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Camille Venee Maddox

April 15, 2013

“The Way Opportunities Unlimited Inc.”:
A Movement for Black Equality in Minneapolis, MN 1966-1970

by

Camille Venee Maddox

Dr. Leroy Davis
Adviser

Department of African American Studies

Dr. Leroy Davis
Adviser

Dr. Samiran Banerjee
Committee Member

Dr. Dianne Diakite
Committee Member

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Abstract

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Following the Minneapolis riot in 1966 on the North Side of the city, an organization was created to meet the needs of blacks on the North Side. The organization listened to the political, social, and economic complaints made by the black community. The organization was “The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.” which was located in Minneapolis, Minnesota from 1966-1970. “The Way” was a peculiar enterprise that utilized tenets of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Few studies document the history of blacks in Minneapolis and even fewer studies document the existence of “The Way.” Through reconstructing the history of “The Way”, this thesis provides a background for the development of the Black Power Movement in Minneapolis and establishes the history of blacks in Minneapolis and their place in the larger U.S. Black Freedom Movement. The thesis contains a brief history of the black experience in Minnesota from 1800-1965, an analysis of the 1966 and 1967 riots on the North Side of Minneapolis, and a detailed description of “The Way”, its development, its existence, and its legacy.

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PREFACE

Growing up in North Minneapolis, Minnesota¹ I learned very little about the history of the black community in the area. The little that I did learn consisted of the inability of the black community to catch up to the economic and educational standards of the average white Minneapolis resident. Additionally, when learning about the Black Freedom Movement in school, I quickly concluded that this movement was confined to the South and larger northern cities, that my Minneapolis black community never took part in the struggle for freedom. It was not until my junior year in college that I was introduced to the history of the Black Freedom Movement on the North Side of Minneapolis. The North Side has been portrayed as the “black area” of Minneapolis and is boasted as having the highest population of blacks in the city since the 1930s.

My introduction to the Black Freedom Movement in the area came from a documentary on the history of North Minneapolis, Minnesota from the time of the first Jewish settlement in the 1860s.² The documentary featured a segment on the race riots that occurred in 1966 and 1967 along Plymouth Avenue, the main business hub in North Minneapolis, Minnesota. It also included an even shorter segment on a little known organization called “The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.”³ After viewing the documentary, I became intrigued with this history and wanted to know more.

I began collecting sources on the race riots. The first source I discovered was a book called *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*. Davis’s autobiography discussed

¹ North Minneapolis, Minnesota will be referred to as the North Minneapolis, the North Side, and the North Side of Minneapolis throughout the thesis.

² *Cornerstones: A History of North Minneapolis*, directed by Daniel P. Bergin, University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center, 2011, <http://www.uroc.umn.edu/cornerstones> (accessed June 16, 2012).

³ “The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.” will be referred to as “The Way” in subsequent references.

“The Way” as a youth organization that utilized similar tactics to the Black Panthers in order to fight for black equality. His discussion of the organization reduced “The Way” to what some would consider a militant black group that relied primarily on what he called “physical action” as opposed to “verbal or legal action.”⁴ Davis’s statement illustrated the larger national debates regarding the differences between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement.⁵ In his discussion of the organization Davis mentioned tensions between organizations working for change in North Minneapolis. He wrote: “A fissure developed in the black community between the more militant voices and those who preferred to work for civil rights within *organized* channels, such as the NAACP.”⁶ Thus, Davis and many North Side residents who described themselves as fighting for “civil rights” preferred to disassociate themselves with the “more militant voices” in the area. After reading Davis’s autobiography I decided to explore the tension between North Side residents utilizing what they considered methods of the Civil Rights Movement with those who decided to utilize methods of the emerging Black Power Movement during the 1960s.

I was hooked and decided to write an Honors Thesis on the history of the North Side of Minneapolis, Minnesota. I began my research in the summer of 2012. As I combed through historical archives, trying to determine a specific theme and chronology, I came across the organizational records of a community organization developed in the 1960s in North

⁴ W. Harry Davis and Lori Sturdevant, *Overcoming The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 174.

⁵ The Black Power Movement (BPM) has been portrayed as antithetical to the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). Prominent Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.’s book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), devotes an entire chapter to discussing the emergence of “Black Power.” King contended that although “Black Power’s” call for black economic self-sufficiency and racial pride were valid, its emphasis on violent action and black exclusivity would prevent it from having “substance.” King’s arguments represent the position of many national and local black Civil Rights Leaders during the 1960s and 1970s who felt that Black Power’s promotion of black militancy would hamper blacks’ fight for civil rights by alienating the Black Freedom Movement’s white political allies.

⁶ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 174.

Minneapolis. The organization, “The Way,” mentioned earlier, was exactly what I considered an organization that genuinely represented the pulse of the community. As its Executive Director Syl Davis eloquently wrote in a report stating the organization’s mission, it was not the intent of “The Way” “to walk behind pushing, or ahead pulling” but it was The Way's intent to “walk together progressing.”⁷ The organization was formed by community members that sought to improve the lives of North Side residents. They did this through a number of programs emphasizing community control of the education system and the police force, and engagement with public officials. While it was in existence, “The Way” created a bridge between city hall and the North Side community. Reading through the organizational records of “The Way” at the Minnesota Historical Society Gale Library was compelling. Not only did “The Way” demonstrate that the black North Side community took part in the Black Freedom Movement, but also that it was influential in causing progressive white residents to rethink their liberalism. Historically, Minneapolis has been viewed as a liberal city compared to other cities with large black populations. The city was viewed as relatively free from the racial prejudice that afflicted urban areas with large black populations during the 1960s. The presence of “The Way” complicated this view.

I decided the major focus of my Honors Thesis would be “The Way” and I spent the remainder of my summer frequenting the historical archives at the Minneapolis Central Library and the Minnesota Historical Society. My enthusiasm for this project rests in my belief that history as a field of knowledge and scholarship can be used as a means of unearthing and reclaiming communities neglected by scholars that investigate their larger societies. To tell the story of the black North Side community is to give back to the community the sense of

⁷ Syl Davis, “The Way Overview,” June 21, 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

determination and resilience that existed there through the organization called “The Way.”

Few writers are aware of the positive contributions that blacks have historically made to North Minneapolis. Currently the North Side is characterized by pockets of urban blight, boarded up buildings, high unemployment, and a defeatist attitude that is wide-spread among many residents. Contemporary writers never fail to remind us that “North Minneapolis hasn’t always been like this.”⁸ They always recall the vibrant Jewish community that once flourished in the area. In the popular narrative of North Side history, the 1967 riot demonstrates the decline of the neighborhood as more blacks moved in and Jews moved out. Although no scholar has directly correlated the North Side decline with the influx of black residents, it is implied. My Honor Thesis aims to offer a counter narrative in which the black North Side residents contributed to the progress and growth of the area and the city as a whole.

⁸ Drew Wood, “The Fierce Urgency of North,” *Minnesota Business*, March 2010, <http://minnesotabusiness.com/fierce-urgency-north> (accessed July 29, 2013).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Associate Professor Leroy Davis Jr. and Associate Professor Dianne M. Diakité for their intellectual support, advice, and guidance.

Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Ishmail Ba, Tia Boykin, Juan-Ita Effiom, Michael Harris, Aerhealle Hampton, Bree Keaveney, Olivia Odoffin, Isaac Osei-Agyen, Sama Worthy and Gabriel Zahi for their constant encouragement and great friendship.

I want to thank the Emory University African American Studies Department and the Emory University Honors Program for this opportunity.

Thanks to my North Side community and everyone from Minneapolis that has supported me over the years.

Finally, without the love and support of my family this project would not have been possible. Immense thanks to my brother Kovan Baldwin, my father Edward Maddox, my sister Maria Maddox, my mother Mary Maddox, my aunt Bev Bickelhaupt and the rest of my family and friends

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1967, the main business hub on the North Side of Minneapolis was set aflame. In the aftermath of the burning, one black youth interviewed by a local reporter exclaimed, “We want Black Power.”⁹ When exploring the ‘Plymouth Avenue Riot of 1967’ historian Eric Nathanson presented this declaration of Black Power as evidence that the black youth of the North Side were influenced by “the angry racial rhetoric of the era.”¹⁰ He cited no connection to the possible influence of the Black Power Movement in the area. A year prior to this declaration, an organization opened to serve the black community of the North Side of Minneapolis. The name of the organization was “The Way” and it operated out of an old storefront off Plymouth Avenue where the riot occurred. Staff of “The Way” made it clear that the organization “identified itself with Black Power.”¹¹

A historiography of the Black Power Movement (BPM) and the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is essential to understanding the identity of “The Way” and the debates concerning the methods used to fight for black equality that emerged in Minneapolis during the 1960s. Prior to the 1980s historians of the CRM claimed that the movement lasted from 1954-1965, starting with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case and ending with the start of the BPM. The BPM was said to start in 1965 after the Voting Rights Act. Additionally, they utilized a top-down approach, analyzing the CRM from the perspective of prominent Civil Rights Leaders of the

⁹ *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 21, 1967, 13 as quoted in Eric Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century: The Growth of an American City* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Rolland Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way: The Story of The Way, 1966-1970 : A Nearly Forgotten History of a Community Organization That Almost Turned Minneapolis Upside Down* (Andover, MN: Expert Pub., 2006), 65.

time (particularly Martin Luther King Jr.).¹² Starting in the 1980s scholars began to question the top-down approach and focused their attention on local struggles and less prominent figures that contributed to the movement. However, they did not contest the 1954-1965 periodization.

In the 1990s, scholars began to re-conceptualize the BPM. They discredited arguments that the BPM was antithetical to the CRM and also opposed the time frame previous historians prescribed to the BPM. Peniel Joseph, a leading scholar of the growing field of Black Power studies, through his work, demonstrated that local and national activists during the 1950s adopted a Black Power philosophy that defined the BPM well before Stokely Carmichael's declaration of Black Power during the 1966 Meredith March.¹³ Joseph referred to the black militant group, the Nation of Islam, as one of the forerunners for the BPM and dubbed Malcolm X, the spiritual father of the BPM. He contended that the BPM and CRM overlapped in many ways.

Additionally, in the 1990s historians began to re-examine the confined time frame of the CRM. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall claimed that the movement actually began in the 1930s and 1940s before the *Brown* decision.¹⁴ Hall, along with historians Jeanne F. Theoharis, and Komozi Woodward, re-interpreted the period referring to it as the Black Freedom Movement

¹² See the following text to understand the progression of scholarship on the CRM: Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review* 96 (April 1991); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-63; Additionally the following text are examples of historical works that confine the CRM to the time frame discussed in the text (note that Manning and Bloom dispute the top-down approach): Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York, 1987); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion* (Jackson, MS; University Press of Mississippi, 2007); and Jack M. Bloom, *Race, Class, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington, IN 1987).

¹³ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry and Holt, 2006), xvii-xviii, 147, 118-120, 295-297; Stokely Carmichael is credited with popularizing the term Black Power during the Meredith March of 1966. Many historians mark Carmichael's declaration as the start of the Black Power Movement in America. Stokely Carmichael changed his name to Kwame Ture in 1978. For the purposes of this study he will be referred to as Stokely Carmichael. For more information on his life and political activism refer to the following books: Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2003) and Jacqueline Johnson, *Stokely Carmichael: The Story of Black Power* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement."

instead of the CRM.¹⁵ Hall, Theoharis, and Woodward also constructed the “Long Movement” thesis. By expanding the time frame of the movement, these historians claimed that “modern civil rights struggles in the North, Midwest, and West, which entered a new phase with the turn to black nationalism in the mid-1960s but had begun at least a quarter century before” were made visible.

Historians Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang believed that this theoretical framework was fallacious and resulted in a misinterpretation of both movements. By recasting the movements as a singular movement they argued historians were losing the differences in “ideologies, discourse, and long range objectives” that both the CRM and BPM promoted. They claimed that the CRM advocated for black political rights and full citizenship as defined by the law. On the other hand, they argued the central tenets of the BPM included the promotion of black pride and black cultural expression, the creation of independent black institutions, and the obtainment of community control over institutions in black neighborhoods.¹⁶

In characterizing “The Way,” this thesis argues that “The Way” drew on ideologies and characteristics central to the BPM, particularly the call for blacks to define black identity on their own terms. However, it also contends that components of the “Long Movement” framework are relevant. Although, a number of the ideologies and discourses that emerged from the movements differed, that does not mean that there was no overlap or that Black Power activists directly opposed all methods used by Civil Rights activists. Thus, when examining the organization, the thesis argues that “The Way” was characterized by tenets of both the Civil Rights and Black Power eras of the Black Freedom Movement.

¹⁵ In addition to “The Long Civil Rights Movement” see Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard’s *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University, 2005).

¹⁶ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies.” *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Spring 2007) 265-288.

The Long Movement framework's emphasis on locality was central to the BPM. For example in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, Joseph argued that even the national Black Panther Party¹⁷ was grassroots in nature. Local chapters of the Black Panther Party adapted methods to fit the specific urban environments in which they were located. Historian Andrew Witt's study on the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee from 1966-1977 is a great case study that revealed how the Panthers commitment to offering services to members of the black Milwaukee community allowed them to take on some of the most pressing issues black Milwaukee residents faced, through dispelling many of the stereotypes about the party and its mission.¹⁸ Witt's work is one of many studies which support the theory that Black Power took on different meanings in different locales.¹⁹ These local struggles were unified in that they illustrated the BPM's "intense local character, commitment to grassroots organizing and political pragmatism." Joseph continued, they all sought to redefine black identity "while simultaneously reinvigorating local democratic institutions."²⁰

The history of "The Way" illustrates how one community organization attempted to foster a community voice which, according to the executive director of the organization,

¹⁷ The Black Panther Party was a black organization developed in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale to patrol black communities in order to protect them from police brutality. As the group developed further it set up programs to address a number of social and economic issues in the black community. The group has been characterized as violent and criminal and was closely watched by the FBI. Many of the Panthers were murdered or arrested. A number of recent studies have countered the criminal reputation of the Panthers and attempted to characterize the group on a pragmatic level. For more information on the Black Panther Party see the following texts: Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998); Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); J. L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

¹⁸ Andrew Witt, *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee 1966-1967* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁹ Other studies outside of those already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis include: Kenneth S. Jolly, *Black Liberation in the Midwest: The Struggle in St. Louis, Missouri, 1964-1970*; David A. Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, *Black Power at Work Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*; Bettye Collier-Thomas, V. Vincent P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*.

²⁰ Joseph, *Neighborhood Rebels*, 12-15.

advocated “social change” through fighting for “cultural pluralism.”²¹ Cultural pluralism was the ability of the “democratic culture” of a society to accept the diverse ethnic identities of racial minorities, not to stigmatize their identities and attempt to force them to integrate into the dominant culture. It was through this fight that unique features of the BPM became evident in the ideology of “The Way.” These features included: (1) the reclaiming of black identity, (2) the struggle to gain some community control of social institutions on the North Side, and (3) the centering of white racism as a cause of black deprivation on the North Side.

In this thesis I reconstruct “The Way’s” history by relying on a number of primary sources, including the organizational records, newspaper articles, and memoirs written by North Side community leaders, some of which worked directly with the organization. Through thorough analysis of these sources, it is evident that understanding the history of “The Way” is important for several reasons. First, it provides a background for the development of the BPM in Minneapolis. Second, it establishes the history of blacks in Minneapolis and their place in the larger U.S. Black Freedom Movement. Areas with smaller black populations, such as Minneapolis, have been largely ignored by historians of the Long Movement.²² Popular studies documenting the Long Movement include: *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* by historian Martha Biondi, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* by historian Charles Payne, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* by historian Timothy Tyson, and *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland (Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America)* by historian Robert O. Self. A similar feature of all these studies is that they focus on states or cities with large black populations.

²¹ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*

Due to the growing field of Black Power studies and its focus on local activism, small articles containing historical narratives of the Black Freedom Movement in nontraditional areas have begun to emerge. Theoharis and Woodard's edited volume of essays, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, contains studies on Black Power organizations in Milwaukee, the Black Panther Party in Iowa, and the CRM in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Even with the addition of these studies on local struggles, Minneapolis remains largely unexplored, with the exception of a few works. For example, historian David Taylor's book *African Americans in Minnesota* chronicles the history of blacks in Minnesota from their first settlement to the 1980s. The book does not directly address the presence of the CRM or BPM in the area; however it provides brief profiles of black organizations such as the Urban League and NAACP, and profiles of important black leaders. Additionally, the book makes no mention of "The Way" and its impact on the Minneapolis black community. The few studies that do examine "The Way" fail to situate the organization in the broader context of the Black Freedom Movement. For example, Rolland Robinson's *For a Moment We Had The Way: The Story of The Way, 1966-1970: A Nearly Forgotten History of a Community Organization That Almost Turned Minneapolis Upside Down*, takes a topical approach to analyzing "The Way" with little regard for chronology. Robinson's book is a great starting point for examining the impact "The Way" had on the black community of the North Side of Minneapolis and on many Minneapolis institutions. Luther Gerlach's *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* only devotes a few paragraphs to describing the development, impact, and methodology of "The Way" and refers to "The Way" as "the community center" instead of its official name throughout the study. Both studies leave readers pondering the following questions: was "The Way" influenced by the local struggles emerging in other areas in the United States during the Black

Freedom Movement? And how did ideologies emerging from the large movement shape the organization's methodology? From analyzing previous studies on "The Way" it is apparent that a more extensive study is needed in order to understand the organization's historical significance. This thesis provides brief biographical sketches on "The Way's" leadership staff that Robinson does not include in his book. Also, the thesis provides a detailed description of the events leading to the creation of "The Way," which previous texts do not offer.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. My first chapter, *Black Minnesota 1800-1965*, includes a brief history of the black population in Minneapolis. This history starts with the first recorded account of black settlement in Minnesota in 1802 and then describes the first permanent black settlement in Minneapolis in 1870. It then discusses the formation of the black community on the North Side of Minneapolis starting in 1920 and ending in the 1960s. I focus on the North Side community for two reasons. The first is that the North Side is the community where "The Way" was located. The second reason is this community was the area with the highest concentration of blacks in Minneapolis. The history of blacks in Minneapolis is an important component of the thesis. As mentioned previously, there have been few studies on the experiences of blacks in Minneapolis. In order for the reader to understand the community where "The Way" developed, it is essential they understand the history of the black experience in this environment.

The second chapter, *Minneapolis Riots 1966 and 1967*, looks specifically at black Minneapolis during the 1966 and 1967 riots. It examines the controversial causes of both riots, those who criticized and supported participants, and the impact of both events on the city, the state and the North Side black community. It also looks at the historical back-drop of the riots, which included civil disturbances in a number of cities with larger black populations. The third

chapter, entitled *The Development of “The Way” 1966-1970* introduces the organization more specifically, examining its origins, major players, and its goals, objectives, and strategies. It also chronicles the development of the organization throughout most of its history, its supporters, black and white critics, relations with other minority progressive organizations, such as the American Indian Movement, and its contribution to the development of the Black Studies program at the University of Minnesota. The epilogue of the thesis, *The Decline and Legacy of “The Way,”* documents the events that led to the decline of the organization, its uniqueness as a hybrid of both the Civil Rights and Black Power eras of the Black Freedom Movement and memory of the organization today among residents of the black North Side community.

CHAPTER 1: BLACK MINNESOTA 1800-1965

The roots of the black population in Minnesota can be traced back to Pierre Bonga.²³ What we know of early black history comes from historian Kenneth W. Porter. According to Porter, the Bonga family was “an example of a fur-trading family of Negro blood the members of which advanced from positions as personal servants or voyageurs to stations as interpreters and who finally became independent entrepreneurs.”²⁴ Pierre Bonga it seemed was the son of slaves. His parents, Joas and Marie Jeanne Bonga, were slaves of a British commandant at a colonial fort in Michigan called “Michilimackinac.”²⁵ Michilimackinac was established in the 18th century by French soldiers. The fort came to serve as an illustration of French conquest against Indians in the area. In 1761, following the French-Indian War, the British took control of the fort. Historian Daniel Ingram analyzed trade relations between the British and Indians at the fort. He noted the interdependence between the two groups for goods. Ingram failed to note, however, the presence of enslaved blacks at the fort and any role they may have played in trade between the British and Indians.²⁶

Pierre Bonga’s status is shady. Bonga was not described as a slave, but as a personal servant to Alexander Henry Jr., a man in charge of the Northwest Company’s Red River Brigade. The Northwest Company set up a Fur Post in an Ojibwe (a Native American tribe) territory,

²³ For information on general Minnesota history during this time refer to the following text: Theodore Christian Blegen and Theodore L. Nydahl, *Minnesota History; a Guide to Reading and Study* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960) and Anne J. Aby, *The North Star State: A Minnesota History Reader* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002).

²⁴ Kenneth W. Porter, *Negroes and the Fur Trade* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934), <http://collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/15/v15i04p421-433.pdf>, (accessed March 3, 2013), 426

²⁵ The spelling and pronunciation of the Bongas’ names remains uncertain. Other historians have spelled the family’s name Bongo and Bonza. Additionally, Pierre Bonga’s father’s name has been reported as either Joas or Jean. Historian William Green refers to Pierre Bonga as Jean Bonga and to Pierre’s son as Stephen instead of George. The majority of historians use the spelling Bonga, because the lake and township named after the family has that spelling.

²⁶ Daniel Patrick Ingram, *Indians and British Outposts in Eighteenth Century America* (Gainesville, Fla. [u.a.: Univ. of Florida, 2012), 88-120.

which is present day Pine City, Minnesota.²⁷ Porter used the journals of Henry Jr. and a nineteenth century book which contained a compilation of the Ojibwe's oral histories and traditions, to provide a small section on the economic and social life of Pierre Bonga. After working as a servant for Henry Jr., Pierre Bonga was promoted to the role of interpreter for the Northwest Company. He later married an Ojibwe woman and she gave birth to their first female child on March 12, 1801. Porter did not indicate how many children Bonga and his wife had, however records reveal they had at least one son after the birth of their daughter. Their son's name was George Bonga and he followed in his father's footsteps by joining the fur trading business.²⁸ A majority of the historical works that examined the early settlement of blacks in Minnesota described George Bonga as one of the first people of African descent born in the state.²⁹ None of these sources mentioned any details on Bonga's older sister and the place of her birth. Therefore, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when Pierre Bonga moved to Minnesota. On the other hand, documents confirmed that George Bonga was born in the state.³⁰

In addition to following his father's footsteps in the fur trading business, George Bonga also married into the Ojibwe tribe. In 1833 George Bonga was listed as a licensed trader in the region and in 1837 he served as an interpreter for a treaty between whites and the Ojibwe at Fort Snelling.³¹ Fort Snelling was approximately seventy three miles south of the Northwest Company Fur Post, near present day St. Paul, Minnesota. The fort was one of the primary

²⁷ The *Ojibwe* Tribe is one of the largest Native American tribes in the state of Minnesota. The tribe is also referred to as the *Chippewa*. I decided to use *Ojibwe* because the majority of historical text I used for this thesis referred to the tribe as *Ojibwe*.

²⁸ Porter, *Negroes and the Fur Trade*, 425.

²⁹ Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota*, 3; June Drenning Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981); Eric W. Weber, "Bonga, George (1802-1880)," *Minnesota Encyclopedia*, December 12, 2012, <http://www.mnopedia.org/person/bonga-george-1802-1880> (accessed March 07, 2013).

³⁰ William D. Green, *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Fall and Rise of Racial Equality in Early Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007); Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota*; Weber, "Bonga, George" (1802-1880).

³¹ *Ibid*; Porter, *Negroes and the Fur Trade*.

locations for trade between Europeans and Indians in the state.³² George Bonga's presence at Fort Snelling raises questions about any contact he may have had with other people of African descent at the fort. Additionally did the Bongas claim their African identity? Porter claimed that the Bongas did not. He wrote, "Although half Indian, Bonga was purely African in appearance. Never having heard of any racial distinction other than that of white and Indian, Bonga, who was a popular and princely host, would amuse his guests by remarking reminiscently, 'Gentlemen, I assure you that John Banfil and myself were the first white men that ever came to this country'."³³ However, Porter's description is suspect. It seems more probable that Bonga's time at Fort Snelling introduced him to another racial distinction.

Historian William D. Green in his book *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Fall and Rise of Racial Equality in Early Minnesota* claimed that George Bonga ate with a "slave woman", Harriet Robinson (who would later become the wife of Dred Scott)³⁴, during his stay at Fort Snelling. Green speculated that Bonga "probably thought of himself as separate, as unlike the slaves", but still argued that "how Bonga and the slaves viewed each other is unknown."³⁵ Despite the ambiguity of Bonga's black identity, the Bonga family was accepted into the Ojibwe tribe. Green wrote that "the Indians called him 'brother', the term used earlier to refer to his father."³⁶ The Bonga family had many descendants. Perhaps their descendants were absorbed into the Ojibwe tribe, though that cannot be confirmed. Nevertheless, the Bonga name continues

³² The Dakota and Ojibwe Tribes are documented as the primary tribes engaging in trade with the Europeans in the region encompassing Fort Snelling. In addition to Ingram's *Indians and British Outposts*, see the following books for more information on the trade between these tribes and Europeans: Anton Treuer, *Ojibwe in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010) and Aby, "The Fur Trade," In *The North Star State: A Minnesota History Reader*, 3-47.

³³ Porter, *Negroes and the Fur Trade*, 426.

³⁴ Dred Scott was a slave who sued for his freedom in 1847 after residing in Free states for an extended period of time. His case reached the Supreme Court in 1856. In 1857 the Supreme Court released their decision. They stated that Scott had no right to sue because he was black and therefore, not a citizen. For further reading on Dred Scott consult Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case, Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

³⁵ Green, *A Peculiar Imbalance*, Intro: ix.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

to live on in the region; Bonga Lake and Bonga Landing are located in the northern part of the state close to present day Duluth, Minnesota.

The existence of the Bonga family raises questions regarding the presence of other free blacks in the region. Jim Thompson, a former slave from Virginia lived at Fort Snelling with his master, George Monroe. Thompson's master was the nephew of President James Monroe. After bringing Thompson to the fort he sold him to an officer. In 1837, the unknown officer freed Thompson, who later worked as an interpreter and married into the Dakota tribe.

Many documents noted the existence of a number of slaves living in the region with their masters during the nineteenth century. Historian William Green explained that French fur traders and army officers in the area owned slaves, even though the possession of slaves in the territory directly violated federal laws.³⁷ Additionally, masters travelled with their slaves when vacationing in the area during the summer months. As mentioned previously, many slaves lived at Fort Snelling with their masters and as a result the majority of the early black population in Minnesota was concentrated at the fort.

By the 1830's thirty officers lived at Fort Snelling, the majority of them owned no more than one slave each. Those enslaved at the fort were responsible for performing menial tasks for their masters' families. Green explained that the enslaved rarely attempted to escape, due to the long cold winters and the likelihood that the Dakota "might capture any fugitives and return them for payment and food, just as they returned some deserting soldiers."³⁸ Of course, the most notable of enslaved blacks to reach Minnesota were Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet Robinson Scott, mentioned earlier. They resided in Minnesota for two years from 1836 to 1838.

³⁷ Ibid, 5.

³⁸ Ibid, 13.

By the mid-19th century a number of free blacks from neighboring states began to trickle into Minnesota. William Taylor and his wife Adeline Taylor for example, moved to Minnesota from Illinois and opened a barbershop in St. Paul.³⁹ The influence of blacks in the growing economy of the region led to a legal debate concerning black male suffrage during the 1860s. After three failed attempts, the Minnesota state constitution was amended, “granting the franchise to males of African descent, “civilized” Indians, and mixed bloods over the age of 21,” on March 6, 1868.⁴⁰ Minnesota granted black men the legal right to vote almost two years before the 15th amendment.⁴¹

These legal accomplishments, coupled with economic opportunities, resulted in a further elevation in the black population. From 1860 to 1870, the black population increased from 259 to 759 people.⁴² The presence of laws aimed at desegregation suggests that there was a large enough black population for racial groups to initiate segregation on their own. It also suggests that there was recognition of racial distinctions other than Indian and non-Indian as historian Kenneth Porter claimed.⁴³

A majority of the blacks migrating to Minnesota in the early 20th century gravitated toward the two urban centers, Minneapolis and St. Paul, most commonly called the Twin Cities, due to their close proximity to one another.⁴⁴ Black decisions to settle in the Twin Cities were a result of the concentration of economic activities in the areas, such as employment with the

³⁹ Ibid, 49.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota*, 6; Gary Libman, “Minnesota and the Struggle for Black Suffrage, 1849-1870: A Study in Party Motivation,” Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1972.

⁴¹ The 15th amendment was ratified on February 3, 1870. It declared the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." See the Library of Congress website (www.loc.gov) to view the entire text of the U.S. Constitution.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Porter, *Negroes and the Fur Trade*, 426.

⁴⁴ Ibid; Jennifer A. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

military and work in agricultural areas.⁴⁵ Upon settling, blacks created communities in the Twin Cities.

Similar to black communities in large urban areas, African Americans created and appreciated their institutions. The black church, for example, was the social focal point for many activities in early black communities in the Twin Cities. Historian David Taylor explained that the “churches in Minneapolis and St. Paul functioned as community centers offering a wide range of social and recreational activities. Their buildings were used as public meeting halls, where issues of the day were discussed. In neither city, however, did black church leaders assume the commanding positions they occupied in other northern urban centers before 1900.”⁴⁶ Early black leaders who occupied commanding positions were “hard-working, unskilled laborers”.⁴⁷ They were instrumental in representing the black community in Twin Cities’ political circles and in attracting black professionals to the area. The rest of the chapter will focus on the black community of Minneapolis

BLACK MINNEAPOLIS

The first group of blacks to move to Minneapolis primarily lived on the North East side of the city in the St. Anthony neighborhood.⁴⁸ As the black population continued to grow, they began to spread into other districts of the city, leading to a concentration of blacks on the North and South Sides of the city. However, the enforcement of restrictive housing covenants, starting in the 1920s, shifted black settlement primarily to the North Side of Minneapolis.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁵ Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission and the Minneapolis Planning Department, *Landscape Research, North Minneapolis: Minneapolis Historic Context Study*, by Garneth O. Peterson and Carole Zellie, Minneapolis, 1998.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota*, 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Refer to the map in the appendix.

⁴⁹ Refer to map of Minneapolis in the appendix to view regions of the city.

execution of the housing covenants at times was achieved by very violent means. In 1931 when Arthur Lee and his family moved into an all-white neighborhood on the South Side of the city, they were welcomed by a white mob of nearly 4,000 residents hurling rocks at the home and shouting threats. These racial demonstrations lasted for several nights and were only diffused after Lee agreed to sell his home.⁵⁰ Although segregation was never legally enforced, the majority white population found ways to separate itself from minority groups they it wished to avoid. The isolation of minority groups to the North Side of the city led to the creation of slum-like conditions in the area.

Prior to black settlement on the North Side of the city, there was a large Jewish population. Jewish settlement on the North Side began in the 1860s.⁵¹ The growth in the black and Jewish populations in North Minneapolis was largely a result of the extreme housing discrimination that existed in the city.⁵² Longtime North Side resident W. Harry Davis recalled, “They [blacks and Jews] were there because the white majority in Minneapolis would not allow them to buy houses or rent apartments anywhere else in the city.”⁵³ In the fourth chapter of *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, Nathanson discussed the discrimination Jews and blacks faced: “. . . while housing discrimination against Jews was subtle and often unspoken, against blacks it was direct and overt”.⁵⁴ Therefore, even within North Minneapolis there was different treatment among racial groups. When public housing was built on the North Side in the 1930s they were segregated, one section of the public housing was for blacks and one section was for Jews and other ‘mixed white’ groups, similar to other cities in the North and the South. The

⁵⁰ Jennifer A. Delton, “Labor, Politics, and American Identity, 1930-50,” *Minnesota History* 57, no. 8 (Winter 2001/2002): 418-434, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20188287>, (accessed July 29, 2012), 420.

⁵¹ June Drenning Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981).

⁵² Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, 102.

⁵³ W. Harry Davis and Lori Sturdevant, *Changemaker* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2003), 9.

⁵⁴ Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, 102.

Minneapolis municipal government attempted to address the slums on the North Side as early as 1936, by opening Sumner Field Homes.

A report created by the City Planning Commission revealed that half of the 1,517 residents living in the new public housing were black. The policy of segregation in the project only served to reinforce the low social status of blacks in Minneapolis, placing them below Jews and other minority groups.⁵⁵ This had dire effects in the mid-20th century. The space between the societal status of Jews and blacks in the city continued to grow, as Jews began to assimilate into the larger white society.⁵⁶ W. Harry Davis explained in his memoir, “As the Jewish population assimilated into the larger society, they increasingly became just white folks in the eyes of young black people.”⁵⁷

In spite of separate public housing, the black and Jewish children living at Sumner Field Homes congregated after school and played at Sumner Field. The field was located behind the housing project. Former black resident Gwedolyn Morrow Fraction and Jewish resident Marilyn J. Chiat reflected on their childhood at Sumner Field Homes. Children in the neighborhood went to ice skate and participated in other recreational activities; adding relevance to historian Katherine Solomonson’s statement that, “Sumner Field was the center of a larger interconnected community”. A survey taken by Sumner Field Home residents revealed that living in the housing project helped to reduce negative perceptions of other races, according to one local paper. However, housing continued to operate as a method for segregation in the city.

⁵⁵ U. S. Minneapolis City Planning Commission, *History of the Sumner Field Homes: A Federal Housing Project*, Minneapolis, MN, 1936.

⁵⁶ Rhoda G. Lewin, *Jewish Community of North Minneapolis* (Chicago, IL: Arcadia, 2001).

⁵⁷ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 158.

Housing was not the only tactic whites used to enforce the system of de facto segregation in the city. The most overt discrimination blacks experienced was economic. Historian Jenifer Delton noted:

“Employers simply refused to hire black workers, outside a few circumscribed areas. The few jobs open to black Minnesotans in the first half of the twentieth century were in the service industries and on the railroads. In 1926, 80 percent of African American men in Minneapolis worked as porters, janitors, and night watchmen. In 1930, two-thirds of African American workers in Minneapolis were employed in three hotels as waiters, maids, or housemen.”⁵⁸

The lack of economic opportunities in the area caused criminal activity to become prevalent on the North Side. W. Harry Davis in his memoir described growing up in the North Side neighborhood that Minneapolis residents nicknamed the ‘Hellhole.’ Davis asserted that the criminal reputation often portrayed by the media did not define the neighborhood and that there was class diversity. Davis wrote, “I joined a neighborhood where people down the street were bootleggers and alcoholics, pimps and prostitutes, gamblers and hustlers, pushers and addicts. But side by side with them, coexisting in an uneasy but unavoidable familiarity, were dedicated doctors, honest merchants, hardworking laborers, crusading social workers, kind senior citizens, and loving families.” Despite the class diversity in the neighborhood Davis noted that it was still hard for blacks to find jobs, he wrote, “. . . there were many more black people in Minneapolis than there were jobs.”⁵⁹

Blacks in Minneapolis set up a number of organizations to help them combat economic discrimination. One of the most active organizations was the Urban League. The Urban League started its first branch in St. Paul in 1923. Although the branch was located in St. Paul its services reached blacks in Minneapolis. Its greatest success was its ability to convince a number of Twin Cities’ employers to adopt hiring policies for blacks in the late 1920s. These policies

⁵⁸ Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 62.

⁵⁹ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 19-26.

made employers agree to maintain a black population at their job sites proportional to the black population in the Twin Cities.⁶⁰ The Urban League also administered educational services to the community and took part in fighting for other legal policies to eliminate discrimination in the Twin Cities.

The NAACP, which opened branches in the Twin Cities starting in 1913 (less than five years after its founding), utilized tactics similar to the Urban League, focusing a majority of its attention on legal action. In addition to fighting for equal economic opportunities, the NAACP organized a number of protests against Twin Cities businesses that discriminated against blacks or owned segregated franchises in Southern states. For example, it staged a protest outside of Woolworth's Department Store in downtown St. Paul during the 1960s with picket signs in an effort to integrate lunch counters there.⁶¹ Most of the members in both the NAACP and Urban League were interracial, comprised primarily of the black and white middle-class, especially professionals. Thus, they had a difficult time engaging working-class blacks in their efforts.⁶²

Two settlement houses⁶³ in the Twin Cities proved to be essential in reaching working class blacks: the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House in Minneapolis and the Hallie Q. Brown

⁶⁰ Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 63.

⁶¹ St. Paul Dispatch & Pioneer Press, "NAACP members picketing outside Woolworth's for integrated lunch counters, St. Paul," in Minnesota History Educator Resources, Item #221, <http://content.mnhs.org/education/items/show/221> (accessed March 19, 2013).

⁶² Ron Edwards explained in *The Minneapolis Story, through My Eyes: The Words and Experience of a Renaissance Black Man in a White Man's World* (Portland, OR: Beacon on the Hill Press, 2002), 209, that both organizations had a difficult time reaching "inner city blacks" and consequently a black elite group formed in the city. Both the NAACP and the Urban League organizations efforts went into carving a political space for blacks in these elite groups not for the masses.

⁶³ Settlement Houses were centers established to help blacks and immigrants assimilate into American society by providing a variety of services to them. The Settlement House Movement started in Britain in the 1800s and reached America in the 1880s. A majority of the houses were set up by religious organizations. For more information on the Settlement House Movement refer to Michael Friedman and Brett Friedman's *Settlement Houses: Improving the Social Welfare of America's Immigrants* (New York: Rosen Pub. Group, 2006) and Ruth Crocker's *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

House in St. Paul.⁶⁴ The Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House, created in 1924, was an organized effort by white social workers and philanthropists who “felt the need for a recreational and housing facility for young black women.”⁶⁵ The first all-white board, appointed a black woman from Dayton, Ohio as the first president. Gertrude Brown was influential in transforming Wheatley from a house primarily for black women to a social center for blacks on the North Side of the city.⁶⁶ W. Harry Davis grew up going to Wheatley. In his autobiography, *Overcoming*, Davis claimed that Brown “positioned the Wheatley on the front line of the neighborhood’s defense against vice of Sixth Avenue and mounted a day-by-day battle for the hearts and minds of the neighborhood’s children . . . The neighborhood parents and Summer School teachers applauded Miss Brown’s work and her staff to make the Wheatley’s offerings fun, interesting, and inviting.”⁶⁷

Aside from after school programs, Brown also opened the Wheatley for local black bands to rehearse and lodged visiting black artists. Famous artists such as Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday lodged at Wheatley, while performing in Minneapolis, when local hotels refused to accommodate them. Wheatley also accommodated black University of Minnesota students who were not able to obtain housing on campus. Although the university did not have a segregated housing policy, black students were not welcome at dormitories on campus. When they applied to university housing they were provided with a list of alternative off-campus options. Former university student Barbara Cyrus worked in the library at Wheatley. She remembered that Wheatley in addition to providing housing to students served as a “social center for University

⁶⁴ The Phyllis Wheatley House will subsequently be referred to as Wheatley.

⁶⁵ Howard J. Karger, "Phyllis Wheatley House: A History of the Minneapolis Black Settlement House, 1924 to 1940," *Phylon* 47, no. 1 (1986): 79-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/274697>, (accessed July 30, 2012), 81.

⁶⁶ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*; Karger, "Phyllis Wheatley House: A History of the Minneapolis Black Settlement House, 1924 to 1940."

⁶⁷ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 54.

students.” Cyrus explained, “We had fraternity and sorority dances [at Wheatley] and basketball tournaments and plays.”⁶⁸ Wheatley was an important component of recreation for black youth from elementary to university age.

The discrimination blacks faced in public spaces led to the notion that the best way for them to gain equality was by setting up black-owned businesses and organizations.⁶⁹ Cecil Newman, a Pullman porter from Kansas City, moved to Minneapolis in the 1920s. In 1935 he published the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, which became the main source of news for the black community.⁷⁰ Historian Jenifer Delton explained that “Newman used the paper to promote Black citizens’ full participation in industrial, civic, and political life.”⁷¹ Newman claimed that the best way for blacks to progress in the area was to become politically active. He encouraged blacks to take part in city politics by protesting discrimination in the city and communicating with public officials about the difficulties their communities faced. In 1935, Newman organized a boycott of Barney’s Café for its disrespectful treatment of blacks. The boycott ended when the café agreed to hire a black employee.⁷² Newman is most noted for becoming a leading voice advocating for Minneapolis black organizations to become more class inclusive. Newman blamed class tensions as the reason for the lack of successful black businesses in the city.⁷³

⁶⁸ Tim Brady, “The Way Spaces Were Allocated: African Americans on Campus, Part II,” *Minnesota*, November/December 2002
<http://www.minnesotaalumni.org/s/1118/content.aspx?sid=1118&gid=1&pgid=1734>(accessed March 24, 2013); Karger, “Phyllis Wheatley House”, 86.

⁶⁹ Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 74.

⁷² *Ibid*, 429.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

During the 1930s the NAACP partnered with Wheatley in order to reach a larger segment of the black community.⁷⁴ W. Harry Davis, a former NAACP member, recalled the Minneapolis chapter's initiative to get young blacks politically involved. Davis recounts his experience as a teenager attending NAACP classes at Wheatley: "The organization took a primer in politics. We learned about the precinct, the ward, the district, the caucus. In election years, we went door-to-door with the organization's senior members registering people to vote and distributing literature for candidates we supported."⁷⁵ The NAACP also worked with Wheatley to promote education as a way to fight against the city's racism. It also encouraged young blacks to stay in school, arguing that as the black population in the city became more educated there would be more economic opportunities for them.⁷⁶ As the 1940s hit, there continued to be a lack of economic opportunities for blacks. In 1939 (roughly the end of the Great Depression), the unemployment rate was 60% for blacks as compared to 25% for Whites.⁷⁷

Some blacks in the area even during the 1950s and early 1960s felt that racism, not lack of education was the reason for the limited number of opportunities for blacks in Minneapolis.⁷⁸ A majority of blacks who were employed only held menial or service jobs. Even after the passage of the fair employment law in 1955, many North Side residents still argued there were little opportunities available for them and that equality, although achieved on paper, had yet to become a reality in the city. One black North Side resident stated in a survey conducted in the late 1960s, "I came to Minneapolis because I heard this was a good place for Negroes. But there aren't any jobs here. You call up for a job and then when you get there and they see you're

⁷⁴ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*; Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*.

⁷⁵ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 149.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota*, 46.

⁷⁸ Joe Blade, "White People Blamed for Plymouth Rioting: Negroes Heard by Clergy," *Minneapolis Star*, July, 25, 1967, *Way Center Collection*, Minneapolis, 1969-1992, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

Negro, they say there isn't any work. But all the while you sit in that office, they're giving jobs to white people who come in." Another black North Side resident, detailed a similar experience when describing how employers reacted when he went to apply for jobs in the city: "Did you ever go in to a man and apply for a job, and have him sit there and nod his head, and then write 'NEGRO' across your application and toss it in the waste basket as you leave? That kind of thing hurts, man, it hurts." Even those who found jobs complained that they were still discriminated against once they were employed. One black North Side resident stated, "Even if you do find a job, it's not one where you can use your training or qualifications; and then you have to put up with a lot of abuse from all the white people you work with."⁷⁹

The lack of black businesses in the city, particularly on the North Side, only served to reinforce the economic deprivation of blacks in the area and created tension between black residents and Jewish business owners. Liz Samuels recalled that all the business stores on Plymouth Avenue, the major business hub of the area were run by Jews.⁸⁰ "Grocers were overpricing the items, selling inferior goods. There were no employment opportunities."⁸¹ The lack of control blacks felt over the economy in their own neighborhood resulted in direct confrontation between blacks and their Jewish business owners. This confrontation came in the form of two riots which will be the subject of the next chapter.

⁷⁹ Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development, "A Report by the Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis," August 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 3.

⁸⁰ Refer to illustration in appendix to view the location of Plymouth Avenue in reference to the rest of the city.

⁸¹ Al McFarlane, "Liz Samuels: A lifetime working for liberation of Black People," *Insight News*, January, 5, 2003, <http://insightnews.com/archives/316-liz-samuels-a-lifetime-working-for-liberation-of-black-people>, (accessed June 27, 2009).

CHAPTER 2: THE MINNEAPOLIS RIOTS OF 1966 AND 1967

*“A fire of protest against indignity and denial is burning here as it is elsewhere. It will not be extinguished by promises or pledges that are not translated into action.”*⁸² – Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin

During Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin’s inaugural speech of 1963 he discussed the need for a more concerted effort to enforce equality in the city. He explained that a refusal to focus on the issues of equality in Minneapolis would have volatile results. Mayor Naftalin’s remark regarding the “fire of protest” that was burning around the country was a direct reference to the Black Freedom Movement that many government officials feared was taking a more militant tone during the mid-1960s. Many feared growing black militancy would supersede the moderate Civil Rights approach to the fight for black equality.

Mayor Naftalin’s words were prophetic. As the 1960s progressed, urban cities began to explode in urban upheaval, starting with New York City in 1964 when black teenagers in Manhattan had a misunderstanding with a janitor, leading to the fatal shooting of one of the teens.⁸³ In response to the shooting, rioting broke out in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn) that lasted for six days. Historian John F. McDonald explained that, “Many of the black youth saw the police as “oppressors” intent on maintaining the system of segregation.”⁸⁴ The riot was the black youths’ way of protesting against the oppression they faced on a daily basis and an attempt to right an injustice. The outbreaks of rioting in major urban centers, of the United States, like New York, was seen as an outgrowth of the growing emergence of black militancy in the country and mounting dissatisfaction with the limited results the CRM was providing. There was more to come.

⁸² Edwards, *The Minneapolis Story Through My Eyes*, 215.

⁸³ John F. McDonald, *Urban America: Growth, Crisis, and Rebirth*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 134.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

The majority of the riots occurred during the summer of 1967, popularly named the “Long Hot Summer”.⁸⁵ As a result of the large number of race riots breaking out throughout the country, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11365 on July 28, 1967, establishing the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.⁸⁶ President Johnson ordered the commission to produce a report outlining the causes of the riots and coming up with possible solutions. The report released on March 1, 1968 by the commission featured profiles on a number of cities that experienced riots during the 1960s including: Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, Newark, and other cities.

Historian Simon Hall in his book *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements of the 1960s* characterized the riots as “a testament to the failure of both liberals and the Civil Rights Movement to deal adequately with the problems that affected urban blacks in the North.”⁸⁷ Perceptions of the riots could be thematized under three broad rubrics according to historians Joe Keagan and Harlen Hahn: conservative, liberal, and radical.⁸⁸

The conservative view, according to historian Jonathan Bean, characterized the riots as “outbreaks of mass criminality.”⁸⁹ This view painted a picture of riot participants as individuals looking to capitalize on the material gain the riots could produce for them. The conservative view was best documented through political scientist Edward Banefield’s “Rioting for Fun and Profit,” chapter nine of his book *Unheavenly City*.⁹⁰ Banefield and other supporters of the

⁸⁵ U.S. National Advisory on Civil Disorders, *Report of National Advisory of Civil Disorders*, (Washington, DC, 1968).

⁸⁶ The National Advisory on Civil Disorders will subsequently be referred to as the Kerner Commission.

⁸⁷ Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements of the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 59.

⁸⁸ Robert W. Kweit and Mary G. Kweit, *People & Politics in Urban America*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 1998), 88-82.

⁸⁹ Jonathan J. Bean, “Burn, Baby, Burn”: Small Business in the Urban Riots of the 1960s,” *Independent Review*, September 22, 2000, 165-188, http://www.independent.org/pdf/tir/tir_05_2_bean.pdf, (accessed March 20, 2013), 166.

⁹⁰ Edward C. Banefield, “Rioting for Fun and Profit,” in *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1970).

conservative view argued that riot participants failed to attack “government buildings and the looting of stores was done more for “fun and profit” than for making a political statement.”⁹¹

The major flaw with this argument was that it failed to adequately examine the views of riot participants alongside those who opposed the rioting in their communities. Historian Jonathan J. Bean provided a wealth of personal testimony from black residents who were not convinced that rioters were acting out of protest and viewed the riots a source of violence that “hurt the cause of civil rights.” Bean also failed to produce any riot leader testimony; instead, he deconstructed arguments made by prominent Black Power activists who were not directly engaged in the rioting.⁹²

The liberal view argued that the riots were a result of social conditions, including lack of adequate facilities, mass discrimination, and underemployment. The liberal view was best documented through the *Report of the National Advisory of Civil Disorders* by the Kerner Commission. The report concluded that white racism was responsible for the outbreaks of urban violence and that in order to prevent future occurrences, the inequalities between blacks and whites needed to be addressed. The report warned that the nation was “moving towards two societies, one black, one white- separate and unequal.”⁹³ Similar to the testament by Mayor Naftalin during his inaugural speech, the Kerner Commission believed that inequality was at the root of poor race-relations in the U.S.

Lastly, the radical view, according to political scientists Mary and Robert Kweit, argued that the riots were “rebellions against a political and economic system that left blacks in a position of subjugation.”⁹⁴ Black Power activists, in part, were responsible for the creation of

⁹¹ Bean, “Burn Baby Burn,” 167.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ U.S. National Advisory on Civil Disorders, *Report of National Advisory of Civil Disorders*.

⁹⁴ Kweit and Kweit, *People and Politics in Urban American*, 82.

this view. A line from a speech made by activist, Stokley Carmichael, on July 28, 1966 best illustrated the radical view.⁹⁵ Carmichael affirmed, “Now, let's get to what the white press has been calling riots. In the first place don't get confused with the words they use like "anti-white," "hate," "militant" and all that nonsense like "radical" and "riots." What's happening is rebellions not riots . . . ”⁹⁶ My analysis of the riots or civil disturbances in Minneapolis in 1966 and 1967 focuses on the actual participants and does not specifically privilege any of the views established by the scholars mentioned above.⁹⁷

THE 1966 RIOT⁹⁸

*“Why should we be down all the time? It’s time to rise up and let people know we want something.”- Clarence Benford Jr.*⁹⁹

As blacks around the nation attempted to bring awareness to the inequities they faced in their marginalized communities, black youth in Minneapolis began to take action. On the evening of August 3, 1966 a group of 35 to 50 black youth, frustrated over the lack of jobs in the area, took to the main business hub on the North Side, Plymouth Avenue. They threw rocks through the windows of a number of businesses. The *Minneapolis Spokesman* reported that although looting and vandalism occurred, youth that participated in the “rumble” dispersed when

⁹⁵ For more information on the Black Power Movement or Stokley Carmichael refer to footnote 13 on page 9.

⁹⁶ Stokely Carmichael, "Negro Rights and the American Future," *Negro Digest*, October 1966, http://books.google.com/books?id=0zkDAAAAMBAJ&source=gbs_all_issues_r&cad=1 (accessed March 24, 2013). The speech was reprinted in an issue of the Negro Digest. From analyzing when the speech was made, it is probable that Carmichael was referring to one or a number of the riots that had occurred prior to this speech including: Harlem/ Brooklyn (1964), Rochester (1964), Philadelphia (1964), Watts (1965), Chicago (1966) or Cleveland (1966).

⁹⁷ Throughout this study the riots will be referred to as riots, civil disorders, and disturbances.

⁹⁸ Very little information exists on the activities of the 1966 riot unlike the 1967 riot which will be covered in the next section. The majority of the materials that do exist on the 1966 riot cover the aftermath of the riot and the possible causes of the riot.

⁹⁹ Maurice Hobbs, “Negro: Vandals Wanted Jobs,” *Minneapolis Star*, August, 8, 1966, *Way Center Collection*, Minneapolis, 1969-1992, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

police arrived on the scene “in riot equipment to meet the disorder.”¹⁰⁰ Clarence Benford Jr., described as the leader of the group, told reporters, “It took a few rocks and the businessmen on the avenue had to pay.”¹⁰¹ Benford explained that black youth in the area were fed up with their inability to get jobs. He said that the businesses he applied to in the area stated to him “We’ll call you tomorrow, but tomorrow never came.”¹⁰² Benford also pointed to police harassment and lack of maintained housing and park space as secondary causes of the riot. He explained that the goal of the youth involved was to make people aware of the problems they faced: “When they did this here, I guess they made people aware of it.”¹⁰³

The 1966 riot on the North Side shocked many Minneapolis residents and resulted in North Side residents gaining the ears of public officials. On August 4-10, 1966 the city government put together a number of meetings in the North Side community to allow residents to voice their grievances to public officials.¹⁰⁴ Residents also voiced their opinions regarding the causes of the riot initiated by black youth. At a meeting held at Oak Park Community Center on August 4, 1966, a few blocks from Plymouth Avenue where the riot took place, more than 250 black residents attended. North Side resident James Spalding agreed with the youth, asserting the main cause of the riot was lack of jobs:

“You want to know our motivation? Well how’s poverty for a starter? We don’t have an equal chance for jobs in spite of equal opportunity programs. How many Negroes do you see working on Plymouth Ave? We can’t [get] jobs there. Everywhere we look for work they tell us we’re not qualified. All we are qualified for is to wash dishes for \$1.25 an hour.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰“Minneapolis Disorder Is Mild Reminder of Need For Action,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, August 11, 1966, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

¹⁰¹ Hobbs, “Negro: Vandals Wanted Jobs,” *Minneapolis Star*.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Negroes Hope a Meeting Will Yield Understanding,” *Minneapolis Star*, August 11, 1966, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁰⁵ Mike Hall and Pat McCarthy, “Negro Grievances Heard,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 4, 1966, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

The inability of blacks to obtain jobs in their own neighborhood was particularly disheartening to blacks in the area, as evidenced by Spalding and Benford's statements to reporters.

After blacks' grievances were heard at a number of community meetings, the city moved very quickly to resolve the problems identified. The city government made several resolutions. Beginning on August 5, 1966 they provided a number of youth from the area with jobs. One newspaper headlined, claimed 85 youth had obtained jobs within ten days of the riot.¹⁰⁶ Another resolution was to bring a coalition of leaders together from both the black and Jewish communities. The group had its first meeting on August 8, 1966.¹⁰⁷ One of the most significant outcomes of the riot was the Mayor's decision to form the City Council's Commission on Human Development, a few days following the riot.¹⁰⁸ The commission contained a number of public officials. It was charged with three major tasks: "determining the causes of the violence, making recommendations to prevent recurrence, and to make recommendations for the resolution of problems on the Near North Side."¹⁰⁹ The commission was given a year to produce the report.

The last resolution made by the city government was to allow the community access to a building to create a recreation center for youth on August 5, 1966. As Benford stated, one of the issues the black youth were trying to bring attention to was the lack of maintained park space in

¹⁰⁶ Sam Newlund, "85 Obtain Job After Vandalism on Plymouth Av," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 13, 1967, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis.

¹⁰⁷ Sam Newlund, "Leaders to Seek Ways to Improve City's North Side," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 9, 1966, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁰⁸ The City Council's Commission on Human Development will subsequently be referred to as the Minneapolis Commission.

¹⁰⁹ Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development, "A Report by the Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis," *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Intro: i.

the area. The city government believed that by donating the building to community members it would allow them to create space for the “troubled black youth” of the North Side.¹¹⁰

The shock of the riot continued to permeate throughout the Twin Cities. Many Minneapolis newspapers started articles on the riots with lines such as “Last week’s disorders in Minneapolis probably shocked a great many.”¹¹¹ The Minneapolis Commission concluded that, “perhaps one reason these problems and the struggle resulting from them have become so deep and so complex is that many people in Minneapolis have never been willing to admit that these problems exist.”¹¹² Additionally the commission asserted that “many people in Minneapolis feel that our ‘negro or slum problem’ is not serious.”¹¹³

Although there was discord regarding the severity of the problem in many circles throughout the city, black North Side residents seemed to be in accordance when asked about the issues. W. Harry Davis, although he did not agree with the methods used by black youth to bring awareness to their problems, agreed that discrimination was a problem stating, “It was impossible to be a black man anywhere in America in the 1950s and not to be aware of both prevalent racism and a persistent stirring to overcome it.”¹¹⁴

Two important messages came out of the 1966 riot. One was that blacks in Minneapolis were no different from blacks in other areas of the United States and thus, faced similar problems. Crawford, a black youth who participated in the 1966 riot exclaimed, “The mayor and governor think that Minneapolis Negroes are good Negroes . . . The Negroes in the Twin Cities

¹¹⁰ Robinson, *For A Moment We Had The Way*, 36-37.

¹¹¹ “Minneapolis Disorder Is Mild Reminder of Need For Action,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*.

¹¹² Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Intro: iii.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 149.

feel like Negroes all over.”¹¹⁵ One *Washington Post* article concluded that a major concern was “if this city [Minneapolis], with its Scandinavian population and overwhelming white majority, cannot handle its race relations without violence, then the prospect of eventual racial peace in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles is dim indeed.”¹¹⁶ Another important message was that the blacks on the North Side were capable of initiating a full scale riot. The 1966 riot was initiated by a small group compared to riots in major cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles (Watts). Also, the group dispersed when police arrived. However, the actions by youth on the evening of August 3, 1966 still created a fear of the possibility for future incidents in Minneapolis. Thus, if word of the contemplation of another riot was revealed, federal authorities would have to be notified.

On May 16, 1967 Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure’) spoke to a crowd of 7,000 at Williams Arena at the University of Minnesota. A black student group at the university invited Carmichael to speak. The speech was open to the public and was attended by black and white students, Minneapolis residents and others from outside the state. Carmichael was prized by historians for making the term “Black Power” popular after his famous declaration during the 1966 Meredith Mississippi March.¹¹⁷ As a result of Carmichael’s political activism, he was closely watched by federal officials. When he visited Minneapolis, local authorities scrutinized Carmichael intently, fearing he would make comments to spark protest among blacks in the city.

Hennepin County Sheriff Donald J. Omodt reported to federal authorities that Carmichael on his visit to Minneapolis declared, “The blood will flow in the city of Minneapolis this

¹¹⁵ Hall and McCarthy, “Negro Grievances Heard,” *Minneapolis Tribune*.

¹¹⁶ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Risk on Plymouth Avenue,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1966, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/142820162?> (accessed February 20, 2013).

¹¹⁷ Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks; Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), Refer to the footnote number for more information on Carmichael.

summer.” It is hard to judge whether this claim by Sheriff Omodt was valid. He did not report this statement to federal authorities until June 22, 1967, a month after Carmichael’s visit to Minneapolis. Additionally, Sheriff Omodt claimed that Carmichael met with blacks on the North Side in the months of July and August of 1967. It is very unlikely that Carmichael was in Minneapolis at this time.¹¹⁸ He attended the Dialectics of Liberation in London, England in July 1967 and no documents have surfaced that suggest Carmichael travelled to Minneapolis any time other than his May 1967 visit at the University of Minnesota. As mentioned in the introduction, the Black Power Movement (BPM) was portrayed negatively by the press and perceived by the majority of Americans as a call for violence. Did local authorities contribute to this portrayal by falsely reporting declarations of violence by Black Power activists?

Negative publicity of the BPM unfolded rapidly and affected the thinking of Minneapolis policemen, especially since the disturbance of 1966 had occurred almost a year ago. In early June, less than a month after the speech, local officials fearing another riot would occur, spent time surveying the North Side. They paid particularly close attention to residents suspected of being Black Power activists. Local officials reported all their findings to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which kept a file on Minneapolis from June to September 1967. In one report describing suspicious activity observed by local authorities, there was a section outlining the movement of two North Side residents, Earthia Wiley and Michael Crawford, from June 23, 1967 to July 7, 1967. Wiley’s home was described as a “Black Power headquarters”. Crawford

¹¹⁸ Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission), “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/histvault?q=001346-025-0298> (accessed February 20, 2013). Although the Kerner Commission was not established at the time that the FBI records on Minneapolis began, it was established a month after the records were created. It is probable that the records are listed under the Kerner Commission records because the majority of the records deal with the events leading up to the 1967 riot in Minneapolis and its aftermath. The Kerner Commission was established a week after the 1967 riot in Minneapolis. The Commission may have used some of the information from the records when researching for their report.

was described as “a young Negro male, high school dropout, who is radically anti-white...” Wiley and Crawford were closely watched by local authorities who suspected they would initiate a violent outburst. The report claimed Wiley and Crawford were planning to start a riot in order to “cause considerable property damage and publicity for their cause in an attempt to arouse the Negro community.”¹¹⁹ The North Side continued to be on close watch in the months following Carmichael’s visit.

Meanwhile, the efforts to resolve the problems of the North Side had come almost to a standstill. For instance, the Minority Group Housing Committee (MGHC) created a report of recommendations for improving the North Side following the 1966 disturbance. In MGHC’s annual report released on June 16, 1967, the group stated that “its major concerns” were “yet to be satisfied”.¹²⁰ Additionally, one Washington Post article reported as early as August 19, 1966 that “[Mayor] Naftalin’s efforts, aided by half a dozen Federal state and city agencies, netted scores of job possibilities. But that’s where it stopped. No one was actually hired.”¹²¹ The delay in taking steps to implement the improvements requested by North Side residents and organizations, further frustrated members of the black community. North Side residents complained that public officials did little to address any of their complaints. One North Side resident confessed:

“They [the city government] never give us a hearing. They never listen. That old judge will just pull us aside and try and pacify us. They won’t let us be human beings. When we have a complaint, we want to be heard—just like the white man—but they won’t let us stand up and fight for what we believe in.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Evans and Novak, “Risk on Plymouth Avenue,” *The Washington Post*.

¹²² Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, 8.

Additionally, one reporter concluded that, “Residents say the promises often are turned into cruel jokes, because of delay and confusion.”¹²³

A number of North Side residents warned that if progress on their recommendations continued to be halted there would be more rioting to come. A local newspaper quoted John Hampton, a SNCC¹²⁴ representative warning that the 1966 “slight minor disturbance could be the forerunner of more serious violence if Negro problems were not attended by the white community.”¹²⁵ Moreover, North Side resident James Spalding conferred, “If something isn’t done about our wants, Plymouth’s going to burn!”¹²⁶ Spalding’s warning became reality on July 19, 1967.

The 1967 Riot

*“If you didn’t have the cold winters of do-nothing you wouldn’t have the long hot summers of violence.”*¹²⁷-Harry Spike Moss

On July 19, 1967 a group of youth set fire to a number of Jewish businesses along Plymouth Avenue on the North Side. When the authorities arrived in the area, the youth confronted the police by hurling rocks and insults. The event came to be known as the Plymouth Riot, but the impetus for it started several days before.

¹²³ Dick Cunningham, “Promises to N Side Often Become Jokes,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 27, 1966, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹²⁴ SNCC, formally called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was organized in 1960 in North Carolina. The group organized chapters on a number of campuses throughout the United States. SNCC gained national recognition for its involvement with the sit-ins of the early 1960s. SNCC migrated from a philosophy of nonviolence in the mid-1960s with the emergence of the BPM and Carmichael’s declaration of Black Power. For more information on SNCC refer to the following text: Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Faith S. Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC’s Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹²⁵ “Negroes Voice Grievances at N. Side Parley,” August 9, 1966, *Minneapolis Tribune, Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

¹²⁶ Hall and McCarthy, “Negro Grievances Heard,” *Minneapolis Tribune*.

¹²⁷ Blade, “White People Blamed for Plymouth Rioting: Negroes Heard by Clergy,” *Minneapolis Star*.

North Side resident Gwen Jones-Davis¹²⁸ claimed there were several incidents that caused police-community tension to build in July 1967. It is important to note that Jones-Davis was called by the FBI on July 31, 1967 to provide testimony on the events of the 1967 riot and on the problems North Side residents faced. The records on her dialogue with an FBI official concluded with a note that stated she would provide facts on Minneapolis to the “President’s newly appointed Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders [Kerner Commission].” Her testimony in this chapter comes from a report she created in September 1967 found in the *Records of The Way, Inc.* Minneapolis 1966-1974 manuscript collection at the Gale Family Library at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota. Jones-Davis recalled that on July 15, 1967, the evening of one of the Aquatennial parades¹²⁹ in Minneapolis, blacks faced a great degree of police harassment and neglect. Though lengthy, Jones-Davis’ account captures the intensity of the situation:

“For instance, near Third Street and Fourth Avenue, a 5-year old Negro boy wandered into the streets. The police were alleged to have pulled their guns and stated ‘Nigger, get out the streets or we will blow your brains.’ His mother ran out to get him and [was] pushed by the policemen back to the curb. At the end of the parade, no Negro persons were allowed to board the buses going into South Minneapolis, and those living in North Minneapolis were not let on where possible. This action on the part of bus drivers made it necessary that these people walk to their homes—a distance in some cases of five or six miles. This walk home made Negro people open target[s] for whites driving by in their cars to heap insults upon them, throwing bottles and debris, calling names and threatening. This behavior reached a climax in North Minneapolis at Plymouth and Newton where four white boys caught a Negro boy and beat him in the presence of policemen disbursed to the area earlier. The boy was injured in the head and the police, on request that they take the boy to the hospital, answered, ‘Nigger, go home; there is

¹²⁸ Gwen Jones-Davis was the wife of the executive director of “The Way”, Syl Davis. She will be formally introduced in the following chapter; FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹²⁹ The Minneapolis Aquatennial Festival is an annual eight festival in the city. It has been nicknamed *The Best Days of Summer*. The festival contains a number of events throughout the city. During the festival, a number of parades occur throughout the city. For more information on the Aquatennial visit the following website, <http://www.aquatennial.com>.

nothing wrong with you.’ To the white boy they said, ‘Get out and go home before we have to take you to jail.’”¹³⁰

Although North Side residents often complained of police brutality and neglect, the white Minneapolis community presented a counter perspective. Even though the Minneapolis Commission concluded otherwise, the Mayor and the City Council said, “that they know no instances of police brutality . . .”¹³¹ The failure of public officials to reprehend police officers for their brutality and neglect of North Side residents, led to more tension between local authorities and blacks on the North Side.

On July 19, 1967 a Jewish bar owner, Wayne Anderson, shot a black patron (Samuel Simmons). Prior to this shooting, Anderson was rumored to have shot two other black patrons and neither time was he apprehended by the police. The shooting caused a crowd of youth to retaliate. Jones-Davis explained, “...they [the crowd] were heard to say, ‘The bastard won’t get away with it this time,’ as they proceeded in front of the bar.”¹³² Jones-Davis claimed this marked the beginning of the riot. W. Harry Davis described the shooting as “all the spark that was needed.”¹³³

Government documents and major media sources- including: articles from the *Minneapolis Star* and the *Minneapolis Tribune*, the Minneapolis Commission’s report, and the FBI records on Minneapolis-pointed primarily to a fight between two black women over a wig as the trigger for the riot. The FBI records reported that a group of “500 Negro teenagers and younger spectators congregated around a Negro drum and bugle corps marching unit . . . A

¹³⁰ Gwen Jones-Davis, “Plymouth Avenue Minneapolis Problem,” late September 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.* Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 2.

¹³¹ Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, 8.

¹³² Jones-Davis, “Plymouth Avenue Minneapolis Problem,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, 4.

¹³³ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 159.

scuffle between two unnamed Negro girls over a wig was broken up by police officers present. This aroused the remaining crowd . . .”¹³⁴ It is important to note that the altercation between the two women occurred in downtown Minneapolis. North Side resident, Harry Spike Moss,¹³⁵ contended to a reporter of the *Minneapolis Star*, that it was not the fight, but the police’s reaction to the fight that served as one of the catalyst for the riot. Moss was quoted in a local newspaper claiming that the two girls “were thrown to the pavement by policemen breaking up the fight. A Negro boy who protested was knocked down.”¹³⁶

Despite the uncertainty regarding the catalyst for the riot, following the shooting, a group of what the FBI described as “several hundred Negro” teenagers and younger children set fire to shops on Plymouth Avenue after 11pm in the evening. Once the stores were set aflame, according to the testimony of local authorities, approximately 100 policemen were called into the area.¹³⁷ One local newspaper reported that the difference between the 1966 riot and the evening in 1967, aside from the difference in the number of participants, was that when more local authorities arrived the crowd did not disperse; they continued to protest. Federal records described the group’s actions toward the police as “rock and bottle throwing.” Around 3a.m. when police were finally able to disperse the crowd, five black males and three black females were arrested.¹³⁸

Jones-Davis explained that the crowd targeted specific stores that night. The stores targeted had at some point discriminated against blacks in the neighborhood. Jones-Davis in her retelling of the riot stated:

¹³⁴ FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹³⁵ For the remainder of the thesis Harry Spike Moss will be referred to as Spike Moss.

¹³⁶ Blade, “White People Blamed for Plymouth Rioting: Negroes Heard by Clergy,” *Minneapolis Star*.

¹³⁷ FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹³⁸ Ibid; “Fires, Fights Continue on North Side,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 21, 1967, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

“With the dawn it was noticed that a grocery store [called], Country Boy, had been burned. (Note: The owner’s [of the grocery store] son had shot a Negro boy last summer for stealing a 59-cent package of bologna after the owner had refused payment. After that, the son sat at all times in the rear of the store behind a door, watching all individuals who came in, especially Negroes. On numerous occasions, Negro kids have been suspected of stealing, held at gun point by the son, and taken by the police through the back way to headquarters...Silver’s Market, at Knox and Plymouth, was also ablaze. (Note: This man had been the triggering point for the 1966 disturbance. The policy of the owner was that a limited number of Negroes could be in his store at a given time. On the night in question, August 2, 1966, he had [as he had done for at least 20 years in the past] forced Negroes out of his store at gun point. Sitting next to his store were a number of young men who, in response to Silver’s action, went to ask police in a parked car to intervene. Instead, the police rolled up the window and ignored the pleas. The young men returned to the store, began arguing with the owner about his actions, and as tensions mounted, began to break windows, etc. in his store. At that time, another shopkeeper, a block away, who had also a reputation for unfair treatment of Negroes, had his store wrecked. It is rumored that Silver has shot three Negroes in the past.) Next to Silver’s Market a church was ablaze because of its proximity to Silver’s Market. Wayne’s Bar, in response to the owner’s actions, was also set afire.”¹³⁹

W. Harry Davis, on the other hand, argued that blacks and Jews in the area had a history of cooperation. He asserted, “Our Jewish neighbors have been our oldest allies in the struggle for civil rights. They remain our partners in the struggle.”¹⁴⁰ Although federal reports described riot participants as “roving bands of Negro youth”, North Side residents contend that “...not only Negroes, but poor whites and Indians as well, were involved in causing the disturbance...”¹⁴¹

Historian Iric Nathanson noted that the following evening “saw some sporadic episodes of rock throwing and fistfights and reports of gunfire.”¹⁴² FBI records stated that at approximately 1a.m. “extensive fire and looting was reported on Plymouth Avenue” and that

¹³⁹ Jones-Davis, “Plymouth Avenue Minneapolis Problem,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 158.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, 117.

firemen called into the area were “stoned by the gathering crowd.”¹⁴³ After the evening outbreaks on July 20th, the governor called National Guardsmen into the area, to lessen the threat of future outbreaks, causing the riot to make headlines in newspapers outside of the Twin Cities. The *Chicago Tribune* headline read “Minneapolis Calls Guard to End Riots.”¹⁴⁴ The article referred to the North Side as “racially troubled” and made sure to note that out of Minneapolis’s population of 483,000, only 12,000 were Negroes.¹⁴⁵ The governor when defending his decision to call upon the National Guard for support contested, “I want the citizens of Minnesota to be fully aware that rampant lawlessness and bloodshed will not be allowed to exist in Minneapolis, or any city of this state.”¹⁴⁶ Public officials felt it was necessary to send the message they did not intend to negotiate with riot participants as they had for the 1966 riot. Mayor Naftalin declared that the violence was “simply a product of lawlessness” and that it was not “related to deficiencies or neglect.” He added that “talk will not quell racial disturbances” and ended by concluding that “these people [riot participants] are beyond our reach.”¹⁴⁷ The guardsmen were not limited to the North Side; they were stationed throughout the city and even in predominately black areas of St. Paul.

After the National Guard pulled out of the area, North Side residents held a meeting at the Wheatley Settlement House. The group of about 200 put together a list of demands to present to public officials at City Hall the following morning. The list included demands in

¹⁴³ FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹⁴⁴ “Minneapolis Calls Guard to End Riots,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 22, 1967, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/179255351?accountid=10747> (accessed February 20, 2013).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “Guardsmen Sent Into Minneapolis: Governor Provides 600 Men- Fire Breaks Out,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1967, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/117528758?accountid=10747> (accessed February 20, 2013).

¹⁴⁷ “Mayor Talk Won’t Quell Violence,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 22, 1967, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

human rights, employment, education, housing, and community service. The Director of the Upper Midwest Indian Center, located a few blocks north of Plymouth Avenue, requested that the list of demands reference all minorities, instead of just Negroes.¹⁴⁸ The group presented the demands as requiring immediate action.

On the morning of July 24, 1967, a group of North Side representatives made their way to City Hall to present the demands. This group included a number of community organizations, which were active in the aftermath of the riot, such as “The Way.” At the conclusion of the meeting the mayor agreed to meet with North Side residents at Lincoln Junior High School at 7:00pm.¹⁴⁹ During the meeting residents offered their opinions on the cause of the second riot. One black youth in the crowd, Harry Moss, discussed his frustration over the lack of support by public officials: “We’ve been asking for 400 years. The Indians came to the peace table and they’re still on reservations. The Man brought you here to be slaves; now the Man doesn’t need you anymore.”¹⁵⁰ The Mayor ended the meeting by reflecting on his 1963 inaugural speech, “In 1963 I presented a blueprint for action to the City Council. I hoped to have delivered it- no US city has. Because we don’t know how to deliver it.”¹⁵¹ In addition to the mayor’s 1963 blueprint, the Minneapolis Commission’s report findings suggested that the government alone could not provide enough services to the North Side community to prevent future race relation problems.

Still the report concluded that white racism was the root cause of the riots in Minneapolis and the plight of blacks in the area and also that Minneapolis, in racial terms, was “a reflection of

¹⁴⁸ Marilyn Hoegemeyer, “North Side Residents Demand Action by City,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 24, 1967, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁴⁹ FBI, “Minneapolis, Minnesota June-September 1967, *Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the Kerner Commission* July 1, 1967- December 31, 1968.

¹⁵⁰ Hoegemeyer, “North Side Residents Demand Action by City,” *Minneapolis Tribune*.

¹⁵¹ Kristin Serum, “North Sides Confront Officials,” July 25, 1967, *Minneapolis Star*, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis.

the national scene.”¹⁵² The last section of the Minneapolis Commission’s report outlined recommendations for containing the threat of future violence. It also made a key recommendation for the development of “indigenous organizations” to provide social services to the North Side community. The report cited one organization as already making substantial progress in the community, due to their ability to reach “people with services who have never been reached.”¹⁵³ This promising organization was “The Way.”

CONCLUSIONS ON RIOT IDEOLOGY

Examining the dialogue between reporters and young riot participants, as well as personal testimony from a number of North Side residents, it is clear that the conservative view of riot ideology failed to support the North Side riots. The primary argument of the view was that the rioters were not making any political statement. Banefield stated in his book *The Unheavenly City*, that the after the riot “no one gave a very clear or convincing account of what the rioters were revolting against...”¹⁵⁴ Because of their tactics (burning and looting stores) and failure to directly confront police and attack government buildings (the main source of their oppression), rioters were not really rebelling against discrimination. Evidence seems to contradict this view. Also it assumes that the stores rioters attacked were in no way guilty of discriminating against black patrons. North Side residents, as shown in North Side resident Gwen Jones- Davis’s testimony, reveal that residents strategically attacked businesses with a history of discriminatory practices. Lastly, the conservative view minimizes rioters’ complaints of poor conditions in their

¹⁵² Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis”, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Intro: ii.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ Banefield, *The Unheavenly City*, 196

neighborhoods by conducting a comparative statistical analysis of living conditions in black neighborhoods across the United States. Banefield writes, “Like Los Angeles, Detroit was a city of relative prosperity and opportunity for the Negroes; it had no real “ghetto” and its police had for several years been under very enlightened and determined leadership”¹⁵⁵ Banefield offers no analysis of how blacks fared in comparison to whites in any of these cities. Also, Banefield used housing as evidence to show how there were no “ghettos” in these cities. Scholars have not only questioned his conclusions on what constituted a “ghetto,” but also his failure to examine how discrimination limited blacks’ economic and social mobility.¹⁵⁶ W. Harry Davis’s memoir, the Kerner Commission’s report and the Minneapolis Commission’s report, all paint a picture in which no matter what class or education level blacks attained, they continued to be marginalized.

The causes of the civil disturbances in the late 1960s across the nation and on the North Side of Minneapolis are still a matter of debate. However, following the Minneapolis riot in 1966, an organization was created to meet the needs of blacks on the North Side. The organization listened to the political, social, and economic complaints made by the participants in the riots and tried to do something to help them. The organization was “The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.,” and is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Banefield, *The Unheavenly City*, 197.

¹⁵⁶ See reviews of the *Unheavenly City* by historians David Elesh, "The Unheavenly City by Edward Banfield," *The Journal of Human Resources* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 251-56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/144924>, (accessed April 1, 2013) and Joel Lieske, "The Unheavenly City Revisited by Edward C. Banfield," *American Journal of Sociology* 80, no. 3 (November 1974): 765-67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2777261>, (accessed April 1, 2013).

CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF “THE WAY” 1966-1970

“...a community organization that almost turned Minneapolis upside down”-Rolland Rolland

“The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc.” took shape following the 1966 riot. The city, responding to complaints from riot participants that there was no place for them to go, donated an old vacant building to the North Side community. The building was located off of Plymouth Avenue, in the same area that the rioting broke out. It was soon transformed into “The Way.” Former board chair of “The Way”, Rolland Robinson, recalled in his book narrating the story of “The Way”, how the organization got its name: “The unusual name, **The Way**, was chosen by some of the young people of the neighborhood to symbolize a “Way out,” but surely it means also a path-that is, traveling with a desired goal in mind.”¹⁵⁷ Syl Davis, the Executive Director further elaborated on the organization’s unique name,

“**The Way** is proud of its name because it was decided on by the young people of the North Side community. They believed that the center had to be more than a place, it had to represent a “way of life” to the persons who came. While those youths had only other youths like themselves in mind, adults accepted the simplicity and directness of their choice and began working toward seeking out other adults to adhere to its meaning.”¹⁵⁸

Although the original purpose of “The Way” was to serve as a center for youth, the early leadership of the organization did not place all of its focus on youth programming. Executive Director Syl Davis declared, “The Way represents a voice-hope for the people who before had little or no hope . . . The Way is more than just a Youth Center or a Community Center, or a cultural center. The Way is a way of life.”¹⁵⁹ The leading forces of this “new way of life” included Executive Director Syl Davis and his wife Gwen Jones-Davis, Rolland Robinson, Willie Mae Dixon, Mahmoud El-Kati, and leading youth worker Spike Moss.

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 39

¹⁵⁸ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Syl Davis, a native of the North Side, prior to becoming the executive director of “The Way”, worked for Wells Memorial Settlement on the North Side.¹⁶⁰ Davis’s decision to leave his former job and work for “The Way” rested on his belief that social service agencies, like the settlement house he worked for, “have not become a part of solutions but a part of the problem themselves.”¹⁶¹ He believed that the issues that the North Side faced could not be solved with more social service agencies. Syl Davis asserted, “The North Side didn’t need more services. People need to be enfranchised and given the opportunity to create and run their own institutions.”¹⁶² Thus, he envisioned “The Way” as a community-wide effort that would allow residents to take part in the progress needed to improve living conditions on the North Side.

Syl Davis’s wife, Gwen Jones-Davis, was an unsalaried program director. Although, she was rarely mentioned in the media or in program documents, as a leading figure in the organization, Davis played a significant role in creating and directing programs at “The Way.” The organization’s failure to acknowledge the leading role Davis played in the organization, as evidenced in program documents (which show she was not provided a salary), may allude to the subordinate role of women that several scholars discuss in histories of the Black Freedom Movement.¹⁶³ Gwen Davis attended Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in social work. She went on to receive a law degree from John Marshall Law School in Chicago and two advanced degrees from the University of Minnesota. She had a history of political activism in Minneapolis prior to her involvement with “The Way.”

¹⁶⁰ Sam Newlund, “Leaders to Seek Ways to Improve City’s North Side,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 9, 1966, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁶¹ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹⁶² Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 18.

¹⁶³ For information on the roles women played in the Black Freedom Movement refer to the following text: Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) and Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Minneapolis Tribune reporter, Dick Cunningham, wrote of an incident where Gwen Davis “broke up a luncheon meeting of the Mayor’s Human Relations Commission by calling two of the city’s most respected white human relations workers paternalistic racists.”¹⁶⁴ Staff of “The Way” commended Gwen Davis for giving the organization “direction and purpose.”¹⁶⁵

Willie Mae Dixon, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, moved to Minneapolis from Mississippi. Dixon left the South to escape the racial violence that ended in the deaths of two family members. Her niece was one of the victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham Alabama in 1963.¹⁶⁶ Her father was shot in the back by a white police officer for refusing to answer to “boy.”¹⁶⁷ Prior to working at “The Way”, Dixon fought the Minnesota Welfare Department to provide adequate services to black families upon their arrival to Minneapolis. Dixon’s primary responsibility at “The Way” was directing the legal services program. Rolland Robinson described Dixon as seldom receiving the credit she deserved.¹⁶⁸

Milton Williams, who later changed his name to Mahmoud El –Kati,¹⁶⁹ a native of Cleveland Ohio, moved to the Twin Cities in the 1950s with his family. He first settled in Rondo, the black neighborhood of St. Paul. El-Kati was involved in community activism from the time he arrived. While working as a psychological counselor at the St. Paul Rehabilitation Center, he taught classes on black history at community centers such as the Hallie Q. Settlement House. He also joined the North Central Voters League, which he cited as one of the first

¹⁶⁴ Dick Cunningham and Mike Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation,” *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, December 1, 1968, *Way Center Collection*, Minneapolis, 1969-1992, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN, 9.

¹⁶⁵ David Chansen, “Gwen Jonesdavispyle, leader in battle against racism, dies,” *Star Tribune*, September 22, 1992, Newspaper Clippings, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁶⁶ For information on the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing refer to the following text: Carolyn Maull McKinstry and Denise George, *While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age during the Civil Rights Movement* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011); Shelley Tougas, *Birmingham 1963: How a Photograph Rallied Civil Rights Support* (Mankato, MN: Compass Point Books, 2011); Paul Kersey, *The Tragic City: Birmingham 1963-2013* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).

¹⁶⁷ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 24.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Throughout the thesis Milton Williams will be referred to as Mahmoud El-Kati.

organizations in the nation to receive a grant from President Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty program.¹⁷⁰ El-Kati later worked for the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC). The OIC worked to provide employment and training to the poor and unemployed. In 1966, after connecting with Syl Davis, El-Kati became involved with "The Way" and the following year quit his job to run "The Way's" education department. El-Kati declared that the education department was about "self-assertion, self-definition, and self-affirmation."¹⁷¹

Rolland Robinson, "The Way's" white board chair, was a native of Marshall, Minnesota. Robinson was the minister at Calvary Methodist Church, which was located a few blocks from "The Way". He left his job at a church in the affluent Lake Harriet neighborhood to take part in the movement of mobilizing the poor. He commended "The Way" for being "an infant beginning of an act of liberation" and believed that through "The Way's" programming which brought awareness to the black experience, the whole nation would benefit.¹⁷² Robinson worked on a number of programs at "The Way" and also was responsible for writing press releases.

Spike Moss, the leading youth voice of the organization, lived on the North Side from the age of two years. Following the riot of 1967, Moss received a considerable amount of attention from the press, making headlines when he declared that white people were the cause of the North Side riots. Moss boldly told one reporter, "You back the colored man into a corner and complain when he comes out fighting... You tell him rioting is wrong when he doesn't have his freedom. Brick throwing ain't nothing. You wait two or three years while this young generation comes

¹⁷⁰ Lisa Steinmann, "Mahmoud El-Kati's half century as educator and activist in the Twin Cities," *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2012/04/18/mn-voices-mahmoud-el-katis-half-century-educator-and-activist-twin-cities> (accessed July 25, 2012).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Cunningham and Zerby, "The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation," *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 16.

along. They see that if you want anything, you got to take it.”¹⁷³ Moss took the role of providing the white Minneapolis community a black youth perspective on the issues they faced on the North Side. He addressed white church congregations, discussing topics such as Negro identity, the reality of life in the ghetto, and the reasoning behind the rioting. At “The Way” Moss was influential in the development of the youth music program. He actually organized his own youth band.

The early programs of “The Way” during 1966 and 1967, sought to play a defining role in the lives of black residents of the North Side. Drawing on prominent Black Power ideologies of the time, “The Way” was successful in organizing “3700 families to work on eight commissions covering the basic problems of the area.”¹⁷⁴ The problems included: housing, education, law enforcement, economic development, religious unity, youth action, community development, and employment. Through all its programming “The Way” emphasized black power and pride.

“THE WAY” AND BLACK POWER

Historian Peniel Joseph asserted that the Black Power Movement was seen as “a template for restructuring society.”¹⁷⁵ Part of this restructuring was a reclaiming of black identity. The prominent Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael claimed that in order to redefine black identity blacks had to “struggle for the right to create our own terms to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized.”¹⁷⁶ “The Way” operated out of

¹⁷³ Blade, “White People Blamed for Plymouth Rioting: Negroes Heard by Clergy,” *Minneapolis Star*.

¹⁷⁴ Reverend Delwyn R. Rayson, “Report: The Way, Inc.- Opportunities Unlimited,” September 10, 1969, *Way Center Collection*, Minneapolis, 1969-1992, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁷⁵ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and, 2006), xiv.

¹⁷⁶ Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 32.

this framework, emphasizing black pride and attempting to gain economic, political, and social power for North Side residents within their community. “The Way” described one of its priorities as “attack[ing] white people psychologically so they don’t define us [blacks] for us [blacks] again.”¹⁷⁷

The organization utilized a number of methods to counter the negative images of black North Side residents. For example, classes on black history and the pathology of white racism were taught. All classes were open to the public. The classes on black history were attended by black and white North Side residents and Minneapolis residents from throughout the city. Additionally, “The Way” offered both adult and youth classes to whites on the pathology of racism. The adult classes attracted white church leaders, business professionals, educators, and public officials. The head of the Civil Rights Department, Lillian Anthony, suggested that all city employees take the class and she actually became one of the teachers for the course in 1968.¹⁷⁸

While the adult classes were taught at “The Way”, staff from the organization traveled to suburban high schools to conduct the youth classes. The program for white youth was called “The Way Vista Mex.” In a document outlining the progress the organization’s programs made, “The Way Vista Mex” successfully instructed 400 youth focusing on “enabling them to begin dealing with racism in their own communities.”¹⁷⁹ The organization’s request for whites to address racism in their own communities was reminiscent of Malcolm X’s assertion on the role whites could play in the Black Freedom Movement. In his autobiography, Malcolm X wrote, “let sincere white individuals find all other white people they can who feel as they do- and let

¹⁷⁷ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation, *Way Center Collection*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Howard Erickson, “Negro: Whites Rob Blacks of Identity,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 26, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minneapolis Historical Society, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁷⁹ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

them form their own all-white groups, to work trying to convert other white people who are thinking and acting so racist. Let sincere whites go and teach non-violence to white people!”¹⁸⁰

“The Way” also instructed whites to work to eliminate racism in their own isolated communities.

The organization’s classes on the pathology of racism challenged notions that black depravation was a result of black apathy. The education director, Mahmoud El-Kati, emphasized the differing experiences of blacks and whites in the United States: “white people expect black people to have the same values, but their group experience is different. For whites there is freedom, democracy, civil rights and wealth. For black people there is slavery, hypocrisy, segregation, and poverty.”¹⁸¹ Striving to help whites understand the history of inequality blacks faced, “The Way” worked to help whites understand that the negative images they had of blacks was a result of stereotypes created in defense of slavery. These images were perpetuated in the post emancipation era to deny blacks social mobility and maintain white supremacy. “The Way” believed that in order to dismantle the white supremacist ideology the nation was built on; whites had to understand that it would take a collective effort between the two racial groups.¹⁸²

Classes were not the only method “The Way” used to reclaim black identity. “The Way” created programs to teach blacks and the rest of Minneapolis about black heritage through the arts. A group called “The Way Players” put on productions of plays written by black playwrights. The Minneapolis Tribune wrote an article on August 25, 1968 showcasing the group’s production of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a play by Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka. The director of the play, Gerri Cain, explained that “she envisioned the arts program as a vehicle

¹⁸⁰ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 1992).

¹⁸¹ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation, *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 18.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

to make both blacks and whites aware of themselves.”¹⁸³ After opening in Minneapolis, “The Way Players” got requests to do performances at public and parochial schools in Alberta Lea, Minnesota, Rochester, Minnesota, and Omaha, Nebraska in 1968.

“The Way” also sponsored cultural events for the community. *The People’s Festival* was a multi-day event that celebrated black culture through live music and dance performances, and it encompassed Malcolm X day.¹⁸⁴ The event lasted two days and drew crowds of up to 2500 people in 1968.¹⁸⁵ “The Way” also created a *Black Arts Evening* that was built around the work of Gwendolyn Brooks, James Weldon Johnson, LeRoi Jones, and Langston Hughes, all prominent black cultural artists known worldwide. Additionally, “The Way” made awareness about black heritage a part of city-wide events. For the Aquatennial parades mentioned earlier, “The Way” created a float that included African traditional dancing and drumming. A photograph found in the *Records of The Way* manuscript collection revealed that the float performers wore traditional African dress.¹⁸⁶

“The Way’s” emphasis on the African heritage of black culture was one of its Black Power characteristics. One significant element of the BPM was its ability to connect the struggle of blacks in the United States with the struggle against oppression worldwide. “The Way” sought to explore connections between African and Black American culture and to connect with African-descended peoples across the globe. The organization focused on its art center which designed an African Display that was covered by local papers and open to the public. Tanya Spellman, a North Side resident, for example, presented her ‘African-made products’ at the display. “The Way” also borrowed an African wood carving from the Walker Art Center in

¹⁸³ Mike Steele, “Way Theater Plays on Spontaneity,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 25, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

¹⁸⁴ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

downtown Minneapolis in 1968 to showcase at the center.¹⁸⁷ It was not uncommon to see “Way” staff or program participants dressed in dashikis and “The Way” used Swahili words in the titles of a number of its programs.

The music groups were part of the *Karamu* program. In Swahili *Karamu* means party or feast. The mission of the *Karamu* program was “to sustain humanness in the city through the celebration of the constants of life: birth, death, struggle, and change.”¹⁸⁸ The *Karamu* Program housed “The Way Players”, “The Way Ensemble”, “The Way Artistry”, and “The People’s Festival”. Both “The Way Ensemble” and “The Way Artistry” taught community members how to express themselves through the arts. “The Way Ensemble” offered sculpture, stone-carving, wood-carving, and drum-making classes and served an average of 150 to 200 youth per week in 1968.¹⁸⁹ “The Way Artistry” helped to create a “Park-Playground on the lot next to ‘The Way’” that was “unique in concept and design.”¹⁹⁰ The *Harambee* Program intended to employ “creative involvement in shaping the life-styles of an urban society, including manners, dress, neighborhood, and sociability that makes urban life meaningful.”¹⁹¹ *Harambee* means unity in Swahili. The program focused on working with youth, particularly ex-convicts and also with correctional facility staff. “The Way” also started teaching Swahili classes through its education program in 1967.

In an attempt to create a real connection with Africa, “The Way” started a pen pal program with Ghanaian youth. The flyer for the program wished to solicit people to become pen pals with Ghanaian youth and sent back-issues of the Nation of Islam publication *Muhammad*

¹⁸⁷ Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis,” *Records of The Way Inc.*, 6.

¹⁸⁸ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Speaks to youth in Ghana. “The Way” also encouraged donations to help in residential areas of Accra, the capital city of Ghana.¹⁹² None of “The Way” records document the outcome of the pen pal program. However, a progress report of “The Way’s” education programs revealed that six of its students traveled to Ghana for six weeks during the summer of 1969.¹⁹³ By establishing a connection between North Side Blacks and Ghanaians, “The Way” was employing a foundational Black Power strategy, according to historian Peniel Joseph, which was “the connection between civil rights in the United States and in the third world.”¹⁹⁴

“The Way” also produced an important community newsletter. The newsletter informed the community of the programs available to them and also included an opinion page where it voiced its concerns on local community issues, such as police-community relations. In Volume Eight of “The Way’s” newsletter, *Inside The Way*, the first page explained the purpose of the newsletter:

“Inside The Way, is published for the express purpose of informing the community of programs, events, issues, and other important information affecting the lives of minorities within our communities... Inside The Way is another approach to helping Black people develop an understanding about what they can do to help in helping themselves. Self-determination or Freedom of Choice, can only be realized when the people of the community in which we live are: informed, interested, and work together.”¹⁹⁵

Inside The Way was one method the organization used to promote community unity.

In addition to the newsletter, there were other publications in Minneapolis that published news on “The Way.” For example, A. Karim Ahmed, produced pieces discussing “The Way” in local news magazines. Little information exists on A. Karim Ahmed and the role he performed at “The Way,” however he wrote two articles for a local magazine and a number of articles for

¹⁹² Pen-Pal Program Flyer, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

¹⁹³ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

¹⁹⁴ Joseph Peniel, “The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field,” *The Journal of American History*, 2009, 751-776 (accessed March 22, 2013), doi:10.1093/jahist/96.3.751., 752.

¹⁹⁵ “Inside The Way”, Vol. 8, April 1970, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

the organization's newsletter. The magazine that published the articles was called the *Ivory Tower* and was published by the University of Minnesota. Ahmed's first piece *Inside The Way* was published in February 1968. It provided a historical sketch of the organization, profiling the organizations' most controversial programs, presenting biographies of the major staff, and the effects of the riots on the organization. Ahmed's second piece *Side by Side On the North Side*, was published the following year and explored the consequences of racism in society asserting that "... it seems the bulk of 'racism' is with white society today. If increasing black consciousness and black pride bring about an inverted dislike of everything white, one can hardly blame black society for it. They have suffered every imaginable indignity men can be subjected to and still survive."¹⁹⁶ Ahmed's assertion demonstrated "The Way's" view on white racism and its similarities to the Black Power ideology of the time.

"The Way" staff were regularly featured in popular media outlets in Minneapolis. Syl Davis and Spike Moss were interviewed on local news programs. In 1968 they were interviewed in KMSB-TV Fox 9 by Little Herbie, a columnist for the *Twin Cities Courier* newspaper.¹⁹⁷ Education Director Mahmoud El-Kati wrote articles that sketched "the black man's origins" and examined "his (the black man's) contributions to American society," in the *Minneapolis Tribune* in 1968.¹⁹⁸ The female staff of the organization rarely appeared in media sources documenting "The Way." Additionally, as evidenced from the quote taken from El-Kati's article above, the organization failed to use gender neutral language in its publications.

¹⁹⁶ A. Karim Ahmed, "Side by Side On the North Side," *Ivory Tower*, February, 1969, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN..

¹⁹⁷ Cunningham and Zerby, "The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation, *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 31.

¹⁹⁸ "A history of the black man in the U.S.," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN..

“THE WAY” HAD ITS CRITICS

Despite the positive coverage “The Way” was not without criticism. The introduction of the *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine* issue, which featured the organization, illustrated the uncertainty many Minneapolis residents felt about “The Way”:

“Some picture it as a crime college where ‘they’ are making Molotov cocktails in the basement. Some picture it as the Minneapolis center for a revolutionary movement toward black self-determination. Some picture it as a gigantic hoax being played by cynical black people on guilt ridden white financial supporters. Some, on the other hand, picture “The Way” as an effort by the same white supporters to keep the natives in their place by promoting a hoodlum minority and ignoring the conservative majority of Negroes on the North Side.”¹⁹⁹

The article concluded that “The Way” sparked more “curiosity” than any other race-relations organization in the city. The article also concluded that “The Way’s” worst critics were black.

One black organization that opposed “The Way” was the Concerned North Side Residents (CNR). The CNR was a group of 250 North Side residents, the majority of which were black, whose alleged mission was to accentuate the positive things occurring on the North Side. Their motto was “Tell it like it is.” The CNR adamantly opposed “The Way, referring to it as a “white man’s establishment,” which alluded to the *Minneapolis Tribune Picture Magazine’s* statement that some believed “The Way” was a ploy by white supporters to control the black North Side community.²⁰⁰ The CNR declared in one interview that “The Way” was using children and “the downtrodden as pawns.” The CNR went on to declare that “The Way” did not

¹⁹⁹ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation, *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 4.

²⁰⁰ Maurice Hobbs, “Members Oppose ‘Hate Merchants’: North Side Groups Stresses Realism,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 14, 1968, ” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

“give a damn about the poor.”²⁰¹ The CNR claimed its biggest concern with “The Way” was the type of people that gravitated to the organization. The CNR, like many other Minneapolis residents, believed “The Way” attracted ‘hoodlums.’²⁰² Even though the CNR was often skeptical of “The Way,” there is very little information on its activities. Additionally, there are no records regarding its membership. Thus, the composition of the CNR is unclear.

Reverend Delwyn R. Rayson, the minister of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ on the North Side, discussed the conflict between “The Way” and other organizations on the North Side in a report he released in the fall of 1969. Reverend Rayson wrote that blacks who criticized “The Way” had “found an uneasy safety within” or were in some way “dependent upon white society.”²⁰³ He also stated that some of the criticism aimed at “The Way” was a result of “inter-agency jealousy and competition for funds,” which was ironic due to the fact that “The Way” did not accept federal dollars as funding.²⁰⁴ Inter-agency rivalry was such a serious problem on the North Side that the Minneapolis Commission listed it as the number one problem affecting the success of private and public social welfare agencies. The commission asserted in its report, “each agency seems to be threatened by the program and leadership of the others.”²⁰⁵

The 1967 riot demonstrated that “The Way” also faced opposition from a number of public officials, in addition to service agencies. As mentioned previously, “The Way” was created after the 1966 disturbance to engage the “troubled” youth of the North Side. When the 1967 riot occurred some Minneapolis residents concluded that “The Way” as a social experiment

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Rayson, “Report: The Way, Inc.- Opportunities Unlimited,” , *Way Center Collection*.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development, “A Report by the Minneapolis City Council’s Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis,” *Record of The Way, Inc*,11.

had failed to control the youth it was created to serve. Some even blamed “The Way” for the 1967 riot. In September of 1967, the Hennepin County Grand Jury investigated “The Way” for any possible connections it had with the initiation of the riot. Rolland Robinson explained that “the Hennepin Grand Jury revealed the thinking in certain sectors of the white power community that The Way was really behind the riots.”²⁰⁶ After a thorough investigation, the Grand Jury concluded that this was a false accusation²⁰⁷ The Grand Jury went on to conclude, however, that, “there is fear at this present time that many of the criminals they are attempting to help are taking advantage, assuming too much power and actually using this establishment as their headquarters. Should this establishment continue to show negative results in rehabilitating the hoodlum element, it either should be discontinued, or its leadership changed.”²⁰⁸

Despite, the Grand Jury’s ambiguity, ironically, “The Way” gained greater support from other local authorities and public officials. When asked if “The Way” promoted lawlessness one police officer answered, “Nah, that’s a lot of name calling. No facts. There’s a lot on interagency jealousy involved too, you know. And remember, too, its purpose. Its purpose was to get those kids off the streets and it has done that to a large degree.”²⁰⁹ Additionally, after the 1967 riot, Minneapolis Mayor Naftalin urged continued support of “The Way” by its financial distributors. He believed the North Side youth had “responded enthusiastically to The Way.”²¹⁰

The ability of “The Way” to engage the black youth of the North Side, which some Minneapolis residents referred to as the ‘undesirables’, created a great deal of hostility between “The Way” and its counterparts. The organization fought back claiming that black organizations

²⁰⁶ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 44.

²⁰⁷ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation,” *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 42; Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 44.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 44.

²¹⁰ Gordon Slovt, “Naftalin Urges Support for The Way,” *Minneapolis Star*, September 13, 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

that opposed them were “playing a collaborative role with powers downtown.”²¹¹ It also stated that the criminals they were accused of “coddling” were “young Black men trying to find themselves and their way in an inhospitable world.”²¹²

One unique feature of “The Way” was its commitment to serving convicts and ex-convicts. “The Way” claimed that it was “the first to offer non-traditional social service programs to the prison population, in local, state, and federal institutions of confinement,” through two of its programs established in 1967.²¹³ Through *Development of the Abilities of Rejected Egos (D.A.R.E.)*, “The Way” offered a “cooperative educational experience” to inmates.²¹⁴ Additionally, through its program *Stimuli Project Upward Reaches (S.P.U.R.)*, it worked with white correctional facility staff in order to help them better relate to black inmates.²¹⁵ After the training the staff were supposed to be able to offer an intelligent answer to the following questions: “do you know what a racist is, can you write an essay on the meaning of Black Power as defined by the black man, can you identify some middle class hang-ups, and what do you see when you look into you social mirror.”²¹⁶ These questions were intended to help staff recognize their positions of privilege in society.

During 1968 “The Way” was working with “Minnesota Correctional Facility- Red Wing,”²¹⁷ located about an hour southwest of the North Side. At Red Wing “The Way” provided basic education to inmates as well as “group discussions and recreational activities” to juvenile

²¹¹ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 66.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid, 55; It is highly unlikely that “The Way” was the first to offer services to the prison population in federal institutions. The Nation of Islam offered social services the inmates beginning in the 1950s. It may be true that they were the first to offer such services in the state of Minnesota.

²¹⁴ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Record of The Way, Inc.*

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ J. Morgan, “Project SPUR,” September 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN., 47.

²¹⁷ Minnesota Correctional Facility- Red Wing is one of the largest correctional facilities in the state and has detention centers for adult and juvenile males.

inmates.²¹⁸ Its ultimate goal was to teach “inmates how to be in control of themselves and their environment.”²¹⁹ It also believed by focusing on classes that taught black history they could “improve the minority group delinquents’ image of himself and his relationship with others, thus reducing the likelihood of further delinquency.”²²⁰ “The Way” planned to expand the program to other correctional facilities in Minnesota including: Glen Lakes, Lino Lakes, Shakopee, and Stillwater.²²¹ It explained that its focus on education for these programs was a direct result of its belief that, “education is that which shows a person how to best deal with the pragmatic world in which he lives.”²²²

Even with “The Way’s” programs that worked with inmates, no program created more controversy in the North Side black community than “The Way’s” implementation of the “Soul Force,” which was created in 1968. The program started as a group of black men who called themselves the “Black Patrol.” The group was organized by Dan Pothier, one of “The Way’s” employees and Joe Buckhalton of the Twin Cities Opportunities Industrialization Center (TCOIC).²²³ Following the 1967 riot the group patrolled the neighborhood in moving cars. “The Black Patrol” successfully broke up several small incidents following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.²²⁴

The connection between “The Way” and the Black Patrol is unclear. A. Karim Ahmed in his article profiling the “Soul Force” wrote,

²¹⁸ “The Way’s Project for the Development of the Abilities of Rejected Egos,” September 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Morgan, “Project SPUR,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, 46.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 4.

²²³ The TCOIC was created by a former employee of “The Way” who wanted to focus exclusively on workforce development in the community

²²⁴ A. Karim Ahmed, “Side by Side On the North Side,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

“The idea of the formation of the Soul Force proper (as distinct from the Patrol) began long before King’s assassination.”²²⁵ However, “The Way” approached Potheir during their planning process and he created the first proposal for the program. The “Soul Force” would act as a component of the “Black Patrol”, pledging itself to nonviolence, “Soul Force” volunteers would call the “Black Patrol” or the Police to handle situations that required the use of force.²²⁶

Although, “The Way” did not list the Black Patrol as one of its initiatives in its program documents, it is possible that the Black Patrol was an unofficial program of “The Way”. As noted earlier in this section, the organization was heavily criticized for attracting “criminal activity.” It is probable that the Black Patrol was armed. Ahmed wrote that the Black Patrol was called to deal with incidents that “required the use of force.” If this was the case, it is likely that “The Way” would want to downplay its connection to the Black Patrol for the purposes of its public image as a “non-violent” organization.

The differences between the Black Patrol and the Soul Force reflect the variance between the CRM and BPM ideologies. Although not an official program of “The Way,” the organization relied on the Black Patrol to prevent violence in the community when the police failed to show up and to implement some community control over law enforcement in the area. They were influenced by Carmichael’s assertion, “the only protection we are going to have is from each other.”²²⁷ The “Soul Force,” on the other hand, was an example of how “The Way” associated itself with the CRM discourse. In the program documents for the “Soul Force”, the group is described as “pledged to nonviolence.”²²⁸ Additionally the name of the organization is a direct reference to a concept popularized in the United States by Martin Luther King Jr. In King’s *I Have a Dream Speech* he stated, “Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ “The Soul Force: A Program of “The Way” Community Center”, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²²⁷ Carmichael, “Negro Rights and the American Future,” *Negro Digest*.

²²⁸ “The Soul Force: A Program of “The Way” Community Center”, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

of meeting physical force with soul force.” The intent of the organization was just that to prevent violence using “soul force.” Additionally, the interracial make-up of the organization reflected King’s call for interracial cooperation in the movement; he asserted “We cannot walk alone.”²²⁹

During the planning meetings for the “Soul Force”, the presence of white volunteers created tension within the group. A. Karim Ahmed wrote:

“at first there was considerable friction among those who came to these meetings-some dropped out quickly, some decided to hold on; some argued vigorously, some kept quiet and listened; some left in anger and disagreement, and some stayed on and waited. The drama of white volunteers coming in to play an unusual role in a black community was perhaps one of the most important things that happened last summer.”²³⁰

One of the white volunteers was Ned Crosby, a member of one of the wealthiest families in the city. He stated that he joined the “Soul Force” after becoming “tired with the aridity of University life.”²³¹ When asked about the controversy over the presence of white volunteers Crosby answered, “It turned out color was not the problem; we just didn’t get hung up on color. Being white didn’t really matter, because acting right was more important than color...”²³²

Although there was controversy over the presence of white volunteers, Rolland Robinson recalled an incident where black youth came to the defense of one white “Soul Force” volunteer. Robinson stated, “The Soul Force enjoyed the support of the community. There was an incident where a Black person who lived in St. Paul harassed a member of the Soul Force. The kids from the North Side neighborhood took the side of the White Soul Force member; color was not the

²²⁹ Martin Luther, King Jr., "I Have a Dream," Speech, March on Washington, Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C., August 28, 1963, <http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>, (accessed March 22, 2013).

²³⁰ A. Karim Ahmed, “Side by Side On the North Side,” *Records of The Way Inc.*

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

issue, the fact these White persons cared to be there on their behalf was what was important.”²³³

Some white volunteers such as University of Minnesota graduate student Zev Aelony, claimed that white volunteers on the force were needed to “keep white troublemakers out of the neighborhood and to be nonblack witnesses to watch for racism in police action.”²³⁴

The “Soul Force” made a major impact on the white volunteers. Steven Church, a University of Minnesota freshman football player claimed that the “Soul Force” provided him with experiences that “illustrated how the police treat black people.”²³⁵ He stated that one night he was on duty:

“ . . . one of them [the police] stopped by in his car and asked me ‘how are *they* tonight? I pretended not to understand his question . . . And one night kids were playing touch-football on the streets. The police came by and warned a couple of times. We found out that about ten squad cars plus a paddy wagon were out on Olson and Penn. The kids dispersed. That to me illustrated how the police treat black people. Such a thing would never have occurred in a white community.”²³⁶

Thus, the “Soul Force” succeeded in demonstrating to some whites that there was a real difference in how blacks were treated by the police. Black complaints about poor police-community relations were a real problem that directly affected black life.

The Way was a peculiar institution. Although it utilized a number of Black Power ideals, its inter-racial staff contradicted its Black Power status. Could “The Way” be a model of how the BPM developed in areas with small black demographics? Along with the white volunteers on the “Soul Force”, Rolland Robinson, a white man, played a leading role in the organization. Many scholars would argue this feature of “The Way” would disqualify the organization as a part of the BPM. Historian Patrick Jones in his chapter of Theoharis and Woodard’s

²³³ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 82.

²³⁴ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation,” *Minneapolis Tribune: Picture Magazine*, 26.

²³⁵ A. Karim Ahmed, “Side by Side On the North Side,” Davis, *Records of The Way Inc.*

²³⁶ Ibid.

Groundwork, argued that Black Power was “not a color, but an attitude.”²³⁷ Jones provided a case study of Father James Groppi’s role in Milwaukee’s Black Freedom Movement. Father Groppi led the Black Nationalist group, the Commandos, Leaders of Pride, Inc. The son of Italian immigrants, Father Groppi began his participation in the Milwaukee Black Freedom Movement by participating in a campaign for school desegregation in the city. He went on to be a leading figure in radical black politics in Milwaukee. Father Groppi and the Commandos raised the question; could an inter-racial group claim to fight for Black Power? “The Way” raised the same question during its existence.

“THE WAY” AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

“The Way” was politically active on behalf of the North Side black community. The organization wrote letters to public officials requesting they become advocates for better race relations in the city and criticized officials who demonstrated a lack of commitment to improving the North Side community. One example was “The Way’s” letter to Alderman Daniel Cohen, representing the seventh ward in Minneapolis. The letter stated that “The Way” regretted previous support of Alderman Cohen, it read: “. . . [they] deeply resent being ‘represented’ at city hall by a person who is so morally bankrupt that he would try to make political hay at the expense of another’s misfortune, and so hostile toward all minorities. . . .”²³⁸ Other letters were just as critical of officials who did very little for the North Side community.²³⁹

²³⁷ Theoharis and Woodard, *Groundwork*, 259-281.

²³⁸ Louise McCannel, “Dear Mr. Cohen,” January 4, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²³⁹ See also Rolland Robinson, “Civil Rights Department Letter,” January 5, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974, Gale Family Library, Minneapolis Historical Society, Minneapolis, MN. Rolland Robinson recommended, on behalf of “The Way”, that “Mr. Edwards be appointed to the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights Advisory board.” Robinson did not name the current representative, but complained that a politician “who will only communicate with the simon pure will soon find himself communication with no one at all.” Robinson went on to prove Mr. Edwards qualifications, claiming that he possessed an

“The Way” also created press releases announcing its stance on a number of community issues. For example, in April of 1970, it opposed busing black school children out of their North Side community to predominately white South Side schools. The organization asserted that integration would not result in “an understanding of the races” and supported the North Side parents who advocated for quality neighborhood schools as an alternative to integration.²⁴⁰

Their stance on school busing represented an important tenet of the BPM: community control of schools. However, similar to other urban areas with large black populations, that view came into conflict with conventional CRM leaders and organizations that were in favor of busing. Conventional Civil Rights leader, W. Harry Davis, recalled in his memoir, “the NAACP had been a leading force in the 1950s, in Minneapolis and around the country for ending school segregation.”²⁴¹ “The Way’s” fight to gain “community control” over institutions was directly related to its opposition of school integration.²⁴²

“The Way” also played an active role in the aftermath of the Lincoln Junior High School Incident. In December 1967, a white teacher at Lincoln Junior High School on the North Side slapped a black student. The school administration responded by allowing “The Way’s” rivals, the CNR, to organize a parent meeting. One local newspaper article reported that CNR members used the meeting to continue their campaign against “The Way.” The article went on to argue that, “the result, which should have been foreseen, was the parents and others identified with The Way called their own meeting at the community center and issued much more militant demands

“understanding of, capacity to act with, and ability to speak for the ethnic, religious, and economic minorities of our community.”

²⁴⁰ “DRAFT of statement on ‘school busing’ - The Way, Inc.,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²⁴¹ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 18.

²⁴² Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

upon the school administration, including the boycott threat.”²⁴³ The Way, ultimately, decided not to support a school boycott, but requested that the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights “be invited by the Minneapolis School Board to analyze the manifestations of society’s racial problems found city-wide in public education and to recommend the kind of machinery which will divert the energy generated by these problems into creative channels,” according to one *Minneapolis Tribune* reporter.²⁴⁴ The Lincoln School incident placed a negative spotlight on “The Way.” One newspaper article examined the merits of the organization after documenting the claims made by the CNR during its meeting following the incident. It asserted that the North Side community continued to share “conflicting viewpoints about the controversial community center.”²⁴⁵ It cited four reasons that some North Side residents opposed the presence of “The Way” in their community: (1) there was a “feeling that those associated with The Way were extremists,” (2) “The Way” was accused of teaching hatred and Black Power,’ (3) “The Way” staff was considered outsiders in some political affairs regarding the North Side, and (4) some of “The Way” staff had “been criticized for being abusive, disrupting school programs, stirring up trouble ‘ and the organization had come to represent militancy on the North Side.”²⁴⁶ The article concluded that “The Way” would “continue to be an issue in the community as long as it represents the militancy of the ‘have-nots’ as against the moderation of the ‘haves’.”²⁴⁷ It reasoned that although “The Way” had the right to be an advocate for the community, it should not have had the right to tell public institutions what procedures to undergo.

²⁴³ “Lesson in the Slapping Incident-Part I,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 25, 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²⁴⁴ “Lessons in the Slapping Incident- Part II,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 26, 1967,” *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

In addition to advocating on behalf on the black North Side community in its political pursuits, “The Way” also aligned itself with other minority progressive organizations. It often collaborated with the Minneapolis chapter of the American Indian Movement (AIM).²⁴⁸ The Minneapolis AIM was formed in 1968 by Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt. AIM sought to “combat racist discrimination in urban areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul.”²⁴⁹ AIM held demonstrations, one of the most famous ones being the “Trail of Broken Treaties”²⁵⁰, which was a reverse movement by Native Americans from the West Coast to the nation’s capital.²⁵¹

In 1970 leaders from “The Way” and AIM partnered to establish a law firm called “Of and For the People.” The leaders involved were Doug Hall, “The Way” members, Gwen and Syl Davis, the AIM members, Peggy and Clyde Bellecourt, and Peter Dorsey from the law firm Dorsey & Whitney. The inspiration for the law firm came from the *Gideon v. Wainwright* case. On March 18, 1963, the United States Supreme Court ruled that it violated the 14th amendment to convict person without the assistance of counsel in the *Gideon v. Wainwright* case. This resulted in the creation of a Public Defender’s System in Minnesota. This program, according to the community leaders who came together to create the “Of and For the People” law firm, was “under-funded, under-staffed, and insensitive to cultural issues.” Community leaders wanted to create a law firm that was “under the ownership and operation of the people” and that would act as a “partnership between minority and legal communities.” “Of and For the People” law firm,

²⁴⁸ For information on the history and activities of the AIM see the following text: Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Troy R. Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Steven L. Couture, *The American Indian Movement: A Historical Perspective* (St. Paul: University of St. Thomas, 1996).

²⁴⁹ Clifford Edward Clark, *Minnesota in a Century of Change: The State and Its People since 1900* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 423.

²⁵⁰ For more information on the “Trail of Broken Treaties” see Vine Deloria, *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties; an Indian Declaration of Independence* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974).

²⁵¹ Ibid.

eventually become the Legal Rights Center and continued to provide free legal services to people of color in Minneapolis.²⁵²

“The Way’s” many programs were expensive, yet, amazingly, the organization accepted no funding from the federal government. Reverend Rayson in his report on the organization explained that it was “a policy consciously pursued to preserve maximum freedom of action” and that, as a result, the majority of “The Way’s funding came from white philanthropists.”²⁵³ Thus, the organization staff spent considerable time fund-raising. Every member of “The Way’s” leadership contributed to fundraising efforts. For example, Syl Davis promoted “The Way” in a number of media sources, urging Minneapolis residents to support the organization. Additionally, “The Way” staff met with business leaders throughout the city in an effort to secure their support.²⁵⁴

Their reliance of fundraising as the main source of their income became a problem when previous contributors began to waver. Gordon R. Ritz, a Minneapolis broadcasting entrepreneur who was in charge of “the Way’s” finances stated in 1968 that there was “plenty of money when there was trouble but less money when there was no trouble but plenty of work to be done.”²⁵⁵ He concluded that “The Way” faced the same problems that “plagued civil rights organizations. As “The Way” became “more revolutionary”, less people donated. It is hard to determine if the initial backers of “The Way” did so out of appearance or because they genuinely wanted to help the North Side black community.

²⁵² "Our History", Legal Rights Center, <http://www.legalrightscenter.org/History.htm>, (accessed March 17, 2013).

²⁵³ Rayson, “Report: The Way, Inc.- Opportunities Unlimited,” *Way Center Collection*.

²⁵⁴ Robinson, *For A Moment We Had The Way*.

²⁵⁵ Cunningham and Zerby, “The Way is part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation,” *Minneapolis Tribune-Picture Magazine*, 39.

“THE WAY” AND ACADEMIA: THE ROLE OF “THE WAY” IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BLACK STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA 1966-1969

Jared E. Leighton, a lecturer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, once wrote that, “. . . Black Studies programs remain one of the enduring and outstanding legacies of the Black Power Movement.”²⁵⁶ After the 1967 riot, “The Way” expanded a number of its programs, but paid particularly close attention to its education department. The department inspired the fight for the development of a Black Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, one of the institutions that continue to have an impact on the black Minneapolis community today. This section will explore “The Way’s” role in the establishment of the Black Studies Department.

On April 4, 1968 the only black organization, the Afro-American Action Committee (AAAC), on the University of Minnesota campus, met with the university administration regarding the implementation of policies and programs that would lead to the acquisition and inclusion of more black students. The list included seven demands²⁵⁷ which were designed to include everything from increasing the number of black student at the U of M, establishing a Black Studies Department, to renaming a library after Martin Luther King Jr.²⁵⁸ In January of 1969 the U of M had made little progress on the demands of the AAAC. The group called a meeting where it discussed their plans to take over the administration building on campus, Morrill Hall. During the takeover participants decided they would require that their list of demands be met immediately. The leading figures of this group were Horace Huntley, Rose Mary Freeman, and Marie Braddock Williams.

²⁵⁶ Jared E. Leighton, *A Small Revolution: The Role of a Black Power Revolt in Creating and Sustaining a Black Studies Department at the University of Minnesota*, Thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008, 3.

²⁵⁷ See the appendix to view the complete list of demands.

²⁵⁸ Williams, Marie Braddock, Rose Freeman Massey, and Horace Huntley, *“Nerve Juice” and the Ivory Tower Confrontation in Minnesota: The True Story of the Morrill Hall Takeover (at the University of Minnesota)* (Jonesboro, AR: GrantHouse Publishers, 2006), 95.

Jared Leighton describes the actions taken by the AAAC in his master's thesis, *A Small Revolution*. On January 14, 1969 in the afternoon five members of the AAAC arrived at Morrill Hall. The group included Horace Huntley, Rose Mary Freeman, Marie Braddock Williams, John Wright and Warren Tucker. They requested that university employees leave the building at once. They then proceeded to barricade themselves in the building for 24 hours. Several attempts by white students and university employees to break into the hall were avoided. The group, however, allowed black community leaders from Minneapolis and St. Paul to come in for support. University officials attempted to negotiate with the students during the takeover. They finally reached an agreement on January 15, 1969 at 12:30pm. The university agreed to set up a scholarship fund for black students, to pay for a Black Studies conference at the university, and to establish a Black Studies Department.²⁵⁹

Huntley, Freeman, and Williams all built strong connections with community organizations in Minneapolis, during their time as U of M students. They all described their community connections as essential in preparing them for the protest they planned in 1969. They recalled that “The Way” staff provided them with “political capital,” during the takeover²⁶⁰ U of M Professor and Morrill Hall takeover participant John Wright noted “the importance of the town-gown connection to the increased politicization of black students on campus.”²⁶¹ During the Morrill Hall takeover, the black students were visited by local community members who offered advice and protection. Protest participant Rose Mary Freeman Massey wrote:

“As was well; the Black community had come to us. Milt Williams/ Mahmoud El-Kati stood on top of a desk and began to speak slowly and softly, in retrospect about past ancestors who had struggled so hard for freedom. He spoke in a manner that let us know that freedom ain't free, it never has been, and it never will be; you have to pay...As the evening grew older, all of them would come and speak to the young. As they all arrived,

²⁵⁹ Leighton, *A Small Revolution*, 58-75.

²⁶⁰ Huntley, Massey, and Williams, *Nerve Juice*, Intro: xx.

²⁶¹ Leighton, “A Small Revolution,” 45.

I knew in my heart that all was well. Syl Davis and Spike Moss came to make sure that we were OK. They debated whether they should get some brothers from North Minneapolis to come to the University to protect us.”²⁶²

After the protest was over, community leaders from “The Way” and several other organizations helped the students create a formal list of demands to present to the university president in their follow-up meeting.

On March 3, 1969, following the takeover three protest participants were indicted by the Hennepin County Grand Jury; the same jury that investigated “The Way” on accusations of aiding riot participants in 1967. Horace Huntley and Warren Tucker were arrested and taken into custody, when police arrived at their homes the day the indictment was issued. Before Rose Mary surrendered to authorities, she met with black community leaders and students on campus. Included in the group of black community leaders were Syl Davis, Mahmoud El-Kati, and Spike Moss from “The Way.” Rose explained that they came to “give advice and moral support.”²⁶³

Their support did not end there, as a result of the indictments community leaders set up the *Liberation Coalition*, which was a partnership between campus and community organizations. Among the community groups in the coalition was “The Way.” The coalition’s first act was to write a letter encouraging faculty to join it in condemning the charges against the students. The coalition also sponsored a “Liberation Week” on campus from “March 31 to April 3, 1969, the day Rose was scheduled to appear in court.”²⁶⁴

Of the community leaders that testified at Rose’s court appearance, Mahmoud El-Kati was one of the most memorable. El-Kati argued that the university was at fault for what happened at Morrill Hall, not the students. El-Kati said, “universities are as racist as any

²⁶² Huntley, Massey, and Williams, *Nerve Juice*, 40.

²⁶³ Ibid, 77.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 108.

institution in this society, and they can afford not to be. They have shown no direction, no guidance, and no encouragement for Black students. The University must understand the position of Black students on large White campuses.”²⁶⁵ The charges against the students were later dropped and their goal of establishing the Black Studies department was achieved during 1969.

Not only were “The Way” staff able to offer the participants of the Morrill Hall takeover “political capital,” they also provided them with “intellectual preparation” for the protest. Huntley asserted that the classes he took on black history at “The Way” built “a firm black foundation” that inspired him to fight for the creation of a Black Studies Program at the U of M. Horace Huntley recalled that at *The University of The Way* he was able to learn information on black history that was lacking in his University of Minnesota history courses. Huntley wrote in a memoir on the Morrill Hall Takeover written by the participants, that after meeting “The Way’s” education director, Mahmoud El-Kati, he was inspired to change his major from business to history.²⁶⁶ Reading works such as John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom*, offered Huntley the “intellectual preparation for the movement at the U of M.”²⁶⁷

The majority of “The Way’s” education programs was open to the public and attracted people from all over the state. Under the leadership of Mahmoud El-Kati and Gwen Jones-Davis, “The Way’s” education program grew to encompass preschool, elementary, junior, and high school programs, as well as University courses. It was most known for its emphasis on

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 72.

²⁶⁶ Huntley, Massey, and Williams, *Nerve Juice*, 27.

²⁶⁷ Jared E. Leighton, *A Small Revolution: The Role of a Black Power Revolt in Creating and Sustaining a Black Studies Department at the University of Minnesota*, Thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln 45.

‘minority’ history courses and its innovative educational approaches to the instruction of prison inmates and ‘behaviorally challenged’ children.²⁶⁸

The education department of the organization was broken into three main programs: “*The Way*” Project: Chain Gang, “*The Way*” Education Center, and “*The Way*” Laboratory School. “*The Way*” Project: Chain Gang was a program that collaborated with Minneapolis Public Schools to offer high school credit for drop-outs. “The Way” used attendance lists from the local high school, North High, to recruit youth into the program. During 1969 the program had close to thirty participants and an almost 100% percent participation rate.²⁶⁹ “*The Way*” Education Center was responsible for providing classes on white racism and minority history. These courses included ‘African and Afro-American History’ and ‘Indian-American History and Culture.’ “The Way’s” progress report in 1968 gave the following description of the courses on Black history: “The Way’s classes in Afro-American history have created an awareness in the community that has led to a deluge of requests for help—for speakers and for teacher training and curriculum design. They [the requests] come from five states, from colleges, industries, and institutions . . .”²⁷⁰

“*The Way*” Laboratory School was also important, according to Executive Director Syl Davis, because it provided an “alternative to public schools for students [so] alienated that no learning is possible within the system.”²⁷¹ *Minneapolis Tribune* reporter, Sam Newlund wrote a piece documenting the program and commenting on its success in February of 1970. The article revealed that the Laboratory School had set up a cultural exchange program with Blake School, a prestigious private school in the city. Once a week Blake students visited the school to help tutor

²⁶⁸ Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Record of The Way, Inc.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Syl Davis, “The Ford Foundation Grant Proposal,” September 30, 1968, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 11.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

“The Way” School youngsters. Aside from being successful in promoting cross-class, cross-cultural, and cross-racial communication, the school served students, wrote Newlund, “who for some reason or another fail to fit into ordinary classrooms.” One five year-old student Billy arrived at “The Way” School after his public school teachers and a psychologist concluded he was “a classic picture of a brain-damaged child.” After Newlund observed Billy for a day at the organization’s Laboratory School, he presented a counter view claiming that “Billy gave an outsider appearance of a tranquil child grooving on learning.” Newlund went on to write that the behavior problems that defined these students’ experiences in public school settings failed to be a problem at “The Way” Laboratory School.²⁷²

“The Way” also promoted learning on the university level through its *University of The Way* programs. It taught courses at Augsburg College in Minneapolis on racism, which were conducted by the Tilman Associates. James Tilman and his wife Mary Tilman began conducting anti-racism classes in 1963. The Tilmans collaborated with “The Way” to help provide classes on racism when it established its education department. The organization’s board chair, Rolland Robinson, recalled that the Tilmans firmly believed racism was a disease. They created a pamphlet titled *A Layman’s Guide for Detecting and Treating Racism*, which they used in their course that required participants to “confront their prejudices and then relearn new attitudes and behavior.”²⁷³ In addition to the courses on racism, “The Way” offered college level courses to the community at North Side locations. One such location was the Glenwood Shopping Center. Rolland Robinson described the program in his memoir:

“The initial plan for The University of The Way was to bring persons of different cultures and backgrounds together in an uncommon learning environment. The college student,

²⁷² Sam Newlund, “Way-AIM School Offers Learning in Atmosphere of Mutual Caring”, *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 15, 1970, *Records of The Way, Inc.*, Minneapolis 1966-1974. Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

²⁷³ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 141.

usually middle class, took credited courses in an inner city setting with students who came from the inner city. Eventually, the students from the inner city would go on to take courses on a college campus. The University of The Way faculty included African-American and Native-American teachers, as well as European-Americans who offered courses on cultural perspectives unique to their culture. Courses included the challenge of intra-cultural communication along with an analysis of social institutions and society from the perspectives of people of color.”²⁷⁴

“The Way’s” education department staff made an impact on Minneapolis residents from the elementary to university level.

Once the Black Studies Department was established at the U of M, El-Kati played a significant role. Huntley described him as the “most important professor in the new department.”²⁷⁵²⁷⁶ As a professor, El-Kati remained very active in North Side community affairs. When the Department hired a new head, the department’s mission changed. It reassessed the Department’s role in the community. In 1973 the Department of Black Studies dismissed El-Kati from his position, arguing that El-Kati “involved himself too much in community affairs.”²⁷⁷ This marked a shift in the Department. Leighton wrote, “The community, which felt a strong connection to the department in the first few years, slowly watched that connection disappear.”²⁷⁸

Although there was a shift in community relations, the legacy of the Morrill Hall Takeover is evident in the development of Chicano Studies, American Indian Studies, and Woman’s Studies at the U of M. These area studies departments also owe credit to “The Way’s”

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 144.

²⁷⁵ Leighton, “A Small Revolution,” 108.

²⁷⁶ Mahmoud El-Kati never obtained a doctorate degree, but was still invited to teach at the Department of Black Studies at the U of M. It was not uncommon for professors at Black Studies Departments to not possess doctorates during the time of these departments initial development. For more information on Black Studies departments throughout the country at this time see the following text: Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) and Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 121.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 132.

education department which inspired black students to fight for changes in curriculum at the U of M and demonstrated the importance of studying ethnic history to Minneapolis residents.

CONCLUSION

Since its development in 1966 “The Way” demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of North Side residents, through its programs in the areas of arts, education, law enforcement, and political activism. Although “The Way” did receive positive coverage from a number of media sources, some Minneapolis residents, black and white, opposed the organization. The 1967 riot in Minneapolis affected “The Way’s” funding, by attracting new contributors and causing a number of old contributors to discontinue funding the organization. As mentioned throughout the chapter, “The Way” was a peculiar enterprise. It represented tenets of both the BPM and CRM. The organization identified itself with Black Power, promoting black pride and community control over neighborhood institutions. Yet, “The Way” possessed an interracial staff and preached nonviolence through its law enforcement program, the Soul Force. It was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. “The Way” raises many questions regarding the evolution of the Black Freedom Movement in urban areas with small black populations. From analyzing “The Way” it appears that even in areas with small black populations, discrimination and racism affected the daily lives of black residents. The organization suggests that interracial cooperation was common even for organizations that aligned themselves with the BPM in areas with small black populations.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ See also Joseph, *Neighborhood Rebels* and Theoharis and Woodard, *Groundwork*.

EPILOGUE: THE DECLINE AND LEGACY OF “THE WAY”

*“The ripples of creative justice from “The Way” and the spirit of Syl Davis are still being felt.”*²⁸⁰ - Mahmoud El-Kati

Syl Davis, the Executive Director of “The Way,” was arrested in St. Louis, Missouri in April of 1970 on possession of marijuana charges. Local media picked up the story and it made headlines in Minneapolis newspapers. The *Minneapolis Star’s* headline read, “Syl Davis Charged on Marijuana Count”, while the *Minneapolis Tribune* posted the headline “The Way Head Bound Over for Marijuana Trial.”²⁸¹ Davis denied the charges, which were later dropped, however, the charges confirmed to some of “The Way’s” contributors that the organization was promoting lawlessness and they discontinued funding. On October 2, 1970, “The Way” Board accepted Syl Davis’s resignation as the executive director of the organization. Board chair, Rolland Robinson, reflected on Davis’s final words to the board. He wrote:

“When Syl publicly announced his resignation in early October there was a deep resignation in his words: In 1966 we started a job of trying to bring awareness and some community movement toward self-determination for the people who had been left out. We envisioned that certain specific needs existed within the community and we have seen some of those needs come to pass. We provided leadership in a community that had lacked movements or even aspired to change of any form. My point is that what is done cannot be undone easily. And we cannot rest on laurels, it is with this thought that I feel we must make significant changes lest we become a part of that which we have fought-[not to become,] established.”²⁸²

With the resignation of Davis, the majority of “The Way” staff decided to also leave the organization, with the exception of Spike Moss. When “The Way” became “The New Way” in

²⁸⁰ Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 51.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 108.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 116.

1972, Moss became the new director and as Davis feared, the organization became what many believed as another voice of the “Establishment.”²⁸³

For starters, “The New Way” adopted new principles and a new philosophy. According to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, “The New Way” broadened its “appeal to non-blacks,”²⁸⁴ changing from a “black oriented thing” to an organization for “the entire community.”²⁸⁵ . The organization also decided to accept funding from the United Way. Robinson argued that the essence of “The Way” had died, stating that “**The New Way** had become part of the establishment. The price came high, bringing to an end an extraordinary experiment that brought the poor and rich together in a common pursuit that in itself was part of an infant beginning to an act of liberation. For a moment we had The Way.”²⁸⁶ By the 1980s “The New Way” lost its funding from the United Way and in 1989 the city sued and took possession of the organization’s building. Today the building that housed “The Way” is now the 4th police precinct on Plymouth Avenue on the North Side.

Today, few North Side residents know that the police precinct in their neighborhood was once home to an organization that had a mission not only to serve the community but also to learn from the community. “The Way” championed community control and were determined to enable people to become participants in their own struggle for progress and equality. Moreover, older North Side residents argue that “The Way” is not the only neighborhood institution that has been forgotten. W. Harry Davis wrote, “I HAVE LIVED ALL MY DAYS in Minneapolis. Yet

²⁸³“The Way” defined organizations that were established as organizations who catered to the middle class and affluent residents in the neighborhood and neglected the working class. Additionally, they argued that established organizations served the interests of local government officials. Davis, “The Way Overview,” *Record of The Way, Inc.*

²⁸⁴ Sam Newlund, “The Way to Broaden Appeal to Non-Blacks,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 27, 1970, *Way Center Collection*, Minneapolis, 1969-1992, James K. Hosmer Special Collections, Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis, MN.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 118.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

the place I knew as home is gone. The city's near North Side, the old Hellhole, is like a black-board that was written on first by Jews, then blacks, then erased, rewritten, and erased once more."²⁸⁷ Rolland Robinson expounded on the significance of the North Side's forgotten history in the conclusion of his book:

“Harm comes to a community that does not possess a sense of its own history and so lacks a critical way of thinking about itself. There is the understandable reason dispossessed communities have little time for such things. Such communities spend most of their waking hours dealing with the fallout that comes in fighting the shackles of poverty and racism as well as its own personal demons. It can be said of the Near North Side of Minneapolis the struggle for human dignity and justice goes on; only the faces have changed. This book cries out that this no longer be the way!”²⁸⁸

Robinson's words raise important questions about the consequences of forgotten history on a community. What does it mean that within the North Side community the memory of “The Way” has been destroyed, the very building it once occupied has been repossessed by the police, a group that continues to sustain poor relations with the community?

Yet, “The Way's” legacy lives on in a number of Minneapolis institutions. The Black Studies Department at the University of Minnesota continues to educate U of M students in African American history, culture, and intellectual traditions. The department has also renewed its commitment to the community, opening a Horace Huntley House for black male college students and assisting in the creation of a film documenting the history of North Minneapolis. Additionally, the Legal Rights Center continues to provide free legal services to Twin Cities' residents of color. A number of the center's employees have gone on to do remarkable work. For example, the first Muslim Congressman in the United States, Keith Ellison, worked at the center as an attorney before becoming a congressional representative for the 5th district on the North Side.

²⁸⁷ Davis and Sturdevant, *Overcoming*, 290.

²⁸⁸ Robinson, *For A Moment We Had The Way*, 197.

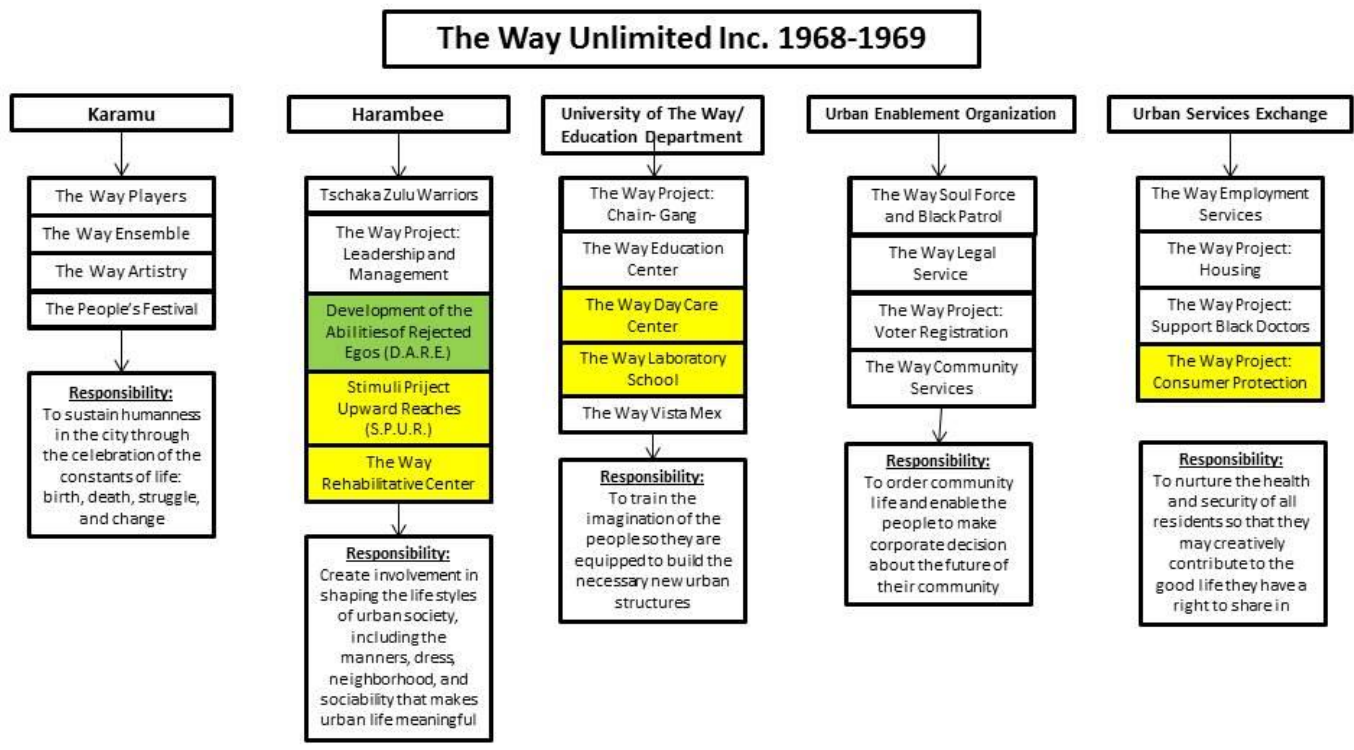
When interviewed in 1984 by Howard L. Shapiro, a reporter writing an in-depth study of the North Side, Syl Davis declared that, “If people say Plymouth Avenue is improved, I’m surprised. It’s only because now there are some buildings on it. But things haven’t improved in terms of people’s livelihoods. You still have the same poverty as before.”²⁸⁹ Two decades later when Spike Moss was interviewed by a reporter from the *Star Tribune* he stated that not much had changed since 1967. Moss said, “We’re still fighting for our basic rights in this city, this state and this country. Why? Because we’re still being denied the equal opportunities - education and employment-wise -that we have fought, bled, sweat and shed tears over.”²⁹⁰ The North Side community continues to fight to be a positive presence in Minneapolis. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the city has paid close attention to the development of the North Side. Mayor R. T. Rybak in his 2012 State of the City Address asserted that the North Side was “the key to growing the city” as he outlined his plan for assisting the North Side in its efforts to catch up to the rest of Minneapolis.²⁹¹ Only time will tell if the city maintains that promise. As Davis stated in his memoir, the North Side continues to be rewritten. The question that remains is will the North Side ever find *the way* again?

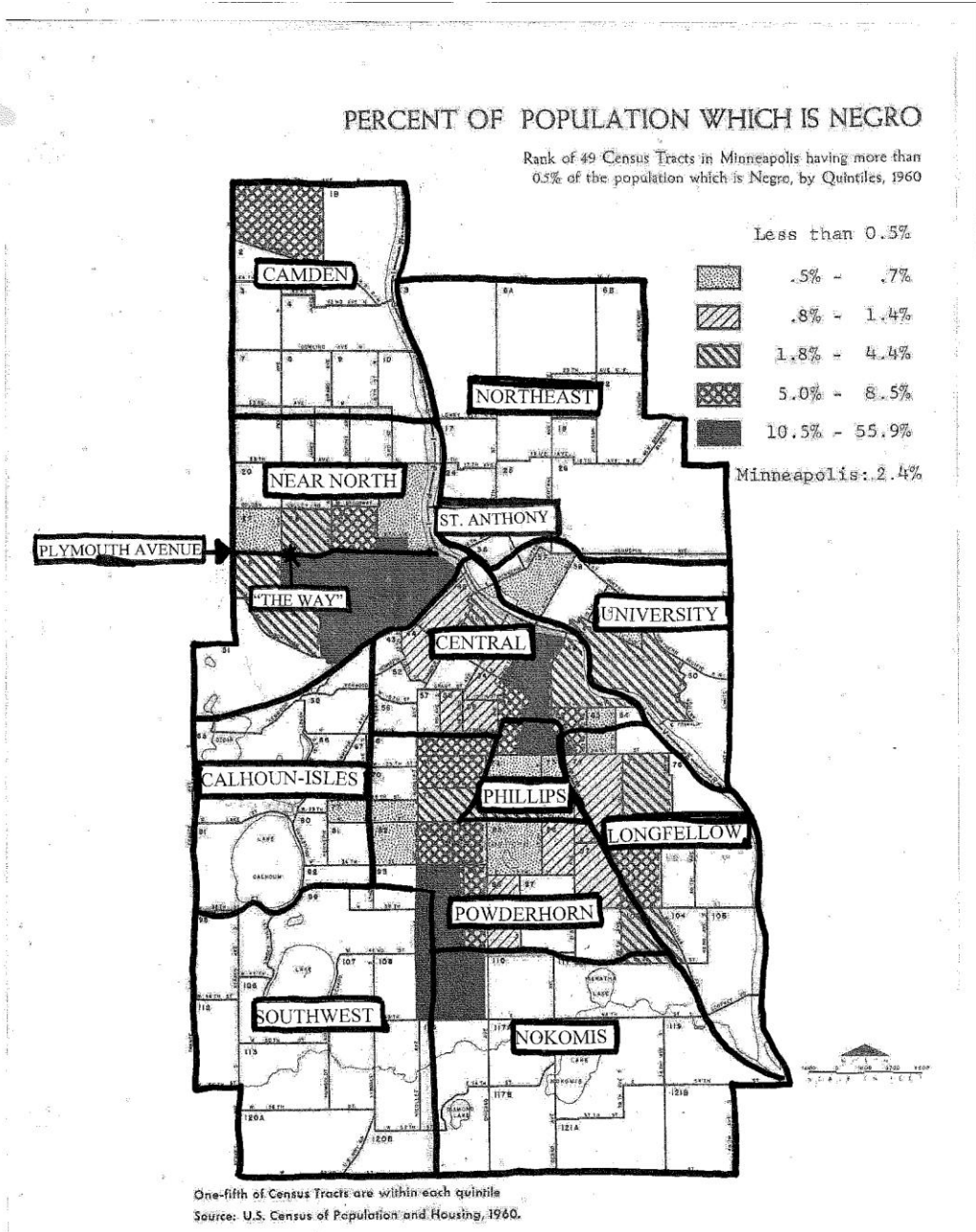
²⁸⁹ Howard L. Shapiro, “Whatever Happened to the North Side’s Dream?,” *Minneapolis St. Paul Magazine*, September 1984, 108.

²⁹⁰ Steve Brandt; Terry Collins , “One Hot Week in July; A riot on Plymouth Avenue in Minneapolis 40 years ago changed one neighborhood and shaped a new one,” *Star Tribune*, July 19, 2007.

²⁹¹ R.T. Rybak, "North Minneapolis Is Key to Growing City," Address. Mayor Rybak’s State of the City Address 2012, Capri Theater, Minneapolis, 11 Apr. 2012, City of Minneapolis, <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/mayor/news/WCMS1P-091021>, (accessed March 19, 2013).

APPENDIX





²⁹² Camden and the Near North are considered the North Side of Minneapolis. Plymouth Avenue and the location of "The Way" are represented on the map. Additionally, the North East area of the city is illustrated on the map. The map was taken from Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development, "A Report by the Minneapolis City Council's Commission on Human Development to the City Council and to the People of Minneapolis," *Record of The Way, Inc.*, 11.

AAAC Demands 1968

1. We want the establishment of at least 200 full scholarships made available to the graduating class of Black Minnesota high school students this year
2. We want full consideration of the proposal to eliminate tuition for underprivileged Black high school students
3. We want the establishment of guidance counseling and recruitment agencies especially geared to the needs of Black students
4. We want the establishment of a board to review the policies of the athletic department towards Black athletes
5. We want serious consideration of the possibility of using Martin Luther King's name for the new West Bank library.
6. We want representation of Black students on all major university policy determining groups
7. We want educational curriculum at the university to reflect the contributions of Black people to the commonwealth and culture of America.²⁹³

²⁹³Williams, Marie Braddock, Rose Freeman Massey, and Horace Huntley, *"Nerve Juice" and the Ivory Tower Confrontation in Minnesota: The True Story of the Morrill Hall Takeover (at the University of Minnesota)* (Jonesboro, AR: GrantHouse Publishers, 2006), 95.

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