. Interview by Emma Hulse, March 6, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid* p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid* p. 6.

sense of identity. “I’m trying to fix this,” she says resolutely, “so the next generation- both black, white, Latino and Asian [...] (don’t) take 20 years of their lives to understand what Black Power meant. Black Power really meant self-determination and that is all.”<sup>100</sup> The idea of Black Power was then a necessary step forward, a memory that should not be forgotten.

But making clear the true meaning of Black Power requires developing a critique of its failures, false meanings manifested in the breakdown of community. Baraka discusses two particularly divisive areas of conflict, one racial and the other gender-based. Most interviewees do not directly address the schism between whites and Blacks during the era of Black Power, but the polarization of ethnic, white radical and African-American communities shaped the political landscape in the late 1960s. The alliance of white and Black radicals that defined the southern movement dissolved with the rise of Black Power. SNCC famously expelled its white members in 1966 during Stokely Carmichael’s tenure as chairman. The pain of this dissolution figures prominently in both histories of the period and in the memories of whites who had previously supported the movement. However, most African-American narrators de-emphasize this rupture, explaining that the call for community control included the movement. The sense of empowerment that infuses narratives of self-determination supports the claim, made powerfully by Carmichael and Hamilton in *Black Power*, that African-Americans “must lead and run their own organizations [...] convey(ing) the revolutionary idea- and it is a revolutionary idea- that black people are able to do things themselves.”<sup>101</sup>

The directness with which Amina Baraka addresses racial polarization, then, is unusual. She weighs the justifications of racial separation against its costs for both the movement and the city. Baraka is careful to explain why radicals embraced separatism at the time, reiterating the

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid* p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Carmichael. p. 46.

need for community control and recalling the anger and mistrust that followed the assassination of Malcolm X. But she also evaluates the separatist impulse critically. Baraka hints that her embrace of nationalism and rejection of white acquaintances damaged her relationship with her grandparents and parents. “It wasn’t until around ’66,” she remembers, “[...] that I began to actually separate myself from the white people that we knew. And these were people,” she continues, “who were my grandmother’s friends and my mother’s friends, who they worked for.”<sup>102</sup> She links the rupture within her personal relationships with the division within political circles, specifically between Jewish supporters and African-American radicals. “Once we said Black Power,” she said, “many of the Jews who had funded our organizations, who had [...] walked side by side with us and even died and (been) maimed along with us, we began to separate ourselves from them.” Baraka remembers feeling confusion at the time, even as she embraced the liberation promised by Black Power. “I never could quite hate,” she recalled. “I wanted to, though. No doubt about it. And I felt there was something wrong with me and that perhaps I didn’t have enough [...] consciousness.”<sup>103</sup>

This doubt surfaces again when she discusses the political consequences of racial separatism. “Now when I think about it- now, this is many years later, here we’re talking - [...] and I’m saying I think we made some mistakes but I don’t think- I’m not going to- I think we made many mistakes actually, of not understanding the difference between who are our friends and who are our enemies.”<sup>104</sup> Identifying separatism as a mistake is clearly a painful moment, almost interrupted by what, presumably, would have been a reassertion of the fundamental validity of nationalism. But by questioning the personal and political outcomes of separatism,

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid p.3.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid p.6.*

Baraka challenges one of the fundamental tenets of Black Power; liberation requires that African-Americans close ranks and constitute a separate interest group independent of whites.

Memories of conflict surrounding the role of women also figure prominently in Baraka's narrative. Black Power advocates understood the reconstruction of Black masculinity as central to the psychological and political reconstruction of the Black community. As the statement that opens this chapter illustrates, Amiri Baraka was no exception, imagining the "Black Man" as the central actor who reclaims the Black nation. The reconstruction of masculinity represented a response to cultural theories of poverty, particularly Daniel Patrick Moynihan's theory of "black matriarchy" which shaped the discourse surrounding African-American communities in the late 1960s. Nationalists concluded that traditional gender roles should be re-imposed. Karenga posited a model of "complementary" relationships in which "a man has to be a leader" and the woman submits, embracing her duty "to inspire her man, educate their children and participate in social development."<sup>105</sup>

Baraka remembers that Karenga's conception of the family became a source of contention within CFUN. She recalls her frustration with US members who, when they arrived in Newark after the collapse of US, attempted to introduce polygamy as a formal practice on the grounds that it paralleled "African" family structures. Nationalist conceptions of gender roles also shaped the leadership structure within the organization. Baraka was a member of the central committee, but she emphasizes her marginalization. "I was the Chairman's wife, so it was almost like the king and the queen [...] and I was the only woman (who) was allowed- and even I wasn't allowed in certain meetings and so forth. And so they used me," she concludes, "to

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<sup>105</sup> Tracye Matthews, "No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is: Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966-1971." *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998). Page 272.

assure everybody that women were involved.”<sup>106</sup> However, Baraka also depicts the women’s resistance to male chauvinism as a quiet triumph. When formal polygamy was proposed, “we just banded together, the women did, and said “This is not happening.” Now some of the poor little women, like I was, thought it could work but we weren’t even going to let them even try it.”<sup>107</sup> The women united again to demand representation in the National Black Assembly. “We closed the doors. We locked them in the room. We wouldn’t let them out until they decided they was going to have some women.”<sup>108</sup> In contrast with narratives of self-determination that associate filled spaces with an assertion of power, Baraka envisions resistance with the closure of space, a symbolic refusal to acquiesce.

This refusal is made possible by the sense of “strong sisterhood” that Baraka remembers in the early years of the organization. This sisterhood includes three of her neighbors on Sterling Street, the location of the Spirit House: Ms. Stokes, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Slade. “These women were mostly single parents and the ones that did have a husband [...] they worked hard,” she explained. “These weren’t middle class- they weren’t even lower middle class. These were lower working class people.”<sup>109</sup> These women, Baraka emphasizes, had much to lose and little that they could afford to give, but yet they gave unconditionally to the neighborhood around them. “When I was pregnant they fed me,” she remembers, “they took care of the community.”<sup>110</sup> She recalls with gratitude how Ms. Johnson helped her hide her husband’s papers during the riots, protecting them from police and National Guard. Although they never joined CFUN, the women also contributed what they could to the organization. Ms. Slade sewed dashikis for the men and sold

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<sup>106</sup> Baraka, p.17.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid p.15.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

clothes in the group's store. They attended meetings and volunteered for the African Free School. "If I don't mention their names you wouldn't know these people," she said, "But if it were not for these people many of these things would not have happened."<sup>111</sup> Baraka's memories challenge any vision of Black Power as the reconstruction of Black masculinity, asserting the central role of women in the work of political organizations.

However, the disintegration of this spirit of sisterhood overshadows memories of modest victory. Amina Baraka recalls that when women continued to challenge hierarchy, sexual relationships became a site of political conflict. She notes that men would "start seeing women outside of the organization to prove that these women were real women and [...] we were part males and so forth."<sup>112</sup> Men also pursued other women who were members of CFUN. "Many times men would try to play women against each other [...] Or they put you in compromising positions. [...] Like if you have a sister in the organization that you are a friend to, they would start seeing her."<sup>113</sup> Baraka remembers that the women became jealous and mistrustful, weakening the organization. When ideological debates intensified in the mid-1970s, she felt she could no longer continue. Describing the difficulties surrounding the coordination of the Black Women's United Front, Baraka laments: "we had really no support. We had none. And we had to do it on our own. And that was a period in the organization when [...] we weren't all together, united. [...] Things were breaking internally. They were breaking down."<sup>114</sup> She eventually decided to resign from CFUN. The organization collapsed soon afterwards.

The fragmentation of the Black Power coalition, culminating in CFUN's "turn to the left" in 1974, haunts narratives of self-determination and is central to memories of struggle. Narrators

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid. p. 17.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid p.18.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid p. 24.*

offer two tacit explanations for CFUN's demise. The first, suggested by Woodard, traces the breakdown of the organization to increasingly violent police repression. Consequently, CFUN members became "careless" about politics. Baraka would probably agree that the violence directed against Black Power organizations precipitated their collapse. But she suggests another explanation for the failure of Black nationalism in Newark: internal conflict centering on sex and socialism that made CFUN vulnerable to attack.

Amina Baraka is not the only veteran of the organization who tells this story. Interestingly, Johnson also remembers that ideological debate in 1974 centered on the question of polygamy, placing the date of the controversy three years after it appears in Baraka's narrative. He also describes Baraka as the most vocal opponent of the practice. When the leadership of the CAP chapter in Camden sided with her faction, a third of its members left. Johnson's memory suggests that by the mid-1970s one's understanding of the status of women within the organization determined whether members continued to support cultural nationalism or embraced Marxism. Other former CFUN members cite Baraka's involvement in the "turn to the left," although their stories suggest that her politics were misguided. Baraka is aware of the criticism leveled against her, noting that she resigned from CFUN in part because members blamed her for the breakdown. Her emphasis on sexual conflict might be read as a response to her critics, defending her decision to challenge male leadership and gendering the memory of Black Power.

Baraka's reckoning with the past ultimately led her to a new vision of collectivity- a model drawn from her memories of working class Newark. As a child in the 1950s, Baraka and her family lived on Howard Street, located just off Springfield Avenue and infamous for its bars and brothels. Baraka remembers Howard Street not as a symbol of the urban underclass but

rather as a vibrant interracial neighborhood. “At that point Black people lived all together, independent of their class,” she recalls. “You had a collaboration of teachers, construction workers, truck drivers, store owners, little small colored- we used to call it a colored store.”<sup>115</sup> Nat, a Jewish man who owned a store on the corner of Howard and Mercer, provided her grandfather with groceries on credit when he was out of work. Nat “was part of the family.” An Italian family also lived on the block; their children grew up with the Baraka. “I had two friends: Patty—I remember their names—Patty and Estelle,” she recalls. “I think her mother’s name was Marian and I never saw her father. I used to hear Marian calling out her window, just as my mother, “Where are you at?” “When our brother went to jail, so did her brother,” she adds.<sup>116</sup> The prostitutes from the brothels came to visit her grandmother, who everyone called Momma. “They would come to her and Momma [...] would feed them and talk with them and they would bring their troubles.”<sup>117</sup> The image of her grandmother feeding the prostitutes recalls the women who lived alongside her on Sterling Street. Baraka’s vision counters theories of pathological Black matriarchy, asserting the centrality of women in neighborhood life. She recalls their relationships founded on respect, their kitchens open to all regardless of status. Ultimately, Baraka remembers Howard Street as a place where the common experience of poverty gave life to an ethos of care and community. “I grew up in a pretty, I think looking back – a pretty democratic neighborhood. [...] On looking back, I am happy because it kept me from the abyss of being hateful.”<sup>118</sup> Was Howard Street really democratic? Was it really free of racial animosity? The answers to these questions make no difference. In remembering the community

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid* p.1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid* p.2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid* p.3.

of her childhood, Baraka envisions a different future for her city: an inclusive space, a working class democracy.

### **Epilogue: Black Power as Inheritance**

*The place of my birth stood me up in it anew. And no matter the bleak occasion I began to see yet new again, and take new spirit from that newness, new energy and courage. Because this was literally, and certainly now, Home. And if there was a blackness that was not mythical, it would be found there.*<sup>119</sup>

- Amiri Baraka

The memory of Black Power continues to inform politics in the city today. The activists who first defined the term continue to play a role in city government, community institutions and the artistic life of the city. But a new generation of leaders has emerged. In 2006, Sharpe James, first elected in the Black Power election of 1970, declined to run, clearing the way for Cory Booker. Booker is not a native Newarker. The popular media emphasizes this fact, contrasting his moderate politics and public demeanor with James. Booker is imagined as the consummate “post-racial” politician, breaking with the “dogma” of Black Power and the “provincialism” of Black politics. Booker acknowledges the legacy of Black Power in Newark, citing Gibson as a model in his inaugural address, but ultimately embraces the “post-racial” label. But Booker is not the only young leader in the city. Young activists lead new community development efforts, cultural organizing initiatives and labor campaigns, consciously locating themselves within the tradition of Black Power.

One of these young activists is Ras Baraka. The son of Amiri and Amina, Baraka is currently the principal of Central High School. A spoken word artist like his father, Baraka is also active in city politics. He first ran for public office in 1994, when he was only 25 years old, challenging Sharpe James for the mayor’s office. His father managed his campaign. Baraka

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<sup>119</sup> Baraka. p. 459.

eventually served as deputy mayor during James' last term. He has run for city council in the Central Ward three times, and plans to run again in 2010. He has also worked as a youth organizer, serving on the committee for the first National Hip Hop Political Convention in 2004.

Black Power shaped Baraka's childhood. He remembers reciting the alphabet, "A is for Africa,"<sup>120</sup> at the African school and dancing at the Hekalu, CFUN's headquarters, on Belmont Avenue. He remembers the "turn to the left" because "the cultural kind of stuff abruptly stopped and we started going to different kind of rallies and different kinds of meetings and different kinds of people began coming around."<sup>121</sup> But these memories of cultural activities are less powerful than his recollections of the violence deployed against Black Power activists. "I remember bullet holes in the window, the front window of the building," he says when describing the Hekalu.<sup>122</sup> He returns repeatedly to the memory of hiding in the closet while police searched his home, or watching police break up a rally from his parent's car, waiting for them to return. When his father was arrested after police observed him arguing with Amina in their car, Baraka was called to testify. When his father briefly served time, he remembers standing outside the prison holding "Free Amiri Baraka" signs. His parents did not discuss these experiences at the time. "It was just happening and they was just living their life and doing the things that they thought they should do ... and that they were making some sacrifices (for the struggle), and our family was part of the sacrifice."<sup>123</sup>

Only later, as a young adult, did Baraka begin to explore his parent's political beliefs. At Howard he became active in a revolutionary nationalist group, Black United Youth, and founded a cultural organization called Black Nia F.O.R.C.E. He began to turn to his parents for advice,

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<sup>120</sup> Ras Baraka. Interview by Emma Hulse, January 31, 2009. Newark. Transcript in possession of the author. p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid* p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid* p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid* p. 27.

and in return his parents shared books and memories. His mother was an especially important figure in his development. “My mother would talk to me would talk to me about ... issues, just race period. .... She wanted a discourse on equal footing. And those kind of things I get from her, like the tolerance of people, the whole respect for different people’s ideas and culture and the value in it, and the ideal that everybody has a right to have a say-so.”<sup>124</sup> He notes that his father had a more “hard-line kind of political stance.”<sup>125</sup> “It put it all together for me,” he says of these discussions, “exactly what was going on and why different things were happening at the time they were happening.”<sup>126</sup> He finally understood the significance of the boot dance, the reasons for the changes in their lives after 1975, making sense out of memory as he developed his own political ideas. “I do formulate my own opinion based on what I’ve read and what I think and what my experiences are, but ... we’re not that far off in terms of the way we see the world,” he continues. “I just happen to agree with them on a lot of things.”<sup>127</sup>

Given his own memories of the 1970s, Baraka defends the Black Power generation against the charge that they are no longer relevant in the wake of post-racial politics. Many young activists would disagree with this claim, but they are critical of older leaders for not mentoring their successors. “You’ve got to understand,” he insists, “and I understand it because I’ve been around a lot of those folks, growing up, and listened to conversations. Some of these people just got leadership ... people have been fighting (the civil rights struggle) for a long time and it’s just recently that they were even recognized.”<sup>128</sup> He argues that the media has exploited

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid p. 5.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid p. 5.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid p.2.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid p. 4.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid p.12.*

the rift between young and old activists, overemphasizing divisions within African-American community.

But although young people like Baraka remain loyal to their predecessors and draw from a Black activist tradition, this does not mean they seek to replicate their parent's Black Power. Baraka agrees with his mother that the politics of the early 1970s was a necessary move. "Absolutely necessary in the phase of struggle in this country and in the city ... to get Black people together, to give them some self esteem, to feel like we don't have to be under the yoke of slavery and imperialism and subjugation."<sup>129</sup> Just as he defends the leadership of the older generation, so he defends Black Power: "it was never about subjugating or dominating anybody. It was about hav(ing) the ability to control your own destiny."<sup>130</sup> But he would agree with Amina that Black Power is not the ultimate end of radical politics. "It's narrow in that it doesn't embrace the different ideas of people that you need to embrace to be able to move the way you need to move."<sup>131</sup> Democracy should be the new goal of Black activists. In an allusion to Mao, he describes the need for collaboration among Black leaders. "It's not about my voice over your voice," he says, "it's about all of us having the opportunity to let 100,000 flowers blossom."<sup>132</sup>

Yet Baraka hints that if the final goal of Black Power was a society in which all Black people are full citizens, equal both formally and substantively within the the American democratic system, then it remains unrealized. Poverty and inequality still shape the lives of Newarkers 40 years after African-Americans were first elected to office. When describing the platform of his 1994 campaign for mayor, Baraka articulates a vision of Newark first expressed in the late 1960s. "We have democracy for a few," he explains. "We wanted more people to have

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid p.14.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid p.15.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid p.12.*

access to the resources and the wealth of the city that they didn't have. ... We had changed the complexion of the city and we need to change the power in the city."<sup>133</sup> Newark, he suggests, is not yet a true Black city.

I interviewed Ras Baraka in his office at Central High School. The Black nationalist flag hangs in the atrium; Baraka has lined the hallways with quotes from Black leaders and artists. When I left the building, I walked east towards Irvine Turner Boulevard, passing the 4<sup>th</sup> precinct on the corner. The public housing complexes that once surrounded the brick building are gone, replaced by new condos and single-family homes. But the place where the events of July 1967 began remains intact: Newark does not allow its past to be forgotten. In 2008, a year after the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration, a plaque was installed on its north wall. "On this site on July 12, 1967, there began a civil disturbance that took the lives of twenty-six people and forever changed our city," it reads. "May this plaque serve as a symbol of our shared humanity and our commitment to seek justice and equality." In the wake of the era of Black Power, a new generation marks Newark's spaces with memory, claiming the city as its own.

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For those who remember Black Power, Newark is a "Black City." The visions contained within Black Power are made material by descriptions of the city's real and imagined spaces. For those narrators who remember Black Power as self-determination, Newark, a city shaped by the forces of oppression, is a space that must be reclaimed and reconstructed. In narratives of Black Power as strategy, Newark is a place with its own political traditions and neighborhood institutions that transcend a history of exclusion, a space that must be rebuilt in the aftermath of 1967. In contrast, narratives of 1967 as trauma depict Newark as a city irrevocably marked by

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid* p,7.

grief, while narrators of struggle describe Newark as a place fraught with conflict. But the city's working-class neighborhoods provide a model of how divisions might be healed and relationships restored as residents come to terms with the memory of the past.

But even when narrators imagine space differently, the languages that shape political discourse in the city are inscribed with similar meanings. Visions of community rooted in the city are central to narratives of Black Power. Narrators of self-determination and strategy imagine community as both the neighborhoods that comprise the city and the people who inhabit them. Community in this context is frequently racially coded. When activists like Baraka or Hamm refer to "community," they envision a Black, working-class collective. Similarly, Curvin frequently mentions the "Black community" when discussing his organizing work. In both cases, the word "community" suggests an egalitarian order rooted in common interest and mutual concern. "Community" is then the standard against which political decisions are measured as well as the base of the claim for Black Power. Narrators of self-determination envision Black Power as an attempt to seize power in Newark for this racial community. Narrators of strategy argue that leaders ought to gain access to power in order to benefit the community. In turn, the community should hold these leaders accountable for their actions. Ultimately, both sets of narrators imagine Newark as a "Black city," a place that ought to be controlled by its African-American residents.

However, disruptive narratives of the era of Black Power challenge these visions of community and power. Who is actually included in this community, and who is given power within it? Narratives of struggle are shaped by memories of exclusion from community, suggesting that the rhetoric of Black Power sometimes reproduced hierarchy instead of ensuring equality. To build true community, power must be fundamentally re-imagined: it cannot simply

be claimed or seized from the existing power structure. These narrators envision the “Black city” as a place defined by shared values of consideration and care.

Ultimately, remembering Newark in the era of Black Power is not only an attempt to define the city from within, but to reclaim its image in the national imagination. Newark is almost universally characterized as a symbol of urban crisis: Black Power is described as a symptom of its perverse pathology. But Newarkers are fiercely loyal to both the city and the legacy of Black Power. They are bound to it by their personal histories and collective identity. It is the space that gives shape to their political visions, a place rich in culture and memory. To tell the story of Newark in the 1960s and 1970s is then an act of resistance, a defense of Black Power in an age of “post-racial” politics. Those who claim that the emergence of a new generation of political leaders marks the end of Black politics lack an appreciation of the power of history in African-American communities. Building a post-racial society would require a great deal of forgetting, and no one in Newark has forgotten the era of Black Power.

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