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Between Rebellion and Ruin: Local Documentary, Civic Infrastructure, and the Manufacture of
Black Futures in Detroit

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a study of local Black media development in Detroit in the decade following the 1967 Rebellion, as Detroit became a majority Black city. I argue that Black Detroiters not only produced documentaries that challenged local white discourse within what George Lipsitz terms “a Black spatial imaginary,” but also developed media infrastructure to confront broader racialized systems of civic governance and community advocacy. Through production histories and discourse analyses of local documentary, I describe how Black media infrastructure was created in Detroit, and examine the local strategies designed to sustain it, despite ongoing depletion of opportunities for business development and economic advancement in the post-Rebellion city. I conceptualize Black media infrastructure as a networked system of economic, political, and cultural exchanges that undergird the operations of Black civic life and bind Black citizens together amidst deepening spatial and ideological divides.

While this period in Detroit history is largely associated with rising crime rates, economic recession, and accelerated architectural decline, I examine how Black citizens envisioned documentary as a platform to articulate the conditions of their own emplacement in the post-industrial city and produce content that countered the distorted representations of Black urban life found in mainstream fare. Local struggles to produce media emphasize the materiality of daily life, which contrasts sharply with the cautionary narrative of industrial decline that “Detroit” comes to signify for outsiders during this period. Thus, through archival research on documentaries produced by Black Detroiters, I argue that local documentary production and distribution historiography serves as a vital means to more deeply understand Black responses to political, spatial, and economic change in urban centers.

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Introduction

Imagining A Post-Rebellion Black Detroit Through Documentary Media

speramus meliora resurget cineribus
We hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes

--Gabriel Richard, Detroit Official Motto

Detroit's oft-cited official motto, coined by Father Gabriel Richard in the wake of an 1805 fire that leveled Detroit's architecture, has proven eerily prophetic of the city's recurrent narrative of collapse and anticipated resurgence [Figure 0.1]. Then as now, Detroit was conceptualized as a malleable city, a site particularly conducive to profound socio-spatial transformation. In the first half of the 20th century, Detroit was proclaimed "America's Arsenal of Democracy," the fourth largest city in the US and a rapidly developing boomtown home to the country's highest-paid blue-collar workers.¹ By the late 1960s, Detroit had become an emblem of urban distress. Post-war suburbanization and the decentralization of the automotive industry significantly diminished the city's population and employment opportunities. Discriminatory housing protocols fortified suburban boundaries, relegating Black residents to neighborhoods with inadequate schools, environmental hazards, and poor housing conditions. These circumstances fueled five days of violence in the summer of 1967, dubbed a "riot" by mainstream media and the "Great Rebellion" by local Black citizens and political allies.²

While the seeds of Detroit's "urban crisis" were sown much earlier in the post-World War II period, the upheaval of 1967 demonstrated to city leaders and citizens alike that the economic

¹ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3. Scholars like Sugrue have demonstrated that causes of Detroit's urban crisis were entrenched long before the outbreak of violence in the 1960s, debunking locally held myths that the riots catalyzed white flight and divestiture in Detroit industry.

² Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

divisions and racial foment, long simmering in Detroit, was much more pervasive and harder to contain than they had previously assumed.³ As such, the Rebellion catalyzed demands for widespread civic change. Hoping to avoid future outbursts of violence, local politicians and business leaders were eager to bridge the racial divide and work to incorporate Black voices into the management of civic life. In post-Rebellion Detroit, city powerbrokers produced documentaries to model the behavior of compassionate white citizens eager to understand the plight of Black residents and taking steps to mend broken race relations in the city. White establishment media celebrated political figures from the Black middle-class as advocates for non-violent uplift. At the same time, Black leaders—from the moderate to the radical—were demanding that minority residents gain an active voice in local politics and urban development decisions. Significantly, the Rebellion opened up space for a diverse range of Black Detroiters to participate in local media production to advance the cause of racial equity. This was a significant accomplishment in a city where Black autonomy had been severely restricted by municipal policies, legally authorized police brutality, and few opportunities for educational or economic advancement.⁴ In the Rebellion's aftermath, Black citizens strategically used media to address the political concerns of the city's growing Black population, to produce content that examined the material realities of everyday life in Black city space, to explore how Black consciousness

³ This was done at the behest of Mayor Cavanaugh. For an ethnographic presentation of newsroom responses to the Detroit Rebellion, see: Tim Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses: The History of Detroit Television Journalism* (Wayne State University Press, 2009), 66–67.

⁴ Detroit's Black public affairs television programs included *In Your Interest* (WTVS, 1968), *Profiles in Black* (WWJ-TV Channel 4, 1968), and most notably *CPT* (WTVS, 1968), hosted by Tony Brown and which later became *Detroit's Black Journal*. The programs on WTVS, Detroit's Public Broadcasting Network, were specifically funded by the New Detroit Committee to ease racial tensions in the city and prevent further cause for "rioting." Gilbert Alan Maddox, *A Study of CPT: Public Television Programming for Detroit's Black Community* (Wayne State University, Department of Speech, 1970).

could be cultivated and expressed using audiovisual media, and to create new channels of economic enterprise for a Black city.

My dissertation research begins with the events of July 1967, situating the Rebellion as a pivotal moment in which conversations about the interrelated politics of civil rights, municipal policy, and urban infrastructure took center stage across all media made in Detroit and galvanized an era of local Black documentary practice. Film and television produced in and about Detroit prior to 1967 often positioned the “Motor City” as the epicenter of industrial modernity and celebrated the affordances the city offered investors and residents.⁵ By autumn 1967, it was nearly impossible to present an image of Detroit isolated from the city’s record of urban violence, the deepening racial divide, and the shifting socio-economic conditions for the city’s working-class. Conversations on Detroit’s urban crisis likewise took place at community centers, local churches, city hall, and was widely covered by local, as well as national, publications. However, city leaders and community activists looked to local documentary film and television production, in particular, as a key tactic to make sense of the deepening urban crisis and publicize solutions to stabilize and improve living conditions in the city for all residents. With the increasing availability of portable, lightweight film technologies in the 1960s, documentary appealed to both city powerbrokers and Black activists because screen media had the cost-effective capacity to reach a wide viewership and render the structures of embedded racism visible to local audiences.⁶ After 1967, media production quickly became an essential

⁵ Jam Handy Organization, *Detroit: City On the Move*, 1965, <https://archive.org/details/DetroitC1965>. A. J. Baime, *The Arsenal of Democracy: FDR, Detroit, and an Epic Quest to Arm an America at War* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

⁶ Technological developments in portable and quiet 16 mm cameras, such as the Arriflex and Auricon, and the introduction of portable tape recorders such as the Nagra, made on-location filming easier and more convenient for small crews by 1960. In documentary history, this

means to maintain control of social order and quell anxieties about the potential resurgence of racially motivated violence. Yet, Black activists and intellectuals quickly took advantage of shifts in the local culture industry to also produce media that guided urban renewal process in productive directions for Black uplift and articulate Black Power ideologies to local audiences.

Writing on early cinema exhibition in Pittsburgh, Michael Aronson argues that while film historians "now collectively agree that locale matters, there remains a deep lacuna of knowledge regarding the potent variations between and within communities small and large, rural and urban. Local film history, in its narrow empirical vision and fine attention to detail, reveals the complex dynamics of everyday life in relation to the social and economic forces within which it is embedded."⁷ Accordingly, by examining local documentary media history alongside and within a historical analysis of Detroit from the late 1960s through the late 1970s, this dissertation elucidates the complex dynamics of Black life in the city and the socio-economic conditions in which Detroit's Black citizens operate. I call attention to varied media texts and production contexts oft elided by dominant media histories and emphasize the importance of media production as an interlocutor of civic discourse within local historiography. Given the ways in which Black bodies are disproportionately affected by geographic, economic, and human ephemerality, the hyper-visibility of Black bodies in locally produced Black media lends itself particularly well for discussion of Black resistance in Detroit. As colonial and neocolonial

enabled the rise of Direct Cinema and Cinema vérité. According to Bill Nichols, by the 1960s speech could be "synchronized with images without the use of studio settings, bulky equipment, or cables that tethered recorders to the camera. The camera and tape recorder could move freely about a scene and record what happened as it happened and where it happened." Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition* (Indiana University Press, 2017), 151. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the emergence of videotape allowed a cost-effective means for WGPR-TV to produce and recycle content.

⁷ Michael Aronson, *Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905-1929* (University of Pittsburgh Pre, 2010), 6.

powers have long subjugated and subordinated subaltern voices and images, the project of seeing and documenting Black media as a site of refusal is critical. Film and television producers in post-Rebellion Detroit created a repertoire of Black visibility, an archive of quotidian experiences of Blackness in which we can see how Black citizens rejected white “public” control of image making processes and linked Black self-representation to the mutually constitutive processes of civic engagement and urban development. Accordingly, my project supplements grand narratives of urban crisis and the symbolic collapse of a once great city, with research that demonstrates the material efforts to maintain a thriving Black urban sphere by local subjects of color in the period too often discussed as the dawn of decline.

While Detroit’s Black neighborhoods boast a long and vibrant history of cultural production prior to the Rebellion, Black Detroiters seldom had access to the means of media production nor had images of Black city space reached a broader audience.⁸ Black citizens interested in film and television did not have the economic backers, socio-political connections, or technological skillsets to either intervene in white systems of media production or support the growth of independent Black media practice. Indeed, media power in pre-Rebellion Detroit was largely operating within what George Lipsitz has termed a “white spatial imaginary.” Lipsitz’s *How Racism Takes Place* illustrates how urban space contains deeply embedded “racial assumptions and imperatives,” maintained by white citizens in positions of power and reinforced

⁸ In 1920s Detroit, for example, Richard Maurice produced several “race films” in Detroit’s “Black Bottom” district, home to the majority of Detroit’s African American residents. Like his contemporary Oscar Micheaux, Maurice created films about Black life in the city, using Black performers, and exhibited these films to local Black audiences. See: Jane M. Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (University of Chicago Press, 2001). Motown stands as perhaps the most significant example of Black visibility in Detroit produced within a Black spatial imaginary reaching outside of the city space. Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

through media politics that typically perpetuate “suburban structures of feelings” centered around white hostile privatism and defensive localism.⁹ According to Lipsitz, a spatial imaginary connotes the policing of moral space that consequently shapes geographic development along racial lines. Racialized representation of place, and media control of spatial discourses, impacts the way cities operate and how narratives of urban development circulate. By examining cultural practices within the “white spatial imaginary,” we can see how white Americans have historically legislated their socio-economic advantage and reinforced hierarchies of race and class. The white spatial imaginary promotes a hegemonic image of white social space as clean, uniform, safe, prosperous and morally righteous. In sharp contrast, Black space—especially in times of social upheaval—is figured as a set of chaotic zones of despair, poverty, and violence, with a lack of strong family values.¹⁰ Such spatial imaginaries inform policies and institutional practices that systematically grant place advantages to whites, relegating Black residents to predominantly run-down inner-city areas.

As Black Power politics coincided with socio-spatial change during this period, institutional support for Black media makers gathered further traction both locally and nationally and documentary productions challenging the white spatial imaginary increased substantially. As I will discuss in Chapter One, quelling Civil Rights protest and thwarting the potential for future civic upheavals led white civic leaders to grant communications outlets to Black citizens.

⁹ This refers to strategies suburbanites used to form community bonds, aggregating resources for themselves outside of the city center while outsourcing the burdens of repairing and maintaining deteriorating urban spaces to communities with less economic, social, and political power. George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁰ I am primarily referring to media informed by the “Moynihan Report,” which I will discuss in Chapter One. The report correlated urban decline in Black neighborhoods to a loss of strong patriarchal values in Black families, with male household heads turning to drugs or crime. Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action” (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Labor, 1965).

Initially, Black citizens were invited to participate in bi-racial discussion programs and token Blacks anchor were incorporated into existing news programs. Soon after, Black public affairs programs were developed on Public Broadcasting stations in Detroit, and in cities with sizable Black populations, to cater specifically to Black viewing audiences—a topic I explore in depth in Chapter Two. However, as Detroit’s Black population began to outnumber the white population, as Black Power politics radicalized, and as Black leaders obtained positions of civic power, Black media visibility and access to the means of media production were increasingly attained. By 1970, Detroit had become 43% Black and by mid-decade, the first metropolitan city of its size with a Black majority [Figures 0.2-0.7].¹¹ Although employment and housing conditions were not ideal, Black leaders saw opportunity in the city’s demographic change. Black Detroit held promise as a space where Black residents could have an active voice in local politics and urban development. Many citizen-activists hoped to convert Detroit’s rebellious energies into large-scale socio-economic changes. These hopes launched the careers of local Black politicians and transported Black radical activists into both elected and symbolic positions of civic power.¹² As Dan Georgakas and Marvin Sturkin’s 1975 *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, points out, “this movement [the rise of Black radicalism in Detroit] generated an amazing sequence of separate

¹¹ In 1950 the city was 16.1 percent Black and in 1960 28.9 percent Black. By 1980, Detroit was 63 percent Black. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Table 23. Michigan - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990” (United States Census Bureau, February 2005),

<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/MItab.pdf>. This also connotes within the city limits and not the Metropolitan region in its entirety.

¹² The careers of Black congressman like Charles Diggs and John Conyers were solidified in this moment. Mayor Coleman Young was elected as the city’s first Black city Mayor in 1973. Radical Black Nationalist preacher, Albert Cleage, was a respected Black Christian Nationalist leader in Detroit. He formed the Citywide Citizen Action Committee in 1968 and continued to rally support for Black radical causes through the 1970s. Meanwhile, in 1977 Kenneth Cockrel, the Marxist-Leninist Civil Rights attorney that played a formative role in the creation of *Finally Got the News*, the central case study of Chapter Three, was elected to the Detroit City Council.

but interlocked confrontations in the factory, in the polling booths, in the courts, in the streets, in the media, in the schools and in the union halls.”¹³ Sturkin and Georgakas’ recognition of media as a vital staging ground for social action is important, but has been too often absented from accounts of Detroit history.¹⁴

In her study of experimental ethnographic film, Catherine Russell argues that once a “gaze of power is dethroned, new histories can emerge.”¹⁵ As the racial dynamics of Detroit changed, the hegemonic gaze of white power within local media was destabilized, opening up space for new documentaries and new counter-hegemonic histories of Detroit to emerge. Lipsitz demonstrates how Black media practices and products intervene in structures of racial oppression, offering a “Black spatial imaginary,” which opposes the “land use philosophy that privileges profit over people.”¹⁶ The Black spatial imaginary comprises a counter-archive of historical Black consciousness, which continues to guide collective social change in the present. “The Black spatial imaginary can function as a key resource in struggles for social justice, for fair housing and fair hiring, school desegregation and affirmative action, equal opportunity and democracy. Where the white spatial imaginary disaggregates and divides, the Black spatial

¹³ Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (South End Press, 1998) 5. The activism that Sturkin and Georgakas describe in their study was positioned against the wealth, power, and interests of the governing elite in the New Detroit Committee, discussed in Chapter One. However, the radical media activism they introduce will be the subject of Chapter Two.

¹⁴ While scholars like Suzanne Smith, Angela Dillard, and Todd C. Shaw elucidate the overlapping relations of cultural production and community organizing in Black Detroit, the roles film and television played in mediating local race relations has not been widely acknowledged. Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Harvard University Press, 2009). Angela D. Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (University of Michigan Press, 2007). Todd C. Shaw, *Now Is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Duke University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Duke University Press, 1999) Xvii.

¹⁶ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 19.

imaginary produces unexpected connections and coalitions.”¹⁷ I examine the material relationships between media production, political activism, and socio-economic development in Black Detroit at a time when local Black citizen-activists were reconfiguring the Black spatial imaginary in an effort to craft an emergent Black city. My project further emphasizes how Detroit’s Black spatial imaginary expanded considerably as demands for improved representation of Black communities and greater Black access to film/broadcasting technologies increased both locally and nationally.¹⁸

This by no means suggests that white powerbrokers ceded control over Detroit completely. Christine Boyer notes that, “Behind every city plan and architectural project lay the wildly utopic belief that society was progressing toward a better future, that industrial production when harnessed by collective desires would erase want, eradicate disease, and supplant revolution.”¹⁹ The “future” presented in contemporaneous hegemonic media emphasized white business development as a symbol of utopic progress that could fix the chaotic Black city through processes of policy change and policing. White-owned media still reinforce place advantage through journalistic and media practices that construct the Black city as a case study of urban failure—perpetuating images of violence, crime, poverty, and broken families. Furthermore, the

¹⁷ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 255.

¹⁸ As I will discuss in Chapter One, President Lyndon Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission in 1967 to investigate the underlying causes of urban rioting and propose solutions to stop the emergence of future incidents of racially motivated violence in urban centers. The eleven-member commission chaired by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner released a report in February 1968 entitled “The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” or “Kerner Report” argued that institutional white racism and a lack of opportunity for Black community growth was a primary cause of racial unrest in American cities. Suggestions, among recommendations, the Report asserted that increasing Black representation in media and allowing for greater Black access to media production was key to improving race relations in the nation.

¹⁹ M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (MIT Press, 1996), 23.

struggles faced by Detroit media makers reflect the broader challenges faced by minority practitioners trying to challenge and/or work within telecommunications systems maintained by hegemonic social structures. As such, Black Detroiters made significant inroads in Black media production and distribution, but could not completely overhaul existing structures of white power. Nevertheless, it is critical to recognize how social actors making documentary media within a local Black spatial imaginary in the late 1960s and early 1970s worked to challenge the white establishment media and the structure of civic governance that relegated Black residents to inadequate housing, employment, and educational opportunities.

I use the phrase social actor here—borrowing from Bill Nichol’s term for non-profession actors in documentary—and citizen-activist elsewhere, to reinforce the point that these media makers typically lacked formal training in media production and were primarily drawn to documentary as a form of communicating Black thoughts about the oppressive conditions of urban life to city leaders and citizens alike. Accordingly, the media makers discussed in my research came to their respective projects with goals for community enrichment rather than auteurist ambitions for aesthetic experimentation. Some stylistic experimentation did occur in local television and film, yet inserting Black direct address into local media flows was the primary objective of local Black documentary in the post-Rebellion moment. Media rendered the machinations of racism visible to Detroit audiences of all backgrounds—including those viewing from the growing white suburbs. As I will explain further in this introduction and in Chapter One, suburbanites and white citizens in Detroit—a city in which neighborhoods were de-facto segregated by race and ethnicity—were largely unaware of, in denial about, or unconcerned with the racial structures that granted place, educational, and economic advantages to whiteness. As white citizens continued to flee to suburbs, they displaced themselves from the deteriorating

educational, economic, and housing infrastructures in the city, and simultaneously perpetuated a statewide decrease in concern for fixing Detroit's socio-economic problems. Thus, the local documentaries discussed in this dissertation afforded Black citizens a privileged platform to convey their perspectives on the emergent Black city and often gave white citizens their first expanded view of Black city life produced through an insider lens.²⁰

For Black civic leaders and activists, incorporating Black voices into local media did not sufficiently address the demands for media equity in a majority Black city, especially one that still held a significant racial gap in terms of housing, education, and economic prospects. With a growing Black urban base in the early 1970s, citizen activists also worked to push beyond the boundaries of isolated creative projects for Black audiences in order to create an infrastructure that would enable further Black developments in the city and expand Black control of media production, distribution, and exhibition. Infrastructure generally signifies the interlocking systems of planning, transportation, communication, and economic exchange that undergird and facilitate urban life. The notion of a media infrastructure is central to this dissertation, as it connotes both the situated communications technologies that enable flows of information, like television broadcast signals and power grids, as well as media's positioning in the broader constellation of civic dynamics that govern, as well as produce, the conditions of daily life in the city, including racialized conditions. Media infrastructure scholarship does not only call attention to the organization of telecommunication networks, production technologies, and signal traffic,

²⁰ I am using the word "insider" to strategically reference the insider/outsider binary frequently examined in documentary discourse and within Hamid Naficy's work of exilic and accented cinema. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2001). I also want to note that Motown performers gave a public face to Black Detroit. However, Motown performances and star texts on television and in film were an exception to a general rule of Black Detroit visibility. They also exceeded the boundaries of local quotidian life, becoming positive symbols of the city.

but the processes of labor, maintenance, and repair that are often left invisible in studies of media circulation.²¹ My research emphasizes the labor Black citizens put into maintaining open channels of communication while the city remained architecturally, economically, and politically unstable. Black media infrastructure, in particular, signifies networked economic, social, political, and technological systems of Black Power and protest—from the streets, to the factory floor, to city hall, to civic institutions, to Black businesses—that coordinated to enable Black access to civic knowledge, and to create new channels of Black communication. Black media infrastructure produces, curates, distributes, sends and receives Black images and ideas for the empowerment of Black citizens. Black media infrastructure intervenes in white systems of communications—which otherwise control the flows of civic information—and provides representations of Blackness for white viewers. However, Black media infrastructure—prioritizes the development of channels for Black citizen engagement, cultural enrichment, economic growth, and education above white enlightenment. By instituting Black media infrastructure, Black Detroiters connected creative output in Detroit to larger systems of minority media production nationally, and sometimes internationally, but in ways indelibly shaped by their particular (racialized) conditions of locality.

This project traces the development of Detroit's Black media infrastructure by describing the production histories of a range of Black documentaries, the proposed media projects Detroiters hoped to develop and the imagined possibilities of what media could do for the post-Rebellion city, as Detroit shifted from a racially divided urban center to a majority Black city with Black governance and a hostile white outer core. In the chapters that follow, I study ways a

²¹ Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, "Introduction," in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, ed. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 7.

collection of local documentary production and distribution efforts employ different visual and technological strategies to reframe the image of local Black culture for the city's Black residents, negotiates socio-economic policies and urban planning decisions, and projects a spatial imaginary for a prosperous Black urban future. As I will discuss at greater length in my Chapter Breakdown, I first examine a televised community discussion forum (*In Your Interest*, 1968) and a sponsored documentary (*The Black Eye*, 1968) produced in the immediate aftermath of the Rebellion by The New Detroit Committee as the manifestation of the city's crisis management plan to avoid further destruction of civic space. While the urgency of crisis management dissipated after 1968, Black public affairs programs emerged from that moment as an enduring staple of Black political visibility in Detroit. In Chapter Two, I discuss *CPT* (1968-present) at length to analyze how the magazine-formatted Black public affairs program responded to social, political, and economic change for Black citizens in the city. In Chapter Three, I examine the radical documentary *Finally Got the News* (1971), made by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in collaboration with Newsreel Detroit. At the same time as Black public affairs programs were airing on local public broadcasting stations and reaching a Black middle-class viewer base, the League was imagining ways to increase reflexive documentary film practice linked to radical activism and establish a counter-hegemonic distribution company to increase radical media circulation in Detroit. Building on discussions of Black distribution and infrastructure discussed in Chapter Three, my final chapter focuses on the development of the Black-owned and operated television station WGPR-TV (1974-1994), which aired a variety of Black non-fiction fare, including newscasts, ethnic variety programs, talk shows, dance shows, videotaped church services, and public affairs programs. In this way, I selected a range of media texts produced for televisual, theatrical, and community exhibition and proceed chronologically

in my analysis to trace the expansion of Detroit's Black spatial imaginary through documentary media during the decade following Rebellion as the city shifted to a "Black" city.

My dissertation demonstrates how Detroit's Black media history reflects many of the struggles minority media makers typically face in order to gain control of the means of media production and distribution. Yet, in other respects, Detroit's status as mythic symbol or icon of industrial modernity in the first half of the 20th century and urban decline in the latter, makes the city a unique case study. As I will soon discuss at length, Detroit is an exceptional example of Black media infrastructure that developed in direct response to the city's extreme conditions of deepening poverty, racial isolation, and political instability. While Detroit's history of television and film production is not often considered in scholarly conversations on American media cities—in the way that New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago frequently are—Black media makers in the post-Rebellion city drew from limited resources available to re-imagine and attempt to re-manufacture the "Motor City" as a center for Black media development on the road to becoming the nation's premiere Black metropolis.

Building Black Civic Infrastructure and Imagining Black Futures

This dissertation underlines the variegated local histories and potential futures negotiated through film and television projects made by Black Detroiters at this pivotal time of social, spatial, and economic change. I examine not only how Black media was embedded spatially but also how citizen-users imagined media technology and the possibilities of media representation. I repeatedly use aspirational language to describe Detroit documentary films and television programs, I consider what citizen-activists "hoped," "designed," "conceptualized" and "imagined" when they decided to pick up cameras, funded documentaries, or built media

infrastructure.²² To borrow phrasing from Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, the media projects described in this dissertation are “committed to documenting underexposed material realities of Black life.” Yet they also reveal the “interests, intentions, and desires” of the producers.²³ I look to archival documents and discourses written by and about local Black citizen-producers to assess the spaces of desire, interest, and intention we can read in Detroit's Black media. There is a significant difference between the imagined possibilities of what representing Black life could achieve for Black urban development, what projects were actually produced, and what survives of these Black media projects for future generations. In each of my case studies, I discuss the development histories and post-production legacies of completed Black media texts. But my discussion is not limited to the study of realized films and televised programs. By considering planned and aborted projects as well, I seek to elucidate why Black citizens turned to documentary in order to *imagine* a Detroit rising from the ashes of Rebellion, and how they understood media technologies as a central mechanism for facilitating Detroit's urban transformation. My focus on the rich field of imagined possibilities of documentary for Black citizens belies the pervasive associations of (Black) Detroit as a site of collapse, failure, and decline perpetuated in the white spatial imaginary.

Of course, all emergent technologies are assessed for their potential to aid social growth. Throughout modern history, citizens, artists, and intellectuals have repeatedly explored the possible ways technologies could serve the public good. As scholars Lynn Spigel, Carolyn Marvin, and Lisa Gitleman have discussed, the discourses surrounding the everyday

²² I use television and film here as mediums for documentary address. WGPR-TV, discussed in Chapter Four, also used videotape for television broadcasts.

²³ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, “The L.A. Rebellion Plays Itself,” in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*, ed. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, n.d.), 254.

implementation and usage of technologies bring utopian ideals of social progress to the public.²⁴ Yet, technological discourses likewise reflect public anxieties about the social, spatial, and political effects of civic change and social decline. By the late 1960s, the utilization of television and film to facilitate conversations on public welfare was a common practice in American cities. As Anna Everett has described, coverage of the protests in the 1960s, primarily on television, borrowed strategies from 1930s documentaries to convey “imagistic reductions of urban chaos versus suburban order that served to reassure if disinform the nation about complex issues” related to Black inner city life.²⁵ Television borrowed “antiseptic models of space” from earlier technologies like the telephone and telegraph, normalizing divisions of place and race. As such, technologies have long been instrumentalized by the white spatial imaginary to contain Black bodies and impede Black advancement.²⁶ As Alondra Nelson describes, “Western culture generally constructs Blackness as always oppositional to technologically driven chronicles of progress.”²⁷ It is thus unsurprising that Black citizens were largely occluded from media representation and discourse. Yet, as the organizational structure and political concerns of the Civil Rights Movement fragmented in the late 1960s, Black media makers looked increasingly to the televisual medium, in particular, to intervene in spatial discourses of white hegemony. As Aniko Bodroghkozy argues, it was in this historical moment when “television as a representation technology implicated in the status of African Americans again becomes an animating issue for

²⁴ Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford University Press, 1999); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁵ Anna Everett, *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (SUNY Press, 2009), 8.

²⁶ Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 109-115.

²⁷ Alondra Nelson, “Introduction: Future Texts,” *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (71) (June 1, 2002): 1.

Black commentators, critics, and viewers.”²⁸

This, however, does not mean Black citizens did not ever have access to technologies or use available media to imagine an alternative future for Black citizens—especially in Detroit. As a major center for industrial development, centered around the automobile and fueled largely by a Black worker base, Detroit became a consequential hotbed of both Black radicalism—as Black citizens worked to rethink Black labor exploitation—and Black creative production that drew inspiration explicitly from the forces of industrialization. As scholars like Allyson Nadia Field and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart have shown, Black migrants seeking urban modernity in cities like Detroit, Chicago, and New York in the 1910s and 1920s took to filmmaking to produce images of Black social equity, advocate political reform, and advance racial uplift.²⁹ According to Field, uplift filmmakers at this time, “embraced cinema as a useful medium for promoting the interests of African Americans and covering the possibilities of Black citizenship for both Black and white spectators.”³⁰ In the 1920s, Richard Maurice produced several aesthetically ambitious “race films” that promoted Black uplift in Detroit’s “Black Bottom” district, home to the majority of Detroit’s African American residents. Like his contemporary Oscar Micheaux, Maurice created films about Black life in the city, using Black performers, and exhibited these films to local Black audiences.³¹ Several decades later, Motown Records grew to become

²⁸ Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 8.

²⁹ Jacqueline Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2005), 139.

³⁰ Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham; London: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 1.

³¹ Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* (Indiana University Press, 2001); Jane M. Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

perhaps the quintessential example of Black media visibility associated with Detroit and its Black uplift narrative. Motown founder Berry Gordy found inspiration in Detroit's automotive assembly lines to engineer a new system of Black artist development in the late 1950s that began locally, but re-imagined Black popular culture on an international scale.

We might say that these examples of local, Black creative innovations in cinema and music distribution form part of a longer history of Afrofuturist creative practice that fuses Black identity with technology to envision new trajectories for Black culture. The tradition of Afrofuturist art and thought is comprised of a robust body of speculative fictions that treat African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century techno-culture. Most of the texts scholars discuss as “Africanfuturist” pre-date the adoption of the term in academic discourse, including the Detroit media discussed in the dissertation. Nevertheless, Africanfuturism blends aesthetics of cultures from the African Diaspora with technology to imagine a technologically enhanced future or alternative reality for Black citizens.³² For example, Anna Everett connects Black cyberspace communities to communal longing of the African diaspora. Everett argues that the bonds formed through “chattel slavery encouraged, long before the term became chic...self-sustaining virtual communities through paralinguistic and transnational communicative systems” that sustained a “diasporic consciousness.”³³ In this way, Black uses of technology in Detroit imagine a Black urban future that is part of a historical spatial practice in which oppressed citizens take advantage of limited

³² Erik Steinskog, *Africanfuturism and Black Sound Studies: Culture, Technology, and Things to Come* (Springer, 2017); Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones, *Africanfuturism 2.0: The Rise of Afro-Blackness* (Lexington Books, 2015); Ytasha Womack, *Africanfuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago Review Press, 2013); Paul Youngquist, *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Africanfuturism* (University of Texas Press, 2016); Nelson, “Introduction: Future Texts.”

³³ Everett, *Digital Diaspora*, 3.

resources to conceptualize new possibilities for their marginalized communities. In Detroit, components of Afrofuturism can be found in the emergence of techno music production, and Nation of Islam theology—which interpreted the Prophet Ezekiel’s vision of a wheel in the sky as UFOs serving as vehicles for Black salvation.³⁴ These projects linked the politics and aesthetics of Black Nationalism and Afrocentrism through technological experimentation. While Afrofuturist literature and music are not central case studies in my dissertation, I do explore connections between Black Power agendas and the technological possibilities for Black advancement in post-Rebellion Detroit as they intersect with broader legacies of localized Black creative thought.

Beyond and including the Nation of Islam, Detroit has historically been a major center for Black citizens to organize collectively around platforms of Black Power and imagine a radically different future for oppressed citizens. Such groups include the Detroit-founded Republic of New Afrika, Rev. Cleage’s organizations for Black Christian Nationalism, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, as well as very active local branches of the Black Panthers and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE).³⁵ Leftist thinkers, activists, and organizers like James

³⁴ Stephen C Finley, “The Meaning of Mother in Louis Farrakhan’s ‘Mother Wheel’: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Cosmology of the Nation of Islam’s UFO,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (June 2012): 434–65.

³⁵ The Marxist-Leninist League of Revolutionary Black Workers—discussed in Chapter Three—was founded to coordinate a selection of revolutionary unions at various factories in Detroit. The Republic for New Afrika was founded after a meeting of the Detroit Malcolm X Society in 1968, led by brothers Milton and Richard Henry [later renamed Gaidi and Imari Obadele]. The Republic advocated the establishment of a separatist Black nation within the US South, 400 billion dollars in reparations from the US government for injustices incurred during slavery, and a referendum in which African Americans could decide what to do with their citizenry—as emancipation did not give former slaves the option to form a new nation. Albert Cleage felt that Christian theology, with emphases on the afterlife and the supernatural, was too abstracted from everyday life. He strove to create a Black religious center that would be first and foremost answerable to the poor and marginalized on earth. His Shrine of the Black Madonna became a

Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs likewise gravitated towards Detroit as an archetypal site for imagining revolutionary change. According to Grace Lee Boggs, Detroit's years of crisis created room for the "kind of community that was not possible during the years where there were lots of jobs and the industry was expanding" and that Detroit's "collapse" offered "a whole new way of looking at life in the future."³⁶ A 1973 *Jet* article on the election of Detroit's first Black mayor, Coleman Young, echoes this hope for a Black Detroit. Quoting Michigan's first Black Democratic Congressman, Charles Riggs: "I think his election means that we can establish new aspirations." Or as Representative John Conyers put it "It means a new day... We're beginning to turn the city around toward becoming an ideal metropolis."³⁷ For Detroit city leaders, film and television provided a platform to visualize change and create a new spatial imaginary of Detroit centered around Black quotidian life.³⁸ As Robin D.G. Kelley has discussed, "the most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with problems of the aggrieved

staging ground for Black radical activism in the late 1960s and 1970s. *The Republic of New Afrika*, Archives Unbound (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, 2011). Detroit's Congress on Racial Equality was active in mobilizing citizens in the Civil Rights Movement, organizing the Detroit "March to Freedom" in 1963. The Black Panthers had supporters in Detroit as well, who advocated the beginning of the Black Detroit (violent) revolution in line with national African Panther struggles. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers guided the agenda for Black labor activism in the city and often overshadowed the local organizing activities of other Black radical groups like the Panthers.

³⁶ In this quote, Boggs is likely talking about activism around the turn of the century, as she continued to organize in the city until her death in 2015 at the age of 100. For More on the Boggs': James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution* (NYU Press, 1974); Grace Lee Boggs and Scott Kurashige, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (University of California Press, 2012); Stephen M. Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (UNC Press Books, 2016).

³⁷ Gregory Simms, "What to Expect from First Black Mayor of Detroit," *JET*, November 29, 1973, 41.

³⁸ In 1974, Coleman Young took office as Detroit's first Black mayor. His primary campaign promise was to curtail policies enabling police brutality in the city. This is a topic that will be explored in greater depth in chapter's Three and Four.

populations confronting systems of oppression.”³⁹ According to Kelley, significant projects in African American thought, including those developed by activists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Oliver Cox, were catalyzed by the threatening conditions of white brutality towards marginalized bodies. “Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression, rather the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors, and more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.”⁴⁰ Within this tradition of Black radical thought, Kelley identifies a desire to engender new prospects for Black life. “In the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born.”⁴¹ I thus approach the systems of oppression and dynamics of urban struggle to contextualize how Black citizens turned to documentary as a medium to negotiate a different future for Black citizens on the precipice of a Black city—perhaps one not yet born in the US. In doing so, Black documentaries are not only showing an interpretation of the historical world grounded in the “real” as documentaries are commonly presumed to do—a topic I discuss in a subsequent section—but making sense of the present to also conjecture what the historical world could or should become for Black citizens. In my case studies, Afrofuturism does not play out in aesthetic representations of an alternative utopian society, but imagined through strategies of direct address in local media texts and Black discourse about the possibilities of Detroit media. While the Rebellion is commonly understood as the final nail in the city’s coffin, I am drawn to the post-Rebellion moment precisely because

³⁹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2003), 8.

⁴⁰ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 8.

⁴¹ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 9–10.

it opened up a world of possibility in which Black citizens hoped a Black metropolis could be born, and media was an integral component of imagining and building that urban future.

The projected future of Detroit anticipated by documentary producers includes both increased representation of Black citizens as well as the implementation of Black media infrastructure that would effectively shift the balance of civic power away from white corporate ownership and towards Black citizen control.⁴² To challenge the white spatial imaginary, Black film and television producers also needed to command control over means of production. As Lynn Spigel notes, “in order to maintain and reproduce its power a group must not only occupy physical space, but it must also occupy imaginary space (the space of stories, of images, of fantasy). In the modern and postmodern eras, this is largely achieved through the control of media institutions.”⁴³ In Detroit, this entailed controlling media institutions as a central mechanism of a process by which Black citizens gained access to other social institutions that directly dictated economic and policy decisions for the city. Black citizens thus developed and sustained Black media infrastructure to challenge the white spatial imaginary of Detroit that

⁴² Parks and Starosielski, “Introduction.”

⁴³ Of particular interest to my work, Spigel illustrates how popular conceptions of “space” in the post-war period were divided along racial lines. In particular, she uses literature from African American newspapers and magazines to show some of the ambivalent responses regarding NASA and the “space race” from African American perspectives. She demonstrates that while for many citizens the space race represented social progress, the space race also used money that could have been spent on social welfare to send (exclusively) white astronauts into orbit. In doing so, the narrative she unravels “counters the myth of the space-age family so central to the images of the space race in white venues. Instead of the suburban dream house, it depicts a failed Black family whose demise is caused by discrimination both in the space program and in the white suburbs.” Like Lipsitz, Spigel demonstrates in useful ways how whiteness dominated both “physical geographies through racist zoning laws, transportation policies, and other practices of segregation” and also the “culture’s imaginary geographies of the universe at large.” Black media makers in Detroit call attention to cultures “imaginary geographies” that affect the socio-cultural well being in the city and imagine new landscapes for the city through technological access. Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Duke University Press, 2001), 145.

perpetuated binaries of white law and Black disorder. According to Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, “media infrastructures,” in particular, are essentially “situated sociotechnical systems that are designed and configured to support the distribution of audio-visual signal traffic.”⁴⁴ To understand the concept of infrastructure in greater depth, Parks and Starosielski turn to the work of sociologist Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, a scholar of Informatics, who argue that “infrastructure is that which runs ‘underneath’ actual structures — railroad tracks, city plumbing and sewage, electricity, roads and highways, cable wires that connect to the broadcast grid and bring pictures to our TVs. It is that upon which something else rides, or works, a platform of sorts.”⁴⁵ Yet, infrastructure need not be a material edifice; it may also consist of “soft” systems of organization and knowledge, ranging from professional societies to classificatory procedures. As Parks and Starosielski put it: “Infrastructure studies... is not simply a quest to understand large technical systems; rather, it explores processes and changes at a 'mundane scale' and treats them as part of the building of organizations and production of knowledge. They are the technical structures that support a society—interrelated systems providing commodities and services essential to enable, sustain, or enhance societal living conditions.”⁴⁶ Infrastructure points of to the “materialities of things, sites, people, and processes that locate media distribution within systems of power.”⁴⁷ Expanding on this notion, Jeffrey E. Fulmer also notes that infrastructure “require large financial commitments for their development, repair, and replacement. They can be built, touched, enabled, and disabled, and function together to form interrelated, dependent systems that deliver needed commodities and

⁴⁴ Parks and Starosielski, “Introduction,” 4.

⁴⁵ Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, “How to Infrastructure,” in *Handbook of New Media: Student Edition*, ed. Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia M. Livingstone (SAGE, 2006), 230.

⁴⁶ Parks and Starosielski, “Introduction,” 11.

⁴⁷ Parks and Starosielski, “Introduction,” 11.

services.”⁴⁸ My dissertation considers both media representations of the city and their relation to the urban resources that supply and govern the city’s manufacture; that is, to borrow a phrase from David James, the “cinematic registers of social and material production.”⁴⁹ I am interested in the institutional, political, and social forces that shape the various “Detroits” documented on film and the technological as well as organizational systems media makers hoped to create in order to support and sustain the development of Detroit as a Black metropolis with Black citizen-controlled systems of power.

Why Detroit? The Socio-Spatial Politics of the Post-Rebellion Imaginary

Popular lore positions the violence of ’67 as the major cause for Detroit’s post-war architectural and economic decline. But scholars like Thomas Sugrue and June Manning Thomas have effectively demonstrated that the contributing factors for Detroit’s urban crisis were in place much earlier in the 20th Century.⁵⁰ Post-war suburbanization and the decentralization of the auto industry dramatically altered the city’s geographical layout and reshaped residential understandings of race and urban politics. Freeway construction was planned to cut through Black neighborhoods, displacing long-term hubs of Black community [Figure 0.7]. Depleting economic opportunities for Black citizens immobilized within the city lines only worsened relationships between Black citizens and civic authority—especially the

⁴⁸ Jeffrey E. Fulmer, “What in the World Is Infrastructure,” *Infrastructure Investor*, August 2009.

⁴⁹ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History And Geography Of Minor Cinemas In Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 31.

⁵⁰ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. For more on the origins of Detroit’s crisis see: Joe Darden, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Wayne State University Press, 2013).

local police, who frequently perpetrated brutal acts of containment against Black residents.⁵¹

Yet the drain caused by “white flight” and socio-economic disinvestment in the increasingly Black-populated city only intensified in the Post-Rebellion moment [Figure 0.8 – 0.13].

Post-Rebellion Detroit has primarily been represented as the “the worst case scenario” of urban decline in both media and scholarship, a (racialized) cautionary tale of American collapse. According to Daniel Berry, the image of Detroit as a Black metropolis “defiant towards the suburbs but amenable to Blacks—unleashed a protracted backlash from local newspapers and TV channels which grew obsessed with crime, depopulation, and fires in the city, arson-fueled or otherwise.”⁵² For instance, in 1990, *ABC PrimeTime Live* ran a special entitled “Detroit’s Agony” on the decline of the once bustling American city. Positioning Detroit as the apotheosis of urban decline, host Judd Rose, begins the program by noting, “Our first story is not about a city. It’s about a warning. Detroit was once a symbol of US competitive vitality. Some say Detroit is still a symbol of the future, the first urban dynamo to fall.” He continues:

Most big cities do have the same problems. In some cases, they are worse. Washington has more murders, Los Angeles has more gangs, New York City has more racial violence. America’s cities are on a dark and dangerous road. But you come here and you get the feeling that this, this is what the end of the road looks like. White suburbs and a Black inner city have turned their backs on each other. Here in Detroit we have seen the future and it’s frightening.

Rose then puts forth a scathing exposé of the city’s infrastructural collapse and crime epidemic.

⁵¹ For a history of Police Brutality prior to the rebellion, see: Joe T. Darden and Richard W. Thomas, *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide* (MSU Press, 2013).

⁵² Rupinder Singh and Daniel Berry, eds., “Detroit: A Primer,” in *Ctrl+Alt+Delete: Detroit in the Age of Obsolescence* (Rupinder Singh, 2008), 22.

The *Primetime Live* crew follow Detroit Police Department officers along on drug busts, speak to a grieving mother about the loss of her son due to the city's pervasive gang violence, and drive around the city's depressed neighborhoods, highlighting the many cases of arson that contours the city's "bombed-out warzone" look. "Detroit's Agony" presents a place removed from lawful society; a once great city descended into total chaos. The program ends with Rose noting, "Children dead, homes abandoned, hopes dashed; you don't have to come here on Devil's Night to see that Detroit is burning." In this way, *ABC Primetime* ultimately presents Detroit as a mere harbinger of what might soon befall other major cities with deindustrializing economies and significant Black populations.⁵³

This type of coverage provided by "Detroit's Agony" is reflective of both national Post-Rebellion reportage and local news coverage (from white-controlled stations) in which Detroit is narrativized as a city lost to the interrelated conditions of economic decline, architectural decay, and widespread violence. Detroit's profound transformation over the course of the 20th century has been mirrored by other industrial cities—especially those in the Rustbelt with significant minority populations. Neighborhoods in Chicago's south and west sides, Cleveland, Gary, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Newark have all faced significant rises in poverty, crime, unemployment, and a tremendous loss in manufacturing jobs. All of these cities have developed

⁵³ Of course, this imaginary of Detroit was not novel to 1990, but had been a projected mainstay of documentary discourse about the city since the 1960s. In 2012, the under-paid underserved police force even released a declaration that conditions are so out of control in the city that visitors are "entering at their own risk," admitting the police force's inability to protect citizens from the onslaught of crime, vandalism, and gun violence. Also see: Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre's series of photo books on Detroit's ruins (2005-2010). Yves Marchand, Romain Meffre, and Robert Polidori, *The Ruins of Detroit* (Innovative Logistics Llc, 2010); Yves Marchand and Rolan Meffre, *TIME Magazine Cover: The Tragedy Of Detroit - Oct. 5, 2009*, accessed December 28, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20091005,00.html>; Yves Marchand and Rolan Meffre, "Detroit's Beautiful, Horrible Decline - Photo Essays," *Time*, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1882089_1850973,00.html.

“large ghettos characterized by extreme segregation and spatial isolation.”⁵⁴ The complex overlapping histories of race relations, residence, and labor in American cities has led to Post-WWII crises in housing development, business growth, urban planning and segregation, education, political management, social welfare policies, and citizen safety. All of these crises have been shaped, explicitly or implicitly, by structures of racial discrimination, and have led to the rise in impoverished urban centers marked by “otherness.”

Yet Detroit has captured international attention as the epicenter of urban crises because the institutional neglect and suburban flight combined with the rise of racial isolation and concentrated poverty has been more aggressively and devastatingly felt than in most other US cities. Census data and articles about the city’s decline abound with evidence that makes Detroit a compelling case study for journalists, scholars, and sociologists.⁵⁵ According to census reports focused on cities with more than 500,000 residents, Detroit currently has by far the largest percentage of citizens living in poverty (48.9 percent making less than 25,000 dollars a year).⁵⁶ Detroit likewise boasts the highest statistical reporting of crime per capita and the most vacant homes [Figure 0.14]. Criminologists warn against the interpretation of raw data without contextual analysis, especially as such statistics do not fully account for how larger metropolitan areas have higher concentrations of crime relegated to specific neighborhoods—such as

⁵⁴ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 57.

⁵⁵ “Caution Against Ranking,” FBI, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/crime-in-the-u.s.-2010/caution-against-ranking>.

⁵⁶ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Table 23. Michigan - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990”; Catherine Morse, “Research Guides: U.S. Census and Demographic Information: Historical Census Data,” <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=283004&p=1885626>. Sonya Rastogi, et al., “The Black Population” (US Census Bureau, September 2011), <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>.

Chicago’s south side. And yet criminal activity extends far beyond specific sectors of the city in Detroit—it is a city not with excessive pockets of crime, but a broadly unsafe urban center with a few pockets of low-crime neighborhoods. The city likewise has the highest concentration of Black residents for a major US city, catalyzing a myriad of studies aimed to link the dangers of urban crisis with the structures of racial inequality. As Dan Georgakas stipulates, “while similar conditions can be found in many post-industrial cities in the Americas and Europe, Detroit recommends itself for particular attention by virtue of the legibility, scale and enormous social impact of these remarkable transformations.” In this way, Detroit is typical yet extreme: “at once paradigmatic of the processes of modernization in the formation of the twentieth century urbanism and indicative of contemporary trends in metropolitan urban centers developed by increasingly mobile capital in context of a global economy.”⁵⁷

Accordingly, photographers and documentary filmmakers have long flocked to Detroit to view, explore, and record what a *TIME* Magazine article has called “Detroit’s beautiful, horrible decline.” Films like *Requiem for Detroit?* (2010), *Detroit: Wild City* (2010), and *Detropia* (2012) rely on juxtapositions of ruin cinematography and archival footage to historicize the city’s socio-spatial transformation. More often than not, however, these media—often derided as “ruin porn” in popular discourse—are produced by non-Detroiters aimed at a broad viewership beyond the city’s borders.⁵⁸ They are less likely to be structured around the perspectives of Black citizens positioned at the center of the city’s crisis. In *Stalking Detroit*, Jason Young argues that in the post-white-flight-era, Detroit’s suburban majority is “afforded knowledge of their own former city streets not through lived experience, but rather through coverage: the displacement of reality

⁵⁷ Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim, and Jason Young, *Stalking Detroit* (Actar, 2001), 11.

⁵⁸ Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).

itself in favor of its television representation.”⁵⁹ Since the 1960s, tele-tourists have watched incendiary and often sensationalist accounts of crime, violence, and urban decay on a nightly basis, presented by anchors living in the suburbs and television stations that also lie outside the city limits. Since the Rebellion, the city has likewise been featured in popular film and television narratives as a quintessential backdrop for stories of criminality and racial discord. From the gritty Blaxploitation film *Detroit 9000* (1973) to ultraviolent dystopic narratives like *RoboCop* (1987) and *The Crow* (1994), Detroit has repeatedly served as an inspirational blueprint for the cinematic and televisual imagining of the post-industrial nightmare.

Consequently, Detroit has become more than just a city struggling to stay afloat. “Detroit” now stands as a significant site through which discourses of American identity, the future of urban infrastructure, economic development, and racial justice are interrogated. As Jerry Herron argues, “Detroit used to stand for success, and now it stands for failure. In that sense, the city is not just a physical location; it is also a project, a projection of imaginary fears and desires. This is the place where bad times get sent to make them belong to somebody else; thus, it seems easy to agree about Detroit because the city embodies everything the rest of the country wants to get over.”⁶⁰ In *Driving Detroit*, George Galster likewise conjectures that “Detroit’s most important product is not cars, music, politics, or precedents. It is symbolism. What Detroit has always been best at making is a symbol of itself. Americans, and indeed much of the world, have held up Detroit as an icon of either the best or the worst of what a metropolis

⁵⁹ Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ Herron, *Afterculture*, 9.

can be.”⁶¹ Accordingly, a significant corpus of urban studies and historical literature dedicated to assessing socio-spatial change in the city in the 1990s and 2000s has simultaneously worked to make sense of Detroit’s iconic decline while also increasing popular fascination with the city—as showcased in discussions of Detroit’s ruin in popular press think pieces, ruin photography essays and compilations, and documentary films on decline.⁶²

My scholarly project on Detroit is only tangentially related to its statistical extremes and popular iconicity.⁶³ I was born in Detroit, and hold a deep, personal, affection for the city that has guided my research trajectory. This dissertation is fueled, in part, by my own response to reductive law-and-order media coverage and the flood of “ruin porn” documentaries about the city in the early 2010s. I am likewise influenced by the stories of the city’s perseverance, cultural legacy, and the alternative forms of community and consciousness that circulated amidst (and often unbeknownst to) broader narratives of decline and decay. As a media scholar, I began

⁶¹ George Galster, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 6.

⁶² These studies include: Darden, *Detroit*; Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*; Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000); David A. Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Cornell University Press, 2010); Herron, *AfterCulture*; Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture* (Wayne State University Press, 2004); Philip Levine and Andrew Moore, *Andrew Moore: Detroit Disassembled*, First Edition (Bologna: Damiani/Akron Art Museum, 2010); Van Gordon Sauter and Burleigh Hines, *Nightmare in Detroit: A Rebellion and Its Victims* (H. Regnery Company, 1968); Shaw, *Now Is the Time!*, 2009; Thomas and Manning, *Redevelopment and Race*; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Cornell University Press, 2004); B. J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Wayne State University Press, 1989); Galster, *Driving Detroit*; Brian Doucet, *Why Detroit Matters: Decline, Renewal and Hope in a Divided City* (Policy Press, 2017).

⁶³ During my college years at the University of Michigan, I drove to the city twice a week to tutor in Detroit elementary schools. Entering graduate school out of state, I initially intended to explore other documentary subjects, yet was repeatedly drawn back to histories of the city until it became the primary focus of my work. I am part of the urban exodus and yet my mind always returns home.

researching the city's audiovisual history and found a rich archive of material that has been too often neglected and undervalued in socio-historical studies of the city. I am, thus, actively working to contribute to an intellectual archive of the city's Black spatial imaginary and recover the Black-produced and Black-oriented television programs that have survived to leave a lasting impact on Detroit's long-time citizens as well as former residents.

While monographs about Detroit's history and legacy of activism abound, few academic studies have been attentive to cinematic and televisual politics that intersect with postwar or post-Rebellion processes of urban transformation.⁶⁴ Former broadcaster turned scholar of journalism, Tim Kiska, has published two popular monographs on the history of local television and news journalism in Detroit.⁶⁵ Kiska's work presents a local broadcast industry history leading up to the 1980s, primarily grounded in interviews with industry professionals. His book, *A Newscast for the Masses: the History of Detroit Television News* contains a detailed account of local news responses to the 1967 "civic disturbances," including interviews with local broadcasters who filmed or presented the events to the viewing public. It does not include the media work of Black activists after the disturbances dissipated. *Finally Got the News* (1970), a radical documentary produced by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers—discussed at length in Chapter Three—has likewise been discussed in a selection of historical texts and scholarly writings, yet usually positioned within the context of New Left filmmaking or histories

⁶⁴ Popular histories of Detroit are likewise common—though few monographs (of any form) have been written about local film and television history in Detroit. Gordon Castelnero's nostalgic reflection on popular local TV shows is a notable exception. Gordon Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit* (University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁶⁵ Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses*; Tim Kiska, *From Soupy to Nuts! A History of Detroit Television* (Momentum Books, LLC, 2005). Therefore, my project will be less focused on constructing a history of popular Detroit television.

of American radicalism.⁶⁶ Widely publicized in 1975 as the first Black-owned television station in the continental US, a selection of Communication Studies scholars have likewise recognized WGPR-TV as a significant accomplishment for Black advancement in the Broadcast industry.⁶⁷ However, the only scholarly analysis of WGPR-TV and its contributions to Black programming is Mary H. Johnson's 1979 master's thesis.⁶⁸ Johnson discusses WGPR-TV's initial program roster, arguing that the station fell victim to its over-enthusiasm and technical inexperience and thus failed to accomplish many of its programming goals—despite being a positive step towards increased minority representation in communications fields. While my project works to position WGPR-TV within broader structures of Black capitalism and Detroit civic infrastructure, I am indebted to Johnson's formative descriptions of WGPR programs that have since been lost. Indeed, each of the aforementioned texts provides insight into a facet of Detroit media history—often in relation to national minority production trends. Yet, my project is the first extended study of Black documentary production focused exclusively on Detroit.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Robé. Chris, "Detroit Rising: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Newsreel, and the Making of Finally Got the News," *Film History: An International Journal* 28, no. 4 (November 4, 2016): 125–58; Georgakas, Dan, "Finally Got the News and the Making of a Radical Film," in "Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary, ed. Thomas Waugh (Scarecrow Press, Incorporated, 1984), 153–67; Muhammad Ahmad, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind: Black Radical Organizations 1960-1975* (Charles H. Kerr Pub., 2007).

⁶⁷ Tait, Alice, "Ethnic Voices: Ethnocentric Public Affairs Television Programming," in *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Toby Miller (Taylor & Francis, 2003), 32–38; Yuya Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice: The History of African American Media Democracy* (SUNY Press, 2012); Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, *Pimpin' Ain't Easy: Selling Black Entertainment Television* (Routledge, 2012); Leah P Hunter, "Overcoming the Diversity Ghetto: Determining the Effectiveness of Network Broadcast Diversity Initiative Programs" (Florida State University, 2014).

⁶⁸ Johnson, "A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV."

⁶⁹ Carleton Gholz has written on Detroit music and radio history. Carleton Gholz, *Where the Mix Is Perfect": Voices from the Post-Motown Soundscape* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011).

As my work will demonstrate, local documentaries have been deeply imbricated in the city's coterminous processes of urban development and social change. While the primary local broadcast stations have reported on crime, corruption, and spatial change, Black media operating within a local Black spatial imaginary has been significantly more attentive to the causes of these problems and processes, casting them as ramifications of structural oppression on localized Black citizenship and the deferral of social justice. Thus, I contend that local, Black-produced, media have played a crucial role in making sense of the emergent Black city, projecting opportunities for Black empowerment, proscribing directives for the instantiation of progressive urban policies, and imagining new possibilities for Black networks of civic power. My objective is not to simply indict local TV news and mainstream journalism for their hyperbolic coverage of the ongoing urban crisis. Rather, I highlight a range of locally produced documentary film, television, and informational programs that each developed strategies to move beyond incendiary demonization of the predominantly Black inner city to engage both citizens and civic institutions in dialogues about the city's pressing problems and possible solutions to improve the quality of life for all Detroiters.

Representing Blackness in the City

According to Stuart Hall, identity formation is not represented by the cinema, but constituted *within* the politics of cinematic representation. "Cinema is not a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kind of subjects and thereby enable us to discover who we are."⁷⁰ Along with Lipsitz and Hall, I understand the construction of media, place, and race as interdependent

⁷⁰ Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Framework* 36, 1989, 70.

processes. Thus, my research draws upon scholarship on structures of race in American media to further explore the deep imbrication of such media with the practice of everyday life in urban spaces dominantly occupied by minority residents.⁷¹ In particular, my work is crucially indebted to cultural studies scholarship and monographs on Black filmmaking and Black cinema history, which provide nuanced accounts of the intersection between media, politics, and the stakes of representation for social formations.⁷²

Scholars like Herman Gray, Sasha Torres, Aniko Bodroghkozy, Gayle Wald, and Christine Acham have located television as a vital locus for Black cultural struggle.⁷³ In *Watching Race*, Gray notes, “I believe that television remains a decisive arena in which struggles

⁷¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011). I borrow the term practice of everyday life here from de Certeau who celebrates daily life as a site of resistance.

⁷² Influential discussions of Black media as a site of political struggle also take place in: Michele Wallace and Gina Dent, *Black Popular Culture* (The New Press, 1998); Manthia Diawara, *Black American Cinema* (Routledge, 2012); James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood From the Dark Side* (Routledge, 2016); Miriam J. Petty, *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood* (Univ of California Press, 2016); Mia Mask, *Contemporary Black American Cinema: Race, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* (Routledge, 2012); Manthia Diawara, *Black American Cinema* (Routledge, 2012); Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (University of California Press, 1993); Bowser, Gaines, and Musser, *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle*; Bambi Haggins, *Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America* (Rutgers University Press, 2007); Gaines, *Fire and Desire*; Michael T. Martin, *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality* (Wayne State University Press, 1995); David J. Leonard, *Screens Fade to Black: Contemporary African American Cinema* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006); Gladstone Lloyd Yearwood, *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African American Aesthetic Tradition* (Africa World Press, 2000); Valerie Smith, *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁷³ Acham, Christine. *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Gray, Herman. *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995; Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*; Gayle Wald, *It's Been Beautiful: Soul! And Black Power Television* (Duke University Press, 2015). Also see: Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, *Watching While Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences* (Rutgers University Press, 2013); Smith-Shomade, *Pimpin' Ain't Easy*.

for representation, or more significantly, struggles over the meaning of representation continue to be waged at various levels of national politics, expressive culture, and moral authority.”⁷⁴ Reworking Gray’s claims, I argue that media scrutiny cast a critical gaze upon Detroit in the wake of the Rebellion, during which the struggle over the meaning of “Detroit,” at various levels of local and national politics gained new dimensions of social significance. Through televised documentaries, Black citizens constructed new representations of Black communities, articulated local Black political perspectives, and offered viewers new ways to perceive the city, its history, and its culture. Furthermore, Black Detroit’s struggle for cinematic or televisual representation operates in tandem with broader struggles to use the television medium as a strategic platform in civil rights activism and increase Black access to channels of production.⁷⁵ Devorah Heitner’s work, in particular, demonstrates the import of Black public affairs programming to promulgating and publicizing the Black Arts Movement in sites throughout the United States.⁷⁶

My work on Detroit further contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines the intersections of media representation and urban histories of other cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. Jacqueline Stewart’s *Migrating to the Movies* with its focus on Chicago is organized around Black mobility and visibility in the early 20th Century, exploring “ways in which these social, geographic, and conceptual Black movements radically realigned African American individuals and communities in relation to each other, to the dominant

⁷⁴ Gray, *Watching Race*, xvii.

⁷⁵ Christopher Sieving, *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema from the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation* (Wesleyan, 2011). Devin Orgeron et al., eds., “Screen Culture and Group Discussion in Post War Race Relations,” in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 397–423. Also see: Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles Over Mississippi TV, 1955–1969* (Duke University Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Duke University Press, 2013).

American culture, and to white ethnic immigrants.”⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Craig S. Watkins contends that “ghettocentric” films and hip hop culture of the 1980s and 1990s have become key sites through which Black American youth struggle to make their everyday lives more empowering, rewarding, and pleasurable, despite social and economic marginalization. Focusing on cultural production in the inner cities of Los Angeles and New York, Watkins argues Black youth have gained unprecedented access to the popular media and continue to influence not only Black popular culture, but also U.S. popular culture at large.⁷⁸ Paula Massood’s *Black City Cinema* uses “the city” as a through-line to chart the shifts in Black filmmaking practices, also contextualized within broader socio-spatial and political transformations of Black American life. According to Massood, “The city is never simply a city...it has been an immense force in shaping American life and culture during the 20th century. It also has been a crucial influence on African American life and culture, and, as such, an analysis of the changing roles and presence of urban space in Black cinema can only expand and make even more complex the questions we ask about the power of cinematic representation.”⁷⁹ Building on the work of these scholars and more, this project traces Black documentary discourses to not only produce a more complex understanding of the intersection of media and local life in Detroit, but also contribute to broader scholarly conversations on often overlooked minority media practices.

⁷⁷ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating To The Movies: Cinema And Black Urban Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005), 8. Jane Gaines’ *Fire and Desire*, and Pearl Bowser and Charles Musser’s edited volume *Oscar Micheaux and his Circle* posit that Micheaux and his contemporaries, including Detroit’s Richard Maurice, established a distinctive set of stylistic and narrative parameters informed by Black popular culture, and which opposed, rather than poorly attempted to imitate, the hegemony of Hollywood.

⁷⁸ S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁷⁹ Paula Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences In Film* (Temple University Press, 2003), 9.

Local Media and Black Documentary

Throughout this dissertation, I employ “documentary” as an umbrella category to link the range of non-fiction film and television programs produced in a local context. This includes films that follow modes of production found in established documentary traditions like *Finally Got the News* (1970) and *The Black Eye* (1968), Black public affairs programs like *CPT* (1975-1987) and WGPR-TV’s *Big City News* (1975-1994), and educational fare like *In Your Interest* (1968). I am also including local dance programs like *The Scene* (1975-1987) and *Rolling Funk* (1975-1977) as documentary media due to their direct engagement with representing, as well as documenting, everyday life in Black city space and Black performance contextualized within a local milieu.⁸⁰ I do so primarily because “documentary” theory and scholarship positions this form as a rather capacious category that can encompass a range of theoretical impulses, institutional relations, exhibition contexts, aesthetic practices, and authorial intentions. Documentaries can be produced for television, theatrical screenings, and/or local educational forums. Documentaries can be produced by institutions, artists, sociologists, and activists, as well as non-professional citizens with access to technology and a desire to interrogate their worlds.

Generally, documentaries can be recognized by a political and social emphasis on representing “real” places and “real” subjects. Yet, the dimensions of the “real” in documentary can be explored through aesthetics ranging from realist fidelity to avant-garde and experimental renderings of subjective experience. Bill Nichols’ definition of documentary augments the

⁸⁰ I do not have records for the official end date of *Rolling Funk*. That is an estimated date based on reading old television guides for the metro Detroit region.

Griersonian understanding that documentaries entail a “creative treatment of actuality.”⁸¹

Nichols posits that documentary films speak “about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a way of seeing the historical world directly rather than into a fictional allegory.”⁸² Furthermore, “documentary” as articulated by Michael Renov, connotes the “more or less artful reshaping of the historical world” and is decidedly an anamorphous formal practice.⁸³ Renov, following the example of Trinh T. Minh-ha, calls attention to interstitiality of documentary and its tendency to traverse binaries of science and art, truth and fiction, the constative and performative, self-representation and media coverage.⁸⁴ “Documentary” films typically have an investment in exploring or interrogating the political dimensions of reality—more often than not, a specific and/or historical, lived reality—in order to create a future. Bill Nichols further notes that documentary foregrounds “social issues and cultural values, current problems and possible solutions, actual situations and specific ways of representing them.”⁸⁵ I am similarly drawn to documentary because of the form’s simultaneous

⁸¹ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary* (University of California Press, 1966); Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (SIU Press, 2000); Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations* (British Film Institute, 1995).

⁸² Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 14.

⁸³ Michael Renov, “Introduction,” *Theorizing Documentary* (Routledge, 2012), 15.

⁸⁴ Renov, “Introduction,” *Theorizing Documentary*, 11. Also see: Minh-ha, Trinh T., “The Totalizing Quest of Meaning,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Renov, Michael (Routledge, 2012), 90–107. Minh-ha claims that while there is a clear documentary tradition, the monolithic understanding of “documentary” as a genre, form, set of practices, needs to be deconstructed.

⁸⁵ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 1991) ix. For more on the politics of documentary: Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (U of Minnesota Press, 2000); Thomas Waugh, *“Show Us Life”: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (Scarecrow Press, Incorporated, 1984); Janet K. Cutler, *Struggles for Representation: African*

connection to material reality and its flexibility to contemplate, and often question, the framing of “the real.” Furthermore, scholars of documentary are consistently attentive to the relationships between the filmmaker and their subjects, demonstrating deep investments in the politics and processes of representing social actors and the conditions of everyday life. Thus, I approach “documentary” not as a neatly defined genre of filmmaking, but rather as a form of content delivery and a framework to examine the multivalent strategies filmmakers have used to understand what “Detroit” signifies for local lived experience.⁸⁶

Documentarians and viewers of documentaries are also driven by epistophilia – “a desire to learn, be moved, discover or be persuaded of possibilities that pertain to the historical world.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, documentary scholars and practitioners are attentive to the frameworks that maintain and control historical imaginaries. Black documentaries made in Detroit share an investment in creating a vision of the Black historical world and share an epistophilic desire to make sense of Detroit’s past. They are also driven by the possibilities for Black filmmakers to communicate a Black future and catalyze further empowerment of Black citizens. Jay Ruby notes that, “the agendas of people representing a culture in which they are native have to be different from those who are not...as no one can speak for or represent a culture but only his or relationship to it.”⁸⁸ Documentaries made by Black Detroiters are driven by a need for self-

American Documentary Film and Video (Indiana University Press, 1999); Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (British Film Institute, 2007).

⁸⁶ David Bordwell, throughout his writings on film, approaches Documentary as a mode akin to Animation or experimental film rather than a genre. Documentary, in this context, is more than collections of themes, conventions, and marketing strategies. Rather, it is a form of communication with distinctive distribution, exhibition, and labor practices. David Borwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th ed. (MacGraw Hill, 2016).

⁸⁷ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition*, 38.

⁸⁸ Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2000) 31.

representation, a desire to shape their own realities, and create a space for local subjects to thrive. As Chapter One of this dissertation will discuss, the first Black documentaries to emerge in the aftermath of the Rebellion were specifically financed due to the undergirding assumption that Black citizens had a significant perspective on the city that could be represented through non-fiction filmmaking. However, as each subsequent chapter of this dissertation will demonstrate, Black citizens arrived at documentary practice with varying impressions of Black history, Black experience, and the prospects for a Black city moving forward—yet they all did so in ways that diverge from white-directed media coverage of the city. While most documentary media discussed in relation to Detroit present the city as “other” from the gaze of an outsider gawking at scenes of desuetude and decline, the local Black documentary frame is able to challenge such an ethnographic approach to understanding a place and its people.⁸⁹

Situating the texts examined in this project as “Black documentary” also positions it within a longer national history of studying Black documentation of Black life. In Phyllis Rauch Klotman and Janet K. Cutler’s estimation, Black documentary begins with Black community photographers living in Northern cities during the Great Migration, “personalizing and

⁸⁹ Accordingly, to stress the import and impact of Detroit’s ruinous decline, in ruin photography or films like *Detroit: Wild City* (2011) and *Requiem for Detroit?* (2010), the city appears already dead, eliding the living conditions of the city’s current residents in favor of a ghostly romanticization of its potential (ominous) future. Furthermore, studies of (auto) ethnographic film practice, from Kierston Knopf’s *Decolonizing the Lens of Power: Indigenous Films in North America* to Jennifer Deger’s *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Aboriginal Community*, demonstrate how “indigenous people have been using the inscription of their screen memories in media to talk back to structures of power and state that have denied their rights, subjectivity, and citizenship for over 200 years.” Quote from: Faye D. Ginsburg, “Screen Memories and Entangled Technologies: Resignifying Indigenous Lives,” in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, ed. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (Rutgers University Press, 2003). Although there is a significant contextual different between indigenous film practice and minority filmmaking in Detroit, these texts will nonetheless help me theorize the politics that influence local filmmakers as they counter the dominant media imaginary of Detroit, producing representation of their own communities and familiar spaces.

historicizing the great social and economic changes that were taking place.”⁹⁰ Many of these photographers, some also journalists, would later take up motion picture cameras. Early filmmakers such as Addison N. Scurlock of Washington DC produced newsreels on Black life and cultural events for the city’s upwardly mobile Black middle-class. However, Klotman and Cutler position the emergence of contemporary Black documentary with *Black Journal*, a nationally broadcast program on *PBS* (formerly *NET*) that worked to address various interpretations of “the Black experience” for a presumed Black audience.⁹¹ As the show often included long form documentary segments on Black life, politics and history, the series likewise connected television with longstanding documentary agendas of representing the “real” and serving community, while promoting the cultural and political interests of Black producers.⁹²

Black Journal set a tone for subsequent Black public affairs programs, which appeared in many cities with sizeable Black populations. Often, low budget public affairs programming was the only form of Black television that allowed Black control in the late 1960s—such was definitely the case in Detroit. While *Black Journal* aimed for a Black General audience, the majority of viewers were typically a part of the Black middle-class. Local iterations of the Black public affairs genre in Detroit and elsewhere—exemplified by *CPT* (WTVS, 1968-present) discussed in Chapter Two—likewise were aired on local UHF stations and public broadcasting networks and found their viewer base among educated Black citizens with middle-class

⁹⁰ Phyllis Rauch Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, “Introduction,” in *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Phyllis Rauch Klotman and Janet K. Cutler (Indiana University Press, 1999), 2.

⁹¹ The Corporation for Public Broadcasting took over the duties of the National Educational Television on October 05, 1970. In 1973, it merged with Educational Television Services. For a more detailed history see: Oullette, Laurie. *Viewers Like You: How Public TV Failed the People*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

⁹² Klotman and Cutler, “Introduction.”

income.⁹³ Emphasizing a variety of approaches to local documentary, however, I am able to explore how citizen-filmmakers strategized ways to move beyond public affairs to document a wider range of Black subjects and produce a broader selection of entertaining and informational content.

Finally, “documentary” is central to this study because documentary production was the primary practice affordable for local Black citizens working under considerable socio-economic strain. With access to channels of community exhibition and with institutions committed to funding and distribution, “documentary has provided a home for risk-taking and controversy, creating opportunities for the best efforts of socially engaged and aesthetically innovative film/video makers.”⁹⁴ Minority media-makers often turn to documentary form, not only due to a desire to present a non-fictional glimpse at an oft oppressed lived reality, but also because it offers cost-effective “possibilities for politicized, experimental work not often available in the arena of commercial fiction film.”⁹⁵ In the case of WGPR-TV, discussed in Chapter Four, there was an ultimate goal of shifting focus towards the production of fictional entertainment fare. But the prohibitive costs of such productions ultimately hindered the development of any scripted programs.

In this way, Detroit Black documentary also shares significant overlap with Third Cinema, due to the financial limitations of minority media practices, the emphasis on liberation politics, and the expressive possibilities that arise when working outside of white hegemonic parameters. While Black public affairs programs (in particular) aimed to achieve a level of

⁹³ Laurie Oullette, *Viewers Like You: How Public TV Failed the People* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 134.

⁹⁴ Klotman and Cutler, “Introduction,” xiv.

⁹⁵ Klotman and Cutler, “Introduction,” xiv.

aesthetic polish and professionalism offered by other mainstream news programs, the financial and technological constraints of Black local productions made it nearly impossible to achieve the production values that signify “quality” of hegemonic media. These conditions put Black projects at a competitive disadvantage for funding. Yet the struggle to create politically provocative work within an imperfect production system has also been a celebrated asset to counter-hegemonic productions. “Third Cinema” scholars and filmmakers approach cinema as an essential tool in a revolutionary struggle to liberate and/or transform repressed sectors of a society. Theoretical texts and/or Manifestos written by filmmakers like Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina, Glauber Rocha in Brazil, and Julio García Espinosa in Cuba, engendered debates on how film should be effectively produced and exhibited to catalyze change, and to whom such films should be addressed.⁹⁶ Although “Third Cinema” connotes a heterogeneous transnational film movement, its advocates generally argue that establishmentarian media like Hollywood, or “first cinema,” perpetuated the capitalist conditions of underdevelopment in the global south and maintained systems of subjugation through formal and narrational strategies.⁹⁷ While Third Cinema practice was originally theorized outside of First World locales, Cynthia Young describes how Third Cinema practices were applied by artists and activists engaged in anti-imperialist struggles within the US—which ties particularly

⁹⁶ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Toward A Third Cinema,” *Cinéaste* 4, no. 3 (1970): 1–10; Glauber Rocha, “An Esthetic of Hunger,” in *New Latin American Cinema*, ed. Michael T. Martin, trans. Burnes Hollyman and Randal Johnson (Wayne State University Press, 1997), 59–61; “For an Imperfect Cinema by Julio García Espinosa, Trans. by Julianne Burton,” <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/ImperfectCinema.html>.

⁹⁷ Michael T. Martin, *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality* (Wayne State University Press, 1995); Robert Stam, “College Course File: Third World Cinema,” *Journal of Film and Video* 36, no. 4 (1984): 50–61; Scott MacKenzie, *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Univ of California Press, 2014); Teshome Habte Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (UMI Research Press, 1982); Jim Pines, *Questions of Third Cinema* (BFI Publishing, 1989).

well to my analysis of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' radical Detroit documentary, *Finally Got the News*, in Chapter Three. Whether they did so intentionally or as a strategic cost and resource saving strategy, Detroit Black documentarians avoid replicating the production values of dominant cinema, and in doing so, engage in film practice that attempts to reflect the impoverishment and imperfection of conditions of life for citizens within systems of oppression.

In Detroit, the ideological underpinnings of Black media may have varied, yet every Black-led film or television project I have come across in my research struggled to attain funding, articulate their political purpose without reprisal, and maintain a presence in the city's visual landscape. This struggle, of course, was not only limited to Black documentary. Hamid Naficy's study of Iranian exilic television in Los Angeles likewise demonstrates how programming styles represented exile's liminal condition; "its formlessness, the endlessness of its time, its ambivalence."⁹⁸ While significant to the maintenance of marginalized communities, the scheduling of exilic programs were subject to change, always facing a likelihood of cancellation and expected to be financed independently. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, local Black television also forged connections with other liminal communities, with WGPR-TV providing air-time for local ethnic access and exilic programming such as *The Arab Voice of Detroit*, *Lebanon Middle East*, *Dino's Greece*, and the *Balkan Variety Hour*. As such, this project provides an alternative history of local media from a situated Black perspective, and documentation of the struggles it took to make Black media at all—a struggle that connects Black Detroit to a wider network of minor and minority media practices.

⁹⁸ Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 99.

Furthermore, while I adopt “documentary” as a central term for this project, I recognize that many of the film and television texts described throughout this dissertation could likewise be referred to as sponsored, educational, orphan, minor, ephemeral, public access, and/or public affairs programming.⁹⁹ David James’s historical and conceptual approach to “minor” cinemas in LA foregrounds many of the research questions I address in relation to Detroit. In *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*, James explores a vast array of independent cinema practices in Los Angeles that emerged separate from or counter to Hollywood: avant-garde and art cinemas, ethnic and minority films, industrial film, pornography and documentaries. His ambitious text considers multivalent ways in which media takes place in Los Angeles aesthetically, socially, historically, and geographically. In doing so, he explores exhibition histories, labor practices, and institutions that support work in opposition to the industrial practices of Hollywood cinema.¹⁰⁰ Studying film clubs and collectives, James posits that the concept of minor cinema offers new to view the intersections of media practice with localized politics and the art world that were all contingent upon emplacement adjacent to the central node of the American media industry—Hollywood—while also standing purposefully apart from its production, exhibition, and distribution practices. I build upon minor, orphan, and sponsored media scholarship to understand the structures of media operating outside of spheres

⁹⁹ To explore these other categories of minor cinema see: Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Melinda Stone and Dan Streible, *Small-Gauge and Amateur Film* (John Libbey, 2003); Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation: The Politics of Preservation* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Charles R. Acland, *Residual Media* (U of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2005).

of dominance, but employ the broader "documentary" framework to situate Detroit Black media projects within broader historiographies of minority counter-hegemonic visualizations of "the real" guided by localized epistophilia.¹⁰¹

Positioning this dissertation project within a local framework further allows me to explore the slippage between different approaches to documentary form across the mediums of film and television.¹⁰² For instance, many of the documentaries discussed in this dissertation began as community-oriented television broadcasts, yet were produced with the expressed understanding that they could be subsequently used as educational content for community meetings and exhibited in schools. While scholarship on commercial film and television is not primarily concerned with the local functionality of media exhibition and distribution for citizen-activists, educational and sponsored film scholarship has explored the institutional efficacy of non-fiction

¹⁰¹ The contributors to *Films that Work* argue that non-fiction research might best be understood as part of a "broader epistemology of media," drawing attention not only to the sponsored film, but also to the constellation of discourse the film produces. They likewise argue that what is at stake in their approach to industrial film research is, "the complex interrelationship of visibility, power, and organization, and how film as a medium creates the preconditions for forms of knowledge and social practice." Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds., "Introduction," in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam University Press, 2009) 12.

¹⁰² For most of the 20th century, the history of American cinema has been conventionally chronicled as a history of narrative, feature length films. According to Patrick Vonderau and Anna Heymer, film histories generally focus on the cinema as "an institution of entertainment, they are lists of names, places, authors, nations. It is a history of film as event, which narrates the evolution of styles and movements as the great biography of cinema." This primacy of Hollywood in popular and scholarly accounts of US cinema consequently marginalized other films and modes of film practice. Non-theatrical, amateur, home video, instructional, institutional and industrial films have thus been largely occluded from the instructive annals of cinema history. Patrick Vonderau and Amy Heymer, "Industrial Films: An Analytical Biography," in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 407.

media form.¹⁰³ In her discussion of post-war civil relations films, Anna McCarthy, for instance, reports how difficult it is to know what fraction of local television stations' broadcasting ecologies were constituted by panel discussions and community meeting programs.¹⁰⁴ She further notes that grassroots programming is difficult to quantify precisely because such media was distributed on the local level across a hybrid, downstream exhibition network comprising both broadcasting and 16mm film exhibition.

Though not invested specifically in documentary practice, Daniel Widener's *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* traces the production of Black cultural politics throughout a wide spectrum of media. Focusing on the period in Los Angeles history between the Second World War and the explosion of widespread "rioting" following the Rodney King verdict in 1992, Widener frames the transformation of the "postwar city through an analysis of the role played by Black artists and by contrasting visions of African American culture."¹⁰⁵ Widener posits that the intense segregation of the early postwar period facilitated the development of a Black arts cohort situated in a relatively specific part of the city. Thus, while reflecting on a range of contents and forms of cultural production in Watts, Los Angeles, Widener constructs both a cultural history of a social movement—the Black Power struggle—and a social history of a cultural movement—the Black Arts struggle.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, Widener argues that this exploration of the postwar freedom struggle through the lens of expressive

¹⁰³ Here, I am using "citizen-producer" to describe producers who came to media from professions outside the film, radio, or television industry due to a primary investment in civic development. They are non-professionals, yet specifically driven by a duty for community enrichment.

¹⁰⁴ Orgeron et al., "Screen Culture and Group Discussion in Post War Race Relations," 92.

¹⁰⁵ Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Duke University Press, 2009) 1.

¹⁰⁶ Widener, *Black Arts West*, 2.

culture “offers a critical vantage point for understanding the unfolding of both racial unity and class conflict among Black Americans.”¹⁰⁷ The different chapters of my dissertation will also draw points of unity among different Black citizen-producers in Detroit while highlighting their various approaches to documentary practice and urban change that emerged within this localized media network. In Detroit, this ranges from Black capitalist goals for increasing Black enterprise to a radical leveling of the American economic structure advocated by Black revolutionaries.¹⁰⁸

While this dissertation focuses on Black documentary within post-Rebellion Detroit, I think it essential to approach visual media as part of a larger assemblage of cultural practices working conterminously to re-imagine socio-spatial order. And I contend that while media continuously serves as a location for struggles over cultural meaning to play out, these struggles will play out differently through different forms of media. The construction of race and identity politics in network television shows will be markedly different than the image of culture produced through home videos, radical documentary, or even Hollywood film. The use of different modes of documentary, as discussed by Bill Nichols, also yield varied exhibition

¹⁰⁷ Widener, *Black Arts West*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Widener’s exploration of the experiences of a variety of California’s Black artists “highlights the extent to which efforts to realize a distinctly African American modernism would necessarily involve collective organization, the crossing of forms and genres, and an expansive exploration of the meaning of community.” Black musicians, painters, writers, theatre figures, and filmmakers advance an aesthetic strategy concomitant with the larger project of artist’s organization, community linkages, and social transformation. Tracing the lives and artistic works of Black artists during the second half of the 20th Century, *Black Arts West* draws vital connections between distinctive artistic impulses, from the Pan Afrikan People's Arkestra to the production of LA rebellion films in Watts, from the Watts Writers Workshop, to the Inner City Cultural Center and to the New Art Jazz Ensemble. Widener asserts that different branches of Black expression each played an integral role in the broad fight for racial equality and an autonomous zone of political action. As such, visual artists were a crucial factor in transforming cultural activism into a mass movement with a wide social base. Widener, *Black Arts West*, 175-176.

frameworks and produce discourse with a range of ideological objectives.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the expository mode of programs like *CPT*, broadcast on public television speak primarily to a Black middle-class subject. Meanwhile, the political reflexivity of *Finally Got the News* and its participatory inclusion of The League of Revolutionary Black Workers has hailed a radical viewer base beyond Detroit, yet catered to a more niche audience within the city's parameters. As such, I argue that focusing on documentary visions of a Black urban life across a multiplicity of media, as Cynthia Young or Daniel Widener do, generates an image of the city wrought with discursive complexity, contradiction, and nuance that more accurately reflects variegated real, as well as reel, encounters with the built environment.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, while the field of media studies has historically centered primarily around entertainment produced primarily for commercial or artistic interests, a focus on non-theatrical and non-commercial media more productively reflects the kinds of production practices found in most cities and towns throughout the US. As such, my project speaks to existing literature on local arts and media culture, yet aims to engender new discussions of place-based media practice outside the dominant US spheres of cultural influence: New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, offering an deeper understanding of the how a vast number of people used media—as makers and

¹⁰⁹ The modes identified by Nichols include Expository, Reflexive, Participatory, Performative, Observational, Interactive, and Poetic. While there is considerable slippage and overlap between modes in practice, the conventions and of different filmmakers and Documentary movements are reflective in the different documentary frameworks in which they operate. For instance, expository modes were adopted by educational film to convey propagandistic rhetoric. *CPT* uses an expository mode, not only to challenge the conventional rhetoric of other expository documentaries on Detroit violence, but also instruct Black viewers on appropriate uplift principles. The reflexive and participatory components of *Finally Got the News* calls attention not only to the processes of making a film but also the exploitation of Black images in both film and factory labor. Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition*.

¹¹⁰ Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Duke University Press, 2006).

consumers—in locations all over the country to address their immediate realities and needs.¹¹¹

Placing Detroit Media in Urban Studies

Jean Baudrillard notes “The American city seems to have stepped right out the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not then, begin with the city and move inwards towards the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outward towards the city.”¹¹² Baudrillard is not alone in making this connection, as scholars and artists have long commented on the dialogic relationship between film, city space, and urban history. Since the advent of the cinematic medium, film has functioned both as a means to document modern cities and as an active agent of cultural and spatial production. In turn, modernist thinkers have theorized engagements with urban space as a cinematographic experience.¹¹³ Nezar AlSayyad argues that “the ability of this new medium to capture images, process them, and then project them to the public contributed

¹¹¹ Chicago does not boast the same industry as New York or Los Angeles, but has been the particular focus of studies on early cinema and race films. The presence of the Kartemquin documentary collective has also positioned the city as an important hub of media activism. Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2007); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies and Culture in Turn-Of-The Century Chicago* (Rutgers University Press, 1998); Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*. See discussion of *Hoop Dreams* in Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (Routledge, 2006); “Kartemquin Films,” accessed May 12, 2018, <https://www.kartemquin.com/>; Bernard Beck, “Three Documentaries about Organized Labor: Kartemquin Films,” *Contemporary Sociology* 15, no. 2 (March 1986): 212–216; Alicia Kemmitt, “Documentary Stories for Change: Viewing and Producing Immigrant Narratives as Social Documents,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 60, no. 1 (2007): 25–36.

¹¹² Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner, n (Verso, 1989), 56; also quoted in David Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City*, First Edition (Routledge, 1997).

¹¹³ Hediger and Vonderau, “Introduction.” David E. Clarke notes, “The city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city.” David E. Clark, (*The Cinematic City*. London: Routledge, 1997) 2.

substantially to the making of the modern.”¹¹⁴ Visual media became entangled with the development of the city, and vice versa, synchronizing its representational techniques with the emergence of radically new urban conditions. For instance, the “City Symphony,” a transnational genre of the early part of the 20th Century that used cinematic technologies to map industrialized city space, makes sense of emerging modern metropolises, and inscribe viewers into this vision of modernity. As such, cinema played a significant role in “transforming the way space, time, and everyday life were being experienced in urban environments.”¹¹⁵

The “spatial turn” in humanities scholarship has contributed to a further outpouring of work considering the relationship between place and the production of social meaning.¹¹⁶ The “spatial turn” works to understand, as Edward Soja has explained, “how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human

¹¹⁴ Nezar AlSayyad. *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. (New York: Routledge, 2006) 3.

¹¹⁵ Les Roberts, *Film, Mobility and Urban Space: A Cinematic Geography of Liverpool* (Liverpool University Press, 2012), 6. For more on City Symphonies: Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display: Re-Viewing Nonfiction Film and Video* (Wallflower, 2008); Alexander Graf. “Berlin-Paris-Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony films of the 1920s.” In *Avant-Garde Film*, edited by Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann, 77-98. (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007); Sabine Hake. “Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*.” In *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, edited by Thomas Knische and Stephen Brockman, 127-42. (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994); Scott MacDonald, “The City As Motion Picture.” *Wide Angle* 19.4 (Winter 1997): 109-130; Scott MacDonald, “The City As the Country: New York City Symphonies from Rudy Burckhardt to Spike Lee.” *Film Quarterly* 51.2 (Winter 1997-1998): 2-20; Carsten Strathausen, “Uncanny Spaces: The City in Ruttmann and Vertov.” In *Screening the City*, edited by Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, 15-40. London: Verso, 2003.

¹¹⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Taylor & Francis, 2001); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (U of Minnesota Press, 1994); Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Wiley, 1996); Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000); Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Verso, 1995).

geographies become filled with politics and ideologies.”¹¹⁷ Humanities scholars have thus considered how power and discipline are spatially inscribed into cultural texts and the spatial organization of cultural production. Working in conversation with scholarship on critical geography, sociology, and urban studies, media scholars have begun to map media spatially and geographically, looking at various micro-histories of production and exhibition and the ways spaces are imagined through media.¹¹⁸

Herman Gray argues that “conceiving of television as a dense site or a place of struggle over the symbolic meanings and uses of Blackness in the production of the nation admittedly gives television a central role in cultural politics.”¹¹⁹ Thinking of television as a contested terrain, in this way, with “multiple logics, social contexts, and contradictions,” allows Gray to bring Black contributions to image construction into sharper focus.¹²⁰ Understanding and describing television through spatial metaphors, as Gray does here, and positioning television as a *space* or *place* in which citizens (or viewers) encounter the world, reflects an essential way scholars have historically demonstrated the deeply embedded intersections of media, geographies, and lived experience. Local media production relies upon the spatial dimensions of civic infrastructure to

¹¹⁷ Edward W. Soja, *Post Modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, 1989), 6.

¹¹⁸ Other texts explore the intersection of urban studies and cinema studies include: Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, *Screening the City* (Verso, 2003); Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011); Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City since 1945* (BFI, 2007); Roberts, *Film, Mobility and Urban Space*; Richard Koeck and Les Roberts, eds., *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008); Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiv.

¹²⁰ Gray, *Watching Race*, xiv.

disseminate broadcast signals and circulate information, reflects the (racialized) imagined ideological spaces of citizen-producers, and creates new spaces for citizens to interact and organize around issues of civic importance. Gray further argues that shows produced by Black people were far more likely than those produced by white people to show Black cultural perspectives, Black cultural spaces, and deal with issues of racism, class, and equality.

“Blackness operates as a specific perspective from which to speak, act, and see the world.”¹²¹

Though Henri Lefebvre does not exclusively discuss visual mediums like film or television, his work illuminates different, yet intersecting ways of understanding space that subsequent scholars have used to comprehend the deep entanglement of real and “reel” spaces of the city.¹²² For Lefebvre, “representations of space” refer to signs and codes produced by scientists, urban planners, architects, and social engineers to organize and direct spatial relations. It is the way space is conceived through plans, designs, drawings, and maps. “Spatial Practice” refers to the way people use or perceive space in their daily lives; the decisions they make to navigate spaces. Meanwhile, “representational spaces” for Lefebvre are those that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate; the “representational” points to the way individuals imagine and value spaces; the space of art. While discussions of space are usually dominated by representations of space and spatial practices, representational spaces *inform* spatial practices and representations of space. Local Black media, in this instance, is at its core a representational space—a mode of imagining the world. Yet the racialized and codified imagery produced by Black media makers in Detroit projected new spatial practices for Black citizens and aimed to re-map the city as a Black metropolis.

¹²¹ Gray. *Watching Race*, 104.

¹²² Lefebvre does mention film, but considering space through the lens of visual media is not the primary objective of this work.

Les Roberts's study of the cinematic geography of Liverpool draws explicitly on Lefebvre and critical geographers like Soja and Mike Davis—who's *City of Quartz* discusses the conflicting futures intellectuals imagined for Los Angeles—to examine how moving images engage each of these understandings of space, mapping the cultural economics of mobility that inform the way Liverpool has historically been represented.¹²³ For Roberts, sponsored and industrial films often operate as documentation of urban planning histories. Meanwhile film can serve as a spatial practice, a means of ethnographically documenting the built environment, engaging with symbolic architectural spaces as experienced by the media-maker. Moving images can also project a spatial imaginary of a city, using visual media to work through citizen conceptions of the built environment. Challenging Charlottes Brunsdon's emphasis on the fictional nature of spatial imaginaries projected by urban cinematics, Roberts is interested in how the lived geography of the city impacts the way moving images document actual city spaces.¹²⁴

While my project is not working to map geographic space through cinematic representations, I am interested in the ways local media work with, and sometimes against, the official organizers of urban space to produce meaning for the de-industrializing city. For instance, 20th Century Detroit was designed as a sprawling city to accommodate increased automotive travel for Detroit residents. Between 1915 and 1926, the city of Detroit annexed new territories and housing developments were planned far from the city's downtown to cater to swaths of workers moving to the city to obtain jobs in the automotive field. Suburban developments continued to shift Detroit's residential neighborhoods further from the riverfront

¹²³ Mike Davis and Robert Morrow, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, New Edition (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

¹²⁴ Brunsdon, *London in Cinema*; Roberts, *Film, Mobility and Urban Space*.

city center [Figure 0.15 – 0.16].¹²⁵ While freeway construction enhanced mobility for suburban communities, it decimated Black neighborhoods like Black Bottom. Neighborhoods in Detroit were significantly spaced out and as population decreased and as citizens were spatially displaced, Black citizens lost a sense of a community organized around a geographic place. Often referred to the Motor City, Detroit's iconography and imaged space is still largely linked to automation. As such, Detroit never developed large-scale public transit systems. Media, in this sense, became a way for citizens to connect and form community bonds. While production of *Finally Got the News* took place within the liberal atmosphere of the Wayne State University Campus in Detroit's Midtown neighborhood, the film is still organized around segments of driving around the city and scenes of automation in Detroit factories. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers further use Detroit's structural orientation around automation to re-center the city as the premiere cite for a labor revolution, led by exploited Black workers. Here, the League utilizes the city's symbolic and geographic organization to demonstrate the need to combat systems of capitalist oppression that unevenly immobilize Black citizens.

In his study of Chinese cinema as an interlocutor of national urban development from 1949-2008, Yomi Braester argues that films work to form a social bond for the city, using the term "urban contract" to call attention to a particular power structure that brings together government agents, citizens, businesses, and urban planners. Film, like urban design, operates as a "go-between in a high-stakes game of political and economic power," mediating different visions of city life.¹²⁶ Local media in Detroit forges "urban contracts" between local authorities

¹²⁵ Manning, June Thomas and Bekkering, Henco. *Mapping Detroit: land, Community, and Shaping a City*. (Wayne State University Press, 2015).

¹²⁶ Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Duke University Press, 2010).

and the post-Rebellion urban public. The different manifestations of local media discussed throughout the dissertation—from sponsored crisis management media of Chapter One to the radical film *Finally Got the News* analyzed in Chapter Three—produce Black spatial imaginaries of the city amidst a massive reordering of social, political, and economic order. Struggles to incorporate Black visions of the city into public discourse happened concurrently, and often in direct conversation, with Black Power struggles to control the built environment and policies installed to govern it.¹²⁷

Each of my central case studies of local documentary practice approached film and/or television as dialogic mechanisms for gathering research on public sentiments and subsequently addressing, and perhaps even influencing, social issues. The post-Rebellion television projects discussed in Chapter One used crisis management conversations as means to quell anxieties about the possibility for future outbursts of violence, but also collect viewer perceptions of the city's racial divide, structures of discrimination, and sources of urban crime. Subsequent programs would build upon such feedback to speak directly to citizen concerns. Meanwhile, *CPT* was conceptualized as a form of Black educational television that coincided with producer Gilbert Maddox's own Wayne State dissertation that assessed the uses of television in urban development.¹²⁸ *Finally Got the News* did not have a formal research component attached to the documentary. However, the film was designed as a tool for Black union organizing and coalition building; it was to be screened at local meetings to gather support for groups like the League of Revolutionary Black workers and generate public discussions about labor exploitation in the

¹²⁷ The activists working for *CPT* and other related programs were deeply invested in championing issues central to Black Detroit, yet in ways considerably less economically or politically radical than the Black workers in Sturkin and Georgakas's study, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

¹²⁸ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*.

Motor City. Though ideologically quite distinctive, each of these examples saw the examination of Black city space and Black citizen life through the development of Black media channels of production, distribution, and/or exhibition—working in cooperation with other civic forms of Black Power in politics and business—as essential to the future of a Black Detroit.

Historiography, Archives, and Methods

Detroit remains a majority Black city with a history that has been profoundly contoured by the politics of race and institutionalized racism. While scholars have worked to explicate the post-industrial power dynamics that exacerbated urban decline in the second half of the 20th century, Black citizens are often blamed for the on-going crisis in the inner city. Although select Detroiters have been celebrated for their contributions to popular culture—from Joe Louis to the purveyors of the Motown sound—a broad spectrum of cultural contributions of Black Detroit has been vastly under publicized. Especially in a city noted for its highly visible history of institutional neglect, architectural decay, political corruption, and business failures, the records of Black achievement have been too often lost. As such, a core objective of this dissertation is to provide a micro-history of Black cultural production in the post-Rebellion city, re-constructing the obscured words and images of Black citizens and documentarians. Essentially, this project is comprised of both discourse analyses of the imagined futures conceptualized by Black media-producers, and textual analyses of the ephemeral media texts that constitute an archive of Black quotidian sentiments and activism in the post-Rebellion city.

Archival records documenting Black production histories in Detroit, contemporaneous writings of Detroit activists, and the audio-visual recordings of documentary film and television programs have been unevenly maintained and underexplored by scholars. *CPT*'s history has been

well preserved and curated by the Special Collections Library at Michigan State University, though to date no other scholarly works have explored *American Black Journal* archive in depth. Many other media texts discussed in this dissertation—like *In Your Interest* (1968)—have been lost entirely. I was able to piece together traces of local Black documentary at institutions like the University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library, the Benson Ford Research Center at The Henry Ford, The Arab American National Museum, The Walter Reuther Archives at Wayne State University, and the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library by strategically looking at files on activist groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (Chapter Three), files on the New Detroit Committee (discussed in Chapter One), and the few scant files on film and television that existed as individual records. To supplement extant documents, I have interviewed representatives of social, historical, and religious organizations like Shrine of the Black Madonna Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, WGPR-FM, and the Revolutionary League of Black Workers. My research also entailed reading Black press on Detroit, especially television and film, in *The Detroit Chronicle* and *The South End Press*, as well as national magazines that highlight Detroit media (including *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*). In my archival research into the city’s media history, I have been very attentive to the insider versus outsider politics that emerge when studying Detroit. My work brings these local and national sources together and frames them within broader social and cultural narratives of urban life and media historiography.

One of the primary challenges of this research is that many of the institutions working to safeguard Detroit history do not have the resources or facilities to preserve media history—nor did practitioners know the historical utility their projects could serve if preserved for posterity. Each of the documentary texts discussed in my work was made despite considerable financial

concerns and struggles for institutional support. It was difficult for these media projects to come to fruition at all, let alone maintain an active presence in Detroit's mediascape for any duration. Consequently, documentation of many local films and television programs has been very difficult to track down with many recordings lost entirely. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, WGPR-TV had an on-going practice of recording over videotapes of their own programming as a cost-saving mechanism. In this way, local media producers in Detroit were consequently complicit in the erasure of their legacy as a means of survival. This is a common complication of working with any orphan or ephemeral media objects—television in particular. As Lynn Spigel has demonstrated, "Given its ephemeral nature, television is still largely viewed as disposable culture, and what is saved is in large part based on what happens to be recorded, what happens to be in someone's basement, a thrift store, flea market, someone else's flight of fancy."¹²⁹ While archivists, like Rick Prelinger, are dedicated to preserving ephemeral media in Detroit and elsewhere—or what he describes as media designed to "teach, to educate, sometimes to miseducate, to train, to sell, pitch a product, or promote an idea"—preservation of media produced for commercial theatrical distribution has been the archival priority.¹³⁰ Other media discussed in this dissertation was only accessible to me because of citizen-led YouTube archivism, such as the work of Nat Morris, former host of WGPR-TV's *The Scene*, who uploads personal tapes of episodes onto his YouTube channel. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, former employees of WGPR-TV—like Morris—ultimately consolidated surviving traces of the station's history to produce their own museum exhibit about Black television history in the city

¹²⁹ Lynn Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation," in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 92.

¹³⁰ "Rick Prelinger," *Creative Commons* (blog), October 1, 2005, <https://creativecommons.org/2005/10/01/rick/>.

in 2017. It is, thus, not only the work of citizen activists that brought Black media to the fore in the first place, but it is also through their ongoing personal investment in the city's Black media history that much of content discussed throughout this project has been made available to me.

As this dissertation is deeply invested in media produced by Black citizens and their struggle for visibility, I still discuss several media projects that boast significant archival documentation but lack a material copy for viewing. Following Giuliana Bruno's model of scholarship in *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*, I work to synthesize nebulous pieces of social and cultural history to fill in gaps in the historical record and construct a rich, multifaceted media history around this archival lacuna.¹³¹ To compensate for archival absences, I weave together an eclectic amalgam of newspaper reportage, archival documents, discursive frameworks, and correlative scholarship on similar media practices from elsewhere. In doing so, I strive to build an interdisciplinary historical study that conveys the complex ways citizens use media, while also recognizing the ways such historical media projects shift in the public imaginary or dissipate with time. In many respects, goals for media production in the city far exceeded what producers were able to achieve or preserve. However, throughout this dissertation, I highlight both the strategies of documentation employed through media practice and the idealized visions of what media could contribute to a Black city, as articulated by practitioners in archival documents and audio-visual recordings.

The case studies ultimately selected for close examination were still determined by what was available in the archives. Following leads provided by archival documents or the rare film reel available, I was able to sketch out clusters of Black media activity catalyzed by interlocking

¹³¹ Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*.

shifts in Detroit's political and labor history—these clusters now form the basis of each chapter. Examining secondary scholarship on minority and subaltern media practice and radical documentary histories, focusing on other geographical contexts, have proven that Detroit's financial and institutional struggles to maintain a lively counter-public sphere for Black ideas to flourish were far from unusual. The histories of media development in other major urban centers with significant minority populations—like Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Baltimore—are also inextricable from those sites' respective histories of urban politics and economic crisis. However, Detroit's unique status as a malleable city, an ever-changing symbol of what an American city could be (for better or worse), has led to a distinctive body of speculative thoughts articulated in documentary narratives, political texts by contemporaneous local activists, and media production documents in which Black citizens imagine an empowered Black city produced (at least in large part) through media Rebellion. Writings on the possibilities of local Black enrichment through media development overlap significantly with re-conceptualizations of Detroit as an emergent center of Black political dominance. My project thus positions these local texts and discourses about urban change as networked exchanges that relied on emergent structures of Black Power to form a constellation of Black media infrastructure. My concept of Black media infrastructure thus emerged as a way to frame the rebellious political and intellectual labor that drove Black media development (real and imagined) in this pivotal moment in urban history.

In doing all this research, I must also acknowledge that the spatial imaginaries of Detroit I discuss are not my own. While I have a strong familiarity with the city's geopolitical and cultural landscape, I'm neither a person of color nor an inner city resident and thus cannot directly articulate the personal experience of Black life, especially amidst Rebellion.

Approaching my research subject from this distance, I am continuously informed by Trinh. T. Minh-ha's concept of speaking nearby and her theoretical dismantling of occidental, ethnographic, and patriarchal assumptions about knowledge formation. Critical of authoritative forms of knowledge that alteritize the ethnographic subject through the pedagogical lens of the documentary, Trinh moves to explore the relationship between the "looker and the camera" and contemplate the ideological stakes of her own filmmaking and scholarship. She has elected to "speak nearby" subjects rather than for them; With films like *Reassemblage* (1982), she considers not only what Senegal culture "means" to her as an outsider and an "other" herself, but elucidates how culture has an indeterminate set of meanings, most of which always remain elusive. "What seems most important to me was to expose the transformations that occurred with the attempt to materialize on film and between the frames the impossible experience of "what" constituted Senegalese cultures."¹³² In this dissertation, I recognize I will not be able to ever truly know or explicate "Detroit" nor fully grasp the multiplicity of shifting meanings that local Black media produces within urban infrastructure. Focusing on documentary media, as Trinh does, I also examine representations of everyday life with the knowledge that a documentary gaze cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of Detroit history or "real" experience therein. Nevertheless, I come to this project with a sincere commitment to documenting under-valued historical discourses about local Black media production from Black perspectives of local life. In my dissertation, I emphasize the contemporaneous writing of Black citizen-producers and responses to local Black media in the Black press. I acknowledge I do not have the political or social authority to speak for the media makers and citizens discussed in this dissertation —

¹³² Trinh T. Minh-ha and Scott MacDonald, "Film as Translation: A Net with No Fisherman," in *Framer Framed* (Routledge, 1992), 113.

especially local inhabitants of color. However, my mindfulness about my own subject position, prompted me throughout the research and writing process to interrogate human capacity to know or make sense of a subject or community completely. I thus hope my work stimulates further conversations on Black Media development and imagined Black futures, bringing additional voices, histories, and visual texts into the fold.

Chapter Breakdown

Each of the chapters of this dissertation explores media production and distribution strategies that imagine a future for a powerful Black Detroit. Nevertheless, each case study selected for this dissertation differs significantly in their conceptualization of what constitutes Black empowerment and what directives would ensure Detroit's future as a thriving metropolis for Black citizens. The crisis management programs implemented by the New Detroit Committee, the subject of Chapter One, emphasize eliminating racist ideologies among white viewers as a primary objective in the struggle for racial equality and to ensure Black socio-economic stability in the city. *CPT*, the subject of Chapter Two, focuses on Black edutainment as a strategy for bringing statements of Black uplift and community control initiatives to Black viewers. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, as I discuss in Chapter Three, linked empowerment to Black radical consciousness. In particular, the League aimed to activate the local worker base in a Marxist struggle for economic equity. And Black-owned television station WGPR, INC. also emphasized uplift ideologies by advocating for networked Black business development as a key to a prosperous Black urban sphere.

Chapter One examines the emergence of local documentaries produced in the immediate aftermath of the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, underscoring strategies local media outlets developed

to make sense of urban crisis, quell fraught race relations, and define the terms of Black citizenship for post-Rebellion Detroiters. After first surveying the coverage of the Rebellion and its aftermath in local and national media, I trace a wave of sponsored documentary projects that sought to address the condition of life in Black Detroit that precipitated the violence in July 1967. With funding from the New Detroit Committee—a collection of local business and political leaders from across the racial divide—documentary projects like *In Your Interest* (1968), *The Black Eye* (1968), and the never produced *Monochrome*, aimed to bring Black citizens in front of and behind the cameras to provide a Black perspective on the Detroit Rebellion to local audiences. I argue that these Black-filmed post-Rebellion media texts operated as a form of crisis management for city leaders, yet critically introduced many Black community leaders to the possibility of using media to catalyze civic debate and ameliorate still simmering racial tensions. On the one hand, some white sponsors had altruistic motives for including Black voices in the local mediascape. But on the other hand, the primary objective for the white elite on the Committee in sponsoring Black media projects was to placate white middle-class fears about the potential for another Black uprising and offer Black citizens a gesture of reassurance that the structures of social inequity (that fueled Rebellion) had not gone unnoticed. I argue that these civic leaders turned to documentary to stabilize urban space by advocating the inclusion of (select) Black citizens into the existing power structures of civic leadership and Media production—still otherwise controlled by the white business elite. For their part, Black participants saw these projects as an opportunity to increase minority representation in the local media industry and as a platform from which to promote civic policies that would improve social, spatial, and economic infrastructure for Black residents. While Black anger was tempered by the white-governed civic discourse, I contend these formative sponsored projects served as

building blocks to the development of Detroit public affairs programs aimed for a Black local audience.

The second chapter picks up where the first left off to consider the development of Detroit's Black public affairs program, *CPT* (1968). Through my analyze, I examine how *CPT* producers—Tony Brown and Gilbert Maddox—sought to use television as a strategic mix of entertainment segments that would attract Black viewers and educational content on topics of Black politics and protest to catalyze demands for Black socio-economic equity. Recognizing that local Black viewers had uneven access to Black history and were at various stages of political awakening to Black Power politics, *CPT* strategies of edutainment sought to both culturally enrich viewers and highlight appropriate political activism for an empowered Black public sphere. Namely, I argue the series' first run focuses on community control of local education, Black advancement in white-collar industries, and patronage of Black cultural institutions as a clear path to Black uplift. My discussion shows how *CPT* producers (Brown and Maddox) thus conceptualized television as a means to guide viewers towards moderate Black Nationalist politics in favor of a paternalistically designed Black metropolis. In doing so, *CPT* showcased Black creative talent, hosted political discussions concerns of local import, and coordinated outreach programs in the city's Black neighborhoods. It is my contention that the series' aesthetic and content decisions are integrally related to ideological objectives aligning principles of "Black Power" with Black educational and economic uplift. Through edutaining content and correlative outreach initiatives, I contend that *CPT* imagined ways media could restructure the racial balance of political and economic power in Detroit.

Chapter Three focuses on the production of *Finally Got the News* (1970), a film celebrated by radical filmmaking circles, that emerged from collaboration between Detroit Newsreel and

the Revolutionary League of Black Workers. After tracing the fraught relationship between the League and Newsreel, I discuss how the League, led by John Watson, seized the means of documentary production to envision their own media infrastructure to transmit radical Black Power ideologies. While the film has largely been discussed as an example of 1970s American radicalism, I position the film within the context of local Detroit media. I considered how its use of guerilla-style documentary stands in stark contrast to my other case studies that primarily center on capitalist rehabilitation and Black inclusion as the path to urban revitalization. For the League, the auto industry did not only affect conditions of oppression, but also more importantly, put the filmmakers in the most ideal position to ignite a Black-led labor revolution starting from the point of production. Film rendered this revolutionary potential visible to a broad spectrum of viewers. In a city where Black citizens have long been immobilized by the effects of deeply embedded racism and exploitation in the auto industry, I argue that *Finally Got the News* explores urban crisis from the mobile frame of Black workers pushing back against systemic injustice. The League also planned to establish their own alternative infrastructure for media production and distribution to bring their revolutionary ideas to factories, meetings of Black activists, and to communities with working-class oppression beyond the city limits. Through the establishment of BlackStar Productions to distribute League materials and other radical films, I argue that the League imagined Detroit as a center for Black radical vitality and media rebellion. Scholars drawn to the film's radical politics—like Georgakas and Sturkin and Chris Robé—argue that the League's inability to agree on an agenda for action moving forward—with a primary divide between those that wanted in-plant bargaining and others interested in media

activism campaigns—led to the group’s demise¹³³ However, studying League’s plans for future media developments under the banner of Black Star Productions, I argue that documentary offered the makers of *Finally Got the News* a radical means to understanding Detroit’s past and conceptualize a revolutionary future centered around Black (radical) media infrastructure.

Chapter Four traces the development of WGPR-TV (1973-1994), the first Black-owned TV station in the continental US, which produced exclusively non-fiction local content for a Black local viewership. I examine the intricate steps taken by owner, Dr. William V. Banks, to network with other emergent forms of Black Power in the city and ensure that a Black station with Black content serving a Black audience could hit the airwaves in Detroit. I then discuss how the station designed a range of programming for daily broadcast that reached an increasingly isolated and diffuse Black urban populace. In doing so, I argue that material ownership of the station was a major step in a movement towards Black control of Detroit’s urban infrastructure. Solidifying Black media infrastructure allowed producers to reimagine Detroit as a stable Black metropolis of thriving Black enterprise. Of course, as my analysis will show, the station was always far from economically stable and struggled constantly to bring images of Black quotidian life to air. I, thus, highlight the sacrifices and creative solutions the station made to merely stay afloat in Detroit’s recessed landscape—which included networking with other minority populations in the region to fill air time. I further connect the political and economic obstacles faced by WGPR-TV staff, talent, and producers in the station’s formative years to broader struggles of Black Detroiters working to negotiate control in an economic and political system locally dominated by Black voices, but otherwise still outstripped by broader white infrastructure (media or

¹³³ As I will discuss in Chapter Three, the League’s inability to effectively incorporate others into the revolution—women in particular—was another significant deterrence to the group’s continued presence as an activist body in the city.

otherwise), amidst increased economic disinvestment.

Read together, the production documents and media texts that form the basis of each chapter comprise an essential, yet largely overlooked part of Black media history. Each chapter examines strategies developed by Black media-activists to challenge white discourse and actively shape the infrastructure of civic life during a period of rapid social, political, spatial, and economic transformation. While my chapters progress chronologically, the objective is not to construct a contained teleology of Black media production, but rather to consider how these varied media projects built upon, questioned, and operated in dialogue with one another to produce a lively Black discursive sphere—or a network of possibilities for Black progress—constituting a local Black spatial imaginary. I also organized this dissertation to describe different types of contributions to the local Black media infrastructure: beginning with isolated sponsored projects, discussing a television series, a Black radical documentary production and distribution company, and a Black television station. The content outcomes of these projects differed dramatically, yet each saw media as a significant component of and necessary step towards Black empowerment in civic space. In tandem, these media projects, both those recorded for posterity and those only imagined, reflect a Black media rebellion after the uprising of 1967 in which Black citizens, that lacked mobility in the white spatial imaginary, paved new roads towards Detroit's potential futures.

Chapter 1

From Crisis Coverage to Crisis Management: Negotiating Visions of Detroit's Rebellion

"We said it couldn't happen here; things were too good. But it did and the nation was shocked."
- Bill Bonds, Reporting for WWJ-TV, July 30, 1967

*"In Detroit, it [the Rebellion] happened for reasons we had not been willing to recognize. It happened with a new violence. And it is this riot that we must understand if we are to do something about the dangers that face us now."*¹³⁴ - Frank McGee, Reporting for *Summer of '67: What We Learned*, NBC, September 17, 1968

On the night of July 23, 1967, Detroit Police officers raided a "blind-pig," or an unlicensed after-hours bar at the corner of 12th Street and Clairmount, a central intersection in Detroit's largest Black neighborhood on the city's Near West Side.¹³⁵ There, the Detroit Police Department arrested eighty-two attendees of a local veteran's homecoming party. Reports indicate that a crowd of approximately two hundred spectators gathered to watch the proceedings.¹³⁶ A few minutes after five AM, an empty bottle was thrown at a police vehicle, shattering the windows. Violence erupted. As word of clashes between Black residents and police spread, a wave of arson, looting, and vandalism moved through the city. Black-owned homes and businesses were not spared. Reports of police brutality were rampant. At the end of day three, the National Guard was called in to stifle the insurrection. Within forty-eight hours, the National Guard and local police forces occupying the city were able to restore a semblance of order, leaving forty-three dead, 1200 injured, over 7000 arrested, and thousands of stores looted and/or burned.¹³⁷ Thirty-

¹³⁴ Freed, Fred, "Summer of '67: What We Learned," *NBC News Special Report*, September 15, 1967, http://www.nbcuniversalarchives.com/nbcuni/clip/51A06133_s01.do.

¹³⁵ In 1976, 12th Street was renamed Rosa Parks Boulevard.

¹³⁶ For the most comprehensive discussion of Detroit's civil disturbance see: Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Race Riot of 1967* (Michigan State University Press, 2007).

¹³⁷ Fine. Also see: Herb Colling, *Turning Points: The Detroit Riot of 1967, A Canadian Perspective* (Dundurn, 2003) 36.

three of those killed and the vast majority of those arrested were Black citizens.¹³⁸

Urban unrest had hit boiling points in other major cities with significant Black populations prior to the Detroit Rebellion: notably New York in 1964, Watts, Los Angeles in 1965, Cleveland in 1966, and Newark in early July 1967. Detroit too had previous outbreaks of racial violence, including a “riot” in 1943 that left 34 dead.¹³⁹ In August 1966, after a Black youth was shot by a white officer on Kercheval Street, an angry crowd quickly mobilized, demanding the arrest of the officer. Community leaders joined with police to successfully stop the protest from spreading. Following the incident, Detroit officials assumed that local forces were prepared to handle any future disturbances.¹⁴⁰ However, as civil unrest spread through the city in 1967, it became abundantly clear to local citizens and leaders alike, that the local infrastructure in place to maintain order in the city was not near stable enough to placate Black protest and the deepening racial divide in the city.

In local, as well as national, coverage of the 1967 Rebellion, city officials and broadcasters expressed incredulity that such an event could ever happen in Detroit, a city home to the nation’s highest paid blue-collar workers. City leaders initially disavowed the possibility that it was

¹³⁸ It went on record as the most deadly and destructive civil disturbance in US History since the Draft Riots of 1863 and remained so until the LA riots of 1992.

¹³⁹ In 1943, clashes between white and Black residents came to a head on Belle Isle, a small beach island in the Detroit River and violence spilled into the city’s center overnight. Ultimately, Federal Troops were sent into to quell the violence, leaving thirty-four dead, twenty-five of whom were African–American, seventeen of whom were killed by the police. Thirteen murders remain unsolved. Overall, Black Detroiters accounted for seventy five percent of the injured and arrested, setting up a precedent for subsequent police dealings in the city. For more information, see: Dominic J. Capeci Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009). Widick, *Detroit*.

¹⁴⁰ Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000) 43. Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 2007, 135-139.

anything more than an anomalous explosion of unfounded Black extremism.¹⁴¹ WJBK-TV anchor Robert McBride, for instance, described the events that July as a “battle waged by a small group of die-hard extremists in the Negro community, some of them undoubtedly from out of town.”¹⁴² During a press conference on July 24, 1967, Governor George Romney likewise declared that the “riot” had some “civil rights overtones,” but primarily was a “case of lawlessness and hoodlumism.”¹⁴³ Yet, as the dust from the Rebellion settled, city officials began to publicly address the likelihood that July 1967 was not “irrational” happenstance, but rather an impassioned response to the structures of racism that relegated Black Detroiters to substandard living conditions.¹⁴⁴

The Rebellion significantly affected the city’s public image, catalyzing intense debate across America, particularly among fearful white citizens, about the potentiality of future outbursts of violence in Black neighborhoods.¹⁴⁵ For broadcasters, government officials, civic institutions, as well as civilians, the Detroit Rebellion became a focal point in conversations of the “ghetto problem.”¹⁴⁶ As such, it was of crucial importance that Detroit set an example for effective crisis management to thwart the possibility of future violence. In the aftermath of July 1967, city-sponsored documentary films screened at community forums and television programs

¹⁴¹ Detroit garnered the nickname “Arsenal of Democracy” due to the city’s central contribution to industrial war manufacturing during World War 2. Discussed at length in Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

¹⁴² Tim Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses: The History of Detroit Television Journalism* (Wayne State University Press, 2009).

¹⁴³ As quoted in: “Cities: The Fire This Time,” *Time*, August 4, 1967, 15.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in: Tim Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses: The History of Detroit Television News* (Wayne State University Press, 2009) 73.

¹⁴⁵ For a broader history of incidence of racial violence in Detroit: Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 2007, 135-139.

¹⁴⁶ *American Education* (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1967), 3.

broadcast on local stations began asking Detroiters to re-examine the city's social history, address the onset of urban crisis, and confront their own imbrication in systems of racial oppression. A central component of this process was putting Black citizens behind, as well as in front of, film cameras. The undergirding assumption of this effort was that Black residents saw and understood the city in ways white citizens could not and that film could provide a means for Black citizens to capture their experiences of city space and civic life. The producers of these documentaries, primarily comprised of representatives of local businesses, churches, educational institutions, and government offices, hoped white Detroiters would gain a greater appreciation for the struggles of Black Detroit by screening content filmed in Black neighborhoods by Black citizens and broadcasting public conversations on methods to achieve a peaceful and racially integrated future.

This chapter traces the politics of Black media visibility during the Rebellion through the immediate post-Rebellion moment, examining a shift from white crisis coverage during the Rebellion to Black-filmed crisis management media in the aftermath. To do so, I first contextualize television news representations of Detroit amidst the Rebellion and attempts to explain the violence in Detroit through TV specials made in its immediate aftermath, namely the nationally broadcast *Summer of '67: What We Learned* (1967). I then discuss a wave of Black-filmed and white-sponsored documentaries that strove to address the underlying causes of the recent civil disturbance and grapple with the racial divide in the city. In particular, I look at the sponsored film *The Black Eye* (1968), the televised community discussion forum *In Your Interest* (1968), and the proposed public affairs program *Monochrome* (1968), all of which represent the experiences of Black citizens and bring local Black viewpoints on social issues to the city's white audiences. All funded by the New Detroit Committee and featuring an overlapping

collection of Black citizen-activists on screen, each of these media texts attempt to review the history of race relations in the city that contributed to the 1967 crisis. These projects combine filmed segments, archival footage, and interviews with local residents, proposing social, spatial, and economic changes to improve living conditions for Black citizens and redefine citizenship for the post-Rebellion era aimed at integrationist reform.

Within these production parameters, Black media participation was still heavily regulated by local funding agencies and channeled towards the project of integrationist urban reform and citizen-corporate coalition building. The projects discussed in this chapter, reflect an ambivalent moment in local Black media history in which Black documentarians were provided with training in media production, funding sources, and exhibition platforms to address concerns about worsening conditions in Black neighborhoods. Yet, they were also forced to adhere to the broadcast goals of white corporate funders and direct their projects towards a white viewer base. In this context, post-Rebellion media modeled appropriate forms of white compassion and Black advancement in a rapidly shifting urban landscape. Since a clear goal of media sponsors for this project was to quell racial tensions and eliminate the potential for future violence, I argue these sponsored documentaries function as an essential component of the city's official crisis management plan.

Crisis management designates a wider set of processes in which businesses and social institutions form coalitions with other agencies and local communities to maintain order in the wake of a "crisis"—or unexpected event that threatens the organization of civic life for economic stakeholders as well as the general public. A "crisis," in terms of "crisis management" discourse, can include a natural disaster, sizeable political scandal, an economic collapse, large-scale industrial accident, or other form of catastrophe that affects civic governance, citizen safety, and

regular business activity. According to Kees Boersma and Ciara Fonio, crisis situations put civic infrastructure under duress and a swift resolution is demanded to re-establish social order. “Information management that supports crisis organizations requires processes to collect, analyze, and share information about the crisis situation, and about the coordination between the responding organizations.”¹⁴⁷ These processes take time, public resources, and money. Thus, effective crisis management is as much about solutions to a present crisis as it is about developing skills and infrastructure to handle, if not avert, future crises.¹⁴⁸ Because of film and television’s capacity to convey information easily and effectively to a broad audience in a short amount of time, media production serves as a central platform through which the city can execute crisis management plans. It allows civic leaders to network with citizens, institutions, and businesses, to collect data on public sentiments, mediate conversations on citizen concerns, and publicize efforts to stabilize city space. All of this works to, not only contain the current crisis, but also forestall the possibility of future crises.

The New Detroit Committee (NDC), which I will discuss at length below, was a crucial sponsor of post-Rebellion crisis-management media [Figure 1.1]. The NDC used its aggregate resources to fund civic organizations that proposed to improve quality of life for Detroit residents and thwart the possibility of a future “riot,” including film and television projects that documented conditions of Black life in the inner city and modeled appropriate action the city

¹⁴⁷ Kees Boersma and Chiara Fonio, *Big Data, Surveillance and Crisis Management* (Routledge, 2017), 1.

¹⁴⁸ Lynn T. Drennan, Allan McConnell, and Alastair Stark, *Risk and Crisis Management in the Public Sector* (Routledge, 2014); Kees Boersma and Chiara Fonio, *Big Data, Surveillance and Crisis Management* (Routledge, 2017); Christine M. Pearson and Judith A. Clair, “Reframing Crisis Management,” *The Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 1 (1998): 59–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/259099>; *Crisis Management: Master the Skills to Prevent Disasters* (Harvard Business Press, 2004).

should take to develop a prosperous, integrated urban sphere. Importantly, the NDC approached media as a two-way educational apparatus that would gather data on public sentiments and broadcast the organization's strategies to quell anxieties about urban upheaval. Public forums often accompanied broadcast of sponsored television programs or public film screenings, in which community organizations and church leaders were asked to gauge citizen responses to the riots and broader effects of urban decline in the city, collecting feedback reports to be processed by Wayne State University graduate students. Projects like *In your Interest* (1968) and *The Black Eye* (1968) opened a channel of communication between citizens, The NDC, and the Cavanaugh administration.

Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's 1975 study of Post-Rebellion radicalism, dismiss the NDC as an institution that despite "all its financial and political clout, represented little more than a recycling of pre-1967 Detroit. It sought to deal with the basic contradictions and problems, which had produced the Great Rebellion, with what amounted to a showcase public relations program."¹⁴⁹ This channel of communication was primarily used to advance Cavanaugh's policy agenda, pacify white fears about rioting, and suppress Black rage about enduring structures of racism in the city. Yet it also ushered in what I argue constituted the largest outburst of Black media visibility in Detroit and dovetailed with the most significant period of institutional support for Black socio-economic progress the city had experienced up to that point—and perhaps to date.

My study emphasizes strategies Black citizens used to control forms of knowledge circulation during this moment of "crisis management." These documentaries networked an assemblage of Black creative talent and political activists to devise "crisis management"

¹⁴⁹ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 3.

procedures through a Black lens and thereby also interject Black urban futures into white-sponsored media that white city leaders would not likely otherwise consider. In this chapter, I examine the social and political dimensions of the NDC's "showcase public relations program." I argue that these sponsored crisis management projects work to stabilize fraught race relations by advocating that Black citizens work with the New Detroit Committee to address concerns affecting Black communities in an attempt to placate both Black radicalism and white conservatism. Yet, I further contend these media serve as both products and producers of mediated negotiations between Black citizens and municipal structures of corporate control at the local level. Records from the mayor's office and the New Detroit Committee indicate that the primary objective of institutional sponsorship was "riot insurance"—they used media as a form of crisis management that would mitigate white fear and Black anger, thereby safeguarding economic investments in Detroit. Meanwhile, Black participants wanted to gain a foothold in the local media industry, increase minority inclusion in civic life, and articulate the conditions of their own social and economic emplacement in the city to white viewing publics. This is not to say Black media-makers were not equally invested in documentary as a form of crisis management. Many of the Black producers I discuss certainly hoped media could dismantle the civic policies and public attitudes that precipitated violence. These producers likewise used media as a form of civic governance, advocating social behaviors and economic practices that would build up Black business development in the city.

Many of these documentaries are no longer extant. Therefore, I draw from series transcripts, program documents, and archival records from Detroit civic institutions to elucidate via discourse analysis the socio-political and racial dimensions of crisis management media during the development stages and the subsequent circulation of documentary in local forums for

data collection. Essentially, as crisis management, these projects promoted urban renewal initiatives to get white viewers on board with civic ordinances aimed to improve living, working, and recreational opportunities for Black residents. Each participating citizen—including white elite and local Black activists—may have had different vested interests in documentary production, yet their combined efforts brought rare-before-seen glimpses of Black Detroit to local publics. For the first time, Black Detroiters were able to use facilities and government resources previously relegated to white media producers to challenge mainstream coverage of the Rebellion and speak back to fearful white Detroiters.

These Crisis management media projects reflect the post-Rebellion moment in which white political and business leaders attempted to form coalitions of appeasement with Black leaders, from the militant to the moderate, in the city. While the voices of Black radical citizens were subdued in crisis management media, Black radical dissatisfaction with the substandard living and working conditions created by economic and political leaders in Detroit would grow louder than calls for moderate leaders to restore civic order. As the Black population increased and Black citizens demanded to be counted in civic life by the end of the late 1960s, Black Power and Black (economic) Nationalist advocates took charge as spiritual and political leaders of Black Detroit—and by the 1970s, the entire city. Nevertheless, participation in these formative Black documentaries shifted the public discourse of Rebellion from white concerns of Black criminality and violence to critiques of white racist structures that unevenly granted socio-economic advantages to white citizens. These projects introduced white Americans to a Black spatial imaginary, helped forge connections among Black activists interested in media production and social justice politics, allowed Black producers to establish a relationship with local PBS affiliate station WTVS—which would later be a platform for Black public affairs programs like

CPT—and thus served as a crucial building block towards autonomous Black media infrastructure.

Broadcasting the Detroit Rebellion

In *Reforming the Wasteland: Television, Reform, and Social Movements, 1950-2004*, Allison Joyce Perlman argues that “the medium’s location in the home, the immediacy and liveness of its broadcasts, and its national reach combined to establish television’s unique cultural power and its function as a primary site of public discourse.”¹⁵⁰ Anna McCarthy likewise approaches the televisual apparatus as “exercising corporate power while appearing to work in the best interests of the population.”¹⁵¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, the corporate sponsors and philanthropic institutions primarily controlling televisual governance were white, and they advocated forms of American citizenship that did not take Black politics under advisement. Thus, as a wave of civil disturbances erupted in cities like Watts, New York, and Newark, television sponsors were forced to reformulate what corporate citizenship meant in relation to the nation’s unstable race relations. Detroit, in this way, is just a microcosm of broader changes in the televisual landscape in the late 1960s. Benjamin Singer’s 1970 study of mass communications in relation to the Detroit Rebellion further demonstrates that television served as the primary vehicle for transmitting information on past occurrences of racial unrest and informing viewers of incidents of public disorder as they unfolded.¹⁵² When we carefully examine how the events of the Rebellion were racialized through film and televisual coverage,

¹⁵⁰ Allison Joyce Perlman, “Reforming the Wasteland: Television, Reform, and Social Movements, 1950–2004” (The University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 8.

¹⁵¹ Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine*, 36.

¹⁵² Benjamin D. Singer, “Mass Media and Communication Processes in the Detroit Riot of 1967,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1970).

we can see the deep entanglement of citizenship, social-spatial change, and the structures of media control.

The outbreak of violence on the eve of July 23, 1967 was actually first met with radio and televisual silence. Concerned that media reports would only escalate the “rioting” as it had done in Newark and Watts, all Detroit electronic media outlets were urged by Mayor Cavanaugh to hold off on reporting until police had managed the crowds. Broadcasters cooperated with city officials in their efforts to keep the situation contained and made no mention of events on 12th Street for ten hours, recognizing their own civic power to exacerbate or curtail moral panic. According to Anne Brophy, a “tacit agreement worked out between radio broadcasters” concluded that the term “riot” was expressly not to be used by the media until authorities do so first.¹⁵³ The first broadcast reports of “rioting” actually came from Windsor, Ontario with station CKLW-TV anchor Irv Morrison matter-of-factly noting at 2:00 PM on July 23: “violence broke out in west side Detroit early this morning when police raided a west side blind pig. A police lieutenant was hit with a rock and one man was stabbed as hundreds brawled for five hours.”¹⁵⁴ Soon after CKLW-TV broke the news, every local television station began running non-stop “riot” coverage. Unlike other cities, where coverage dwindled after the first day of rioting, news coverage of events in Detroit increased substantially on subsequent days.¹⁵⁵ As Tim Kiska notes,

¹⁵³ Brophy, Anne K., *Race, Civil Disorders, and the Mass Media* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1968), 32.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in: Colling, *Turning Points*. Also of note, as July 23 was a Sunday, the first newspaper reports of rioting weren’t released until after 8:00 PM Sunday evening.

¹⁵⁵ This was documented in the Kerner Commission’s findings of News Media coverage of insurrection. The anomalous increase in Detroit’s television coverage of rioting is associated with the slower-pace at which the civil disturbance in Detroit escalated and the longer-than-average period in which police struggled to regain control of the city on the ground. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, “The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder,” GPO (Washington, D.C., 1968), 205. Also see: Thomas J. Hrach, *The News*

“the story was made for television, with smoke, buildings in flames, tanks driving down once-peaceful streets, and a worried Detroit mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh and Governor Romney touring the smoking ruins of the city.”¹⁵⁶

In *A Newscast for the Masses: The History of Detroit Television Journalism*, Kiska relies on interviews with local media personnel to consider how the “riots” shifted Detroit’s primary source of TV News from WWJ-TV to WXYZ-TV. According to Kiska and his sources, WXYZ-TV, in particular, took advantage of developments in portable camera technology and longer battery life to capture footage in the midst of disorder. While other stations primarily aired in-studio commentary and press conferences with city officials, WXYZ-TV featured long, often unedited, sensational footage of a city in chaos. Extant tapes of WXYZ-TV broadcasts and b-roll footage corroborate Kiska’s observations.¹⁵⁷ These tapes largely contain un-contextualized images of vandalism, bloodied bodies, and buildings engulfed in flames. A medium tracking shot of a middle-aged blonde woman driving while clutching a pistol came to symbolize the white fear that coursed through the city during that week in late July.¹⁵⁸ Another image of an elderly Black woman dress shopping through a broken window was replayed frequently, framing Black Detroit as an opportunistic community with little concern for law and order.

Despite the sensational footage, news anchors, especially at rival stations WWJ-TV and WJBK-TV, strove to establish a calming influence on viewers. A contemporaneous KSFO-AM *Radio News Stylebook* articulated the manner in which most local broadcasters in urban centers

Media and Disorders: The Kerner Commission’s Examination of Race Riots and Civil Disturbances, 1967--1968 (ProQuest, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses*, 2009, 65.

¹⁵⁷ My research into televisual coverage was primarily completed at the Audiovisual Collection at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁵⁸ This image has been inserted into recent documentaries such as *Internal Combustion* (Faigenbaum, 2014) and *Detropia* (Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, 2012).

understood the relationship between coverage and crisis: “a civil disorder story, particularly one involving racial strife, is different from any other kind of story in that coverage of it may materially affect its development, intensity, duration, and outcome.”¹⁵⁹ Hoping to contain future rioting, anchors prioritized reports on citizen safety. They sought to remind citizens of the citywide curfew and instructed viewers to stay in their homes. They listed statistics: how many dead, wounded, arrested; how many homes/businesses vandalized or burned. By day three, both national and local coverage primarily focused on control measures taken by police and military forces to stabilize events on the ground. [Figures 1.2 – 1.5] After the arrival of the National Guard, images of armored tanks and servicemen marching through the streets with guns were pervasive in local media.

Analyzing coverage of the LA Rebellion of 1992 following the acquittal of officers involved in the brutal police beating of Rodney King, John Caldwell approaches the recorded video footage of the King beating, television news coverage of insurrection in the city, and the subsequent media discourses, all as televisual forms of “crisis coverage.” He argue that such crisis coverage reveals masculine, hegemonic tactics for containing the perceived “dangerous other,” and gives weight to television’s investment in liveness (or the myth of “liveness”), the medium’s privileged relationship to the present moment.¹⁶⁰ For Caldwell, “from an ideological perspective, crisis coverage convulsed with three recurrent control fantasies: hyperactive embellishments of masculinity, race, and auto-technologies were all thrown into the fray to

¹⁵⁹ *Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Bulletin* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 1967), 12.

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Morse also examines the television myth of liveness with her discussion of news media as performance. See Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Indiana University Press, 1998), 36–67.

establish and maintain television's command presence."¹⁶¹ Caldwell's words regarding the 1992 insurrection likewise speak to 1967 Detroit, where news journalism, television reportage in particular, demonstrated the containment of Black bodies using white masculine force, and gave authority to the white male anchors that described efforts of police to stabilize events on the ground and presented viewers with safety measures. Even if reporters and anchors were broadcasting live from a studio setting, admittedly oblivious to what exactly was occurring in the streets, the fact that television could document the spectacle unfolding and present it to the viewers in seemingly real time "justified and underscored the very authority of broadcasters to speak."¹⁶² It gave meaning to the gravity of their reportage and the ideological vantage point from which anchors spoke.¹⁶³ In Detroit, such coverage solidified white fear of a Black uprising and demands for police to use any means necessary to control the chaos on the street.

Black voices were minimally included in televised crisis coverage, further deepening the spatial as well as social divide between Black and white citizens. As Black Detroit was rarely shown on television before this time, most white viewers were encountering Black city space for the first time and through an outsider's lens, documenting perspectives politically distanced from the insurrection. In *Policing the Crisis*, Stuart Hall et. al interrogates the way crime reportage is controlled by the "primary institutional definers," such as the state, the police, and the corporate structures of power as a means of maintaining civic order and social control. Dismantling recent

¹⁶¹ John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), 303–4.

¹⁶² Caldwell, *Televisuality*, 308.

¹⁶³ Caldwell Continues: "Live coverage has always been the trump card of broadcasters, and crisis coverage on a massive technological scale legitimized two of television's most persistent mythologies: its cult of technical superiority (the result of years of heavy capital investment in concrete, satellite, and microwave technologies) and its cult of journalism (the superiority of delegated professional reportage over democratic or populist media)." Caldwell, *Televisuality*. 305.

newspaper coverage of a wave of “muggings” perpetrated by Black immigrants in London, Hall argues, “crime is *less open* than most public issues to competing alternative definitions” and that those involved with crime are considered to have forfeited their “right to take part in the negotiation of the consensus about crime.”¹⁶⁴ In Detroit, the television broadcasts foreclosed the opportunity for Black citizens to speak sincerely about “rioting,” merely painting the so-called “riots” as lawless outbursts and its (assumed Black) participants as criminals. Meanwhile, the reports of rampant police brutality towards Black citizens during the insurrection, as well as white participation in rioting, went dramatically under-reported. This strategy emphasized Black crime and Black radicalism as the sole culprit of urban violence, simultaneously empowering local police institutions to use whatever force necessary to maintain order and ensure white safety. Such tactics were unsurprising. In the wake of public disturbances, governmental tactics and policy platforms generally shift to a conservative “law and order” model to assuage public safety concerns. According to Michael W. Flamm’s *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s*, this was the case following the outbreak of rioting in Watts in 1964, Newark in 1967, and Baltimore in 1968.¹⁶⁵ In post-Rebellion Detroit, the political shift to conservative law and order governance was aggressive and a law and order candidate, Roman Gribbs, won the city’s mayoral election in 1969.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 72.

¹⁶⁵ Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁶ Gibbs ran for mayor against Black moderate Richard Austin and the even more (white) conservative, Mary Beck. Most of Gribb’s financial support came from suburbs. While Gribbs was a proponent of integration, the election was divided along racial lines. He was favored by the white establishment, particularly popular with business and legal organizations in the city. However, as Wayne County sheriff, Gribbs alienated many central Black leaders to the city.

The “Algiers Motel Incident” or the “Algiers Motel Massacre,” in which three Black citizens were brutally beaten and murdered by police, remains the most prominent symbol of police brutality amidst the Rebellion.¹⁶⁷ For Detroiters and activists elsewhere, these murders symbolized grave miscarriages of justice and the willingness of local institutions to excuse police for acting outside the boundaries of law enforcement during moments of chaos. Here, however, I am interested in how the event elucidates conflicting narratives of brutality and justice perpetuated by the media, as well as how racialized media reportage exacerbated polarizing perspectives on urban violence. On July 26, the Michigan National Guard received radio reports of sniper fire and a potential group of armed gunman spotted at the Algiers Motel. The Detroit Police Department, the Michigan State Police, and the Michigan Army National Guard officers stormed the motel, killing three Black civilians and brutally beating an additional seven Black men and two white women on the premises. The precise facts of the case remain unclear, as police involved attempted to conceal their actual role in the events, while witnesses were too frightened to speak out and/or had limited views as the killings took place. However, the alleged sniper, and one of the men shot to death, was seventeen year-old Carl Cooper. It was later revealed that the weapon spotted at the motel on Cooper’s person was actually a track and field starter pistol loaded with blanks. The others shot execution style by police included the unarmed eighteen year old, Fred Temple, and Aubrey Pollard, age nineteen. The two (white) women brutalized during the incident were in town to visit The Dramatics, a local rhythm and blues group that had been appearing alongside Martha and the Vandellas at the Fox Theatre. The group

Gribbs would be the last white Mayor of Detroit until Mike Duggan assumed office in 2014. Darden, *Detroit*, 209; Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*.

¹⁶⁷ The Algiers Motel violence serves as the subject of Kathryn Bigelow’s 2017 film *Detroit*, as well as John Hersey’s true crime novel, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (1968), I revisit this example in the conclusion.

had been holed up in the hotel, drinking and watching TV due to the citywide curfew, and none of these victims had participated in the chaos outdoors.¹⁶⁸ According to Scott Kurashige, the police were set off after seeing these white women in the company of Black men.¹⁶⁹ Following the motel raid, seven other occupants were detained for hours, interrogated, and tortured.

In August 1967, (white officers) Ronald August, Robert Paille, and Black security guard Melvin Dismukes, were arraigned on the brutal beating of these motel inhabitants. Claiming self-defense, they were acquitted by an all white jury. In September 1968, Dismukes, Paille, and officer David Senak were tried for “violating Michigan law” by conspiring "to commit a legal act in an illegal manner" and again acquitted. In May-June 1979, August stood trial for the first-degree murder of Aubrey Pollard. During trial proceedings, the defense attorney equated the riot with a "full scale war" and constructed a narrative of events that positioned the police as "soldiers in the battlefield."¹⁷⁰ He claimed the officers had to work extended hours and "stand by without being permitted to act against looters and arsonists" to save a city under attack. To substantiate this argument, the defense presented the court with a twenty-minute, heavily-edited color TV film of riot footage that, according to Sidney Fine, showed “Blacks looting, fires raging, and the police and army on the streets defending the city.”¹⁷¹ Judge Beer overruled the prosecution’s objection that the film was "a blatant appeal to bias and bigotry."¹⁷² August was acquitted on all charges and no other officer was ever convicted on any of the numerous charged

¹⁶⁸ Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia*. Details were later teased out by the best-selling true crime book and oral history, *The Algiers Motel Incident*. John Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (JHU Press, 1968).

¹⁶⁹ Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Univ of California Press, 2017), 23.

¹⁷⁰ Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 288.

¹⁷¹ Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 288.

¹⁷² Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 288.

lodged against the National Guard and the Detroit Police in relation to riot policing. The evidentiary dimensions of live television footage, as well as its sensational content in this particular instance, served to strengthen white, and largely suburban, dismissal of Detroit as a site of Black lawlessness and correlative demands for reinstating white order by any means necessary. The use of this footage also demonstrates how televised materials were often considered to have import beyond initial broadcast contexts, as documentary films and videotapes were subsequently exhibited in other local milieus for educational, or in this instance, legal or evidentiary purposes.

Of course, demands for “law and order” governance were not universal. The television broadcast of the Detroit Rebellion concretized a need among Black residents for self-representation. The Black newspaper *The Michigan Chronicle* documented Black outrage at the Algiers Motel Incident, coverage, and subsequent acquittals. At a post-Rebellion meeting of the Black activist organization, the City Wide Citizen Action Committee, it was decided that the Black activist community hold a mock trial to demonstrate how proper justice should be executed. The white patrolmen and Black private security guard involved in the incident were charged, in absentia, with first-degree murder. Activists from Wayne State University’s student newspaper *The Inner City Voice*, gathered evidence and depositions to present at the trial. Labor Attorney Kenneth Cockrel presided as judge and jurors included Rosa Parks and novelist John Killens. This mock trial held at Albert Cleage’s Central United Church of Christ, conveyed a clear “guilty” verdict.¹⁷³ While the mock trial was covered prominently in the local Black press, the mainstream Detroit newspapers and television stations gave little attention to Black demands

¹⁷³ Joel Stone, *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies* (Wayne State University Press, 2017); Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident*.

for justice with this incident or elsewhere.¹⁷⁴

Broadly speaking, experiences of communities of color during the Rebellion differed dramatically from the images broadcast over the three primary VHF local stations in the region that primarily framed the police force as the city's brave protectors against waves of Black criminals.¹⁷⁵ A survey of Detroit citizens in autumn of 1967 showed that Black Detroiters were, unsurprisingly, much more critical of how the newspapers and television had covered the Rebellion than whites. The principal complaint among Black citizens was that print and television news had failed to report white participation in rioting. It seemed only Black citizens were criminals and white citizens were victims.¹⁷⁶ WWJ-TV, for instance, aired a special ninety-minute program compiling "riot" footage and reporting on the funerals of two white police officers killed in the disturbance.¹⁷⁷ Although the vast majority of those killed were Black, the report made little mention of Black deaths and no mention of Black funeral services. Also notably absent from reportage was the long history of police brutality, poverty, de facto segregation, and the recent dislocation of African American families by the I-75 freeway

¹⁷⁴ Cleage, later named Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, was a Detroit Clergyman, political candidate, and activist known for strong advocacy for Black Nationalism. For more see: Jawanza Eric Clark, ed., *Albert Cleage Jr. and the Black Madonna and Child* (Springer, 2016); Albert B. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1987); Dillard, *Faith in the City*; Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (Africa World Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁵ As Joe T. Darden and Richard Thomas note, "white institutional racism in the form of urban renewal, expressways, and white suburban resistance were the major causes of the civil disorder, or Rebellion of 1967. But as to be expected, Black and white collective memories of the event differ." Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Hrach, *The News Media and Disorders*, 42.

¹⁷⁷ WWJ-TV, an NBC Affiliate, is now WDIV-TV. Similar funerary footage was documented in: *Detroit Riot 1967*, accessed April 14, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/5337314>. This original footage was filmed by WXYZ TV-7, and ABC affiliate in Detroit, Michigan. The footage was donated to the Michigan State Police for training purposes. The State Police have since donated it to the Archives of Michigan for permanent preservation.

construction that contributed to the spread of violence.

A 1968 *Variety* article posits that the “one positive result of riot coverage is the emergence of a much clearer understanding of a television station’s relation to its community.”¹⁷⁸ The article was referring to television’s objectives for broadcasting effective crisis coverage that would stabilize dangerous urban conditions. However, I would echo the argument of Black Detroit residents that the broadcasts during the Rebellion illuminated that local television had a strong relationship with, and responsibility to, white neighborhoods in the city with much less concern directed towards communities of color. However, by spring of 1968, broadcasters from across the country began analyzing the diverse conditions of television viewership and strategizing ways television could better service Black communities. This was especially important to broadcasters in the late 1960s, as the medium had established itself as a primary purveyor of news to American publics, outplacing newspapers. Accordingly, J Leonard Reinsch, president of Cox Broadcasting Corporation, saw opportunity in Television’s powerful ability to influence audience sentiments, noting in a public statement in 1968 that broadcasters should work to find methods to better communicate with uneducated and underprivileged persons living in big-city slums as a mean to ease the nation’s catastrophic urban relations, as “communications technology has the opportunity to perform its greatest service in this area.”¹⁷⁹ At a closed session at the University of Chicago on “mass media and urban crisis” in May 1968, Lawrence Pinkham of Columbia University likewise told the seminar that “means must be found to let the ghetto tell its own story on a proportionate share of existing commercial television facilities, allowing the

¹⁷⁸ Michie, Larry, “Community Role Comes into Focus,” *Variety*, April 24, 1968.

¹⁷⁹ A 1968 Study at the University of West Virginia demonstrated that 100% of people interviewed got their primary news from television, drawing increased attention to the import of televisual content as information and communication. “The Media: Broadcasters Told to Seek Urban Solutions,” *Broadcasting Magazine*, May 13, 1968.

Black man to control entirely what he has to say. Television must move beyond its present “limiting journalistic concepts” and “devote massive amounts of time to programming of, by, and for the Black community.”¹⁸⁰

In 1968 Detroit, business leaders affiliated with the Cavanaugh administration began to similarly rethink the relationship between social welfare initiatives, corporate control, and local media. At this point, the Cavanaugh administration and other business leaders in the city turned to visual media, television in particular, as a mechanism to broadcast content that would alleviate both white fears about urban safety and Black concerns about the underlying causes of rioting: inadequate housing, lack of employment opportunities, and police discrimination. As television became the primary mode through which most Detroiters received news, civic institutions, community members, and local authorities all approached educational media as discursive tools to redefine the terms of post-riot citizenship. Essentially, as Hall et al. put it,

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.¹⁸¹

Framing the visual representations of riots, as in the case of the Algiers Motel incident, helped galvanize demands for increased police power in the city. Yet, the city government and business

¹⁸⁰ “The Media: Broadcasters Told to Seek Urban Solutions.”

¹⁸¹ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 16–17.

leaders also used their access to media production to host citizen dialogues on post-Rebellion sentiments, diagnose the underlying causes of anger in Black communities, and pose solutions for stabilizing race relations and economic vitality in the city. In this way, the New Detroit Committee positioned documentary as a key crisis management resource and a means to police public discourse.

The Kerner Commission and National Attempts at Crisis Management for Detroit

The decision of television stations to ultimately expand Black representations was, in many respects, catalyzed by President Johnson's crisis management team. The "National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders" was an eleven-member panel charged with uncovering the roots racial tension and producing recommendations to curtail future incidents of racially motivated violence [1.6]. The resulting document, *The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder*, more commonly referred to as the *Kerner Report* after the chairman of the commission Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, argued that white racism was in fact largely responsible for the eruption of civil disturbances in years prior.¹⁸² Among its claims, *The Kerner Report* stated that television's failure to present African-Americans as integral members of society was a significant component of the structural racism undergirding racially motivated violence. The commission further noted that not only was there little representation of Black people on television, on the rare occasions they did appear, they were represented as whites saw them, not as they saw themselves.¹⁸³

¹⁸² National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, "The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder."

¹⁸³ Also discussed in: Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955–1969* (Duke University Press, 2004). Classen argues that Civil Rights protests

Conveying the poor living conditions of Black inner cities, like Detroit, to white viewers with power was among the core objectives outlined by *The Kerner Report*. News outlets have “not communicated to the majority of their audience—which is white—a sense of the degradation, misery and hopelessness of life in the ghetto. These failings must be corrected and the improvement must come from within the industry.”¹⁸⁴ To do so, the Report recommended the following:

Expand coverage of the Negro community and of race problems through permanent assignment of reporters’ familiar with urban and racial affairs, and through establishment of more and better links with the Negro community.

Integrate Negroes and Negro activities into all aspects of coverage and content, including newspaper articles and television programming. The news media must publish newspapers and produce programs that recognize the existence and activities of Negroes as a group within the community and as a part of the larger community.

Recruit more Negroes into journalism and broadcasting and promote those who are qualified to positions of significant responsibility. Recruitment should begin in high schools and continue through college; where necessary, aid for training should be provided.

Improve coordination with police in reporting riot news through advance planning, and cooperate with the police in the designation of police information officers, establishment of information centers, and development of mutually acceptable guidelines for riot reporting and the conduct of media personnel.

Accelerate efforts to ensure accurate and responsible reporting of pot and racial news, through adoption by all news gathering organizations of stringent internal staff guidelines.

Cooperate in the establishment of a privately organized and funded Institute of Urban Communications to train and educate journalists in urban affairs, recruit and train more Negro journalists, develop methods for improving police-press relations, review coverage

produced a system of de facto accountability where station managers were forced to heed the demands of community activists more than the FCC personnel.

¹⁸⁴ United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and Otto Kerner, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Pantheon Books, 1988), 10.

of riots and racial issues, and support continuing research in the urban field.¹⁸⁵

The report thus identified diversity in the media as crucial for the public interest, a demand recognized by the FCC when it began to enforce equal employment and non-discrimination policies for all broadcasting licensees in 1969.¹⁸⁶

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April of 1968, urban “rioting” erupted in over 160 cities across the US, exacerbating concerns that television merely deepened the nation’s racial divide. This discourse put further pressure on national networks to produce programs that examined race relations in urban centers. Accordingly, in June of 1968, CBS aired a three-part program anchored by Walter Cronkite entitled *The Cities. Part Two: A Dilemma in Black and White* that historicizes Black migration to cities and interviews interracial leaders about the emergence of racial conflict. The program then evaluates different responses to urban crisis. *The Cities* contrasts the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn as an “unsuccessful Black ghetto,” and Rochester, New York, as a city trying to deal with its racial problems through its Business Opportunities Corporation.¹⁸⁷ Cronkite remarked: “Crisis is no overnight thing. It has been gathering for the last 25 years. The result is that the makeup of the inner city has become increasingly poor, increasingly Black, increasingly explosive.”¹⁸⁸ Other national networks followed suit with programs like the five-part *Time for Americans* (ABC, 6/27/1968-7/28/1968) which was followed by the 1969 six-part *Summer Focus* serving the same premise,

¹⁸⁵ *The Kerner Report*, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (Rutgers University Press, 1995) 145.

¹⁸⁷ John Sharnik, Bernard Birnbaum, Paul Greenberg, “CBS News Special Report,” *Part Two: A Dilemma in Black and White* (New York: CBS, 1968).

¹⁸⁸ Also discussed in: Edwin Diamond, “Its Deja Vu All Over Again: From Watts in 1965 to Los Angeles in 1992, Has Anything Really Changed in the Way the Media Cover Race Riots?,” *New York Magazine*, June 1, 1992.

Of Black America (CBS, 7/26/1968), *What's Happening to America* (NBC 7/27/1969), *Justice for All?* (8/3/1968), and a *White Paper* special: "The Ordeal of the American City" (NBC 9/13/1968).

The 1968 CBS Special Report, *Portrait of Black America*, sponsored by Xerox, attempted to eliminate broadcaster bias by relying upon nation-wide polling of Black and white citizens to evaluate sentiments about race relations across American cities. Co-hosted by (white) Charles Kuralt and (Black) Hal Walker, the series is structured along the racial divide.¹⁸⁹ Walker had caught the attention of CBS news for his coverage of the DC insurrection following the assassination of Dr. King; he was the first news correspondent of color hired at CBS News.¹⁹⁰ Throughout *Portrait of Black America*, Walker clearly is positioned to speak to Black concerns while also maintaining a semblance of journalistic neutrality. The first half of the special features interviews with white citizens about their perceptions of Black life and the second half features interviews with Black citizens about their thoughts on white racism. The program begins by noting: "If you say race relations to white people they want to talk about riots; say race relations to most Black people and they want to talk about discrimination or white racism. There are two great fears haunting this nation, white people fear something they call Black extremism, Black

¹⁸⁹ It was Walker's award-winning coverage of race relations at WTOP-TV (now WUSA), CBS' Washington, D.C., affiliate that attracted network executives. Walker won a local Emmy and the Capitol Press Club's Journalist of the Year award for anchoring a WTOP Special Report, "A Dialogue with Whitey," about the Washington riots after the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The next month, Walker was hired by CBS News as a reporter in Washington; their first Black reporter. From Associated Press, "Hal Walker, 70; 1st Black Journalist at CBS News," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/nov/27/local/me-walker27>.

¹⁹⁰ The first Black reporter to appear on a network news program was Mal Goode, hired at ABC in 1962. CBS hired Ben Holman in 1962; he left the station in 1965 to take a media relations position with the US Justice Department. While Walker was not the first Black reporter, he was the first promoted to correspondent at the network. The first Black correspondent hired at NBC was Ben Teague in 1963.

people fear something they call white racism.” The program then proceeds to broadcast white citizens speaking candidly about their concerns about the lack of Black morality. They also voice fears regarding the future stability of their community as more Black citizens move into neighborhoods previously inhabited exclusively by white citizens. The majority of those interviewed and polled in this segment indicate that Black unemployment is the effect of Black laziness, dismissing Black charges of structural racism. Meanwhile, Kuralt reports on Black separatist advocates and Black nationalists, such as Stokely Carmichael, as voices of Black extremism. The program ends with an appeal to the majority of citizens who occupy a middle ground, advocating improvements to city schools, increased access to health care, and greater local government attention to the concerns of Black citizens. While demonstrating a range of citizen viewpoints, the show is still anchored by a moderate view that corresponds with white liberalism, and more accommodationist Black middle-class views aimed at Black integration into the governance of established civic life. It positions both Black demands for community control and Black Power and virulent white racism as two extreme and divisive political positions. Still, a significant contribution of this crisis management program, in comparison to many others of the genre previously mentioned, is that it gives the opportunity for Black citizens to speak at all. Prior to the Black-filmed crisis management media, Black voices and perspectives had been excluded from televised coverage of city news and public affairs discourse.

One such crisis management program that forecloses Black perspectives altogether is the NBC one-hour documentary special, *Summer '67: What We Learned*. It aired September 15, 1967 and told the story of racial violence in Detroit. Produced and directed by documentary broadcast journalist, Fred Freed, and featuring newsmen Frank McGee and Bill Matney, the

program sought to expose the conditions that led to Detroit's devastating civil disturbance.¹⁹¹

According to J. Fred MacDonald, the documentary featured images of Detroit that "resembled Germany in 1945," the documentary positioned the Detroit Rebellion as a microcosm of the racial conflict stirring in cities across the US.¹⁹² As host Frank McGee remarks:

Some of what you will see may make you angry. But if it does no more than make you angry, we will have failed in our purpose. If it does not expose you to the desperation that breeds the outrageous and lawless things being said and done by some Negroes, if it does not impress you with the absolute urgency of relieving that desperation, we will not have communicated what Black America is trying to tell White America. For we believe that the greatest single need in America today is for communication between Blacks and whites.

But there can be no communication between minds closed by anger.¹⁹³

Moving forward, *Summer of '67* sets out a warning signal for other cities about the calamitous effects of Black radicalism. Panning shots of unspecified empty streets replete with graffiti, burned out storefronts, and houses (many still aflame), are intercut with images of tanks and soldiers patrolling the vandalized thoroughfares. McGee remarks that Detroit is in the "worst crisis we've known since the Civil War and time is running short to try to find some answers to

¹⁹¹ Freed also produced such titles as "Khrushchev and Berlin" (1961), "The Death of Stalin" (1963), "Cuba: Bay of Pigs" (1964), "United States Foreign Policy" (1965), "Organized. Crime in the United States" (1966), "The J.F.K. Conspiracy: The Case of Jim Garrison" (1967), "'Ordeal of the American City: Cities Have No Limits" (1968), "Ordeal of the American City: The People Are the City" (1968), "Pollution Is a Matter of Choice" (1970), "Vietnam Hindsight" (1971), "The Blue-Collar Trap" (1972).

Freed, Fred, "Summer of '67: What We Learned," opt sd., col. with b&w sequences; 16 mm. kinescope. (NBC Television Network, September 15, 1967), Wayne State University Audiovisual Collection.

¹⁹² J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television Since 1948* (Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1992).

¹⁹³ Freed, Fred, "Summer of '67: What We Learned."

it. The belief is fading that answers can be found and we have lost the desire to search for them.” Attempting to find the answers, the program constructs a narrative whereby a city of industrial promise declines into racial warfare. First, McGee describes Detroit as an ideal city for Black residents, where white and Black citizens live harmoniously and there is “no discrimination on the factory floor.” Images of Black and white factory workers smiling alongside each other on the line, Black and white children playing in idyllic neighborhood settings, and school children singing peacefully emphasize the voice-over’s contention that unlike other urban centers, Detroit’s Black residents had a chance at the American dream. They could easily afford to own a home and a vehicle, as well as hold important posts in law enforcement, legislation, and manufacturing. According to McGee, “It has been said that Negroes don’t live better anywhere in America than in Detroit.”

The program recognizes the struggles faced by Southern Blacks seeking Civil Rights, incorporating documentary footage of Black and white activists, hand in hand, standing up to intolerance. However, the presentation of pacifist civil rights activists as “patient Negroes” shifts into riot coverage from Watts and Detroit. According to McGee, in Detroit “‘Burn, Baby Burn’ drowned out ‘We Shall Overcome.’” At this juncture, “Black extremists” seized control of the Civil Rights Movement. Demonizing Black Power as dangerous radicalism, *Summer of ‘67* indicates that if such ideologies are allowed to prosper, all of America will be placed on a collision course towards an irredeemable “final apocalyptic confrontation of Black and white.”

The program features sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Moynihan, touring the rubble to shed light on Detroit’s underlying pathologies. Echoing claims made in his 1965 study *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*, commonly known as the *Moynihan Report*, Moynihan stipulates that urban crisis stems from the collapse of familial

values in inner city Black communities.¹⁹⁴ Here, the program exposes the urban poverty that white Detroiters had otherwise been blind to, aligning these claims with a montage of Black families relegated to squalor.¹⁹⁵ These images are accompanied by Moynihan's voice over, foreclosing any differing perspectives—including those of the Black subjects on screen. The program recognizes that racism limits employment opportunities for young Black men, contributing to Black urban poverty. However, the emphasis of the sequence is placed on a failure of Black patriarchy. According to Moynihan, unemployment leads Black men to become criminals and abandon their families, leaving underpaid mothers unable to adequately care for children. Moynihan's narration argues that Black men can achieve manhood one of two ways: "through honest work or they could get it through violence and terrorism." Here as elsewhere, Moynihan drives a discursive shift away from the structural effects of segregation, economic disparity, and discrimination, and towards "individual issues such as culture, morality, and values."¹⁹⁶

Robin D.G. Kelley has discussed how social scientists and ethnographers, such as Moynihan, construct Black neighborhoods as a center for pathologies and unproductive cultural values. According to Kelley. "Much of this literature not only conflates behavior with culture, but when social scientists explore expressive cultural forms or what has been called popular

¹⁹⁴ Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965); Ginsburg, Carl, *Race and Media, The Enduring Life of the Moynihan Report* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1989); Douglas S. Massey and Robert J. Sampson, *The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades* (SAGE Publications, 2009). For more see: Ginsburg, Carl, *Race and Media, The Enduring Life of the Moynihan Report* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1989); Douglas S. Massey and Robert J. Sampson, *The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades* (SAGE Publications, 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.

¹⁹⁶ Massey and Sampson, *The Moynihan Report Revisited*, 9.

culture (such as language, music, and style), most reduce it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior or creative coping mechanisms to deal with racism and poverty...most of the literature ignores what these cultural forms mean for the practitioners.”¹⁹⁷ Social scientists project the objectives of those living in the “ghetto” as to merely survive or escape, rather than examining the cultural practices therein as a form of community, culture, and pride for practitioners. Social scientists in Detroit as elsewhere, explore sites of poverty as objects of study, problems to fix. While structural disadvantages for impoverished regions of Detroit are hard to ignore, this dissertation is interested in media strategies used to obfuscate Black city life as well as those that attempted (and often failed) to provide a voice to Black residents and visualize localized Black cultural practices from an insider perspective.

As S. Craig Watkins has put it, “news discourse is one of the primary means by which a society comes to know itself.”¹⁹⁸ Drawing from the work of Richard Campbell and Jimmie Reeves, Watkins approaches television as a “spectacle of surveillance that displays a range of cultural performances—all of which articulate visions of order by representing legitimate authority, reproducing common sense, and visualizing deviance.”¹⁹⁹ The news, as a mechanism of surveillance and social governance, has a particular influence on structures of race and race relations. “Part of the evolving role of the news media industry has been to determine what is most newsworthy about race, construct images and definitions of race, and pattern the range of potential connotations the idea of race produces.”²⁰⁰ Watkins argues that news media contributes significantly to the moral panic around Black male youth in the 80s, visualizing and defining

¹⁹⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Looking for the ‘Real’ Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (Psychology Press, 2004), 122.

¹⁹⁸ Watkins, *Representing*, 59.

¹⁹⁹ Watkins, *Representing*, 58.

²⁰⁰ Watkins, *Representing*, 59.

Black youth as social deviants connected to crime, drugs, and vandalism. Such pathologies have consequently informed social policies installed to restore social order and police the inner city “underclass.”²⁰¹ *Summer of '67* and other mainstream investigations of urban rioting in the late 1960s prefigure the urban context described by Watkins. They likewise use media to guide the development of social policies and civic practices aimed at mollifying Black rage and white concerns about its consequences for urban space. Programs like *The Cities, Of Black America*, and *Summer of '67* examine race relations in US urban centers and many even include interviews with Black Americans. Yet they do so within the confines of previously established series formats and by presenting information synthesized by established white hosts with a patronizing perspective on Black inner-city life.

Summer of '67, in particular, approaches Black participants in Detroit’s Rebellion as emblematic of a sociological disease; the rioters were deviant extremists suffering from a generalized loss of traditional patriarchal family values. The program then maligns the lots of the

²⁰¹ Watkins, *Representing*, 59. To elaborate on the idea of a Black “underclass,” in the *Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson argues that the migration of Black families out of the inner city into more affluent residential areas exacerbated the social isolation of disadvantaged Blacks and the concentration of poverty in the inner city. This process has resulted in the evacuation of community leaders, social institutions, and economic opportunity from the inner city. Consequently, these areas experienced a rise in crime rates, unemployment, single parent households and “unmarriageable” men, and the physical deterioration of urban space. As such, Blacks left living in the deleterious conditions of the inner city now comprise what Wilson calls an “underclass.” Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton, on the other hand, argue that the formulation of the underclass has less to do with the move of Black capital out of the ghetto, and more to do with the perpetuation of racist policies that deter Black mobility. Massey and Denton illuminate the crucial link between residential segregation and the asymmetry in the concentration of poverty for Blacks and whites. They posit that the perpetuation of racial segregation through employment, housing, and banking discrimination relegates poor African Americans to high poverty areas at high rates and by contrast, disperses poor whites to more affluent areas. As segregation concentrates Black poverty, it also concentrates Blacks in neighborhoods with higher crime rates and other social problems, further inhibiting Black social and residential mobility.

rest of Black America as hapless victims of a cruel fate. *Summer of '67* and other such programs did little to address *The Kerner Report's* call for increased diversity in the television industry and increased self-representation of Black citizens on television. As such, they alteritize Black city space, presenting Black Detroiters as mere ethnographic subjects to be analyzed as a means of combatting the calamitous destruction of public spaces and the further deprecation of civic life. Detroit, as the most dramatic exemplar of a broader American crisis, subsequently comes to stand in for the whole-scale collapse of familial values in Black communities everywhere. The lack of spatial detail erases the localism of the conflict in Black communities and displaces blame away from racism embedded in city infrastructure and civic policies. While the program highlights Detroit's post-riot destruction, it makes no mention of the history of institutional collusion in the structures of racism that perpetuate urban poverty. The program repeatedly uses long tracking shots of unspecified streets littered with debris and burned out buildings, and dilapidated homes in Black neighborhoods. Yet, the program does not address the fact that many Black families were forced into such housing conditions after freeway construction destroyed Black neighborhoods to facilitate suburbanization efforts.²⁰² Furthermore, as far as this program is concerned, there is little positive found in Black Detroit. Freed and Moynihan do not mention anything related to Black cultural production in the city nor the community rebuilding and activism developing in the wake of the violence. Essentially, the devastation of Detroit, the "arsenal of democracy," comes to represent the failure of urban integration and *Summer of 67'* disconnects Detroit's landscape from the lived reality of the Black citizens that inhabit its parameters.

²⁰² Todd C. Shaw, *Now Is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Duke University Press, 2009), 47.

In many ways, this footage stages an encounter with Black Detroit predicated upon the encounter with otherness found in classical ethnographic cinema of previous decades. Bill Nichols argues that ethnography represents a masculinist order symbolic of “male structures of experience and knowledge subsequently naturalized as universal.”²⁰³ Ethnographic film works to tame, control, and often eliminate the threat posed by the body of the Other. Placed in opposition with the normative, white, occidental (male) hero, the Other serves to reify the essential values of hegemonic patriarchal order and rarely is provided character depth or motivation beyond their dialogic relationship with the heroic protagonist/ethnographer. In this case, the white, male journalists employed by NBC tour the rubble as brave heroes trying to make sense of Detroit’s savage, frontier landscape. For social scientists like Moynihan, these spaces have deteriorated, both materially and culturally, as they lack the standard patriarchal values that help the nuclear, white American family thrive. While projecting the looming threat of further distress to industrial order, in these late 1960s documentaries, Detroit comes to signify what the rest of civilization has at stake to lose. Ultimately *Summer of '67* was applauded for its frank investigation of urban conditions, earning an Emmy Award for best television Documentary. Yet local media would soon respond to the Kerner report’s demands for Black representation, preempting Black-filmed crisis management media that explored causes for urban violence from local Black perspectives.

Local Media and Municipal Governance

Immediately following the Rebellion, WWJ-TV responded to demands for increased diversity in the media industry by hiring Jerry Blocker, a former radio reporter for WCHD-FM,

²⁰³ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 248.

making him the first African American anchorman in the city and WWJ the first station to actively recruit from the city's Black community. Other television stations followed suit, slowly incorporating Black representatives into daily news programming.²⁰⁴ However, these small gestures of appeasement did not satisfy broader demands to bridge the city's racial divide and correct media biases against Black citizens. At the same time, Black leaders in the city hoped to not only increase Black representation in broadcasting, but also produce their own media content about Black Detroit that offered uncensored Black perspectives on civic issues. In *Black Arts West*, Daniel Widener argues that local Black arts in Los Angeles served as a path towards "community, identity, and politics," strengthening bonds among citizens and giving community members a means of voicing their emplaced political perspectives.²⁰⁵ In line with Widener's description, the local film and television projects developed in post-Rebellion Detroit ideologically linked Black consciousness and community development with Black documentary perspectives as a means to articulate Black experiences and render Black critiques of the city's structural racism visible to viewers.

On July 27, 1968, Governor George Romney and Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh formed the NDC with aims to rebuild public relations in the city. Headed by Department Store owner Joseph L. Hudson, the committee assembled local business leaders and representatives of prominent civic organizations concerned about the possible effects of racial unrest on the local economy. Members included Henry Ford II; Walter Reuther, president of the UAW; Arthur L. Johnson, the superintendent of Detroit Public Schools; James Roche of General Motors; Walter Cisler of

²⁰⁴ The second Black reporter to appear on Detroit television was Bob Bennett, hired by WWJ-TV in 1968. Beverly Payne would become the first Black woman anchor, hired by WJBK-TV in 1975.

²⁰⁵ Widener, *Black Arts West*, 287.

Detroit Edison; and Max Fisher of Marathon Oil. In a move that many commentators called “riot insurance,” the NDC made strides to create a dialogue with Black community organizations, both militant and moderate.²⁰⁶ Of the Committee’s thirty-nine members, nine were Black, most of which represented established civil rights organizations in the city, like Robert Tindall, executive secretary of the NAACP and Lea Bivens of the Archdiocesan Opportunity Program [Figure 1.1].²⁰⁷ Three Black members, Rennie Freeman, Norvell Harrington, and Alvin Harrison of the Inner City Organizing Committee were selected to the Committee to represent Detroit’s more radical voter base. Lynn Townsend of Chrysler commented on the occasion of the first group meeting “We’d better make an extra effort [to bridge the racial divide]. Detroit is the test tube for America. If the concentrated power of industry and government can’t solve the problems of the ghetto here, God help our country.”²⁰⁸

J.L. Hudson saw the primary job of the NDC as “material reconstruction and building human relationships,” and viewed the latter as the more “urgent and delicate task.”²⁰⁹ For Hudson, the one thing the city learned from the Rebellion was “how little real listening” there had been of Detroit’s Black citizens, and he accordingly urged committee members to listen to and to try to understand “the long-unheard needs and frustrations of the inner-city inhabitants.”²¹⁰ Yet, listening primarily translated to “funding” projects and organizations that sought to improve

²⁰⁶ Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 322.

²⁰⁷ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (University of Illinois Press, 1995). Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*. For more on the New Detroit Committee see: Helen Mataya Graves, *New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated: A Case Study of an Urban Coalition, 1967-1972* (Wayne State University, 1975).

²⁰⁸ Thomas, “The Black Community Building Process in Post-Urban Disorder Detroit, 1967-1997” 215.

²⁰⁹ As quoted in: Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 439.

²¹⁰ Metropolitan Fund (Detroit Mich.) and New Detroit Committee, *Progress Report of the New Detroit Committee* (Metropolitan Fund, Inc., 1968), 25.

conditions in Black neighborhoods and increase communications between Black and white residents. For instance, grants were dispensed to local fire departments, public schools, and housing development agencies that hoped to re-build spaces destroyed by rioting. Significant portions of funds were also distributed to moderate economic organizations aimed at integrating Black businesspersons to the city's capitalist landscape.

While economically, funds from NDC favored Black moderate organizations, this is not to say they altogether ignored Black radical groups. In fact, members of the NDC made it a priority to make sure the voices of Black radicals were not placed at odds with the Committee. Essentially, core NDC leaders wanted to mollify Black radicals and stop them from agitating within the community. Thus, their perspectives were included in NDC meetings, funding practices, and media documents. According to Heather Ann Thompson, New Detroit assumed “that if average poor and working-class African Americans believed that tangible progress was being made by city leaders, they would ultimately reject Black Nationalism...If Black faith could be restored, peace would return and liberal leadership would be secure.”²¹¹ For example, they made a \$50,000 contribution to the ultra-militant Frank Ditto and his East Side Voice for Independent Detroit, which, among other things, trained what he called “ghetto youths” in politics and operated a community youth patrol.²¹² A New Detroit spokesman described Ditto as

²¹¹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 77.

²¹² After serving as an organizer in Chicago and elsewhere, Ditto had come to Detroit at the beginning of the Rebellion at the invitation of the Churches on the East Side for Social Action to serve as what Sidney Fine calls "a catalyst" for their “ghetto activities.” He was soon calling for "revolution against 'white tyranny' by violent, bloody, or whatever means necessary to 'overthrow the system.'" Ultimately, THE NDC made Ditto a trustee. In that role, Ditto, who reputedly became New Detroit's "brightest star," received about \$250,000 in grants from the organization. Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 380.

"a damn controversial guy who scares the hell out of some people."²¹³ He was, however, deemed a "useful" person to have working on the side of the NDC. "They know if there aren't some crumbs on the table," Ditto argued, the militants "might burn down some shit."²¹⁴ The Federation for Self Determination led by Albert Cleage also received \$100,000—which they ultimately returned in 1968 as a gesture of Black autonomy and to make a statement that Black community control was necessary to Detroit's future.²¹⁵ Interviews Helen M. Graves conducted in 1972-73 indicated that there was "an overwhelming consensus" among New Detroit trustees at that time, excluding "senior Black Establishment members," that a militant presence in New Detroit was "crucial to peacemaking," helped educate the white establishment, and made it "easier" for the moderates to operate by contrast.²¹⁶

Like the NDC's approach to Ditto, the media projects they funded on the surface engaged with Black radical thought, yet primarily as a strategy of appeasement. As I will soon discuss in greater depth, a principal objective of the NDC was to produce media that illuminated the crisis in local Black communities, acclimate white viewers to seeing a version of Black life on the screen, and thereby work towards a coalition reconstruction of civic space. The undergirding assumption was that if the demands for better infrastructure for Black Detroit were met, and local media projects showcased as much, local government and business leaders would have an easier time maintaining order among the city's residents and radicals. In this way, the New Detroit

²¹³ Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 380.

²¹⁴ Graves, *New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated*, 25.

²¹⁵ Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 295.

²¹⁶ Ditto resigned from the New Detroit board in December 1974, charging that "vicious back stabbing, murderous madness, hypocrisy and corruption" were rampant in the organization." Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 380.

Committee conceptualized local documentary as an interlocutor of public relations and crisis management.

Of course, this strategy was not necessarily new, but merely a continuation of long-standing practices of using media to enact corporate governance, a practice particularly resonant with Detroit-based manufacturing organizations. According to Anna McCarthy, corporate sponsors have always used television to acclimate viewers to big business and promulgate the ideals that should be in every citizen's mind. Institutional advertising of this kind presented itself as a form of civic education, and its audience research was, inevitably, "also an occasion for people to define their relationships to public policies, to corporations, to evolving language of citizenship and governance, and to mass culture in general."²¹⁷ McCarthy's work operates in tandem with the contributions of scholars like Roland Marchand, William Bird, and Barbara Savage to show how corporations, unions, social reformers, educational institutions and policy groups approached moving images as a means to regulate social behavior, racial attitudes, economic beliefs, and the tenants of American citizenship.²¹⁸ Before the advent of television, film too had been conceptualized as an ideal form of social governance. Corporations and civic institutions invested in media to endorse a model of effective citizenship in industrialized, consumer-driver modernity. Detroit, as a nexus of American industry, had a particularly significant history of employing institutional media as a means of social reform and research. The major Detroit manufacturers (Ford, Chrysler, GM) all used media to document industrial

²¹⁷ Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine*, 35.

²¹⁸ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (University of California Press, 1998); William L. Bird, "Better Living": *Advertising, Media and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955* (Northwestern University Press, 1999); Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (UNC Press Books, 1999).

operations, model social practice, and create feedback for the organization, thus facilitating effective operations and corporate sales.²¹⁹ In this sense, media had always functioned in the city as a primary focal point among many sponsored endeavors mitigating communication between corporate entities and the consuming and working populace.

While scholars of sponsored media have seldom examined the role played by communities of color in the production of useful or industrial cinemas, I contend that these Post-Rebellion documentary and TV forums likewise were funded as extensions of this long-established praxis for promulgating corporate power while still working to improve community relations and serve the progressive interests of the local populous. In line with this practice, the NDC helped local business leaders continue to maintain political power over city development even as their primary business headquarters were moving towards suburban facilities.²²⁰ Thus, the activities of the NDC, including the media they sponsored, gave corporate figureheads a direct line to the working-class that much of their low-level factory labor and consumer practices still depended upon.

The NDC further hoped that improving local media infrastructure and increasing channels of communication between city government and citizens would help solidify the coalition governance in Detroit that mixed big business with political leadership. Anxious about

²¹⁹ Grieveson, Lee, “The Work of Film in the Age of Fordist Mechanization,” *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 25–51. Rick Prelinger, “Jam Handy and His Organization,” in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (Oxford University Press, 2012), 338–55. Also See: Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

²²⁰ John Barnard, *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935-1970* (Wayne State University Press, 2005), 295–96. Between 1947 and 1955, “The Big Three” auto firms built twenty new parts and assembly plants, all of which were in suburban facilities. During 1950-1957, 163 Detroit automotive factories left the city for the suburbs.

negative media attention, in March of 1968 Cavanagh pushed the NDC to set up a hotline and rumor control center designed to provide close contact between the city government and the news media in the event of an emergency. The NDC further assembled a specialized Communications Subcommittee to evaluate the role of media in rebuilding Detroit and designate ways local broadcasting could be best utilized to dispels the “myths of racism and the fears and hostilities that they perpetuate.”²²¹ A significant concern for the Subcommittee was strategizing how to effectively “attack the problem of achieving greater visibility for Negroes as participants in the normal mainstream activities of American life, publicizing their achievements, and promoting greater visibility across advertising, newspapers, and audiovisual media.”²²²

The Subcommittee also decided to use the public image of prominent NDC members to speak as advocates for urban renewal processes. Members were prompted to appear in radio, television, and advertising spots “as reporters on the facts and figures of urban problems,” speaking toward the “development of job locator programs, in which city residents would be systematically apprised of employment, training and related opportunities; stay-in-school campaigns, and adult education activities.”²²³ According to NDC press releases, the “intent is to offer the good offices of the New Detroit Committee as a vehicle to assist in harnessing the full capabilities of mass communications media in a new thoughtful, innovative, and rewarding

²²¹ Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee, “Communications Aims and Priorities of New Detroit,” 1968, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 16, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives, Wayne State University Library, Detroit, MI.

²²² Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee, “Communications Aims and Priorities of New Detroit,” 1968, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 16, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

²²³ Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee Task Force, “Meeting Agenda,” October 24, 1967, 4, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 16, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

effort, that will benefit all people within the reach of the Council's voice in words and pictures."²²⁴ In addition to speaking engagements and participation in neighborhood information centers, New Detroit members were asked to "educate people to stop the dangerous alienation of many ghetto people."²²⁵ Accordingly, the Subcommittee urged the mass media to promote a more sensitive and "self-critical awareness of their impact upon human rights," which necessarily involves "giving greater visibility to Negroes as participants in the every-day fabric of American life."²²⁶

Following the precedent set by the Kerner Commission, the New Detroit Committee sponsored a series of studies on the causes and effects of local unrest. Of particular interest, the Committee found that television's elision of Black Detroit served as both a catalyst for the "riots" and led to the problematic coverage during it. The preliminary findings of the Communication Subcommittee of New Detroit indicate "a lack of/or breakdown in communication and understanding" between the following: Negroes and white, youth and their parents, Affluent and the poor, elected officials and their constituent, police and citizens; especially Negroes, news media and the general public"²²⁷

Accordingly, the report argued that "this apparent breakdown in communication between these groups" has led to:

²²⁴ Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee. "Task Force," 4.

²²⁵ Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee, "Communications Aims and Priorities of New Detroit," 1.

²²⁶ Communications Subcommittee of New Detroit Committee, "Communications Aims and Priorities of New Detroit," 2.

²²⁷ Maddox, Gilbert A., "Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit" (Wayne State University Center for Adult Education, 1968), 5, Accession 660, box 192, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

A belief on the part of Negroes that whites and the power establishments are not seriously attempting to resolve the problems of the city; the inability of whites to understand the urgency of the Negro community in its strivings for self-determination, especially as this aspiration is expressed in terms of Black nationalism; A belief on the part of Negro citizens that the judgments of the news media fail to give accurate and fair coverage of racial issues; the inability of social service institutions to adequately convey to needy persons the resources they possess, as well as the limitations of their services.²²⁸

The committee felt that, if reform measures were taken, television could serve as a platform to assuage the plight of Black Detroiters and ameliorate racial tensions in the city.

In a letter from to the NDC in August of 1967, Fenton Ludke, a writer for the Detroit-based Campbell Ewald Marketing Agency, suggests that the NDC should demand local television stations to produce compulsory documentary segments on urban renewal efforts. He suggests, “Each channel will tackle a separate issue, like housing, jobs, and training “Negros,” and improve education for Negroes.”²²⁹ He also proposes a series of documentaries prepared and sponsored by the people of Detroit to “send a message to our city, the nation” about the birth of a “New Detroit.” While this precise form of programing was not designed, the Subcommittee took seriously Fenke’s suggestion and developed a compulsory television special about the NDC’s new initiatives to “heal the still open wounds inflicted as the result of racism, poverty, and despair.”²³⁰ The New Detroit Committee’s “Progress Report” was broadcast on Thursday, April

²²⁸ Maddox, “Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit,” 4.

²²⁹ Ludtke, Fenton, “Letter from Fenton Ludtke of Campbell Ewald to the New Detroit Committee,” August 22, 1967, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 16, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

²³⁰ Mich.) and Committee, *Progress Report of the New Detroit Committee*.

18th, 1968 in primetime on all five local Detroit stations, co-sponsored by Wildings, Inc., the Jam Handy Company, and the New Detroit Committee.²³¹ The program documents “action the committee has taken in employing the inner city hardcore unemployables, housing education and recreation.”²³² Hosted by William Sheehan, the program drew on film clips to show the breaking of ground for a new housing project, a skill center for the training of mechanics, electricians and plumbers, and the establishment of hiring centers in inner city areas by Ford, Chrysler, and GM. Another clip shows GM chairman Roche describing changes made in hiring practices to include those previously considered “unemployable.” In a filmed address, Hudson claims the NDC’s goal is to “inspire and to motivate all citizens to change their racial attitudes and to challenge private and public agencies to take effective action.”²³³ Hudson thinks a “massive attitudinal change” is necessary among four million Metro Detroiters before such transformations can be made. Kent Mathewson of the Metropolitan Fund further states during the program: “inner city problems will be solved in suburbia where the money and the know-how are.”²³⁴ As such, the NDC hoped their media address would enact social change in Detroit for Black residents and ideological change within a white-flight populous.

Moving forward, the New Detroit Committee began to finance the development of several media projects that put a semblance of creative control in the hands of Black Detroiters to further the attitudinal shift among suburban viewers. In these projects, Blacker Detroiters

²³¹ Co-produced by Wildings, Inc., Jam Handy Agency, and the New Detroit Committee, it was Broadcast on WJNK-TV at 5:30PM, WKBD-TV at 8:30 PM, WXYZ-TV at 9PM, WWJ-TV at 9:30 PM, and CKLW-TV 10:30PM. “Detroit’s 5 TV Stations Team Up for ‘Progress Report on ‘67 Riots,’” *Variety*, April 24, 1968.

²³² “TV Coincidental Study of the New Detroit Committee Report,” 1968, Box 6, Folder 7, Colored People’s Time 1969-1970, University Center for Adult Education Archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

²³³ “Detroit’s 5 TV Stations Team Up for ‘Progress Report on ‘67 Riots.’”

²³⁴ “Detroit’s 5 TV Stations Team Up for ‘Progress Report on ‘67 Riots.’”

challenged the image of Detroit produced by “riot” coverage and crisis management strategies of law and order, shifting the conversation towards a critique of structural racism. Yet, it is still important to note that the Black citizens given the opportunity to make media in this period were still answerable to white corporate leadership centered within the NDC and operated within the economic and political framework designed by the NDC for broadcasting crisis management.

In Your Interest

The first major media endeavor the NDC funded was *In Your Interest*. Developed by the Southeastern Michigan Community Forum in the spring of 1968, *In Your Interest* was designed to address racial tension and serve as a research mechanism for gathering information on post-Rebellion racial sentiments in both the city and the surrounding suburbs. Sponsored primarily by the Interfaith Action Council of Detroit, New Detroit committed \$53,590 to produce the five-program, television series set to correspond with group discussions.²³⁵ Each thirty-minute episode combined voice-over narration, on-location interviews, and documentary footage. The Michigan Community Forum and the Interfaith Action Council organized focus groups of 6-8 people, supervised by a trained discussion leader and provided each with a discussion guide that included an extensive questionnaire aimed to measure viewer attitudes to each episode. The funding proposal submitted to the NDC articulates that the program’s primary objective was to “counteract the uncertainties and fear in the community; to convince citizens that there are

²³⁵ Graves, *New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated*.

alternatives to continuing racial conflict.²³⁶

The proposal and correlative discussion documents for *In Your Interest* specifically emphasize the need to implement the recommendations put forth by the Kerner Commission, educating white residents and increasing diversity in media production. Dubbing *In Your Interest* a “tele-talk-action series,” topics to be covered included police brutality, unemployment, housing conditions, self-determination, immigration, urbanization, the welfare state, and the rise of Black Power.²³⁷ Through the series and correlative discussion, the producers aimed to unpack the following questions: “what does racism mean? Is each white man guilty? What is institutional racism? How did it develop? What are examples of institutional racism? What are its effects on Whites and Negroes?”²³⁸ The NDC funders of *In Your Interest* anticipated that the exploration of such questions would help identify enduring causes of urban unrest and produce solutions that could be enacted within the contemporaneous governmental framework.

Of course, televising interracial dialogs on social issues had precedents in the first half of the century with the intergroup relations movement. As Anna McCarthy has discussed, film and television had long been considered (interrelated) tools of civic pedagogy. In the 1950s, programs like *Free Assembly* and *Soap Box* invited citizens to participate in panel presentations, small group discussions moderated by experts, and re-enactments of socio-political issues of civic importance. Shows like this “worked at the grassroots level to effect changes in conduct and attitude within particular localities—and potentially to build a more democratic polity form

²³⁶ “Proposal for a Metropolitan Detroit Community Forum,” June 1968, Accession 660, Box 155, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²³⁷ “Think For Yourself, Community Forum Guideline Booklet,” June 24, 1968, Accession 660, Box 154, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²³⁸ “Proposal for a Metropolitan Detroit Community Forum.” 2.

the ground up.”²³⁹ According to McCarthy, producers hoped that “if Blacks and whites engaged in constructive and frank dialogue, airing their hopes and fears about desegregation in a supportive and controlled context, they might better work together to identify and resolve problems that arise in the integration process.”²⁴⁰ The NDC was trying to implement a similar integrationist media strategy, also conceiving of televised content as educational texts that would have afterlives in other civic contexts.²⁴¹ However, *In Your Interest*’s investment in Black creative control marked a divergence from earlier models of public relations programming. *In Your Interest*, did endeavor to generate audience empathy for Black Detroiters. Yet the series was less invested in producing a dialogue across racial lines and more in building an informative portrait of Black Detroit for white viewers to digest. It was simultaneously anticipated that Black viewers would tune in watch moderate citizens of color vocalize their experiences of city life.

The program further drew some of its objectives and source material from a previous televised forum written and moderated by Tony Brown, a prominent journalist who would go on to host *In Your Interest*, CPT on WTVS-TV in the fall of 1968, and the nationally televised *Black Journal* in 1970.²⁴² *For Whites Only*, was a three-part television project sponsored by Tartar 100 Production, a Wayne State University Student organization. Broadcast by WTVS-TV in March 1968 on consecutive Sunday Nights at 10:30 PM, *For Whites Only* sought to answer:

²³⁹ McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine*, 91.

²⁴⁰ Marsha Orgeron, “‘A Decent and Orderly Society’: Race Relations in Riot-Era Educational Films, 1966-1970,” in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (Oxford University Press, 2012), 397. Marsha Orgeron has likewise discussed how fictionalized films on urban crisis were produced to as educational tools for controlling the “potentially disruptive behavior in the name of a healthier and less volatile American body politic.” Orgeron, “A Decent and Orderly Society,” 412.

²⁴¹ Televised dialogs were shot on 16mm film and later used for screenings in schools and other community forums.

²⁴² Brown and *Black Journal* will be discussed in greater length in Chapter two.

“Do most Black people identify with Black Power? Is being called Black more acceptable than Negro? Do Black people want to integrate into what the Kerner Commission calls a "racist" society?”²⁴³ The first program directly dealt with the aftermath of the Rebellion, while the second and third programs highlighted important figures in African American history and the works of artists that best articulated Black consciousness (Langston Highs, Oscar Brown etc.).²⁴⁴ *For Whites Only*, perhaps because of its status as a campus-produced local program, received no corporate sponsorship and registered little attention among viewing audiences. Thus, it was hoped that with NDC backing and a primetime broadcast slot, *In Your Interest* would be better equipped to educate white viewers on the reality of Rebellion and Black life in the city.

The resulting TV series was produced by (white) Arthur Alpert on loan from the Public Broadcasting Laboratory and co-produced by Brown.²⁴⁵ While station management involved in the project were predominantly white, the Southeastern Michigan Community Forum hired Brown (who I will discuss greater depth in Chapter Two) as well as a Black cinematographer and crew to ensure that a “Black perspective” would come across in the final product. Premiering on May 20, 1968, the first program attempted to “combat the overwhelming purchase of weapons in the suburbs, and to relieve tensions by discussing frankly the climate of fear that

²⁴³ Maddox, “Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit,” 60.

²⁴⁴ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 88.

²⁴⁵ Tony Brown hosted both *Colored People's Time* and another community-oriented program designed for Detroit's Black residents, *Free Play*, until 1970 when Brown left Detroit for New York to host and serve as executive producer for the nationally broadcast *Black Journal*. In 1977, Brown negotiated with Pepsi to rebrand the program *Tony Brown's Journal*. Still airing on PBS, *Tony Brown's Journal* is the longest running public affairs program in US television history. Also a radio host and author, Brown's politics have notably shifted towards conservatism over the course of the last several decades. Today's iteration of *Black Journal* bares little similarity to the radical Black Power politics Brown advocated in the late 1960s.

persisted.”²⁴⁶ The second show “exposed certain common myths about Black people and about society.” It concluded with a critical analysis of the mass media’s handling of the news, using the reports of recent police treatment of the Poor People’s Campaign at Cobo Hall as an illustration of such broadcast negligence.”²⁴⁷ This program culminated in a "quiz" on *The Kerner Report* in an attempt to "show that people don't know nearly as much about the report as they think they do.”²⁴⁸

According to reports in the *Michigan Chronicle* and *The New York Times*, approximately 80-100,000 Detroiters were mobilized into discussion groups.²⁴⁹ Through the advocacy of the Interfaith Action Council, over 1200 Jewish Synagogues, Protestant and Catholic Churches, and other community organizations in the Metro Detroit region invited members to participate in intergroup discussions.²⁵⁰ A corresponding booklet entitled “Racism! Rebellion! Renewal! What’s it all about? What Can You Do About It? A Prime Time Television Series on Urban Crises” was distributed to organizations invited to host discussion groups. This booklet provided discussion questions on the program, as well as literary and film resources on race and Black history. It also suggested ways local, primarily white, Detroiters could help improve conditions

²⁴⁶ “Proposal for a Metropolitan Detroit Community Forum,” June 1968, Accession 660, Box 155, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²⁴⁷ Loer, Bishop Dwight E., “Record of Statement Given at a Press Conference on the ‘Cancellation of In Your Interest,’” June 10, 1968, Accession 267, Box 96, Folder 24, Detroit Communications on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Series Part 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²⁴⁸ Quoted In: Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 57.

²⁴⁹ Gordon, Lou, “Transcript of Interview with Lou Gordon on WKBD-TV”, June 16, 1968, Accession 660, Box 155, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in: Tait, Alice, “Ethnic Voices: Ethnocentric Public Affairs Television Programming,” 275.

in the city.²⁵¹ Suggestions include: join a civic organization, “ask your bank to have Negroes have access to loans,” send letters to congress and city officials, contact your community about open housing laws, attend community meetings, subscribe to Black publications, volunteer for a community service project, encourage your school district to hire teachers of all races, and distribute background material on race relations at community meetings.²⁵² Other questions asked participants to explain their understanding of the riot’s origins and effects, all the while thinking critically about their personal relationship to *In Your Interest*. Examples of questions include:

Did you attend the screening of the program out of fear?
 Did you read the *Kerner Report*?
 Did you buy a gun?
 Are you responsible for the ghetto?
 Are you responsible for education?
 Do you think real estate should discriminate?
 Should the American system adjust to encourage greater participation of minorities?
 Is the demand for Black Power a threat to white institutions?
 Do you see any connections between the lack of dignity protested by Blacks today and the lack of dignity protested by the American revolutionaries of 1776?
 Do you think majority of Black people are good?
 Do you believe that the majority of white people are good?
 What does Black Power signify to you?
 Do you think Black Power is necessary for the resolution of urban problems?
 Is poverty or race the greatest obstacle to power?²⁵³

Responses to these loaded questions were processed by graduate students at Wayne State

²⁵¹ “Racism! Rebellion! Renewal! What’s It All about? What Can You Do About It? A Prime Time Television Series on Urban Crises. Community Forum Guideline Booklet for Episode 3.” (Michigan Community Forum, June 24, 1968), Accession 660, Box 155, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²⁵² “Racism! Rebellion! Renewal! What’s It All about? What Can You Do About It? A Prime Time Television Series on Urban Crises. Community Forum Guideline Booklet for Episode 3.”

²⁵³ “Racism! Rebellion! Renewal! What’s It All about? What Can You Do About It? A Prime Time Television Series on Urban Crises. Community Forum Guideline Booklet for Episode 3.,” unpaginated.

University and presented to The New Detroit Committee, who used the findings as an assessment of community service needs and as a means to identify sources of future community support.²⁵⁴ Unlike the polling feedback cumulated into *Portrait of Black America*, which was used to produce a candid portrait of American sentiments, the purpose of the questionnaire provided to *In Your Interest* participants was to change white minds towards a broader process of acceptance and integration. Furthermore, unlike *Summer of '67*, the program does not question whether or not institutional racism precipitated the violence in July; it accepted that as fact. Rather, the discussions encourage white citizens to articulate their complicity in structures of racism and accept their responsibility in perpetuating Black oppression. In this way, I contend that (televised) documentaries sponsored by the NDC like *In Your Interest* serve as forms of social governance, attaching importance to Black perspectives, yet only within controlled local contexts. The series recognizes the hindrances of structural racism for Black progress. To correct this process, the series thus, offers images of non-threatening, respectable Black middle-class subjects to counter stereotypes of the violent Black male seen in news footage. The series sought to demonstrate that by modeling appropriate forms of assimilation via polite television dialog will be mirrored by group conversations of white powerbrokers that may subsequently enable tempered Black entry into white-controlled systems of education, employment, and housing. Setting an example through documentary would subsequently catalyze further polite conversations in other community contexts and improve compassion and comprehension across racial lines. In other words, Black media would manage the crisis of pervasive racist misconceptions in white communities.

²⁵⁴ "Questionnaire Response Report," n.d., Accession 660, Box 155, Folder 32: Community TV Forum, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

Marsha Orgeron has argued that fictionalized educational films on race relations and urban rioting functioned to alter race interactions and perceptions, particularly among young, Black audiences. These films were constructed as educational tools for controlling the “potentially disruptive behavior in the name of a healthier and less volatile American body politic.”²⁵⁵ They approached urban schools as a staging ground for political intervention, aimed at both American educators and a primarily Black urban audience. The interactive structure of Detroit’s *In Your Interest* was likewise designed to allow policymakers and religious institutions to articulate municipal concerns to a broad range of citizens, first in community discussion groups and subsequently in classroom settings. Yet, in contrast to the race relation films discussed by Orgeron, they were also structured to gather intel on post-“riot” community sentiments among white adults—a key component of crisis management procedures. The programs and correlative discussion topics primarily hoped to force white Detroiters to confront their own racist impulses and respond to them in an open forum. Martin Gilens points out that media content has been shown to “affect the importance viewers attach to different political issues, their standards for making political evaluations, their beliefs about the causes of national problems, their positions on political issues, and their perceptions of political candidates.”²⁵⁶ In this way, *In Your Interest* emphasizes the import of community initiatives involving education, job placement, and housing development and asks viewers to consider their own positioning in relation to ideological, economic, and spatial oppression as well as to the forms of civic power that maintain racist hierarchies as an important step in the urban renewal process. The discussion booklet for series five specifically told viewers “if we are to change society into a more openly

²⁵⁵Orgeron, ““A Decent and Orderly Society,” 426.

²⁵⁶Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) 134.

human one in which the American dream can be fulfilled, then each person—Black and white—must work in the communities in which he exists to change the community.”²⁵⁷ In other words, I argue it worked towards changing racism within exclusionary white neighborhoods and strengthen community therein, as a means to deter onset white flight and thereby improve overall living conditions in the city, including Black neighborhoods.

The feedback reports for *In Your Interest* discussion groups further requested the participant’s age, race, gender, occupation, and education level and their overall opinion of the show’s content and quality. Results showed that over half of discussion group participants were middle-class white women, with at least high school, if not also college, educations. This is not particularly surprising, as middle-class women had long been active in Detroit’s community reform movements. Likewise, it is no surprise that the Interfaith Action Council and its affiliated religious institutions administered screenings of *In Your Interest* and correlative intragroup discussions. Several concerned local church leaders created the Council in 1967 during the Rebellion with the express purpose of facilitating riot assistance initiatives. While rioting was still underway, they set up a crisis hotline, collected relief supplies for victims, and counseled those in need. After July 1967, the organization supplied loans and job training to minority students and need-based applicants. Yet, the ad-hoc council was merely one religious collective among many in Detroit contributing financial, spiritual, or ideological guidance to citizens.

As Angela Dillard has pointed, out, “religion has been a crucial factor in the cultures of opposition that make collective action possible.”²⁵⁸ The civil rights movement relied heavily upon religious institutions as vital catalysts of sociopolitical mobilization. Religious institutions

²⁵⁷ “Racism! Rebellion! Renewal! What’s It All about? What Can You Do About It? A Prime Time Television Series on Urban Crises. Community Forum Guideline Booklet for Episode 3.”

²⁵⁸ Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 11.

provided a network of sympathetic leadership and local churches operated as convenient spaces for activists to meet. Nearly all the progressive organizations in Detroit's history had some religious dimensions or at least a degree of religious inflection. This was especially true of Black activist movements, which often relied upon religious institutions as galvanizing forces, as well as physical headquarters, for forging political agendas in Black neighborhoods. Black churches have also played a seminal role in supporting Black community development and fostering civil rights and social justice protest. After all, the city was the birthplace of the Nation of Islam and Black Christian Nationalism, two theological schools that integrally linked a Black Nationalist agenda with religious practice as the key towards socio-economic autonomy for communities of color. Additionally, previous integrationist calls for broadcasting interracial dialogues were spearheaded by religious organizations. For instance, groups like the National Conference of Christians and Jews turned both to television and to 16mm film in their search for a method of outreach that might touch the largest number of people, providing citizens with tutelary texts that would help them talk about integration in their own neighborhoods.²⁵⁹ While the NDC is the most widely discussed form of post-Rebellion crisis management, Black community organizations and religious groups likewise had a critical investment in non-violent coalition building and strategizing crisis management that would move beyond structures of white law and order. In this context, the Interfaith Action Council led the charge in facilitating collaborations between civic leaders, religious institutions, and media producers in Detroit—often in tandem with the NDC.

While in 1968, crisis management media were of prime import to the New Detroit Committee; they were however, still only a tenuous priority for commercial broadcasters. Before

²⁵⁹ Orgeron et al., "Screen Culture and Group Discussion in Post War Race Relations," 398.

the third episode was to air On June 10, WWJ-TV decided to bump the program from its initially scheduled primetime slot and instead air a special on *The Monkees*. Mr. James Schiavonne, Manager of WWJ-TV, announced the program would no longer be carried on Monday nights because it was not of “prime time quality.”²⁶⁰ After tense negotiations, the station relented to air the program either Saturday at 5:00 PM or Sunday at 3:30 PM. Producers reached out to local educational television station, Channel 56 WTVS, which offered to show the remaining episodes in primetime slots on June 17 and 24. The accommodation provided by WTVS opened up a dialog between the station and Black Detroit media-makers/activists that would catalyze the production of subsequent Black programming like *CPT* (1968) and *Free Play* (1970). In a special post to *The New York Times* on the network cancellation of *In Your Interest*, Anthony Ripley calls this this decision a means to “shift the program to “ghetto times” where problems are isolated and ignored.”²⁶¹ While many civic organizations and local corporations saw television as a means to manage the urban crisis, for TV producers the financial rewards of mass entertainment still superseded the local use of television for public outreach. Thus, Ripley literalizes the connection between the corporate disinvestment in the inner city that would ultimately occur and television’s long-standing disinterest in Black television programming.

In many respects, *In Your Interest* demonstrates how television, in addition to its entertainment and commercial function, was utilized to transmit informational content and operate as a localized community organizing apparatus. In Detroit, this entailed showcasing Black voices as a means to deconstruct the mechanisms of urban racism and build coalitions that

²⁶⁰ Ripley, Anthony, “TV Station Drops a Series in Race,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 1968, Accession 267, Box 96, Folder 34, Detroit Communications on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection Series Part 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

²⁶¹ Ripley, “TV Station Drops a Series in Race.”

could work towards the effective integration of Detroit housing and business spaces.

However, as Ripley points out, the convergence of the Black public sphere and white media infrastructure was not easily managed. WWJ-TV claimed the series was cancelled due to poor production values and it failed to give a balanced view of all sides of issues, “thus violating the fairness doctrine.”²⁶² Meanwhile, Gilbert Maddox (a *CPT* producer also discussed at length in Chapter Two) attributes the cancellation to racial tension on set. *In Your Interest* hired a Black crew instead of regular station personnel and the show’s content was perhaps “too controversial for station management.”²⁶³ Feedback reports processed by WSU indicate most viewers believed the presentation of content was “from good to excellent.”²⁶⁴ *The Michigan Chronicle* likewise noted that, “Detroit observers active in the civil rights movement have called the series “to point’ and timely.”²⁶⁵ Ultimately, it came down to a divergence in opinion between program staff and station management. In an Interview with Lou Gordon on WKBD-TV, Reverend Arle Porter, a participant in the project, approached the cancellation as such: “television stations determine what is in the public interest. And as you know the FCC is not terribly powerful. So it seems to me that the real issue is not Channel 4. They saw the public interest one way and we see it another way.”²⁶⁶

As Gilbert Maddox notes, “the program was serving its purpose in that it was opening up channels of communication and people were discussing subjects that they previously

²⁶² Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 57.

²⁶³ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 57.

²⁶⁴ “Questionnaire Response Report.”

²⁶⁵ Referenced in: Loer, Bishop Dwight E., “Record of Statement Given at a Press Conference on the ‘Cancellation of In Your Interest.’”

²⁶⁶ Porter, Arle, “Transcript of Interview with Lou Gordon on WKBD-TV.”

attempted to dodge.”²⁶⁷ Arle Porter corroborated Maddox’s position, commenting, “One of our general purposes in this series was to bring the problems of our community out into the open where people could participate in expressing a multitude of views, be together in dialogue, and hopefully come to some sort of place where they could act for the benefit of the whole community.”²⁶⁸ Along these lines, I argue that the program, despite cancellation, successfully models a discursive shift from a social examination of Black criminality and social disintegration, towards a critique of white racism. As social scientists descended upon Detroit to make sense of the city’s economic collapse and social conflicts, *In Your Interest*, utilized NDC funds to call attention to the mechanisms of white racism and give Black citizens a point of entry into media production, opening a space for them to revise the dominant narrative of July 1967 and re-develop the image of (Black) Detroit.

The Black Eye

The second project sponsored by the New Detroit committee was *The Black Eye* (1968), a thirty-five minute film to be freely distributed to Detroit community organizations and incorporated into the New Detroit Committee’s Speaker Bureau Series. Written by Laura Mosley of the United Foundation with production by Charles J. Dorkins Associates and additional filming services by Video Productions Detroit, the film strove to provide audiences with a “full range of viewpoints within the Negro Community” and “better bridge the gap between White and Black Communities.”²⁶⁹ Filmed for a release on the one-year anniversary of the 1967

²⁶⁷ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 58.

²⁶⁸ Porter, “Transcript of Interview with Lou Gordon on WKBD-TV.”

²⁶⁹ “Black Eye Preview,” July 1968, Accession 660, Box 134, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

Rebellion, *The Black Eye* was designed to present white viewers with glimpses of life in Black Detroit, from residential streets in Black neighborhoods to the storefronts of Black businesses, to catalyze community conversations on the future of race relations in the city. Upon completion of the *Black Eye*, the NDC trained a staff of volunteer speakers, many of whom appeared in the film, to bring the film to local community meetings and suburban organizations. The film was screened at a variety of local institutions—such as Dondero High School and Blain Memorial Hospital—and followed by community discussions.²⁷⁰ Audience members were requested to fill out feedback forms and offer further research responses for the New Detroit Committee. Similar to *In Your Interest*, these group discussions aimed to ameliorate white anxiety about Black people. Yet, *The Black Eye* strove to do so by demonstrating how Black Detroiters encountered everyday life in urban space.

To ensure this “Black perspective” would come across, the NDC hired an all Black crew for the project and ceded creative control primarily to them. While the CJ Dorkins production team hailed from New York, additional local Black crewmembers were hired to help the filmmakers gain access to local Black space. Much of the crew selection had to do with access; as previously discussed in relation to “riot coverage,” white reporters and filmmakers knew little of life in Black Detroit, (both spatially and socially). There was an on-going assumption that Black crewmembers had mobility in the Black community and could speak to residents there in ways whites could not. However, discussions surrounding the production of *The Black Eye* also illustrate an investment in the aura of authenticity that Black participation

²⁷⁰ “Audience Reaction Forms,” Screening from April 18, 1969 and May 23 & 27 (Year not included), Accession 660, Box 134, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

would lend the production.²⁷¹ Black participation in the documentary would primarily assure representational verisimilitude in its capturing of site-specific Black experiences, eschewing complaints of caricature and stereotyping lodged against white representations of Black citizens. The documentary filmmakers echoed the liberal integrationist politics of the Kerner Commission and the NDC, that seemingly didn't understand Black life but was hoping to learn from Black citizens in order to avoid further conflict in major cities. It was likewise believed that Black citizens not only perceived city space and civic life differently than white citizens, but that the camera could effectively transmit attributes of Black consciousness to a viewing audience. In addition to appearing in the film, Berry Gordy of Motown Records also agreed to donate an all-original score comprised of Motown artists, providing a "Black" sound to correspond with the visuals. In doing so, the NDC affirmed its belief that Black citizens not only experienced the rhythms of the city differently than white citizens, but that this perspectival difference informed what they captured on film and *how* they framed their subjects. Or, as the published synopsis to the film puts it, "The ability to tell it like it is had to begin and end with members of the Black community as an integral part of the production."²⁷²

As E Patrick Johnson has discussed, "authenticity" discourses often enable marginalized people to counter the oppressive representations typically broadcast through film and television.²⁷³ It was this rhetoric that led to the production of white directed films that incorporated Black input about Black representation and Black space in the 1960s such, as *The*

²⁷¹ "Revised Regional Film Presentation Proposal," March 7, 1968, 1–2, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 16, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

²⁷² "Revised Regional Film Presentation Proposal."

²⁷³ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Duke University Press, 2003).

Cool World (Shirley Clark, 1963) in Harlem and *Uptight* (Jules, Dassin, 1968) in Cleveland.

This concern with authentic Blackness only intensified in the 1970s with the rise of independent Black filmmaking. Both Black Artists and white allies in positions of power worked to provide space for Black citizens to respond to issues related to racial oppression and Black insurgency.

The LA Rebellion, an independent cinema movement centered around the UCLA Ethno-Communications Program, particularly reflects a desire for Black representation that constructs Black citizens as complex, intersectional and diverse, while also acknowledging longer histories of Black intellectual and cultural production, including literature, jazz, theoretical inquiry, theater, and other visual arts.²⁷⁴ The LA Rebellion relied upon faculty and administrators advocating for diversity at UCLA, to give Black artists the economic means and technological know-how to aesthetically and politically challenge the representation of Black life found in mainstream fare—including caricatures of Black vengeance and hyper-sexuality perpetuated by Blaxploitation films—and aimed at more “authentic” portraits of everyday in Black urban space. However, as Johnson argues, it is important to acknowledge both that oppositional modes of artistic production catalyzed by white cultural investments in “Black authenticity” and be cognizant of the “arbitrariness of authenticity,” the tendency of ethnographic documentaries to hone in on certain facets of Black life as “authentic” in an epistephiliac desire to know the other, and the ways such assumptions of Black life as “authentic” carries with it “dangers of foreclosing the possibilities of cultural exchange and understanding.”²⁷⁵

While the NDC held final cut approval, *The Black Eye*'s approach to capturing “authentic” Black experience in Detroit succeeded in registering a multi-faceted understanding

²⁷⁴ Kara Keeling, “Kara Keeling on the L.A. Rebellion,” artforum.com, <https://www.artforum.com/film/id=38801>. For more see: Sieving, *Soul Searching*.

²⁷⁵ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 3.

of what it could mean to live as a Black person in the city and the representational complexities of Black urban identity. Approaching the *Black Eye* as an ethnographic documentary, it's likewise clear that the film entangles a desire for authentic self-representation of Black life and the NDCs investment of a middle-class Black citizenship as the aspirational model for urban advancement. Ultimately, this moment reflects a transitional period in Detroit Black media history during which Black creators worked to figure out the goals for Black representation in the city and work towards Black media autonomy while the city's radical presence was also building towards Black Community Control of the city.

Fatimah Tobing Rony's work on early ethnographic film is particularly instructive to this case, as she troubles the binary between filmmaker and Othered subject. Discussing Robert Flaherty's 1927 *Nanook of the North*, Rony elucidates how contemporaneous discourses of ethnography called for complicity on the part of the "native."²⁷⁶ While careful not to speculate as to how the indigenous actor playing the titular character, Alliariallak, approached the making of the film without proper archival data to support such claims, Rony asserts that the film is structured for a "participant observer." The audience is invited to simultaneously look at Nanook and with Nanook, inviting him and the others featured to "act out their lives."²⁷⁷ Part of the crucial objective of such ethnographic film was not only to show how the "anthropologists sees the native, but how the natives sees himself...The final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight...is briefly, to grasp the natives point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world."²⁷⁸ As such, Rony even gestures to the possibility that much of the beauty of

²⁷⁶ Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Duke University Press, 1996).

²⁷⁷ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 116.

²⁷⁸ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 118.

the landscape cinematography in *Nanook* might perhaps be attributed to Inuit participation in production, indicative of an “Inuit sensibility.”²⁷⁹ Of course, the auto-ethnographic frame referenced here is still managed by the filmmaker who maintains final cut over the filmmaking process. Yet, Rony’s work shows how documentary has always sought to both allow the audience a view of the other and “play with the boundary between viewer and viewed as vicarious participant observers, while reaffirming the boundaries between representation and reality.”²⁸⁰ In contrast, films of the LA Rebellion offered viewers a privileged Black perspective that, according to Jacqueline Stewart, keeps “with the ethos of affirmative action and racial self-determination that structured their film school training. LA Rebellion filmmakers assert the authority of insider knowledge, their intimate relationships with their Black subject matter, which sets their work apart from white-authored representations”²⁸¹ I contend that *The Black Eye* ultimately exists in a space between these two practices. While *The Black Eye* celebrated a Black perspective of local Black experience and relied on the insider knowledge of participants in the filmmaking process, white producers were unable to craft an intimate relationship with the Black subject matter on the screen. The objective of the filmmaking process was not ultimately to project an insider view as advertised, but rather distill Blackness and Black life in the city into a representation digestible for a white, middle-class audience. In this case, the carefully selected Black figures that appear in film were strategically chosen to demonstrate how inner city residents could relate to middle-class respectability politics.

According to the film proposal, producers hoped that “by using the Black middle and upper classes as vehicles of disarmament, the film will mesmerize the fearful white audience

²⁷⁹ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 115.

²⁸⁰ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 119.

²⁸¹ Stewart, “The L.A. Rebellion Plays Itself,” 252.

with visuals of circumstances so familiar in terms of job aspiration and family frustrations.”²⁸² This strategy for crisis management took “an in-depth look at the Black middle-class and upper class to provoke white identification with certain economic, educational, and social frustrations that will transcend color lines, will relax white surface apprehension.”²⁸³ *The Black Eye* was filmed on-location at a range of sites within local Black neighborhoods, observing subjects at carefully selected places.²⁸⁴ The participatory documentary begins with a survey of middle and upper class Black Detroiters, conducting business and attending social events in the city. The film incorporates commentary by prominent Black Detroiters, who attended subsequent screening forums, such as Al Dunmore, the managing editor of the *Michigan Chronicle*, Ed Davis a car Dealer, Jim Frazier, a 29-year old symphony conductor (the first Black person to ever conduct the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the youngest member of any minority group to conduct a major symphony orchestra in the nation), Harrison Taylor, a local interior decorator, and Ilene Robinson an IBM systems engineer for Ford.

It is difficult to determine what thoughts or images expressed in the film originated with the filmmakers and local participants and to what extent their perspectives were influenced by the ideological rhetoric of the New Detroit Committee. Paul Lee, a local historian of the Shrine of the Black Madonna Church, for instance, critiqued the film for being a mere mouthpiece for the propagandistic rhetoric of the New Detroit Committee. Speaking of the film, Lee notes that the funders hailed from middle-class liberalism and had “little connection to or

²⁸² “Proposed Film Theme,” 1968, 1, Folder 16, The New Detroit Committee and Task Forces - from Communications Subcommittee. The New Detroit Committee, New Detroit Inc. Collection, Accession 660, Wayne State University.

²⁸³ “Proposed Film Theme.”

²⁸⁴ Records indicate this film method had one exception; after the film crew themselves were discriminated against at a local eating establishment, a scene of racial discrimination in a restaurant was written into the film.

identification with poor, working-class "Black" Detroiters, much less those without jobs, who were justifiably angry over being exploited, brutalized and marginalized."²⁸⁵ He further stipulates "When I watched the film, I kept wincing because I could tell that the interviewees (most of whom I knew) were responding to questions that they knew were suggested by "white" people, or that might as well have been, given the almost certain cultural alienation of the interviewers."²⁸⁶ Lee further argues that the film's politics were distinctly divorced from working-class Black Detroiters struggling in the postwar era and instead offers images of wholesome, liberal African Americans who merely mimic the ideological imperatives of the white, hiring organization.

The second half of the film does shift focus to poor and working-class Black families. This section begins with shots of empty neighborhoods, where "for sale" signs dot long stretches of street. This scene, in particular, was staged on a street in Grosse Pointe Woods, filmed the morning after President Johnson signed into law the Open Housing Bill. Filming with a back crew in a historically all-white neighborhood attracted "even more than usual" attention. Production documents show the police department received a number of calls regarding blockbusting in this neighborhood on this day and a concern about the "possible moving into the neighborhood of negroes."²⁸⁷ Further exploring the racialized housing crisis in Detroit, the film calls attention to "the juxtaposition of affluence and poverty that occurs on Chene, just north of Lafayette" where establishing scenes of Detroit's city space were shot.

On the east side of Chene are homes that are literally falling apart, while the west side

²⁸⁵ Excerpted from an email interview with Paul Lee, "Re: Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman in Documentary Film, *The Black Eye*," July 24, 2015.

²⁸⁶ Paul Lee.

²⁸⁷ "The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet," 1968, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 15, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

contains a series of bright new brick apartment houses...of note is the fact that those apartment houses, with rents in the \$200 monthly range, were built on “urban renewal” land originally occupied by the same sort of dilapidated housing present on East Chene ... housing torn down to make room for low income housing, which turned out to be the \$200 monthly rental housing that now stands on that site.²⁸⁸

The street discussed here falls on the east side of Lafayette Park, a formerly white neighborhood that became home to many dislocated Black Bottom residents as urban renewal projects broke ground. Here the film documents the uneven spatial transformation of Black Detroit as it began separating into distinctive socio-economic communities. Yet the film makes no visual or verbal indication that what we are seeing is east Lafayette Park. Instead, the film uses East Chene as an establishing shot to stand in for the spatial transformation of the city as a whole. It is possible the filmmakers assumed the targeted local audience would recognize the streets and understand the distinctive spatial politics of each shot, but the lack of orienting information highlights the film’s ambivalent socio-political positioning. In fact, the film in general does not introduce via voice-over nor title screen the different architectural, or human interview subjects in the film. This creates a leveling of the film subjects and their political perspectives. While this lack of context provided by the documentary was more of a result of filmmakers working under the assumption that local audiences would simply recognize all-important figures presented throughout the film, this method further complicates the outsider/insider politics the film seeks to engage. Essentially, the film was constructed with a specific investment in providing an insider perspective of Black Detroit to white/suburban viewers unfamiliar with Black city spaces. These viewers may have recognized the public figures in the film and some exteriors of public spaces, but otherwise lack

²⁸⁸ “The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet,” 2.

knowledge into the specific operations, cultural norms, and hyperlocal interiors of Black Detroit. The film offers a tourist gaze of a carefully curated Black Detroit that would appeal to investors and minds already open to social change. Black Detroit is framed to appear simultaneously familiar and culturally foreign. In this way, a Black lens is used as a crisis management strategy to educate white viewers and white powerbrokers about idealized Black life, offering goals of class mobility as a viable and appealing option that would allow poor Black subjects, perhaps turning to violence or radicalism in frustration, instead take a path towards middle-class integration into civic life.

For example, one segment of the film seeks to introduce “Soul Food” to viewers, presenting food objects as if they were objects of anthropological analysis. The film defines “Chittlins,” the “cast off innards of the hog” as staple of Southern Black cooking since slavery. The film notes that “while considered a delicacy by many negroes, today,” they are regarded as “little more than garbage by others.”²⁸⁹ In this portion of the film, the producers wanted to give meaning to the “conditions of Black poverty” and to make apparent the “peculiar hostility inherent in all people who happen to be Black towards the white world they live in.”²⁹⁰ To make this point clear, the film follows a group of maids commuting to work six days a week to the suburbs on public busses, includes interior shots of homes in East Detroit where families live without adequate access to food and clothing. Interior home shots try to render as typical as possible “the sort of Black poverty that exists in inner city Detroit.” The subjects observed living in poverty include a family on the near East side of Detroit, just off of Jefferson Ave. According to production documents, while filming these sequences the crew reacted to an obvious critical

²⁸⁹ “The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet,”2.

²⁹⁰“The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet,”3.

need for clothing in the household and assembled bundles of clothes for families.

The film also includes an extended segment on the Crystal Beach Housing Project, located in Pontiac on the far west side of Telegraph Road. Originally government-owned during WWII, the property passed into private ownership in 1954. Like other housing projects within the city limits, Crystal Beach deteriorated over time and eventually was bought by the city of Pontiac in 1968 with hopes that they would phase out the project, using the city's relocation officer to move tenants elsewhere. At the time of filming, no new tenants were being allowed to move in. Production notes document:

The film crew ran into a cold, and at times hostile, reception at Crystal Beach.

Residents of the project have been a prime target of polltakers, researchers, and other members of the Pontiac community bent on inspecting and/or analyzing the poor.

Unfortunately, communication between the city and residents of Crystal Beach has not been as good as it might have been...many residents expressed a concern to the crew that attempts by the city to improve and/or rebuild the area (which is bordered by Crystal Lake) are merely another version of "Move out Blackie, this is going to be a beautiful white summer lake resort."²⁹¹

The city's press statements argue that it had no such intention, but failed to adequately explain to the citizens exactly what it intended to do. The hesitance of Black residents to participate in filmmaking was a problem that the filmmakers, despite being Black themselves, faced throughout the production process.

Black identity is discussed with various interview participants from Martha Jean the Queen, a Radio DJ for WJLB, and Charles Wright, a Pediatrician at Wayne State University

²⁹¹ "The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet."

Hospital who developed Detroit's museum of Afro-American Culture in a mobile van, and Rev. Nicholas Hood, pastor of Plymouth United Church of Christ. Hood, in particular, discusses questions of Black identity and "Black citizens trying to fit into the white standard of beauty, to be white in a white world."²⁹² The producers wanted the segment on natural Afro-identity to be longer, but "despite the all-Black crew handling this film, it was extremely hard to find militant Blacks who would allow themselves to be photographed."²⁹³ Even as Black radicalism was rapidly developing in the city, there was pervasive concern that media surveillance or visual documentation of activism could be used against protestors in courts or make activist-subjects the targets of white supremacist aggression— a topic I will return to in Chapter Three's discussion of Black radicalism and *Finally Got the News*.

Moving forward, the filmmakers shoot not only middle and lower class families, but also a variety of local religious groups, youth groups and grassroots organizations such as Albert Cleage's Black-power oriented Shrine of the Black Madonna, an ADC mother's meeting, and the Black Star Co-op Market. In doing so, the filmmakers sought to convey the experiences of a wide array of Black Detroiters, juxtaposing the "illiterate with the intellectual; the militant with the moderate; the old with the young...presenting a perspective of everyday reality unknown to most white Detroiters, ranging from a close-up view of the welfare system to the very personal reflections of people for whom the "inner city" is not a phrase but a harsh reality."²⁹⁴ However, in line with the NDC's objective to minimize the threat of future violence, the film still minimizes the presence of radicalism and Black Power ideologies. While maintaining a "Black perspective" the film and the corresponding screening forums were oriented towards making

²⁹² "The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet," 1.

²⁹³ "Black Eye Preview."

²⁹⁴ "The Black Eye: Speaker Fact Sheet," 1.

Blackness palatable for middle-class white audiences. According to the project proposal:

The purpose of the documentary should be to personalize the frustrations of being Black to the white community in a manner, which creates at least the beginnings of white attitudinal change toward the Black urban community. The film should psychologically disarm the disinterested and/or fretful white audience through a visual confrontation with the Black community, as it really exists. The audience response after viewing the film should be "It must be a hell of a thing to be born Black." Hopefully, this type of audience response would awaken responsible concern to the extent of voluntary civil involvement based on a realistic understanding and empathy towards the Black community.²⁹⁵

Of course, the image of Black Detroit "as it really exists" was still a construct, devised to demonstrate the shared capitalist, family-oriented, values across color lines. While presenting a rare glimpse at the suffering of the Black inner city, the *Black Eye* did so in like with the NDC's mission to improve conditions of Black life maintained by white America.

This emphasis on appeasing whiteness was also not lost on Black viewers. For example, in a letter written to the New Detroit Committee, local lawyer Gary A. Krieger criticizes the film for its attempts to simply pacify white control and maintain the socio-economic status quo:

First of all the film gives the impression that the creation of Black small business hold the solution for the crisis of our times. Such a focus would seem to lift the preeminent responsibility of the white community in resolving this situation. The film likewise places extraordinary emphasis on the necessity for the Black community to improve itself, to increase its educational levels, etc.; yet studies have consistently shown that the gap

²⁹⁵ "Revised Regional Film Presentation Proposal," 2.

between incomes of Black and white widens, not narrows, as levels of education rise.

Thus by not stressing the requisite changes in the social structure the film against ends to reinforce the apathy of the white community... By excluding the voices of the most insistent, the film again tends to only lessen the drive to produce the needed changes with the immediacy they demand. Of course, there is the view that the suburbanites must not be provoked into reactionary activity. Is it not so, nevertheless, that those most likely to view the film are already at least somewhat sensitized to the necessity for change? More crucially, however, is the probable effects of any future Rebellions on the attitudes of these same suburbanites. Thus the highest priority must be accorded to immediate, and pronounced socio-economic change, not in avoiding controversy.²⁹⁶

Here, Krieger criticizes the strategies of white appeasement these projects adopted as a form of crisis management. However, implicit in his critique is a tendency that undergirds nearly all media projects discussed in this dissertation. Reading archival documents about the project, it is difficult to separate the altruistic objectives of the white sponsors aiming for integration and Black uplift, and the input of Black participants in the project in the early developmental stages of the project. Within the film, less attention is given to the income gap for those living below the poverty line or without work and the structures of white hegemony that maintain income inequality. One can assume that the Black participants either aligned themselves with Black moderate hopes for uplift and integration or they had little leverage to challenge the power of white producers. Furthermore, key in Krieger's critique is the film's framing of the Black community and its refusal to engage the possibility of revolutionary change. While I do not know

²⁹⁶ Krieger, Gary A., "Communications Correspondence, 1968," July 26, 1968, 102, Accession 660, Box 146, Folder 17, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

the political allegiances of all participants in the filmmaking process, *The Black Eye*, as well as *In Your Interest*, was financially answerable to the institutional rhetoric of the New Detroit Committee rather than the rising political tide of Black radicalism in the city. Krieger critiques of NDC sponsorship also make it clear that viewers did not passively consume the Committee's pitying stance on "what it is to be born Black."

Paul Lee has likewise critiqued the film's muted message. Lee, argued that it "was *not* reflective of the roiling ferment of "Black" Detroit during that epochal period, after what "Black" locals still call "The Rebellion," with the notable exception of a brief statement by Jaramogi Abebe, which, surprisingly, was rather bland—a rarity for him!" Lee surmises that Abebe, who at that point would have been known as the Reverend Albert Cleage, participated in the film as a favor to the New Detroit Committee. This conjecture was in line with New Detroit's Communications strategy of using Committee members as ambassadors for media projects and the committee's overarching ideological goals of forming bonds with Black organizations—the moderate and the militant. While I cannot speak definitively to the veracity of Lee's conjecture about the interview process, especially as it is offered nearly fifty years after the film's initial release, it further points to ways the film diminished the radical fervor circulating in Black Detroit in order to paint a moderate portrait of Black citizens working to improve their chances in the city's capitalist system. As a powerful figure for Black Detroiters, Cleage directed the energies of Rebellion towards the proposed establishment of Black community control of economic, political, and social institutions. Cleage used his political connections and religious institutions as a meeting space for Black Nationalist organizing and formed the Inner City Organizing Committee (ICOC) in 1963 and the Citywide Citizen Action Committee (CCAC), a Black coalition of community groups organized in the aftermath of Rebellion (late 1967). While

initially an affiliate of the New Detroit Committee, Cleage, and the members of ICOC involved in New Detroit projects, ultimately severed ties from the NDC who wanted to assert control over Black organizing activities. The CCAC challenged the moderate directives of established civil rights activists in the city. Their express goal was garnering community control of inner city redevelopment processes. To further this goal, the CCAC created the multi-class Black initiative, the Federation for Self-Determination (FSD), and first petitioned the NDC for \$500,000 to support Black development initiatives. The NDC rejected the proposal outright, yet after tense negotiations offered the FSD \$100,000 if they agreed to participate in political activities and support policies designated by the NDC. Cleage refused. While moderate Black organizations in Detroit, like the Detroit Council of Organizations, headed by Rev. Roy Allen, and included members of the NAACP and Cotillion Club, were frustrated that Cleage would turn down money white corporations were offering to improve Black lives, Cleage stood firm in his principles and argued that white leaders should be responsive to Black Power and not the other way around.

In retrospect, Cleage's actions signal a turning point in Detroit politics, in which Black citizens, nearing a majority of the city's population, used the momentum of Rebellion discourse to claim a right to self-governance. Black Media production in the city would mirror this shift towards Black autonomy. While The League of Revolutionary Workers initially worked with white radicals in Newsreel to produce *Finally Got the News*, during production the League seized control and insisted that the white radicals must be answerable to Black leadership. In that case, the film proceeded forward because the white radicals listened to Black Power demands. The NDC continued to fund Black projects through 1968, but as Black citizens assumed more leadership roles in the city, white business investments in Black social welfare programs waned

by the early 1970s.²⁹⁷

In the third chapter, I will consider radical filmmaking practices that lie outside the pacifying grasp of the NDC in greater depth. However, here I want to stress the way these media functioned as negotiations of “urban contract” filmmaking. These projects are extraordinarily rare examples of Black filmmaking in the city in the civil rights era, engaging city spaces seldom seen on screens. They opened up a platform for Black citizens to communicate concerns to the governing elite and white powerbrokers that had capacity to influence housing, education, and occupational opportunities for Black citizens. At the same time, Black creative visions were still put into the service of hegemonic objectives of resolving racial tension for white viewers, and framed by the exhibition.

What *The Black Eye* does provide is a preliminary glimpse at Black Detroit as documentary subjects and an attempt, albeit a largely unsuccessful one, to create dialogic contact with the “real” Black community in Detroit. Unlike the alarmist reporting of *Summer of '67*, *The Black Eye* attempts to fulfill the demands for Black community programming put forth in *Broadcasting Magazine*, and the Kerner Commission and to introduce viewers to the range of Black citizens living throughout the city. However, akin to the *CBS Special Report*, the objective was to neutralize representations of Black aggression, which required minimizing the presence of radical Black activists to foreground moderate viewpoints that would be more palatable to a presumably fearful white polity. The complexities of Black Nationalist activities were widely underexplored in the broadcast. The program, in this way, echoes the trend towards acclimating

²⁹⁷ For more on The New Detroit Committee’s history see: Graves, Helen Mataya. *New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated: A Case Study of an Urban Coalition, 1967-1972*. Wayne State University, 1975.

white viewers to a largely peaceful, if oppressed, Black community, the majority of whom would not be swayed by “extremism” nor were participants in the rioting in July 1967. In doing so, the filmmakers sought to manage the crisis creating the conditions for a line for communication between citizens and civic bureaucracy.

Conclusion: Beyond *Monochrome*

In late 1968, The NDC entered into talks to fund another television project exploring the sentiments of citizens living in post-Rebellion Detroit. *Monochrome* was conceptualized to address one issue integral to Detroit’s urban development per episode. However, the treatment of each respective issue would be assigned to two separate production teams, one white and one Black. According to the program's production proposal, each “program would aim for better interracial understanding, not through consensus but through illustration of the differences in perception of critical issues in the Black and white populations of the greater Detroit area.”²⁹⁸ Each episode would introduce an issue, and then sequentially show Black and white footage exploring that issue on location in Detroit. For example, if the issue was “urban poverty,” the pitch anticipated that Black and white film teams would construct profoundly different histories and imagery of economic conditions in Detroit. Rather than a neat two-minute summary by the host, each episode would conclude with a segment that brought Black and white experts and citizens together to talk through the issue and the differing perceptions of it introduced by the two production teams. As such, this proposed program would rely heavily on both single-camera

²⁹⁸ “Monochrome Phase 2: Proposal for Biracial Television News Interviews Program,” 1968, Box 6, Folder 7, Colored People’s Time 1969-1970, University Center for Adult Education Archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

filmed documentary segments and multi-camera in-studio conversations.²⁹⁹ While production never started on *Monochrome*, its conception was predicated on the same underlying assumption as the *Black Eye* and *In Your Interest*: that film could be used effectively to "authentically" represent racial identity and spatial emplacement as lived experiences across racial lines, thereby engendering cross-racial empathy. Accordingly, if producers wanted to construct a realistic depiction of Black Detroit, it was essential that the film be made in and by Black Detroit.

Ultimately, *Monochrome* never made it to air in the fall of 1968 because the creative forces driving its production responded to the city's political shift towards Black control and Black artist demands that Black film be answerable to Black audiences. The production of *Monochrome* was replaced by a Black-focused public affairs program that emphasized Black perspectives reaching Black spectators—essentially cutting out the white aspect of *Monochrome*. In this way, the dialogic format of preceding documentaries and community forums on post-Rebellion civic life that were oriented toward crisis management for white viewership directly informed the development of Black-oriented public affairs programming in the city. Subsequent programs like *CPT* (1968-1969) and a later community-oriented program also hosted by Tony Brown, *Free Play* (1970), gave local Black social actors their first encounters with media production and broadcast technologies.³⁰⁰ Cutting out the white perspective and interracial dialogic aspects of *Monochrome* prefigures the deepening disconnect between life in Black Detroit and white concerns for the city's future imagined from the suburbs.

By the fall of 1968, demands for programs dedicated exclusively to local Black perspectives and Black culture for Black audiences were met with the production of *CPT*.

²⁹⁹ "Monochrome Phase 2: Proposal for Biracial Television News Interviews Program."

³⁰⁰ *CPT* was renamed *Detroit Black Journal* in 1970 to align more closely with the nationally syndicated program.

Importantly, funding for *CPT* was partially supplied by the NDC. Correlative demands for Black community control of local business infrastructure were likewise gaining momentum in the city, causing increased tension within the NDC. As the few militant Blacks affiliated with the Committee were in a constant struggle with NDC corporate leaders over coalition funding, coalitions broke down—as demonstrated by Albert Cleage’s work with the Committee. As the spatial and racial makeup of Detroit continued to shift, the NDC still operated as a funding mechanism for civic organizations, yet their emphasis on public relations media dissipated alongside shifts in media infrastructure. As city leadership and governance of civic institutions moved from white control to Black control and as white businesses continued to move their businesses and hire workers outside the city, I conjecture that corporate leaders involved in the NDC no longer saw it within *their* interest to fund Black media development.

The projects discussed in this chapter capture a contentious moment in local politics during which media played a guiding role in the struggle to diffuse racial tensions in the city. However, pacifying whiteness was increasingly becoming a secondary concern for Black media makers as the city’s white population decreased. According to Hall et al:

It is in the modality of race that those whom the structures systemically exploit, exclude, and subordinate discover themselves as an exploited and subordinated class. Thus it is primarily in and through the modality of race that resistance, proposition, and Rebellion first expresses itself. At the simplest, most obvious and superficial level, one can catch this centrality of race for the structures of consciousness in the immediate accounts and expressions of young Black men and women themselves: how race structures, from the

inside, the whole range of their social experience.”³⁰¹

The Rebellion ignited a sociological and economic exploration into the city’s power structure and racial dynamics that led to substandard living and working conditions for Black citizens. However, hereafter Black media producers no longer believed—if they ever believed—that white funds could aid in the development a viable Black future. As Black citizens gained increased access to the means of media production, content priorities shifted towards educating Black viewers on Black politics and economic objectives, which varied among different production. At the same time, mainstream media continued to engage only with the Black city through crime reportage—through a few Black anchors were incorporated into networks productions with time.³⁰² The era of coalition crisis management across a racial divide—even as that coalition never equally weighed Black and white input—had ended. Thus, following chapter considers how Black citizen-producers in Detroit used Black-made documentary production to comment on the ongoing struggles in Black communities, but this time, for an imagined Black viewer within a Black spatial imaginary.

³⁰¹ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 347.

³⁰² This will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Chapter 2

CPT: Black Edutational Television and The Politics of Community Control

*But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me-
Black and beautiful-
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!*

*I reckon it'll be
Me myself!*

Yes, it'll be me.

- Langston Hughes, excerpt from "Note on Commercial Theatre," 1940³⁰³

On September 25, 1989, WTVS Detroit aired a 20th Anniversary Special for *Detroit Black Journal*, a series which host Trudy Gallant notes had served as "the voice of a people" for two decades. The special interwove interviews with former program staff and archival footage celebrating the show's contributions to Black history and culture. During the Special, Gallant asked series executive producer Gilbert Maddox and Tony Brown, the show's original producer/host, what first drove them to create a Black community television program in Detroit in 1968. In his response, Maddox, who wrote the original funding proposal for the series, referenced the above excerpt of the poem "Note on Commercial Theatre" by Langston Hughes. Maddox claimed it was about time someone filmed not only the problems facing Detroit's Black citizens, but also their cultural contributions to American society. It was about time someone demonstrated the "rich wealth and vitality in the Black community," a perspective not associated with "ghetto" pathologies—which was showcased in programs discussed in Chapter One. And

³⁰³ Hughes, Langston. "Note on Commercial Art," *The Crisis*, 47, March 1940, 79. Was later republished as "Note on Commercial Theatre" in the *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. 1959. New York: Knopf, 1983. 190.

that someone might as well have been him. Meanwhile, Tony Brown recalled that anger primarily brought him to the program: anger at the representation of Black people broadcast on mainstream television (or lack thereof); anger at the treatment of Black citizens during Detroit's Great Rebellion of 1967; anger at the ongoing economic oppression of Black citizens; and anger at the lack of outlets Black people had to voice their rage.³⁰⁴ For Brown, *CPT* (1968-1969), later renamed *Detroit's Black Journal* (1970-present), was a form of Rebellion, a means for Black citizens to speak openly and unapologetically about local issues, in spite of the racist discourse perpetuated by the mainstream press. These were not isolated projects; rather it is my contention that the objectives undergirding the series' production worked together to empower viewers to become the kind of intellectually engaged and financially stable citizens that would be capable of establishing community control of Black city space.

Brown's sense of anger and Maddox's sense of urgency productively encapsulate the multifaceted roles *CPT* endeavored to play in the local mediascape. Namely, it was a program operating within a Black spatial imaginary designed as Black education for Black viewers; showcasing Black Detroit's cultural legacy, providing a public forum for Black civil discussion, celebrating Black identities too often obfuscated by mainstream media, and empowering Black citizens long angered by a lack of socio-political power. Content was likewise constructed so that the hosts, Brown in particular, act as advocates for Black uplift on a decidedly local level, endorsing specific policy positions, community organizations, local businesses, cultural venues, and educational initiatives in order to build a more powerful Black Detroit.

³⁰⁴ He continues to note, "I don't want anybody Black to apologize for being angry. I think some of us today are a little afraid to admit we were angry, we were very very very very angry. And we took it out as much as we could editorially. We had little inside things we did in the news that we never shared with anybody else, but it was Rebellion. Lets not take it out of that context."

First funded by grants from the Detroit Junior League, the US Department of Education, and the New Detroit Committee, *CPT* was broadcast as a response to urban unrest and the correlative demands for better Black representation in local media.³⁰⁵ At the time, *CPT* was marketed as the first television program in the city “with a thoroughly Black flavor—by Blacks, for Blacks, and about Blacks.”³⁰⁶ While today it’s openly acknowledged that the show’s title, *CPT*, stood for “Colored People’s Time,” this was never mentioned on the series itself. Tony Brown assumed their Black audience would get the reference and any incidental white viewers would not. It was Tony Brown’s way of structuring the series as a safe public space for Black citizens to voice “insider” viewpoints in the local Black vernacular, on topics in Black culture and politics without justification or apology to white America.³⁰⁷ Catherine Squires terms this mode of address “enclave strategy”—a way of communicating to Black audiences in discourses and spaces hidden from the dominant public while avoiding repression and reprisal.³⁰⁸ *CPT* producers believed it was crucial that the show’s content was first and foremost comprehensible to local Black residents and answerable to their needs. As such, producers insisted the cast and featured guests use “everyday language of the community” and that they

³⁰⁵ At the time, the US Department of Education was actually the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The funds were made possible through the Title I Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. Part of Johnson’s Great Society initiative, the HEA gave aid to community service and continuing education programs. “Higher Education Act of 1965” (89th Congress of the United States of America, November 8, 1965), General Records of the United States Government, 1778 - 2006, <https://research.archives.gov/id/299923>.

³⁰⁶ “Detroiters to Launch All-Black TV Series—CPT,” *JET*, October 31, 1968, 61.

³⁰⁷ According to Gilbert Maddox, other titles considered include *Inner City Speaks*, *The Neighborhood Show*, *Inner City Happenings*, and *Black Pride*. *CPT* was ultimately favored because it sounded short and pithy, in addition for its inaccessible meaning for white viewers.

³⁰⁸ She further conceives of enclave strategy as “the utilization of spaces and discourses that are hidden from the dominant public...dedicated to Black interests and needs.” Catherine R. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres,” *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 458.

emphasize “music, dance and drama indigenous to the ethnic cultures of the inner city.”³⁰⁹

“As the show is publicly broadcast, the “white community is welcome to watch too,” says Brown in a *Jet*, October 31, 1968 article, “but there will be no explanations and no allowances. If the show wants to use a phrase in the Black idiom, it will use it-without translation.”³¹⁰ Or as he later put it, “If you didn’t know the inside jokes, that’s just too bad.”³¹¹

CPT was not alone in the struggle to carve out a space in television for Black discourse. While the show was touted as the first Black “community program” designed for the Black Detroit market, by the late 1960s, Black public affairs programs were airing in cities with sizeable African American populations all over the United States. As scholars including Devorah Heitner, Alice Tait, Christina Acham, Gayle Wald, and Tommy Lott have shown, these programs operated as a corrective to the inadequate, and often marginalizing, coverage of Black politics and culture found on mainstream television.³¹² From Brooklyn’s *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant* (1968-1971), to Boston’s *Say Brother!* (1968-present), to Chicago’s *Our People* (1968-1972), to the nationally broadcast shows *Black Journal* (1968-2008) and *Soul!* (1968-1973), Black public affairs programming fostered on-going debates in Black communities on issues like the politics

³⁰⁹ Gilbert Alan Maddox, *A Study of CPT: Public Television Programming for Detroit’s Black Community* (Wayne State University, Department of Speech, 1970) 198.

³¹⁰ “Detroiters to Launch All-Black TV Series—CPT.”

³¹¹ “Detroit Black Journal: 20th Anniversary Special,” *Detroit Black Journal* (WTVS Detroit, September 25, 1989), <http://abj.matrix.msu.edu/video/full.php?id=29-DF-BE>, Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries.

³¹² Tait, Alice, “Ethnic Voices: Ethnocentric Public Affairs Television Programming,” in *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Toby Miller (Taylor & Francis, 2003), 32–38; Alice A. Tait, “Minority Programming in Television and the Story of Detroit’s ‘Profiles in Black,’” *MICHIGAN ACADEMICIAN XXII* (1990): 271–86; Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and The Struggle for Black Power* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004); Phyllis Rauch Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video* (Indiana University Press, 1999); Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Duke University Press, 2013); Gayle Wald, *It’s Been Beautiful: Soul!*

of Black Power, electoral participation, economic self-help, cultural nationalism, police brutality, affirmative action, and labor organizing. Devorah Hietner conceptualizes Black public affairs as a brief, but important, genre in late 1960s and early 1970s American Television in which Black talent used televisual platforms to connect Black self-determination and Black nationalism to media activism, aiming to reach local Black viewers.

In this chapter, I emphasize the local dimension of Black public affairs television in Detroit and *CPT's* positioning within an on-going struggle in which Black citizens used media to visualize Black life in the city and educate Black viewers for local Black advancement. Thus, introducing *CPT* to the constellation of televised Black activism described by scholars like Heitner, Gayle Wald, and Christine Acham, I contend that Black television production in Detroit worked concomitantly with other Black public affairs television programs to provide a lively counter public sphere to showcase Black culture and transform television from a site of racist exclusion to a means of teaching Detroit viewers about Black liberation politics.

While my research cannot account for every source of inspiration for each show's content focus, *CPT's* overarching investment in Black middle-class advancement and Black education can undoubtedly be attributed in large part to Brown and Maddox's ideological perspectives and political agendas. Brown was virulently critical of institutional racism in the broadcast industry and an enormous advocate for Black advancement in white-collar industries. His prominent voice on *CPT* led him to take on hosting duties of the nationally broadcast *Black Journal* in 1970, become a founding dean of Howard University's school of communication, and starting his own public affairs television program, *Tony Brown's Journal* in 1978. While an outspoken champion of Black Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, his political conservatism would intensify over time leading him to advocate for a moral and economic shift to the right for Black

citizens.³¹³ Inklings of his emphasis on Black capitalism within a Black Nationalist agenda are present in *CPT*'s early existence—primarily through his lauding of Black economic independence and self-help through education as primary strategies for Black civic advancement. Brown further received an MA in social work from Wayne State and had been involved in local welfare reform before beginning his journalism career— through which he brought debates over social welfare initiatives to a broader Black readership and viewership. Before *CPT*, Gilbert Maddox taught in the Detroit Public Schools and then held faculty appointments at Wayne State University, Howard University, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and later at the University of the District of Columbia and Morgan State University. Maddox is credited by Wayne State University as the first Black person to earn a PhD in Communications, writing his dissertation on the potentialities of Black telecommunications, using *CPT* as his primary case study (1970).³¹⁴ Together, Brown and Maddox developed *CPT* with an understanding that local television could be a productive channel for education and endorsing public welfare.

While Maddox identifies Brown's accomplished career in media and social work as an obvious asset for the series, there was a dearth of other qualified Black candidates with experience in television production. Thus, many of the other contributors that filled out the staff

³¹³ In a 1982 interview, Brown himself commented on his shifting understanding of the media industry. "Money makes things happen. Money makes people treat you nice. Money makes people give you better times. Money makes people concerned about you. Money makes people give you things—if you don't need it. Producing is a business. When I started, I saw it more of a creative enterprise than a business. It is creative in the sense that money can be attracted if you posture what you're doing in some kind of innovative context." C. Gerald Fraser, "'Tony Brown's Journal' Endures," *The New York Times*, February 7, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/02/07/arts/tony-brown-s-journal-endures.html>.

³¹⁴ "Communication Alum Dr. Gilbert Maddox Was a Trailblazing Broadcaster and Educator... - CFPCA - Wayne State University," accessed February 5, 2018, <http://cfpca.wayne.edu/news/communication-alum-dr-gilbert-maddox-was-a-trailblazing-broadcaster-and-educator-10863>.

and on-air talent were civil rights activists, educators, journalists, and accomplished artists. News presenter Abraham Ulmer was a Michigan Civil Rights Commission official. Frequent commentator, Reginald Wilson, was an Associate Dean of Testing at Oakland Community College in addition to a respected figure in the local Civil Rights struggle, also involved in various peaceful Pan-African activists' causes. Neither had broadcast experience. *CPT* Drama Director, Kent Martin, had an illustrious background in Michigan theatre, served as a theatre critic for the *Michigan Chronicle*, and wrote a series of pieces on Black literary history. As *CPT* went to air, he was also the Executive Director of the "Langston Hughes Looks at Dark America" touring production. Music Director Harold McKinney was an acclaimed jazz musician and educator; he conducted seminars in the history of African American music in Detroit schools and for the Detroit Institute of Arts. Scriptwriter Gloria House was a former journalism and English teacher. In this way, *CPT* drew on existing Black community infrastructure to put different components of the local Black community in further discussion with one another—hiring representative citizens from the Black Arts movement in the city, Black educators, and Civil Rights leaders. Herbert Boyd, a Black student activist of the Association of Black Students, coordinated Black students production assistants and technical director Barry Baker introduced training workshops for Black students. Through on air content as well as behind the scenes training programs, educating a younger generation in Black arts, activism, and social history was a clear objective for both Brown, and especially Maddox.³¹⁵

Yet, to enact Black education and uplift, the series had to network with and feature other Black organizations, activists, and artists working in tandem to enact civic change for Black citizens. Christina Acham argues that to understand how African Americans used television in

³¹⁵ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 190–92.

political ways, we must “understand historically the spaces in which African Americans socialized, were entertained, and discussed the social and political life that surrounded them.”³¹⁶ She thus traces the history of Black sites of resistance—from slave narratives to working-class cabarets—before addressing national television programs that showcased Black talent. Her analysis of *Black Journal* is particularly pertinent to Detroit’s implementation of Black television as an interlocutor of Black uplift—namely the push for education, economic rights, and social advancement. According to Acham, *Black Journal* championed Black uplift through an explicit educational component, rational critical thinking, as well as a more implicit politics of advancement—both of which undergirded the series’ aesthetics and program content decisions. I argue that *CPT* also served as a resistant Black space that enacted this uplift project on a decidedly local level, offering viewers specific policy positions, community organizations, local businesses, cultural venues, and educational initiatives to support in order to build a more powerful Black Detroit. *CPT* endeavored to bring a broad spectrum of political and cultural topics of interest in the city to a presumed Black and local viewing audience and enable them to discuss the “social and political life” that surrounds them in the post-Rebellion city. Through instructive segments on Black education, identity politics, community development, and the role of the Black middle-class in local urban life, the series promoted Black economic and political control of local space as a crucial stage in a Black Power struggle. In this way, *CPT* was Detroit’s take on an emerging trend in late 1960s television, but also an “experiment” in television’s capacity to influence local economic and political development for Black citizens.

CPT didactically intermixed popular entertainment and instructive content to broadcast a strain of Black Power politics that linked political economy and social responsibility to Black

³¹⁶ Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 7.

uplift. In the aforementioned “Anniversary Special,” Trudy Gallants recognizes the shifts in formatting and style over the years, but argues the series “has always maintained the same goal: “to provide a public forum for a Black perspective.” I think her use of the singular for “perspective” and her previous referral to the series as “*the* voice for Black Detroit” is particularly revealing. Essentially, the show was not only invested in speaking *with* or *nearby*, but also *at* Black Detroiters; the series worked to capture salient aspects of Black life in the city and present them in legible ways to the urban populace. The show staff and producers, like Brown and Maddox, did so with the understanding that it was their social responsibility to institute implicit guidelines for productive Black citizenship in a city experiencing a profound socio-cultural transition. In a similar vein, Ron Scott, a civil rights activist, the co-founder of Detroit’s Black Panther Party Chapter and the producer of *Detroit Black Journal* from 1975-1979, suggests that the show’s approach to Black television was not dissimilar from the movement to produce rap music as “edutainment.” Under this banner, hip hop performers, KRS-One in particular, conceived of themselves as “teachers,” rapping about Black politics and Black cultural history as a means of empowering a critical consciousness while still engaging listeners through an accessible beat. The point, which Scott traces back to Gil Scott-Heron’s revolutionary approach to spoken-word Soul, was to move the crowd while also moving minds. *CPT* was likewise conceived as an educational and entertaining news magazine for television—culturally enriching, politicizing, and above all, a show that would provide Black audiences with valuable Black perspectives on Detroit’s post-Rebellion change that could not be controlled by white

fundings.³¹⁷

In order to illuminate *CPT*'s broadcast strategies for local outreach and edutainment, I analyze extant episodes and production documents from the program's run as *CPT* (1968-1969), underscoring ways the show used broadcast television to create new terms of Black citizenship for post-Rebellion Detroiters.³¹⁸ As my segment analyses will show, this entails celebrating Black Nationalist identity, advocating Black community control initiatives, documenting Black history, and advancing a Black business agenda through strategies of "edutainment." Since *CPT* aired on public television, it did not support Black business through ad sales, but rather discussed Black businesses within news and current events segments. In doing so, *CPT* was building Black media infrastructure that would enable Black viewers to thrive culturally and economically, but also, position television as a central mechanism to facilitate Detroit's uplift. I further conclude that *CPT* positioned Black television as a centralized mouthpiece speaking out to an increasingly diffuse Black city. Instead of mediating crisis management, *CPT* aimed to educate a Black audience, rendering them active agents of Detroit's social, political, and economic transformation into a powerful Black metropolis. The development of *CPT* as Black educational television, in this formulation, illuminates media's role as an interlocutor between struggles for Black visibility and the struggle for local control of the Black economic and political future of post-Rebellion Detroit.

³¹⁷ The national version of *Black Journal* borrowed its magazine format from other shows that already existed like *Our People in Chicago* and Detroit's *CPT* was developed to specifically align with the national version, but with a local twist. Heitner, *Black Power TV*.

³¹⁸ Extant episodes include: October 23, 1968, November 14, 1968, and January 22, 1969. All found in:

American Black Journal Archive, MSU Special Collections, MSU Libraries.
<http://abj.matrix.msu.edu/shows.php?year=1960>

Local Black Television and Black Public Affairs in Detroit

The rise in Black televisual representation responded to a transitional moment in the Black liberation movement in the late 1960s. The ongoing oppression of Black citizens through municipal practices of employment discrimination, red-lining policies, and police brutality after the gains won through the nonviolent tactics of the Civil Rights Movement occasioned a rise in Black militancy, as many Black citizens became increasingly wary of interracial coalition enterprises for peaceful Black integration. As discussed in Chapter One, Black citizens began to not only demand more Black representation beyond tokenism in media content and among production hires, but also command some Black control of media programming. This socio-political shift towards Black Nationalist politics was reflected in the local Detroit media landscape, as elsewhere, with Black citizens constructing documentary programs that envisioned Black voices dictating ideal solutions to deepening urban problems.

While occupying a small percentage of television's overall content, most major urban centers with significant Black populations began to produce unapologetically Black public affairs programs in the late 1960s. Like *CPT*, these programs created bold titles to link directly to local Black communities and broader Black identity politics like New York's *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* (1968-1971), *Positively Black*, and *Like It Is* (1968-present); Boston's *Say Brother* (1968-present); Los Angeles's *From the Inside Out*; Pittsburgh's *Black Horizons* (1968-present); Philadelphia's *New Mood*, *New Breed* and *Black Perspectives on the News* (1974-1979); San Francisco's *Vibrations for a New People* and *Black Dignity*; Chicago's *Our People* (1968-1972) and *For Blacks Only* (1968-1979); Kansas City's *Minority Matters* (1968-1997); Cincinnati's *Right On!*; Omaha's *Kaleidoscope*; Kansas City's South Carolina's *For the People*; and

Atlanta's *Ebony Journal*, as well as on national programs such as *Black Journal* (1968-2008), *Black Omnibus* and *Soul!* (1968-1973).³¹⁹ These shows implemented a "Black agenda" in public discourse. As the premiere episode of *Black Journal* explicitly stated, Black public affairs programs aimed to "report and review the events, the dreams, the dilemmas of Black America and Black Americans"—each in their respective ways. Unfortunately, most episodes of Black television programs are incomplete or non-extant. Nevertheless, surviving episodes show how citizen-activists used television to define Blackness and set a political agenda for Black Americans.³²⁰ Stuart Hall argues that media representations have reified the boundaries between white (also patriarchal and heterosexual) hegemonic powers and marginalized "others," perpetuating stereotypes that oppress minority groups and commodify difference. Yet for Hall, it is also through popular culture that the "marginalized" can combat the oppressive discourses that mainstream culture creates to perpetuate racist subjugation and broadcast alternative visions of minority life.³²¹

In the late 1960s Black activists were beginning to use television to edify and entertain Black audiences in Black Power politics. Shows like *Soul!* in particular, constructed what Gayle Wald dubs an "affective compact" with the audience, directly hailing Black viewers through

³¹⁹ These programs and more are listed by the WNET thirteen.org project "Broadcasting While Black." Missing dates are due to my inability to find accurate records for programs from Heitner's work or on this list. "List of Black-Produced TV Shows Nationwide, from 1968-On," n.d., <https://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileBlack/uncategorized/list-of-Black-produced-tv-shows-nationwide-from-1968-on/>.

³²⁰ Thirteen, the flagship NY public broadcasting station and part of the WNET network, has begun a Black public affairs archival project. Watch and read more about Black public affairs programs around the country at their "Broadcasting While Black" web project site: <http://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileBlack/uncategorized/broadcasting-while-Blacka-history-and-overview/>

³²¹ Stuart Hall, "What Is This" Black" in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice*, 1993, 104–114.

shared experiences, cultural icons, Black vernacular language, and historical knowledge about Black life. While these shows may have implicitly hoped white viewers would tune in and gain a clearer understanding of Black culture, the explicit project of Black public affairs television was to produce unequivocally Black and proud content for Black and proud viewers. As Ellis Haizlip, the host of *Soul!*, told *The New York Times* in 1968, "We cannot again sacrifice the Black audience to educate white people—They will have to find their education elsewhere."³²²

Devorah Heitner's work further identifies how Black public affairs programs presented varied degrees of radicalism and goals for Black progress, primarily determined by the institutional and social context in which they were produced. Boston's *Say Brother* presented Black critique and messages of black empowerment from the perspective of young radical hosts/producers, proposing a call to action and articulating new principles of Blackness.³²³ In contrast, the nationally programmed *Black Journal* took fewer risks with programming content and advocated less radical solutions to social problems than many local programs. *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant* presented a pacifying voice for Black viewers, mediating between older generations with objectives for Black economic uplift via social mobility. *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant*, produced in and about Brooklyn, illuminates ways the series provided "rhetorical self-defense to racist discourses circulating in the culture, documenting and encouraging activism, and celebrating Black artistic and political achievements."³²⁴ This description fits *CPT* well, which used both news and entertainment segments to sharply critique stereotypes of Blackness and offer local citizens Black perspectives on municipal policies, changes to the urban landscape, and

³²² Quoted in: Wald, *It's Been Beautiful*, 52.

³²³ Heitner, *Black Power TV*, chap. 2.

³²⁴ Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 25.

economic developments in the city that were too often left out of mainstream reportage. *CPT* likewise broadcast content that producers felt would not simply be of interest to local Black Detroiters, but would also help instantiate a shift in Black consciousness, contributive both to the Black Arts Movement and to city politics. While most local news programming in Detroit crafted viewpoints to a primarily white, politically moderate, and largely suburban audience, *CPT* endeavored to reach and create an upwardly mobile, imagined Black audience. As such, I position *CPT* ideologically in between *Say Brother* and *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant* in its presentation of radical ideologies and Black Nationalism. *CPT* understood the dire necessity of urban change in the wake of the Rebellion, advocated for Black voices to speak loudly and proudly, yet still was invested in morally and economically conservative strategies for rebuilding a Black Detroit.

Nevertheless, while *CPT* was historically the most prominent Black public affairs program in Detroit and the first to aim exclusively at Black Detroit viewers, the inaugural Black public affairs program for the Detroit market was actually *Haney's People* (1967-1981). Hosted by popular WJR radio personality, Don Haney, the ninety-minute show (later reduced to one hour) brought together a selection of seven to ten guests—often including both Black and white notable local figures—to cover a range of topics of interest to the Detroit public every Sunday afternoon on WXYZ-TV. Haney was likely given a television platform by the local ABC affiliate station, at least in part, as a concession to the growing demand for Black representation in local media. Yet *Haney's People* sought to provide a respected Black response to social issues affecting Black citizens. He did not shy away from controversial topics ranging, but offered a seasoned and moderate voice on subjects; mediating the opinions of guests from across the political spectrum. Of particular note, Haney was celebrated for calming public sentiment after

the shooting of two police officers at the New Bethel Baptist Church on March 29, 1969.

Police had raided the church, run by Rev. C.L. Franklin, to intervene in a public meeting of the Republic of New Afrika—a collective forged from Detroit radical organizations (Group of Advanced Leadership and the Malcolm X Society) with aims of enacting a separatist state for global Black citizens with its own governance and economic system.³²⁵ 142 people at the church were detained at Detroit Police headquarters for questioning until Recorder’s Judge George Crockett, later a Democratic Representative of Michigan’s 13th District, showed up and had detainees released due to lack of evidence.³²⁶ While Detroit media outlets primarily amplified public outrage that Crockett, one of Detroit’s few Black judges, would have allowed potential killers to go free, he was thereafter invited to speak on *Haney’s People* to clarify his actions. Haney’s interview with Crockett, helped sooth the controversy and restore Crockett’s political reputation in the city.³²⁷ Here we see the intersection of media politics, Detroit’s increasing position as a major center for Black revolutionary thought and possibility, and persistent public anxieties about Black radicalism. In this instance, though, media personalities like Haney promoted Black welfare in the city through his calm demeanor, middle-class respectability, and his efforts to pacify white viewers akin to crisis management media.

In fact, according to an *Ebony* article published in February 1969, WXYZ-TV did not conceive of the program specifically as a “Black” show oriented towards the city’s Black

³²⁵ William L. Van DeBurg, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan* (NYU Press, 1997); “The Republic of New Afrika: It’s Development, Ideology and Objectives - Mba Mbulu, Bomani Sekou; Robert L. Tsai, *America’s Forgotten Constitutions* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

³²⁶ The 13th District includes portions of Detroit as well as outlying working-class suburbs like River Rouge, Melvindale, Romulus, Inkster and Ecorse.

³²⁷ “Services Saturday for Channel 7 Newsman Don Haney,” accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/television/2015/05/29/newsman-detroit-haney/28170591/>.

community. Speaking to Louie Robinson, the WXYZ-TV station manager noted that Don Haney “is only incidentally Black. We think this is more important—and significant—than having a segregated program, which is what minority group programming tends to be.”³²⁸ By the 1970s, however, Haney attributed his success on television to his position as a trusted figure in Detroit. For instance, speaking to *Black Enterprise* in 1974, Haney maintains “I operate with a free hand...nobody tells me what to discuss or how to discuss it. We discuss everything from police brutality to poor housing. There are no taboos that I know of.”³²⁹ While the series managed to remain on the air for a long time, Haney’s program was still relegated to one of the worst time slots possible with almost no budget at all—a circumstance Haney attributes to the ABC corporation rather than the local station management, whom he describes as “sensitive” and supportive of minority inclusion in local broadcasting. Yet, Haney’s model of local discourse still operates apart from the guiding ethos of Black public affairs programs that emerged afterwards, like *CPT*, which was designed to speak directly to local Black audiences with a range of both documentary segments and live entertainment.

It is likewise important to emphasize that despite the upsurge in Black public affairs programming nationally, these shows were still exceptions to dominant broadcast trends, and *CPT* as well as *Haney’s People*, were both anomalous phenomena in a local context. They were the only television programs at the time featuring Black Detroiters, with Black staff members, working as advocates for what was nearing a majority of the city’s total population. Accordingly, the struggle to bring *CPT* to air in a politically tumultuous local context was not easy. In the period between the integrationist programs discussed in the previous chapter and the premiere of

³²⁸ Louis Robinson, “TV Discovers Black Man,” *Ebony*, February 1969, 34.

³²⁹ Jacob Wortham, “In With the Big Boys,” *Black Enterprise*, September 1974.

CPT in the fall of 1968, Black activists hoping to enter the broadcast business, or transition from radio to television, struggled to introduce Black perspectives to Detroit media—and more often than not failed. For example, a Black version of the cancelled public affairs program *Public Television Journal* was developed but never brought to air. Proposed by George M. Collins of WJR radio, this program entitled *Black Perspectives* aimed to address what the “Riot Commission called the growing division between the Black community and the white communities as well as within the Black community itself.”³³⁰ Collins argued that the city needed a primetime news program run by Black Detroiters in order to galvanize racial understanding and to “detour the Detroit area from the present course of continuing polarization.”³³¹ Each episode of the proposed *Black Perspectives* was to begin with a fifteen-minute news segment and conclude with host comments. The bulk of each episode was to be comprised of special reports and interviews with in-studio guests and experts. The structure and aesthetic of each program would further be shaped by the episode’s thematic content. Over the course of the twelve proposed consecutive news broadcasts, the series hoped to “communicate all Negro philosophies, the social and political organizations operating in the ghetto, Negro art and culture, worship and beliefs, and varied lifestyles. It would communicate... a feeling of the difficulties and frustrations of being Negro in Detroit and a sense of the Negro Culture through and history.”³³²

While *Black Perspectives* never came to fruition due to lack of funds, elements of the

³³⁰ “Public Television Journal Detroit: Black Perspectives,” 1968, Box 146, Folder 20: TV 1969, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University Archives.

³³¹ “Public Television Journal Detroit: Black Perspectives.” Interestingly, “Black community” is singular while “white communities” is plural, likely not recognizing multiplicities of identity formations in Black Detroit.

³³² “Public Television Journal Detroit: Black Perspectives.”

project, as well as content ideas from the previously discussed *Monochrome* were incorporated into the production of *CPT*. In Detroit, like many other US cities, Black TV emerged as a process of trial and error through a series of negotiations between white corporate executives, civic institutions, and Black creative talent. Black talent in Detroit—largely excluded from bureaucratic positions within civic life before the 1970s—had to struggle to find a place within urban media infrastructure and local political life alike. *CPT* creator Gilbert Maddox had long advocated Black televisual programming in the city, yet before 1967 gained little headway with station executives. In the summer of 1960 he did successfully produce the first program in Detroit oriented towards the city's Black population. The eighteen-week run of *Black and Unknown Bards* aired on WJBK-TV and highlighted the literary achievements of Black American authors, from Langston Hughes to Phillis Wheatley, many of whom like Dudley Randall, hailed from Detroit.³³³ Similar to many subsequent programs that would follow in its footsteps, *Black and Unknown Bards* was filmed using Wayne State University facilities. Dr. Lee Dreyfus, then Assistant Director of Broadcasting at Wayne State University, and Gilbert Maddox, spearheaded the creation of the series hosted by Dr. James Olsen. According to research compiled by Maddox in the 1960s, it may be the first Black TV series of its kind in US history.³³⁴ The series was not renewed for a second run.

Following the conclusion of *Black and Unknown Bards*, Maddox developed proposals for a string of programs that addressed Black news, culture, and history that never made it to air.³³⁵

³³³ Thompson, Julius E. *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, And The Black Arts Movement In Detroit, 1960-1995*. McFarland, 2005.

³³⁴ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 175–76.

³³⁵ Among the proposals, was a Black history series entitled, "An Untold Story of Americans" that sought to identify outstanding local Blacks and reveal their family backgrounds, their motivational sources, religious and educational influences, and their economical and social

Ultimately, it was *CPT* that enabled Maddox to explore his theories that Black television could be a key tool to connect Black communities through exchanges of information and cultural ideas, and build a prosperous Black future. *CPT* would thus build upon these previous iterations of Black public affairs programs, both nationally and locally, crafting components of preceding programs to fit what Maddox and Brown considered to be the needs of post-Rebellion Black citizens.

Gilbert Maddox's Theory of Black Television for Black Futurity

Gilbert Maddox's writings—his dissertation in particular—provides useful insights into the conceptual foundation driving *CPT* show's development. Namely, through CCTV projects and Black-produced television programming, Maddox imagined a Black technologically enhanced future. Maddox, throughout his career, draws attention to Black exclusion from media infrastructures that inhibit Black media expansion and citizen uplift in a city with a long history of racial oppression.

In December 1966, Maddox submitted a grant application entitled "A Proposal for Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication of Human Resource Development" to the Office of Economic Opportunity seeking funding for his anti-poverty and high school television program.³³⁶ The major thesis of this proposal was that anti-poverty programs were failing to communicate effectively with large numbers of people in high poverty areas. Maddox suggested wiring a specified target area in Detroit for closed circuit television. The programs to be broadcast in this area would be created by local residents and would emphasize the dissemination of information, especially that pertaining to educational, vocational,

environment. This work was done to provide some authoritative conclusions on all the factors which favored their rise.

³³⁶ Maddox, *A Study of CPT* 12.

and social services, community resources, family guidance, and teenage counseling.³³⁷

Through this study, Maddox strove to determine the means by which “educational TV could be effectively utilized” to communicate public needs—especially for Detroit’s youth.³³⁸ Maddox designed the project to transmit classes offered by anti-poverty and education programs, discuss opportunities for employment and job training, the availability of professional services “(medical, dental, legal, social),” and provide programs for socio-cultural development in the community. Other aspects of the TV project stressed the need to “increase the viewers’ awareness of socially desirable values, attitudes, and behaviors and to attempt to dispel negative attitudes in their “perceived value system” by constructing forums for teens to express their social complaints, hopes, and struggles to their peers.³³⁹ These programs would also provide a multi-faceted base for increased awareness of civic, social, cultural, and personal responsibilities.

Maddox was not alone in this approach to broadcast technologies as intermediaries of social justice and education, conceptualizing television as a potentially branch interlocutor of civic infrastructure. Municipal governments and technocratic developers in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh likewise explored the potential uses of broadcast technologies as a form of civic governance and/or a means to open up a channel of communication between citizens and city officials. Jen Light’s *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* traces the strategic top-down implementation of cable technologies in relation to anti-poverty programs. According to Light, experiments with cable

³³⁷ Tait, “Minority Programming in Television and the Story of Detroit’s ‘Profiles in Black.’” 277-278.

³³⁸ Maddox, “Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit.”

³³⁹ Maddox, “Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit.”

television development in New York, ultimately revealed the “medium’s potential as an instrument for community communications, if not for citizen-government communication.”³⁴⁰ Los Angeles also had a history of community radio in minority communities, yet advocates for cable development in the city hoped communications infrastructure could improve information gaps, facilitate job training and improve race relations in low-income communities. By the late 1960s, broadcasters and developers were championing the technological and economic possibilities of CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) and CATV (Community Antenna Television) for community uplift if implemented in “ghetto” areas under minority control. In 1972, the Urban Institute, a Great Society “think tank” developed by president Johnson, published *Cable Television in the Cities: Community Control, Public Access, and Minority Ownership*.³⁴¹ The study advocated for minority entrepreneurs to invest in the new technology before white municipal authorities take hold of emergent communications systems and further exclude non-white citizens from media programming and broadcast institutions. According to the Urban Institute, “control, ownership, and operations of cable systems by minorities could provide economic and political leverage, and the management and technical expertise required to accomplish a dramatic break in the cycle of dependency and exploitation.”³⁴² They further imagine cable as the last “communications frontier for the oppressed” that could aid in school reform, anti-poverty programs, and the vocational training —particularly for the nation’s largest Black markets in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and DC. While Maddox dreamed of Black media control in the 1960s, Detroit would not experiment with large-scale Black media

³⁴⁰ Jennifer S. Light, *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* (JHU Press, 2005), 205.

³⁴¹ Charles Tate and Urban Institute, *Cable Television in the Cities: Community Control, Public Access, and Minority Ownership* (Urban Institute, 1971).

³⁴² Tate, *Cable Television in the Cities*, 59.

ownership until the subsequent decade, a topic I discuss at greater length in Chapter Four.

Maddox's writings on broadcast possibilities mix techno-utopian dreams of what media could do for Black subjects with a deep awareness of the challenges Black subjects face in a city where police brutality and socio-economic infrastructure inhibit Black futures. His dissertation begins by discussing televisual coverage of the space race and imagining techno-futures that could be made possible by CATV and computer systems. Maddox writes:

High-speed electrostatic printing devices attached to television sets will permit the reception of a morning newspaper in viewers' homes. Switching equipment installed in the system will allow the now passive viewer to register comments by sending back signals along the line. By connecting homes into a central computer, access to computer-assists instruction and the retrieval of unlimited taped or filmed information will become possible...The home communication center will also feature a closed circuit system allowing surveillance and communication to all parts of the home an yard.... In short the potential of such an elaborate system is limited only by man's imagination.³⁴³

Here Maddox draws on the possibilities of telecommunications outlined by The President's Task Force on Communications. However, his primary concern is the potential for evolving media technologies to serve the public good, in contrast with the historic disservice media technologies have done to black citizens—especially during the Detroit Rebellion. Citing examples of Black marginalization on TV and the lack of Black access to telecommunications systems, Maddox can imagine a reworking of television to aid Black advancement, putting him in line with traditions of Afrofuturist thought. However, he is still concerned that media, if it continues to be controlled

³⁴³ Maddox, "Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit,"2.

by white hegemonic systems, could be used to further increase the divide between black people and an economically and politically dominant white power bloc to the detriment of Black social advancement. He argues:

Modern communications could thus generate world consciousness or narrow chauvinism, they could be used to make the best teachers and learning available to all or they could be used to propagandize, distort truth, manipulate and eventually enslave many for the selfish purposes of the few. The potential for educational, social, and political benefit, for understanding and world peace, for helping to solve the problems of racism, poverty, ignorance and disease, and many others ills which have traditionally plagued mankind is immense.³⁴⁴

Maddox's dissertation discusses at length the ineffective strategies media makers had thus far taken to communicate with Black publics and the lack of institutional support for Black media development. He nevertheless saw the potentials of telecommunications for Black uplift and conceived of them so great that he felt a social responsibility to become a producer in order to explore media as a means of mass education for Black Detroit. For Maddox, Black public affairs programming was a necessary step in ensuring a Black future within a technologically advancing urban sphere. In this way, *CPT* was an experiment in the afrofuturist possibilities of television to educate and enrich local Black lives.

Local Black Media and Community Control Initiatives

For Maddox, investing in projects like Black public affairs programming and CCTV were

³⁴⁴ Maddox, "Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit,"3.

both a worthwhile means of dispensing information to Black citizens and also a vital step in the process of apprehending political autonomy over Black city life and civic infrastructure. Approaching the project, Maddox insisted that program content demonstrate that “Blacks must control their own communities politically, economically, and socially.” Episodes of *CPT* throughout the series’ first season repeatedly cover community control politics in the news segments and provide featured segments that highlight targeted areas for community control expansion – with a particular emphasis on community control as an educational reform strategy.³⁴⁵ *CPT* was also targeted towards schools with announcements about the shows distributed via pamphlets in Detroit Public Schools weekly. For Maddox, local Black media was not only a mechanism for negotiating urban renewal processes but was also a component of a larger movement for community control of local institutions, including broadcast stations. I use the term urban renewal here, as elsewhere in this dissertation, to signal the strategies of land redevelopment and business revitalization in areas of moderate to high-density urban land use.³⁴⁶ In Detroit, urban renewal began as a process of slum clearance and reconstruction of the city center, with little concern for the welfare of dislocated Black residents from inner city areas. Accordingly, urban planning in the city became a contested process with Black leaders increasing vocal objections to (white) corporate and governmental decisions regarding the city’s built environment.³⁴⁷ Black leaders hoped to intervene in the malfeasant development of urban

³⁴⁵ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 193.

³⁴⁶ Keating, W. Dennis, and Norman Krumholz. *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods: Achievements, Opportunities, and Limits*. SAGE, 1999; Doucet, Brian. *Why Detroit Matters: Decline, Renewal and Hope in a Divided City*. Policy Press, 2017; Triece, Mary E. *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century*. Lexington Books, 2016; Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*; Solomon, Lewis D. *Detroit: Three Pathways to Revitalization* (Transaction Publishers, 2013).

³⁴⁷ Thomas and Manning, *Redevelopment and Race*, chap. 5.

infrastructure, often through tactics of community control. According to Claire Jean Kim, struggles for “community control” date back to the 1800s but gained visibility with the entrenchment of residential segregation in the 1900s and resurged in the 1960s with the emergence of the Black Power movement. Kim emphasizes that moves for “Black Power” and “community control” are related, but not exactly synonymous, enterprises. “Where Black Power calls generally for Blacks to take back power over their own lives, community control calls more specifically for Blacks to take back control over institutions in their own segregated neighborhoods, such as schools, banks, political offices, and stores. We might think of community control as a place-specific application of the Black Power frame.”³⁴⁸ In *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (1970), Alan A. Altshuler described community control as:

- (1) Devolution of as much authority as possible to neighborhood communities; (2) direct representation of such communities of the city council, the board of education, the police commission, and other significant policy bodies; (3) Black representation at all levels of the public service in far more than token numbers; (4) similar representations on the labor forces of government contractors; and (5) the vigorous application of public resources to facilitate the development of Black controlled businesses.³⁴⁹

Likewise, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton’s *Black Power* (1967) advocated Black control over the institutions that affected Black everyday life. They noted that Black citizens

³⁴⁸ Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (Yale University Press, 2003), 61.

³⁴⁹ Alan A. Altshuler, *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (Pegasus, 1970), 14.

must “lead and run their own organizations. Only Black people can convey the revolutionary idea—and it is a revolutionary idea—that Black people are able to do things themselves.”³⁵⁰

For example, the final point the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program explicitly states, “we want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community control of modern technology.” This point further connects to the first listed, “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black and oppressed communities. We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.”³⁵¹ While the Black Panthers were a national organization, it was important that much of this work in the struggle for Black liberation be enacted on a neighborhood level. The Panthers did not give precise methods to achieve control of local space, nor do they explicitly mention broadcast technologies in their umbrella statement. However, as David Goldberg has shown, “identifying land as the basis of all wealth and power, Black businessmen, intellectuals, militants, and economic nationalists, community and tenants’ rights activists, and revolutionary nationalists involved in the Detroit Black Power movement began creating and supporting parallel institutions to challenge racism...in their communities.”³⁵² In the post-Rebellion city, Black citizens grew tired of white authority destroying Black community spaces and displacing Black citizens through housing policies and employment discrimination. They were tired of the abuses perpetrated by a predominantly white city council and police force. They wanted complete participation in public decisions that affected their lives and the conditions of their

³⁵⁰ *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (Vintage Books, 1967), 67.

³⁵¹ “Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program,” n.d., <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/Black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm>.

³⁵² Alan A. Altshuler, *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (Pegasus, 1970), 14.

neighborhoods. In Detroit, community control became a core objective of the tenants' rights movement, Black union movements, and education reform protests, with support from the local branches of CORE (Congress on Racial Equality), the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and organizations like Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC).

Furthermore, Black community control efforts have long been explicitly tied to educational progress. Prior to the 1940s, American schools and educational curriculum were organized differently from community to community—and the structures of Black education were organized separate from white America. In the Antebellum South, formal education for slaves was scant and usually received through subterfuge if at all. In late 1700s Boston and New York, “African Free School,” run by white trustees, sought to instill Black children with Christian values and knowledge to temper the uncivilized associations Black citizens held under slavery. By 1827 Black educated leaders embraced the concept of African Free Schools, yet desired to shift the curriculum to address the needs of local African American communities. Segregated schools until the 1960s, though lacking financial resources and adequate facilities, were run by Black leaders as white school boards showed little or no interests in African American education. Of Course, Equal educational access was a focal point for desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.³⁵³ Yet, desegregation did not unilaterally alter Black adult achievement as anticipated. According to William Henry Watkins, “Educational researchers documented the intense alienation, dissatisfaction, low academic achievement, and sense of inferiority experienced by Black pupils, and pondered how best to increase the academic

³⁵³ Lance McCreedy, “African Free Schools,” ed. Faustine Childress Jones-Wilson, *Encyclopedia of African-American Education* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996).

achievement of Black students.”³⁵⁴ With integration, “pupil teacher relationships were strained for African American students and African American teachers were removed from positions and kept from contributing to curriculum.”³⁵⁵

Demands for school reform was a topic covered directly by *CPT*. As incidents of violence increased in Detroit Public Schools, many Black activists in the city advocated for an overhaul of the public school system. Thus, in the 1960s, education became a focal point of Black Power advocates looking to regain control of community institutions and structures of knowledge. Increased community control of school content was one proposed solution to ensure Black students would achieve academic advancement. Following protests led by students in 1966, the High School Study Commission released a report on the conditions of education in Detroit Schools. The opening chapter of the report, written by Amos Wilder, argued that the schools are becoming “symbols of society’s neglect and indifference, rather than institutions that serve the needs of society by providing upward social and economic mobility.”³⁵⁶ In the aftermath of the commission’s findings, Wilder, SNCC leader Dan Aldridge, and others like Albert Cleage, demanded community control of education as the needed solution to the educational crisis. These please were frequently documented in local Black press, especially the *Michigan Chronicle*. In Detroit, these efforts culminated in the formation of the Citizens for Community Control of Schools organization, endorsed by Albert Cleage. “We citizens of the Black community of Detroit, fully conscious of the fact that our children are not receiving a decent education, viewing the increasing deterioration of the educational situation in this city,

³⁵⁴ William Henry Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (Peter Lang, 2005), 139.

³⁵⁵ Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education*, 139.

³⁵⁶ Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 328.

and after innumerable presentations of our grievances and proposals to the Board of Education to no avail, have finally come to the conclusion that COMMUNITY CONTROL OF SCHOOLS is the only way to establish real accountability of the school system to the Black community.”³⁵⁷ Though the NAACP was cautious that Community Control would exacerbate inequality in schools, demands for community involvement in educational policies grew increasingly popular by the late 1960s and overrode local demands for integrated schools. BY 1970, state legislation approved an act providing for regional school districts and allowing the city school board (rather than the state) to allocate funds, negotiate contracts and payroll, manage property, nominate school representatives, and make curriculum decisions, which led to increased Black history and Black literature taught in schools.³⁵⁸ *CPT*, however, did not only operate in conversation with this movement, receiving educational funding, but likewise served as a platform for the types of Black educational content the schools were advocating for during the late 1960s. While Maddox and the other subsequent producers at *CPT/Black Journal* did not explicitly support all the other objectives in the Panther Ten-Point program, they were undeniably invested in television’s potential as a broadcast technology that could give local citizens the “power to determine the destiny of Black and oppressed communities.”

As I will discuss further in the following chapter, Black radicals, like the Black Panthers in Los Angeles and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit, became deeply invested in seizing control of local media flows to give community members the power to disseminate ideas and political values as a key praxis in the struggle for Black liberation. The League, in particular, called for a total economic revolution to overthrow capitalist structures of

³⁵⁷ Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*, 329.

³⁵⁸ Joseph Francis Zimmerman, *State-Local Relations: A Partnership Approach* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 156.

Black oppression in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology. For the League, Black Power and Black control of civic life was only achievable through the destruction of the capitalist system. *CPT*, while producing media content contemporaneously, provided a voice on Black Nationalism and community control that was more invested in radical Black Power than Haney but still saw education as a means of uplift that differed considerably from the Marxist principles advocated by The League. The show's main segments suggest all members of the Black community support Black enterprise and Black educational development conterminously, entrusting Black leaders to guide the way for Black economic developments in the city. Maddox consequently saw television precisely as the perfect battle ground to determine the future of Black life in America. As he puts it:

Modern methods of communication can be instruments of enlightenment or tools of tyranny. Modern communications could thus generate world consciousness or narrow chauvinism, they could be used to make the best teachers and learning available to all or they could be used to propagandize, distort truth, manipulate and eventually enslave many for the selfish purposes of the few. The potential for educational, social and political benefit, for understanding and world peace, for helping to solve the problems of racism, poverty, ignorance, disease, and many other ills which have traditionally plagued mankind is immense. But because the potential benefits are so great, so is the responsibility to seek them.³⁵⁹

As part of Maddox's conceptualization, media was a mechanism for transmitting Black knowledge and providing viewers with additional information about educational access. Yet it was also a means to understand and solve social welfare concerns. Maddox theorized a series of

³⁵⁹ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 2–3.

objectives and principles to be stressed to staff and reinforced through program content as shows were developed. The first of these concerns, was that Black Americans should see intelligent strong Black citizens in positions of prominence (hence the staffing decisions) and Black citizens should be proud of their “history, heritage and culture.”³⁶⁰ To carry this forth, Maddox developed the program *CPT* to celebrate Black history, Black artistic culture, Black intellectual thought, and Black Power advocacy. It was, in itself, a manifestation of Black community control ideology and pointed viewers to other ventures that further promoted Black uplift separate from white control.

Producing *CPT*

While his CCTV proposal was rejected, Maddox implemented many goals of the CCTV project through the creation of *CPT*. Notably, like *Black Perspectives*, *CPT* was structured as an entertaining and educational news magazine (or edutainment) designed for television that could serve a variety of Black community needs. *CPT* interwove in-studio interviews, round-table discussions, documentary segments produced on location in the city, and live performances. Like the preceding high-school TV project application, *CPT* primarily envisioned television as a dialogic medium; a means to foster Black unity and aid in social uplift projects. According to the funding proposal submitted to The New Detroit Committee, *CPT* worked towards effecting “increased commutations between persons and institutions within the Detroit community, utilizing the medium of television to provide information, practical advice, and motivational materials specifically structured to capture the attention of our citizens who do not use the

³⁶⁰ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 193–194.

printed media for their primary source of information.”³⁶¹ As noted previously, *CPT* was designed to operate as a source of information regarding local job training programs, social services, and educational resources. In this sense, media governance was not solely an objective of the city's corporate elite described in Chapter One. Black producers likewise took advantage of increased access to television production to communicate models of effective Black citizenship for post-Rebellion publics, projecting images of Black uplift values, politics, and history.

A major premise of Maddox's proposal was that the television medium had become the biggest single source of entertainment and information for the American public, and thus could establish more effective channels of communication for minority groups than radio or printed media. *CPT* relied upon local newspapers and radio for their entertainment and news briefs, repacking them for an accessible transmission to viewing publics. *CPT* reciprocally relied on these other media sources for promotion, in addition to word-of-mouth, notices in Black churches, and attempts to distribute flyers advertising the show in Black neighborhoods. As with the production of *In Your Interest*, *CPT* was conceptualized as a discursive tool for community access, both presenting information to local audiences and using survey and feedback mechanisms to understand the perceptions and desires of viewing publics. In fact, producer Gilbert Maddox conducted a series of surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of *CPT* for Black viewers. These include a telephone “coincidental study” conducted by *CPT* staff targeted at residential homes in Detroit's Black neighborhoods and a similar study conducted for station WTVS by the McGraw-Hill Research Company. *CPT* further conducted personal interviews

³⁶¹ Maddox, “Proposal for the Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication within the City of Detroit.”

with potential viewers which examined not only the impact of television, but sought also to determine media habits and attitudes of Detroit viewers in target residential communities.

The study and its conclusions undergird *CPT* producer Gil Maddox's dissertation on the politics of local Black television. Published in 1970, the dissertation outlines the work *CPT* had initiated to both produce radical change and to increase Black access to the means of media production as part of broader project of community control. The dissertation culminates in a discussion of where *CPT* might go in the future and how it will continue to address the ongoing needs of local Black citizens, leading him to the conclusion that increasing positive representations of Black culture and politics on television will play a crucial role in revolutionizing Black urban life. Maddox's grant writing and extensive research endeavor shed light on *CPT*, as both a research experiment in community control and a media text producing a Black spatial imaginary, that projected a specific brand of social welfare, Black cultural identity, and socio-economic uplift in the wake of the Rebellion.

After first securing a principal funding sum of \$20,000 from the Junior League of Detroit and \$22,800 from Department of Education, *CPT* was approved for funding by the New Detroit Committee in September of 1968.³⁶² The NDC contributed a \$49,000 grant to Maddox and his associates towards the production of the series.³⁶³ The NDC itself was funded heavily by member corporations like The Hudson Company and The Ford Foundation. Henry Ford II, in particular, was a prominent committee member interested in post-Rebellion welfare in the

³⁶² "Pamphlet on the Division of Urban Extension: Wayne State University, Vol, 1. Number 2, Winter 1969.," n.d., Accession 660, Box 50, Folder 28: Communications 1968, Television Series, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

³⁶³ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 184. Also see: "CPT Expenditures August 1, 1968 - December 31, 1968 (Programs 1-10)," n.d., New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

originating city of the Ford Motor Company. The same year, The Ford Foundation funded *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant*.³⁶⁴ In essence, corporations based in industrial centers in the late 1960s were invested broadly in funding public affairs television as crisis management. Yet, in Detroit, as elsewhere, they otherwise began to leave creative control to the program producers and staff. Filming for *CPT* took place in the facilities of Wayne State University with the assistance of the Center for Adult Education and Outreach. The Junior League of Detroit further pledged to promote the series through outreach measures on a volunteer basis. In a letter to Gil Maddox, the Junior League further noted that:

We endeavored to learn from the Black community at all economic levels, what they would like and what would be significant to them. We heard from them that commercial television failed to portray members of their race as an essential part of American society and for white viewers. They kept saying that what was needed in Detroit was a television program of their own, one that they could identify with. Members want to volunteer in three essential areas: publicity, promotion, research and opinion surveys. We feel that the program should be produced by Blacks. We have told our members that they might not like or fully comprehend the series. We have told them that the Black community must be allowed to judge it for themselves, but we hope that white people might begin to understand Black problems and concerns.³⁶⁵

Here, the Junior League, which was mostly comprised of white women from wealthy neighborhoods, stresses the importance of giving Black producers free-range to develop content to effectively reach Black viewers, prepping members to work as advocates for a series they may

³⁶⁴ Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 16.

³⁶⁵ "The Junior League of Detroit," September 26, 1968, Accession 660, Box 192: New Detroit, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

not like or understand because it served a larger sociological function.³⁶⁶ While standing by as a secondary support system, the Junior League also used its institutional connections to help facilitate the production of the show as much as possible. For example, in the *CPT/DBJ* Anniversary Special, Tony Brown recalls that one of the Junior League members was married to a Ford executive and got *CPT* staff access to the Ford Motor Company's editing facilities after hours. Ford, which boasts a long history of instructional film production, had far superior film laboratories than the student facilities at Wayne State, and also was a long-time advocate of using industrial film as a form of civic governance.³⁶⁷ In this way, the facilities of corporate forces, like the Ford Motor Company, that were used control to Black worker conduct and suppress Black liberation politics in pre-Rebellion Detroit, were later used by Black Detroiters to instruct minority viewers on Black nationalist politics—a topic explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, while *CPT* had to adhere to regulated television broadcast standards, it was emphasized on air multiple times that none of the local institutions that contributed to the production of *CPT*, either in terms of financing or facility management, censored content or interfered directly in program decisions. However, *CPT* was answerable to a Community Advisory Board devised upon the show's creation that included representatives from grassroots organizations, civil rights groups, education advocacy groups, the Junior League of Detroit,

³⁶⁶ The Junior League of Detroit, Inc. was the 13th Junior League to join the broader association in 1914. As a member of the American Junior League, Inc. the Detroit branch is governed by its own board of directors but bound to the Association's Bylaws. The Detroit League has historically spent less time on "cotillions and cookbooks and more energy on women's alcoholism, battered wives' shelters, rape-crisis centers and teen pregnancy." For more: <http://www.jldetroit.org/whoweare>

³⁶⁷ Gayle Wald unpacks the complicated history between Ford as a philanthropic organization and televised struggles for Black autonomy. Wald, *It's Been Beautiful*.

Wayne State University, and the New Detroit Committee. The Board's function was to suggest and evaluate program content and to provide basic programming guidelines. It also acted as a buffer against any special interest groups who might attempt to thwart free and open programming. While board content objections were implied rather than enforced, Maddox argues that "they conditioned the thinking of the Black staff members" and informed the types of materials they ultimately brought to air. I am unable to confirm how much "conditioning" was actually introduced by funders. However, to avoid upsetting or startling funders at the outset of production, Gilbert Maddox and program staff planned to increase inclusion of militant Black Power rhetoric as the series progressed. The objective was to slowly expose viewers to more and more radical ideologies, without causing too much commotion. Yet, in doing so, they faced pressure from some political organizations for not being radical enough. According to Maddox, they were encouraged by Detroit Black Nationalist organizations, like the CCAC, "to take a hard, abrasive" approach to programming.

These forces wanted us to evolve into a "confrontational" type of series which would devote all energies to pointing out the oppression heaped upon Black persons by white society. The program staff felt that such an approach would be self-defeating. That is, we believed that it was just as important to show the Black community the strength and richness to be found there. Furthermore, we felt that, because even persons in the Black community were at different stages of awareness, to program strongly abrasive materials from the beginning would only frighten or "turn them off," not to mention what such an approach might do to white sponsors.³⁶⁸

Thus, while content producers were given a semblance of free-range, they nevertheless

³⁶⁸ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 249.

developed episodes with the knowledge that aired content would potentially incur reactions from the board, the station, local censorship, and viewers, ranging from the militant to the moderate. While these programs were still aimed at a Black audience and produced for Black discussion, there was still significant caution as to how to bring Black content to air without offending the white structures that governed local media. Also of note, Maddox conceptualized their Black audience at different levels of political “awareness” to social issues and Black Power projects. Thus, strategies of “edutainment” helped producers convey the show’s political objectives while remaining diverting for Black viewers, enriching, but not too aggressively political.

Another crucial stakeholder in the production of *CPT* was Detroit Public Television. The importance of public broadcasting to local Black programming in the late 1960s cannot be overstated. In remarks upon signing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, President Johnson stated: “Television is a young invention. But we have learned already that it has immense – even revolutionary – power to change our lives.” The public broadcasting act was the culminating effect of a decade of media activism on the part of educators and philanthropists, working to reimagine television’s social role separated from the interests of commercial broadcasts.³⁶⁹ The Act pledged federal support towards increasing public telecommunications services and making them available to all citizens of the United States. In Detroit, public television broadcasting began with the establishment of WTVS-TV Channel 56 licensed to the Detroit Educational Television Foundation in 1955. WTVS-TV was devised to provide Detroit and the surrounding suburbs with educational and informational programming concerning local politics, culture, and history. After the programming dilemma of *In Your Interest*, producers turned to WTVS as the

³⁶⁹ For more on the history of Public Broadcasting see: Oullette, *Viewers Like You*.

most stable venue for Black-produced content. Unlike other stations, WTVS was happy to open timeslots and production facilities to Black residents and afforded them opportunity to produce programs that best served the Black community without interference.³⁷⁰

Throughout his dissertation, Maddox too stressed the essential role UHF Public Television played in facilitating Black visions to reach local viewers. While UHF did not have the same reception capacity as VHF, projections saw increases in the Detroit homes able to receive UHF stations as years progressed. Meanwhile, WDIV-TV 56 was open to providing Black producers the flexibility to access channels of communication and enable immediate coverage in the event of civic upheaval, especially “in case of future riots.” It also had a lower cost of airtime than other stations, and would enable more economical productions. In a statement to the New Detroit Committee, *CPT* was hailed as a revelatory project for Black self-representation. The statement quoted the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television’s influential 1967 report; *Public Television: A Program for Action*, which advocated for the government to support and sponsor educational media:

Public television programming can deepen a sense of community in local life. It should show us our community as it really is. It should be a forum for debate and controversy. It should bring into the home meetings, generally un-televised where major public decisions are hammered out, and occasions where people and community express their hopes, their protests, their enthusiasms, and their will. It should provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard. Through this series we can give to the Black

³⁷⁰ While educational television initially only reached those who owned TV sets with UHF capacities, Under the All-Channel Receiver Act, FCC regulations would ensure that all new TV sets sold in the U.S. after 1964 had built-in UHF tuners and each year more Detroiters were accessing WTVS.

community something that is theirs; theirs to create, theirs to support, and theirs to applaud or criticize.³⁷¹

Yet, the transmission of content via UHF Public Television was not a seamless process.

Speaking of Detroit's Public Television, Channel 56, Maddox concluded that their coverage of urban crisis could be characterized as:

Sensitive, creative, relevant, committed, and very encouraging. At the same time, it could be called sluggish, obstructionist, unimaginative, insufficient, and quite discouraging. For public TV has had its good moments and its bad in regard to the Black community. Its record shows some of the finest achievements of quality programming and attentiveness to the wishes and needs of the Black community, but it also demonstrates too often the intransigence and unwillingness of any established power to let the Black man in— all the way.³⁷²

While Channel 56 was more accommodating to the goals of Black-produced programming than other local stations, there was still a significant level of indifference to their project among white station executives, which grew increasingly clear as the dust from the Rebellion settled. Often, station managers, producers, and established staff would contend that approaches were not “technically feasible” or did not make sense from a production standpoint as a means of controlling content. *CPT* also struggled to achieve their goal of training Black applicants in television production. Many University and station personnel were indifferent to the project

³⁷¹ WSU, Station WTVS, Junior League of Detroit, “Submission to the New Detroit Committee,” 1968, 2, Accession 660, Box 50, Folder 28: Communications 1968, Television Series, New Detroit Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives. Also see: Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, “Public Television, a Program for Action: The Report and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television.” (New York: Carnegie Corporation, n.d.), 92.

³⁷² Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 62.

because it imposed extra workloads upon them without providing extra compensation. They were not enthusiastic about expending time training newcomers, especially those that were vying for jobs in the same industry. According to Maddox, white crew members refused to introduce Black staff to the technical skills involved in studio productions and some attempted to “exercise subtle control over program content by restricting the range of possible programming approaches, saying that they were not technically feasible; others went beyond the bounds of merely suggesting ideas.”³⁷³

The production of the series was further hindered by the technical inexperience of the staff. Many of the Black social actors invested in the ideological potentialities of Black television were not prepared for the drudgery of technical production. According to Maddox’s accounts, many contributors found it difficult to keep up with broadcast deadlines, and were irritated by delays caused by “going through proper channels” and set procedures. Too often relegated to older studios and to using older equipment, production hit many stalls and starts due to maintenance and budgetary concerns.³⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the program debuted on October 16, 1968 and completed its run in January 29, 1969. At the end of the fourteen episode run, Tony Brown admitted that despite their struggles, *CPT*’s placement on public television was always conceived of as a training ground for Black television production, a space to learn and develop broadcast strategies for Black media. It was always hoped that the series, and Black media in general, would subsequently move to one of the three VHF stations with wider viewership.³⁷⁵ It is also quite possible that the show’s more experimental cinematography and content design — compared to other programs on Detroit Public Television (DPTV) Channel 56—was not a

³⁷³ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 248.

³⁷⁴ For a discussion of the show’s difficulties: Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 245–49.

³⁷⁵ “Detroit Black Journal: 20th Anniversary Special.”

consequence of the producers' inexperience, but rather the show's uncertainty about how best to express Black culture through the television medium. It is, thus, quite apropos that Brown began the series by dubbing it an "experiment in television's newest color: Black!"

As emphasized before, *CPT* was conceptualized as an "edutaining" magazine program, intermixing serious political conversations and documentary segments with live dramatic performances, comedy, live music, and scripted skits. All of these segments contribute to the show's objective of rehearsing Black economic and political engagement alongside a celebration of Black cultural production in order to educate viewers on the politics of Black autonomy ... without getting "too preachy" as Maddox says. The entertainment segments, in particular, provide aesthetic "experimentations" with Black representation, in terms of framing and editing in particular. Below is an example of an episode structure from October 30, 1968 that demonstrates how political segments were intermixed with entertaining content. Many of these specific segments I will discuss at length below:

Introductory Comments from Brown

Entertainment Guest 1: *CPT's* own Harold McKinney Quartet

Sandy Lawrence Presents: The Grapevine

Featured Segment: The Black Vote

New Faces: Local Talent Bill Murphy

"Free Your Mind" Non-Commercial: "Because We are Number Two

Abe Ulmer Presents: The News

Entertainment Guests 3: Earl Grant Performance/Interview and the *CPT* Choir

Entertainment Guest 4: Comedian George Kirby

Return to the Black Vote: In-Studio Interviews with Robert Tindal, Executive Secretary of the NAACP and Horace Bradfield of Wayne County Community College.

To explicate how the show intertwined political content aimed at educating viewers on community control and uplift, and celebrating Black artistic achievement through entertaining

segments, I will highlight a selection of signature components of *CPT*'s magazine format during the series' first season; the show's intro *The Grapevine* segment, typical entertainment guests, and the series' unique mock commercials. I then will highlight a selection of main featured segments that were strategically mixed into entertainment and allowed Brown to vocalize his take on Detroit political and social issues. While Maddox controlled the production of the show's direction from behind the scenes, in the featured segments, Brown articulates *CPT*'s, as well as his own, objectives for Black uplift. In doing so, I will also introduce many of the core personalities, community organizations, and local conditions that show how *CPT* operated in tandem with other Black public affairs programs of the time, yet also structured content to address local political headlines that affected Black Detroiters and cultural happenings in the city Maddox and Brown deemed important for informed Black viewers.

CPT Intro

Initial episodes of *CPT* open with a “flicker-frame” jump-cut-edited montage of photographs of Black Americans—both prominent and anonymous—played over dissonant, fast-paced jazz music performed by the Harold McKinney Quartet. In order, these photos include: rural poverty housing and senior citizens in Macomb County, actress Abbie Lincoln, Reverend Nicholas Hood, Stokely Carmichael, Congressmen John Conyers and Charles Diggs, State Representative James Del Rio, Reverend Martin Luther King speaking in Detroit, Black models, Malcolm X, Reverend Albert Cleage, Mohammed Ali, Harry Belafonte, Black children at play, scenes from the 1967 Rebellion, Deputy Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools (Arthur

Johnson) speaking to a crowd in the riot area, and the Detroit Civil Rights March of 1963.³⁷⁶

CPT used the televisual medium here to highlight Detroit's emergent Black leaders and salient moments in local Black history. The opening segment hails an informed, yet decidedly local, Black public sphere. Over the montage, an outline of an African American male facial silhouette next to the letters "CPT" appears. The shot fades into a live studio stage, with three podiums marked "CPT" evenly separated within the studio space. Sitting behind the podium from left to right are Tony Brown, Sandy Lawrence, and Abe Ulmer. As the jazz music fades out on the soundtrack, Brown then begins to speak. "Good evening, and welcome to *CPT*, Television's newest experiment in the newest color: Black!" In medium-close-up, Brown typically introduces the "brothers" and "sisters" appearing on this week's show and says hello to his co-hosts, Lawrence and Ulmer. They likewise summarize the upcoming news and events that will soon be highlighted in the episode [Figures 2.1-2.2].

Black Entertainment and Black Cultural History

Episodes showcase the range of Black music celebrated on the series, from contemporary pop and soul to classical, but with a heavy emphasis on gospel and jazz. Local artists often found their way to the *CPT* spotlight—The *CPT* choir and Harold McKinney, in particular, would be frequent guests throughout the series. Youth Choirs frequently recur, like Lee Garnett and Chadsey High School Choir performing Motown selections on January 15, 1969 and the St. James Baptist Church Youth choir performing "There is a Savior" on November 27, 1968.

³⁷⁶ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 264.

Some episodes (like October 30, 1968) put a greater emphasis on musical performances, where poetry and theatrical scenes were a focal point in other broadcasts. Martin coordinated performances and readings from Black literature, with an emphasis on the works of Langston Hughes. For example, the January 22, 1969 episode includes and a comic sketch by the *CPT* Players based on the character Jesse B. Simple created by Hughes. Other episodes also highlight varied poetry readings from prominent figures in Black arts history—both local and national—like Esther Jackson, Naomi Madgett, and Garland Jagers. These performance segments further reconstruct Black heritage and Black culture. As Lawrence says introducing a *CPT* Players segment, “the best way to gain insights into Black people is to look at Black poetry.” The show’s pre-recorded documentary segments frequently use photographs and voice-over narration to present the personal histories of major figures from Black history, like Jan Ernst Matzeliger, Frederick Douglas, and Harriet Tubman. The series continually accentuated ways Black citizens could gain access to Black history—an aspect of TV production Gilbert Maddox felt particularly passionate about.

Formal experimentations often accompanied music performance, rather than static framing of the hosts speaking, which dominated during News reports and Grapevine segments. In entertainment segments, such as that featuring the Harold McKinney Quartet in episode 3, dissonant jazz is accompanied by close-ups of the different instrumental components of the performance superimposed over shots of Gwen and Hal at the piano. The images invert and flash on the screen, double exposures recur, the camera irises in and out, creating a chaotic clash of visuals to correlate with the song’s crescendo into raucous, hard bop. As the song comes to a close, applause is heard from the off-screen, live studio audience. While an excerpt of this song would be featured in the opening credit sequence of each episode of *CPT*, this performance

would be re-aired in its entirety in the 5th episode. Devorah Heitner argues that when veteran *Black Journal* and *Say Brother!* director Stan Lathan came to *Soul!*, he brought technical and artistic direction to the show. “Video production was new, and video effects produced by a machine called a video “toaster” provided an alternative to straightforward cinematography. In an especially innovative episode, Lathan telecast Stevie Wonder playing on the set in such a way that his image doubled, repeated, then reported as a single image.”³⁷⁷ Heitner even credits this type of innovation as one the factors leading to *Soul!*'s popularity. It's unclear whether Detroit's *CPT* was directly influenced by Lathan's work or was independently exploring similar representational strategies for Black performance.³⁷⁸ However, what is very clear is that Detroit was as invested in aesthetic experimentation, if not more so, than other shows oriented around Black performance. While interviews segments on *CPT* typically featured static, conventional framing and editing, nearly every music and dramatic segment included some degree of stylistic play that connected the content of the performance to the mode of cinematography.

Sandy Lawrence Presents: The Grapevine

Each episode of *CPT* included a “Grapevine” segment in which Sandy Lawrence provided a snapshot of upcoming events in fashion, celebrity culture, and entertainment relevant to Black Detroiters. Lawrence, a Detroit native who achieved success as a model, highlights upcoming seminars and programs to aid in Black community development and celebrate the cultural accomplishments of other Detroit natives. Often, the segment begins with Lawrence

³⁷⁷ Heitner, Devorah. "Black Power TV: A Cultural History of Black Public Affairs Television, 1968--1980." Northwestern University, 2007, 155.

³⁷⁸ Lathan directed some segments of *Soul!* in late 1969 but did not move over to the series as permanent director until 1971, after *CPT* was already on air.

telling the audience to “get out their pencils” and datebooks in order to mark down all the exciting happenings. Here, Lawrence offers viewers a Black perspective on local popular culture. For instance, in episode 3, Lawrence highlights Motown artist Kim Weston’s debut in *Hallelujah Baby* at the Fisher Theatre. Lawrence mentions that Weston received a “most unfair review” by Jay Carr in *The Detroit News*. She argues that “Mr. Carr’s overwhelming ignorance of Black people’s needs to artistically express their frustrations led him to confuse civil rights with Black reality. This is a clear case when the public should make up its own mind. We think brothers and sisters should definitely see the show.” For a fair review, she suggests viewers read Lawrence Devine in the *Detroit Free Press* instead. Kim Weston, who previously found success as a recording artist with her duet with Marvin Gaye, “It Takes Two,” and her rendition of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” would actually appear on the following episode of the series performing “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” and giving an interview with *CPT* hosts. On October 30, Lawrence closes the segment by discussing a recent interview with Dianne Carol of the popular show *Julia*. Lawrence cites complaints that *Julia* is not close enough to Black reality and subsequently dismisses them. Both here, and with her appraisal of *Hallelujah Baby*, Lawrence takes a moderate stance on Black culture, deriding both white critics who don’t give Black performers a fair appraisal as well as Black media critics who malign Black artists for not being radical enough as they operate within the white public sphere.

As evidenced here, “The Grapevine,” typically pointed to spaces in the city where viewers could see Black performers, especially those also appearing on the show. Lawrence mentions that guests George Kirby will be performing at the Top Hat Supper Club and Earl

Grant at the Elmwood Casino.³⁷⁹ Lawrence frequently highlighted cultural happenings, career day training, open lunch opportunities, and educational workshops at sites like the Shrine of the Black Madonna Church, Wayne State University, and Booker T. Washington Business Association office within the Great Lakes Building. She reported on daycare openings for low-income Black mothers and tutoring opportunities for high-risk students, including free classes at Northeastern High School. As previously discussed, most of the central Black performance venues and centers for community organizing in Detroit were closed in conjunction with the destruction of Black Bottom-Paradise Valley. This segment, then, reorients Black Detroiters to the performance venues and emergent spaces for Black cultural production in the Post-Rebellion moment. It helps establish television as an interlocutor of the Black public sphere, reconstituting Black popular culture in an increasingly diffuse built-environment. Lawrence even gives out phone numbers for Black businesses and organizations endeavoring to improve quality of life for Black citizens—positioning the show within broader Black infrastructure.³⁸⁰

“The Grapevine” also includes Lawrence presenting a “Together-sister-of-the-week.” This weekly feature highlights the accomplishments of a local woman who has recently excelled in business or the performing arts. In episode 3, another star of *Hallelujah Baby*, Dolores Vanison is discussed as a singer and dancer with “great possibilities for stardom.” Ms. Vanison was a schoolteacher until convinced that her charm should not be confined to the classroom.

³⁷⁹ The Elmwood Casino is actually located in Windsor, Ontario and was a hot spot for local entertainment between 1955 and 1974. Although located in Canada, it was only an eleven-mile distance from the *CPT* studio at 5651 Fenkell, on the city’s northwest side. At the time, it only required a state ID to enter Canada and Detroit culture flowed into Windsor with ease. For more on contemporaneous relations between Detroit and Winsor see Colling, *Turning Points*.

³⁸⁰ Another segment of the series, “The Grapevine,” also include local cultural influencers like Florine Hawkins, of Hawkins apparel, who wrote encyclopedias of Afro-American contributions to history, and Charles H. Wright, an aforementioned local pediatrician who constructed a Museum of Afro-American history in a mobile van.

Lawrence's description is complimented with on-location footage of Vanison in Detroit running and dancing gleefully down city streets.³⁸¹ Other together-sisters-of-the-week include: JoAnn Robinson, a part time model and secretary at Wayne State University, and two coeds from Northwestern High School—keeping up with the emphasis on involving Detroit youth in production. Here the show opened a small space to celebrate Black women as integral members of the local Black populace, essential to the project of Black uplift. While not overtly proscriptive, this segment usually selected enterprising young women starting out in white-collar positions or advancing careers in the entertainment industry. Though the program often included performances by Black female artists and occasionally featured commentaries by women in on-the-street interview segments, the program otherwise emphasized the political contributions of a cadre of Black men and tended to have more Black male guests on the program to speak about Black politics and economics.³⁸²

³⁸¹Dolores Vanison (Blakely) was later a founding member of the Alpha Omeda Dance Company. Alongside her dance responsibilities, she continued her education, obtaining a B.S. in dance from Brooklyn College, an M.S. in Guidance and Counseling from Long Island University and an M.S. in Educational Administration from New York University. These advanced degrees enabled Ms. Vanison-Blakely to replicate the Alpha Omega dance school concept inside the NYC Board of Education, of which she was a member for over thirty years, when she was invited to create one dance department, then another. Prior to Ms. Vanison-Blakely's career with the Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company, she performed as a principal dancer with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company, the Louis Johnson Dance Company, and others. She performed in the Pearl Bailey production of "Hello Dolly" on Broadway, and as a dancer in many off-Broadway productions and on TV. She has been an Adjunct Professor at New York University, and a Teaching Fellow at Long Island University. She created choreography for the Lincoln Center Teenage Workshop "African Tales" and has taught at the NYC Performing Arts Workshop and the East Harlem Teenage Workshop where she produced versions of *Bye Bye Birdie*, *West Side Story*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Porgy and Bess* and *South Pacific*.

³⁸² It is perhaps of note, however, that while Lawrence here is relegated to reporting only on entertainment, fashion, and women's successes, *CPT* and more prominently *Black Journal*, did serve as a vital training ground for women interested in broadcast journalism and media production. By the 1980s, many of the show's producers and primary hosts were women,

Free Your Mind: Public Service Announcements

Each episode of *CPT* includes “non-commercial commercial” segments that take a satirical look at Black identity.³⁸³ As a lead in, Brown would suggest *CPT* cut to commercial, yet instead they broadcast a pre-recorded skit mocking advertisements that either elided Black culture in their consumer address or worked to assimilate Black citizens into white hegemonic order. These segments were one of the unique components of *CPT* that did not exist on other national public affairs programs or those aired in other cities. They were also perhaps *CPT*’s most significant contribution to national Black broadcast practices, as Tony Brown introduced satirical advertising segments to *Black Journal* when he took over hosting and producing duties in 1970.³⁸⁴ Though Maddox does not theorize the driving impetus for these commercials in his writing, he does assert that, “unique characteristics of the Black community in terms of language, dress, and humor should be stressed.”³⁸⁵ Recognizing the lack of advertising interest in promoting Black cultural norms and ideals in mainstream commercial media, these commercials take the opportunity to mock white advertisement strategies and subversively celebrate Black cultural identities. Furthermore, Maddox repeatedly states that Black media need not be “preachy,” but should “maintain the structure of a Black look at Black Detroit, how it lives, works.” Here, through satire, *CPT* provides a critique of white perception of Black Detroit and subtly advocates for components of idealized Black citizenship centered on Black pride without

including Juanita Anderson, Deborah Ray, and Trudy Gallant. *CPT* writer Betty DeRamus likewise became a prominent local journalist after *CPT*’s run concluded.

³⁸³ This is how these segments were framed in both the Anniversary Special and in Maddox’s dissertation project.

³⁸⁴ Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 119.

³⁸⁵ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 193.

direct address.

One such public service announcement aired on October 30 and November 27 is entitled “Because We’re Number Two” and satirizes the plight of Black employees, who no matter how hard they toil, will always be treated secondary to white workers. The segment begins with idyllic classical music and shots of a quaint Detroit street where a group of Black men lay cement. One of the men turns to the camera, smiles, and says, “We work harder because we’re number two.” As the “non-commercial” fades to Black, the line “make this a greater America: Free Your Mind” appears.

A “Free Your Mind” segment from the November 14th episode stages a fake advertisement for a skin bleaching and whitening cream called “Git White” as a critique against attempts to negate Blackness. The ad begins with a woman leisurely applying the cream in her bathroom mirror. As the camera zooms in on her face, a non-diegetic voice-over begins to echo the phrase “Black don’t wear off” seemingly from her own conscience. Cutting back to the studio from the staple “Free Your Mind” slogan, correspondents Tony Brown and Sandy Lawrence joke that they don’t use “Git White” but rather “Git Black [Figure 2.3].”³⁸⁶ Of note, Chicago’s *Soul Train*, which later garnered a national syndication deal (which I discuss in Chapter Four), relied upon Johnson Products, the creators of beauty products like Ultra Sheen targeted to African American consumers, for ad time. In Johnson Products’ commercials, Black identity and beauty is likewise celebrated as a corrective to the lack of advertisements catering to the Black market in the past.

³⁸⁶ For a history of such products see: Wonkeryor, Edward Lama. *Dimensions of Racism in Advertising: From Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*. Lang, Peter, 2015. Tate, S. *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones: Shade Shifters*. Springer, 2015.

Another segment in a later episode featured a young Black boy reciting the lyrics of “America, The Beautiful,” voiced over a single-camera filmed sequence that includes tracking shots of dilapidated inner-city housing and of cluttered inner-city streets, creating an ironic dichotomy between the white imaginary of a patriotic America and Black inner city reality. “Chuckie” satirized a Black person whose quest for status leads him to blindly imitate white standards in food, clothing, reading material, life style, rather than embracing Black heritage and culture. In this segment, “Chuckie” comes home from work, speaking in a relaxed tone to his wife. He expresses his excitement to eat “soul food” and read *Ebony Magazine*, but quickly code switches to an accentuated proper [white] voice and hides his magazine after taking a business call, answering the phone not as Chuckie, but “Charles.” Another “non-commercial” celebrates Black citizens quit imitating white hairstyle, make-up and clothing, all announcing “I’m Glad I Came Black!”

At the heart of these mock commercials is the message that Black Americans may feel that in order to succeed in society they must assimilate and either imitate or adapt white/Eurocentric characteristics. *CPT* challenged viewers to question if the two selves can ever be fully reconciled and brought together, achieving professional success while still being true to one's ethnic identity. Structuring these “Free Your Mind” segments in the place of advertisements further connotes how American marketers reinforce the tenants of whiteness for consumers—a construct of American capitalism the show works to implicitly critique. According to program documents, the objectives of these advertisements were twofold; to counter damaging stereotypes of Black culture and promote pride among Black Americans, many of whom had internalized what Stuart Hall refers to as “inferential” racist ideologies about their beauty and

self worth.³⁸⁷ In 1968, Harry Belafonte wrote an op-ed piece for *The New York Times* sharply critiquing the lack of diversity on commercial television and the limited, as well as stereotyped, roles Black performers are relegated to. In the piece, Belafonte takes particular issue with sponsors, who refuse to contribute advertising money towards diverse programming; “I know very few sponsors who want to put their products behind a weekly program, or even a special, that treats white life honestly and courageously, let alone Negro life. Because if you do that, you may anger some segment of the community, and that is “bad for the product,” — which must be all things to all people.”³⁸⁸ Belafonte writes that television’s hesitancy to include racial diversity in programming hinders Black creative expression and social critique. He continues, “Not only is TV trying to stop us from thinking, it would apparently also take away the luxury and the need of laughing at ourselves.”³⁸⁹ Critically, then, the satirical commercials on *CPT* allow Black subjects to mock the racial exclusions of the advertising industry and also “laugh at themselves.”

These commercials operate as another example of the series’ employment of enclave strategy—linking the politics of Black pride, socio-economic advancement, and entertainment. Like all other content on the show, entertainment was packaged with an underlining political

1. ³⁸⁷ Stuart Hall argues that overt racism is easily identifiable as “an openly racist argument” or a “racist policy or view” aimed to directly promote a racial hierarchy. Meanwhile, inferential racism refers to coded cultural practices—skin whitening, for example—and “apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether ‘factual’ or ‘fictional,’ which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions.” Hall, Stuart. “The Whites of Their Eyes.” In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, 81–84. SAGE, 2011. Colored People's Time 5: "Free Your Mind" Public Service Announcement (Skin Lightening Cream). A video and description of this mock commercial is available at the *American Black Journal* Special Collection at Michigan State University Library Archives: <http://abj.matrix.msu.edu/videofull.php?id=29-DF-25>

³⁸⁸ Harry Belafonte, “Belafonte: ‘Look, They Tell Me, Don’t Rock the Boat,’” *The New York Times*, April 21, 1968, sec. Archives.

³⁸⁹ Belafonte, “Belafonte: ‘Look, They Tell Me, Don’t Rock the Boat.’”

message about Black urban citizenship. In this context, the show counters claims that Black progress necessitates Black assimilation into white culture—striking a balance between Black Nationalism and professionalism. The segments further reinforce the show’s pervasive idea that capitalist development, in this case Black advertising towards Black viewers, is an essential component to a thriving Black urban sphere.

News

Each week Abe Ulmer would report a series of news topics of interest to Black Detroiters. Most of these news stories were lifted from the pages of the *Michigan Chronicle*, or pieced together from articles in *The Detroit News*, *The Detroit Free Press*, and *Ebony Magazine*. Occasionally, the show responded to topics covered on *Black Journal*, which aired immediately before *CPT*, but addressed them from a local angle. Essentially, the news portion of the show did minimal investigative reporting, instead transcribing significant news reports and headlines constructed elsewhere for local broadcast and including some documentary content as supplementary evidence. However, these were still carefully curated. The fights for school community control and efforts to develop new business in the city—two topics I will discuss at length shortly—frequently recurred in news segments. The bulk of the show’s original reportage came in the form of featured segments—which often built upon previous news or provided a news topic to follow up on in coming weeks. Each week, a focus issue is covered by a documentary segment and contextualized by Brown in-studio, often complimented by interviews with significant figures in Black Detroit. In this way, the show highlighted one central concern relevant to Black viewers—usually rehashed throughout the entire episode. In addition to in-studio interviews, selected Black Detroiters are given the opportunity to speak to the issue either

on-location at significant sites in the city or through man-on-the-street interviews. The documentary on-location footage is then synthesized by Brown, acting as the program's spokesperson and teacher, who concludes with his perspective on the topic—which may or may not differ from the interviewee's. This structure was not uncommon for public affairs programs at large, but again, studying *CPT* in the context of Detroit history elucidates how the show explicitly advocated for local infrastructural change. In particular, the theme of educational reform recurs, following protests at local high schools, highlighting interviews with high school students, and reporting on Detroit Federation of Teacher meetings and activism. For example, on December 4, 1968, the show reports on organizations of students at Martin Luther King School presenting a list of demands to the Detroit Board of Education and student walk outs at Highland Park Junior College, emphasizing demands for a Black Studies program and financial assistance for students in need. In this way, *CPT* provided a platform for citizens to promote Black protest, but protest initiatives were carefully selected to correlate with Brown and Maddox's uplift priorities.

Featured Segment: The Black Vote (October 30, 1968)

This week's feature segment is given its own intro montage—which includes photographs of the upcoming presidential candidates. Brown, at his podium, begins by presenting the three main candidates in the upcoming election, Republican Richard Nixon, Democrat Hubert Humphrey, and Independent George Wallace. According to Brown, “This year's election brings an interesting dimension—the white obsession with “law and order.” And to “most Blacks, this means fear.” Brown begins by discrediting Wallace as an out-and-out bigot and Nixon as a “loser,” noting that Humphrey is the obvious choice for Black voters. However,

in the long run he wonders if Humphrey's past as a civil rights fighter will outweigh his turn to "law and order" in post-riot era America.

While Brown's opinions on the candidates are made abundantly clear at the outset, to explore the issue more deeply, he suggests turning to man-on-the-street interviews around the city. In this instance, each person stopped by the *CPT* camera is asked by the off-camera interviewer "Who will you vote for in the coming election and why?" Each framed in medium close-up, the succeeding collection of Black respondents voice their choices in the election. The vast majority of those interviewed are middle-aged, well-dressed, Black men and nearly all of them show reluctant support for Humphrey as the best choice out of the three. A few well-dressed middle-aged women are interviewed and they likewise throw their support behind Humphrey. While none of the interviewees seem particularly enthusiastic about Humphrey, they are given screen time to elaborate on their perspective and indicate that Humphrey has the best chance of representing the interest of the "Black man." He is, at least, the lesser of the evils. One man interviewed, for instance, cites that Humphrey has done most to recognize America's racial divide and would be least likely to make conditions worse for Black folk. A few dissenting opinions are highlighted, including a woman who wants to vote for Nixon because she just thinks "he's the best candidate" without citing further rationale and another gentleman who will vote for Wallace because at least he is "honest." One younger man in sunglasses, dressed more casually than the preceding wave of middle aged men in business attire, articulates his decision to abstain from voting all-together, as it's really just a waste of time. As he puts it: "Wallace will lead to revolution, Nixon will lead to a worse situation, and Humphrey will do nothing."

After this statement, the series cuts back to Brown in the studio where he reiterates his aforementioned assumptions about the election:

The consensus is clear; Hubert Humphrey is the only candidate acceptable for Black voters. At best, he has the history of a Civil Rights leader. At worst, he is seen as the worn-out tool of a willful president: basically a good man. Nixon and Wallace, with the exception of scattered Black support, represent bigotry and a turning back the clock to the good ol' days of the Ku Klux Klan, scanty government aid, and keeping the Black man in his place. Whether this is true or not, this is Black reality.

While not all interview subjects were actually in consensus, Brown describes voting for Humphrey as the only “civilized” option for voters—justifying his stance with more conviction and screen-time than the community experts. In her discussion of *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant*, Devorah Heitner observes that the questions hosts Jim Lowry and Roxie Roker posed to political activists were usually open ended, allowing guests to speak for themselves. “They did not try to represent consensus about what was best for the community—there was no consensus. While introducing particularly radical artists or activists, Roker and Lowry were ambassadors while representing the ultimate in respectability and familiar; they helped to introduce new ideas to the community by modeling an attitude of friendly inquisitiveness.”³⁹⁰ In Detroit these “man-on-the-street” segments definitely do give Detroiters a chance to speak, yet Brown was certainly not a passive ambassador. In contrast to the *Bedford-Stuyvesant* hosts, Brown presents many of the on-location Detroit perspectives as social research on local Black life, evidence to undergird his synthesized analysis of current events. This is not to diminish the important intervention the show was making by letting local citizens speak on local television; introducing Black voices to the televised public sphere was a major accomplishment of the Post-Rebellion

³⁹⁰ Heitner, Devorah. "Black Power TV: A Cultural History of Black Public Affairs Television, 1968-1980." Northwestern University, 2007, 65.

era. Rather, I want to underscore Brown's framing of content from his activist and expert perspective, with no investment in objectivity.

Throughout the series, *CPT*, provided a platform for host/producer/activist Brown to offer his personal insights into local political affairs. Originally from Charleston, West Virginia, Brown came to Detroit to attend college out of the armed forces in 1955. As mentioned earlier, Brown earned a BA in sociology and an MA in psychiatric social work from Wayne State University. Dissatisfied with social work, he became a journalist for the *Detroit Courier* in 1962, quickly rising to the position of editor before leaving to host *CPT*. As mentioned previously, in his subsequent publications and nationally broadcast programs *Black Journal* and the 1980s most popular public affairs program, *Tony Brown's Journal*, Brown garnered a controversial reputation for being an outspoken and often incendiary fiscal conservative.³⁹¹ While still a vocal Black Nationalist in 1968, and with less explicitly divisive opinions about Black economics and culture, his particular take on Black advancement is echoed through the series in formative stages. Today, Brown is an advocate for free-market economy, Black self-help, and is distrustful of big government assistance programs as a means to improve the quality of Black life in the inner city. Some of those positions actually appear here. In *CPT*, Brown advocated for community control and bringing Black citizen into prominent institutional positions—particularly in terms of business development.³⁹² In the 1960s, Brown was a strong advocate for local Black politics, Black inclusion in Detroit civic governance, and shifting power away from the current administration—who he viewed not only as having failed to adequately address the

³⁹¹ Brown would ultimately become invested in Reaganomics and join the Republican Party in the 1980s. In later years he began publishing Black self-help books including Tony Brown, *Black Lies, White Lies* (Harper Collins, 2009); Tony Brown, *Empower the People* (Harper Collins, 2009); “No Whitewash: Tony Brown’s Journal,” *Black Enterprise*, March 1982.

³⁹² “No Whitewash: Tony Brown’s Journal.”

problems in Black neighborhoods, but having worsened conditions.

Nevertheless, after Brown's commentary, the segment cuts back to the on-the-street interviews for further insight. Now the question at hand is whether or not voting for relatively undesirable candidates will have any impact at all on local life. Most of the respondents think there is a significant difference between the candidates, with Humphrey being the only one who represents the interests of the Black voter or who could unite the populace. The dissenting subject who will abstain from voting argues, to the contrary, that there isn't a distinct difference between the candidates as "not any of them give me a clear concise choice in what I want." Another dissenting opinion is given a final word; a man who was not shown in previous segments but likewise sees little difference between the candidates. He jokingly suggests he will vote for comedian-activist and write-in candidate for the Freedom and Peace Party, Dick Gregory, and "maybe get a cabinet position out of it."³⁹³ It's also noteworthy that none of these interviews were broadcast live; they were deliberately edited to support the segment's overarching thesis point. In this case, *CPT* projects a well-informed and sophisticated Black public as evidence of a political trend towards voting for Humphrey as an essential step in a continued struggle for Black civic rights. However, due to the show's investment in "edutainment" it's not surprising that the conversation is capped with a hint at radicalism wrapped in comedy; Dick Gregory, a frequent *CPT* guest. This allowed the producers to both

³⁹³ In the 1968 election, Black activist-comedian Dick Gregory established the Freedom and Peace Party and ran for president, ultimately receiving 47,097 votes. Gregory's party was a play on the Peace and Freedom Party, a radical Black political group established by the Black Panthers of which Gregory was formerly a member. Peace and Freedom unsuccessfully ran controversial radical activist Eldridge Cleaver for president. On the *CPT Christmas Special*, Dick Gregory played "Black Santa Claus" and talked with students from Cass Technical High School about Christmas and its meaning to Blacks. Jean Van Delinder, "Civil Rights Activists and the Reach for Political Power," in *African Americans and the Presidency: The Road to the White House*, ed. Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz (Routledge, 2009), 104–6.

promote their network of Black allies and provide a diverting end to a more sober discussion of politics.

Tony Brown concludes “The Black Vote” by stating that Black people do in fact have a tremendous opportunity to influence the voting outcome, referencing the campaigns of local Congressmen John Conyers and Coleman Young, two of the first Black elected officials in Detroit history.³⁹⁴ Referencing the largest Black voter registration in the history of the state, Brown argues that “voters can influence how we govern our lives...Fear is what will drive Black voters to the polls in record numbers in support of Humphrey, which he otherwise could not have mustered.” Accordingly, for Brown, the election is crucial, as it will signal the political direction the city will take in the upcoming year. It is stressed that while many Black citizens might not have economic power as of yet, they have other forms of localized political power, which could positively affect the future of the emergent Black city—as well as national politics.

After breaking for musical guests, Brown returns to the issue of “The Black Vote” this time with a particular emphasis on local government candidates and initiatives on the Detroit ballot. Accordingly, Brown has invited two figures in the Black community that could speak to upcoming voter decisions. The first, Horace Bradfield, is a physician on the board of the newly established Wayne County Community College. He notes that in the upcoming election, the voter will be asked to pass a 2.5 millage to further build institutions and hire teachers to help low-income students gain proficiency in work training and education. Bradfield is present to speak about the conditions of the millage and encourage Black voters to show up at the polls in

³⁹⁴ Conyers was among the first Black men elected to the United States Congress, a founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, and is currently its longest serving member. Meanwhile, Coleman Young was the first Black man elected to Detroit’s common council and would become the city’s first Black mayor in 1974, a topic I discuss in greater length in Chapter Four.

support of it.

The second guest, Robert Tindall is the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and a candidate for Detroit's common council. Tindall speaks to the profound contributions local voters could make in the election and he has optimism that Black voters will vote "right." He continues:

I think Black folk are starting to understand that the two things that control this country are political power and economic power. You don't have to have money necessarily to exert your political power because that relates to numbers, but they [Black folk] are beginning to understand that if they are going to affect any meaningful change that relates to the governing of their lives, then its going to be in a political area.

Tindall discusses the political clout immigrant populations gained in the first half of the 20th century, like Italians on the east coast, and hopes Black Detroiters replicate such political efficacy. When Brown asks about the growing conservatism among white voters and the turn to "law and order" politics, Tindall presents an analogy about rats. He states that the vermin in Detroit carry disease but those rats don't know to stop spreading disease at Six Mile Road—insinuating that the problems of the inner city will ripple outward towards the safety of the white suburbs. He surmises that local politics affect everyone in the metropolitan region, and if Black Detroiters rally, they could seize political power to change the conditions for both the inner city and its outlying perimeter, perhaps even put a Black president in charge of the common council—i.e. a significant step towards community control of a Black Detroit.

Featured Segment: Making of a Rioter (October 23, 1968)

Throughout the series, *CPT* strove to produce educational content to better serve Black

Detroit and challenge racist discourses still circulating in the aftermath of the Rebellion. As the Black Student Association contested, city schools not only lacked educational resources on Black history, but also were active agents in the on-going oppression of Black citizens. As such, *CPT* supported initiatives to reform Detroit Public Schools, broadcasting stories of student protest as a means to increase educational programs for Black student advancement. In the wake of the city's upheaval, *CPT* positioned itself as a clearinghouse for community action; a space to raise civic concerns that affected minority citizens and galvanize social change. While discussions of community control activism recurred in nearly every episode, segments of the November 14, 1968 broadcast, "Making of a Rioter" examined the inadequacy of Detroit schools in greater depth. The segment begins with host Tony Brown sitting behind a desk in the *CPT* studio, recounting the events of July 23 '67: a vice squad raided a blind pig on 12th and Claremont, one of the worst areas in the city. As police attempted to forcefully arrest all bystanders, chaos erupted. Yet Brown declares "rioters are made not born," and the participants in the Detroit "riot" were not violent criminals, but the product of inadequate education and endemic racism in the school system.

In order to delve deeper into this subject, Brown suggests we "talk to some of our experts about the failings to educate our Black students." Like "The Black Vote," the program cuts to on-location interviews with Black Detroiters. In this instance, we see a wide shot of a group of Black students standing outside Northeastern High School [Figures 2.4-2.5]. The "experts" Brown introduced were in fact the students themselves—a move that subtly critiques the sociologists and the government officials scrutinizing Detroit's Black community in the wake of the riots. For the rest of the segment, the camera intercuts between commentaries provided by Brown in-studio and assessments of public schools articulated on-site by local Black students. In

this way, Brown acts as a mediator, facilitating the discussion between the subjects on the screen and the viewing audience. He lets the students speak for themselves, yet frames their stories within the broader schema of institutional racism at work in the city.

Devorah Heitner argues that Black public-affairs programs offered a space for “articulating self-defense against pathologizing discourses and theories culled from “ghetto ethnography,” which were influential in academic and policy discourse of the time, most notably with Daniel Moynihan’s infamous report.”³⁹⁵ Other programs, such as Boston’s *Say Brother!*, used citizens as experts on conditions in urban neighborhoods. In Detroit, these “experts” are called forth to speak to local conditions prohibiting Black advancement or demonstrate productive strategies for Black mobility. While *Making of a Rioter* does not condone violence, it sympathetically reframes Detroit’s riots as a consequence of enduring systemic oppression. As Brown emphatically states, “white racism, not Black inadequacy is the most crippling problem facing the city of Detroit.” The students at Northeastern High School corroborate Brown’s claims, detailing their lack of access to educational resources, the vermin infestation at the derelict school, and the preferential treatment given to white students at their expense. The Northeastern students stipulate that they have been completely written off by the white-controlled system, leaving them unprepared to get a job or further their education.

At this point, Brown introduces the founders of the Black Student Association who are working to improve curriculum and the school’s physical plan. The group, also featured in the first episode’s news segment, details their plans for protesting educational inequality. Brown closes by noting: “Our very existence depends on the powers of our schools. Black students must have maximum scholastic training because they will have to survive in a system that forces them

³⁹⁵ Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 12.

to be above average in order to enjoy average benefits. In order to compete in American society, young people need to feel it's worthwhile to be a part of that society. If we keep the way we are going, we will either have students who want to build up the city or let it burn down." In this way, *CPT* showcases Detroiters trying to improve the quality of life in their communities, yet is also clear (perhaps ominously so) that the struggle they face is an uphill one.

As demonstrated here, a primary emphasis of *CPT* was the ideological development of local youth. Man-on-the-street interview segments prioritized young Black men, seeking their perspectives on hotbed issues like police brutality and the emergence of a New Afrika movement. A majority of the series' features were likewise designed with a teenage male in mind as the ideal audience. As Maddox notes, "The time is now for helping the Black revolution to inculcate in the Black youth the qualities of human values and dignity in a society dominated by the material and qualitative categories of achievement. If such a goal is not accomplished, we can look forward to frustration, disorganization, and futility."³⁹⁶ *CPT* thus reported local news and entertainment fare perceived as relevant to this target demographic; they advertised open slots in the Neighborhood Youth Corps., economic development opportunities for Detroit high schoolers, and highlighted activities at the recently founded Black Studies Institute at Wayne State with the primary goal of "dispelling the myths about the learning potential of Black youth." *CPT* aired segments on the Urban Adult Education Institute, an education program that recruits inner-city students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and mass meetings to discuss "community control of schools."

While proselytizing towards Detroit's male youth, *CPT* re-conceptualized the interrelationship between their local Black advancement and communication media. One of the

³⁹⁶ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 410.

main contentions of the program was that TV rarely consults the real leaders in the Black community or documents significant events that occur in that community. A basis of this contention is that the white stations do not know the real leaders in that community. Another contention is that the white communities traditionally selected Black leaders and imposed them upon the Black community. For example, in episode 11, Brown argues that Charles Diggs, an African-American politician elected to congress from the state of Michigan in 1965, rose to prominence through the endorsement of white Detroiters rather than his own merits.

Accordingly, programs like *CPT* sought to rewrite this history for Black youth—a central objective of community control activism. Though their strategic selection of guests and interview topics, *CPT* constructed a corpus of prominent Black figures and gave them a platform to speak to local youth.

Revisiting a topic presented by *Summer of '67* and discussed at length in the previous chapter, *CPT* here explores slum life among the city's "underclass" and the difficult struggles faced by Black single mothers raising children in abject poverty. However, unlike *Summer of '67*, *CPT* looks for answers to local crises among paternalistic community advocates.

Christopher Alston, Director of the Forrest Park Citizens Planning Group, Henry Rodgers, Director of Urban Design Development Group, Edward Ball, Consultant at the Urban Design Development Group, and Frank Ditto, Director of the East Side Voice of Independent Detroit speak to Brown about life in the inner-city and the work they are doing to facilitate improved conditions for Black residents. According to Gilbert Maddox, Frank Ditto saw the role of community organizer as one of creating the desire and the programs for change within the community. "The dissemination and discussion of issues relevant to the Afro-American and the instilling of a sense of urgency and action-oriented-thought into the minds of those who see little

hope for change and have less awareness of methods for change are also part of the organizer's role."³⁹⁷ In Ditto's words, the true role of the community organizer is to "...activate dead people and bring them back to life."

Here, as in other main segments, *CPT* responds to mainstream law and order coverage of Detroit civic change and offers strategies of community control to combat white authoritarian infringement on Black civil liberties. For instance, in a segment towards the end of the series' initial run, Abe Ulmer reported that a Michigan Civil Rights Commission panel has charged Detroit Police Officers with racial discrimination in an incident that took place during the July, 1967 Rebellion. The panel said Detroit police officers physically assaulted Edward A. Rosario, owner of a gas station at 9911 Dexter Avenue. The panel said, "We find it impossible to believe that if Mr. Rosario were a white person he would have received the same treatment." The panel asked the full Commission to find the Detroit Police Department guilty of discrimination and order disciplinary action against the officers involved. It also recommended reimbursement for Rosario's property damage and medical bills. The hearing commissioners were Dr. A.A. Banks, Jr., Mrs. Frank W. Wylie, and Referee James W. Baker. Part of the segment was filmed in front of Detroit's Veterans Memorial Building where a recent clash between off-duty police and Black youths had resulted in an unresolved case of police brutality. Here, State Senator (and soon-to-be first Black mayor of a major metropolitan city) Coleman Young attacked the Detroit Police Officers Association (DFOA), saying that the "control" it exerted over the Detroit Police Department "must be smashed." He called for civilian control of police, noting that the present situation represented a "threat to the people" and their liberties— Black and white alike. Police brutality was a recurrent topic for *CPT* and successive public affairs programming, a local

³⁹⁷ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 226.

concern I will explore further in the next chapter. The special on Black Rebellion discussed above, for example, filmed a meeting of the Ad-Hoc Committee on police-community relations, facilitated by Congressman John Conyers. Of central interest, was the lack of media coverage of police brutality, during and since, the Rebellion. This segment ends with a demand for Black unity against the forceful tactics of the DPD. Here, State Representative James Del Rio announces his possession of "secret police files," which prove that the police trial board had found officers guilty of various 'misconduct' charges, but had taken no action to punish the men involved. He called for an action of 'mandamus' to be issued to force action on the issue. In this way, *CPT* enabled Black public figures to rouse support among Black citizens still reeling from the calamitous effects of the urban violence and police brutality encountered during the Rebellion, urging them to take civic action in the polling booths and public forums. While the show's creators repeatedly contended that any white viewers were incidental, these programs likewise could enlighten white Detroiters who ended up with *CPT* on their dials.

Featured Segment: The Black Middle-class

From its debut, *CPT* modeled principles of cooperative economics as essential to Black community self-sufficiency. The creators were not only concerned about raising social consciousness but also envisioned a show that would provide economic and employment opportunities for Black workers. Projecting a profitable Black Detroit, the series broadcast segments like the "together-sister-of-the-week" to applaud local citizens that admirably balanced the intricacies of Black cultural identity and the economic demands of urban living. Essentially, *CPT* strove to recognize the socio-economic challenges facing Black Detroiters in the aftermath of the Rebellion and celebrate success stories of local residents that have contributed to local

business. The “Black Middle-class” segment of the January 22, 1969 episode presents two salient objectives for Black Detroiters in the struggle for Black economic autonomy and what the show refers to as improvements in “ghetto” life. First, there is a need for Black ascendancy towards white-collar positions historically relegated to white citizens and a need for middle-class citizens to feel responsible to the Black underclass—or those with less access to education and employment opportunity.

During the “The Black Middle-class” segment, Brown begins by outlining the history of middle-class development in Detroit. In this narrative, the local origins of the Black middle-class begin with the auto industry and its commitment to offering higher wages than other industrial enterprises in the city. According to Brown, the higher wages led Black plant workers to deem themselves “elite” compared to other Black workers. Along with Black professionals, like postal workers, lawyers, teachers, office employees, and social workers, the Black “elite” created a sense of civic responsibility. Over time, this led to the creation of a “Black society” that mimicked white high society and country club culture—Blacks in these social formations often disassociated with lower income Black citizens. However, Brown sees many middle-class Black citizens now working to help their less fortunate neighbors. Yet he also observes a “rise in militants” who “question the motives of the middle-class and have wreaked havoc on their cocktail parties.” Throughout this entire segment, Brown discusses the “middle-class” as a semantic construction that Black citizens with a greater access to “food, clothing and shelter” use to distinguish themselves as something better than the rest of the Black population. While the show never leaves any doubt that economic advancement through business endeavors is a key strategy for urban revitalization and civic enrichment, the show does question the politics of middle-class identity and its relation to the urban poor.

To more deeply investigate the relationship between the “Black middle-class” and those economically less fortunate, Brown again turns to interviews in the city of Detroit. This time, *CPT* presents a collection of local doctors who identify as “middle-class” and ask them about their perspectives on Black economic development in the city. The question for the program thereafter becomes: What responsibility do Black middle-class citizens have once they shift away from poverty? The first (unnamed) doctor interviewed begins by explaining that in Black Detroit there are three class formations: upper middle-class, lower middle-class, and lower class. There is no upper-class possible for Black citizens comparable to the upper-class in white society, as Black citizens do not have the political or economic possibility to match the upper echelon of white corporate elites. Like Brown’s narrative, he sees a strong disconnect between the two middle-class groups who wish to ascend in class and the urban poor, especially as more and more Blacks move away from the inner city and into new neighborhoods made possibly by white flight. Another doctor articulates that you can’t disassociate the Black middle-class from the problems of the ghetto as everyone in the middle-class is still only “one step away from the ghetto...Black citizens may work hard and advance themselves but we are all still part of the ghetto.” Yet another doctor accordingly argues that the way to solve the crisis of the “ghetto” is to have those middle-class citizens who are able to leave the inner city decide to stay and help support the economic and educational development of those less fortunate. He contends that having mixed class families move into a renovated inner city will help raise living standards therein. He concludes, “I don’t think that enough Negroes realize that if we are ever to succeed as a race, that we’ve got to stick together. We got to stick with the man below us and continually try to pull him up.” In this way, the segment hones in on the economic changes in the city but also the correlative socio-spatial changes in the built environment that have broken up Detroit’s

centralized Black social network of previous decades.

The comments provided by Black professionals are reinforced by cosmetologist Carmen Murphy, president of the Carmen Murphy House of Cosmetology, who Brown calls the “most successful Black business woman in Detroit.” Murphy suggests that Black middle-class citizens need to assume positions of leadership in the city and pool their resources to help all the Black residents of the nation become “first-class” citizens. Those who have found a better way to live need to “teach others less fortunate to learn the way.” She goes on to argue that Black citizens need to also help themselves, to work hard and pick themselves up by the bootstraps and make a better way of life for those around them. However, a voice-over narration of Brown cuts her off to note that there are “many brothers and sisters are without boots and thus without bootstraps with which to pull themselves up and improve their lives. There are fortunately women like Mrs. Murphy who throughout her business career has always used her resources to help people in lower groups.” Murphy concludes her interview by optimistically suggesting that determination and collective effort will help Black citizens improve quality of life for the entire community, in spite of adversity. However, the show does not include voices of those needing improvement. Disenfranchised adult voices are rarely heard; and in the aforementioned instance, female voices are cut off. Brown, himself, is always professionally dressed and advocates through the show for economic Black Nationalism, positioning himself as an exemplar of paternalistic Black success.

Here *CPT* includes a series of talking-head interview shots of more Black doctors echoing a similar point: despite having greater economic success than others, Black Detroiters need to have a united front in the struggle for political, as well as economic, power and that the “middle-class” has a social responsibility to use their resources to assist others to achieve success. Organizations such as the Inner City Business Improvement Forum (ICBIF), a non-

profit organization working to cultivate Black business growth, are referenced as doing exemplary work in the Black middle-class to facilitate Black economic progress for everyone. *CPT* does include a slight dissenting opinion with an excerpted interview with poet and instructor at the University of Detroit, McLane Birch, who critiques the condescending role of “leadership” he seems emanating from many people who identify as Black middle-class. Birch, argues “the term middle-class in itself a misnomer; Black people don’t really have any wealth...they just have conspicuous consumption; a desire to consume, show and ape the prevailing middle-class values that exist in white society. But is this really what we want as Black people?” Shots of Birch are interwoven between the other interviewees, as if he was responding to each separate point they make. In this way, the sequence stages the documentary feature as a forum for debate and Black discourse. However, Birch never actually question the benefits of Black economic success, instead he continually critiques the conceptualization of “middle-class” as a social category and value system modeled after white society. He advocates a social and economic system centered around “Blackness,” and hopes the younger generations of Black citizens will be able to create a new definition of what a “Black middle-class” should mean. Brown concludes that whatever the “differences in opinions, all Blacks share the same problems.”

Overall, this segment encapsulates the idealized rhetoric of Black citizenship in the post-Rebellion city. The selection of speakers emphasize a need for Black unity in matters of economic development in line with the self-deterministic views of Brown, yet recognize Black economic growth must be connected to an investment in Blackness and Black business must work in the interest of Black citizens of disparate economic situations. Echoed here, as is the “Chuckie” segment, is a belief that Black economic endeavors should not coincide with an

abandonment of Black cultural heritage. This stance is also clearly expressed through the show's on-going support for Black business events, entertainment fair, and educational training programs. The show's interest in Black economic development also reflects citywide concerns about the direction of urban welfare policies and Post-Rebellion urban reconstruction efforts. In the pre-war era, Detroit actually boasted the largest concentration of Black-owned businesses in the United States.³⁹⁸ Local business organizations and religious institutions in the city were early advocates for Black enterprise on a community level. For example, the Nation of Islam, established in the city in 1930 by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, later succeeded by Elijah Muhammad, advocated an economic philosophy for the city that emulated the ideals of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey. Muhammad encouraged his followers, many of whom were members of Detroit's laboring class, to obtain vocational training and aspire to independent business ownership. According to Suzanne E. Smith, Black Muslim members were "expected to contribute 10 percent of their personal earnings to the Nation of Islam to assist in the establishment of such independent Muslim businesses." Such financial backing allowed "Nation of Islam members to open restaurants, gas stations, barber shops, clothing stores, and grocery markets. Muhammad also encouraged his followers to patronize any Negro business and to refrain from contributing to the profits of white businesses."³⁹⁹ However, post-war urban renewal projects were extremely disruptive to Black business stability and future Black economic progress. Of sixty-four businesses in the Elmwood Park area targeted for slum clearance, over fifty percent were Black owned, and almost all were local businesses like grocery stores,

³⁹⁸ David Goldberg, "From Landless to Landlords: Black Power, Black Capitalism, and the Co-Optation of Detroit's Tenants' Rights Movement, 1964-1969," in *The Business of Black Power: Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America*, ed. Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig (Rochester: University Rochester Press, 2012), 157.

³⁹⁹ Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 1999, 105.

restaurants, barber shops, and retail stores dependent on walk-in traffic for most of their trade. Approximately seventy percent of these local businesses were unable to make the transition to new neighborhoods after being removed from their previous sites by urban renewal. According to Jacob Bergmann, this contributed not only to hardships for Black business owners, but was also a tremendous loss for Black neighborhoods, “civic identity, and public trust for African Americans.”⁴⁰⁰

By the early 1960s, Black citizens were forming collective organizations to rally against employment and housing discrimination amidst urban renewal processes of slum clearance and Black business dislocation.⁴⁰¹ At this time, the revitalization of Black commercial development in the city and an increase in Black-owned and controlled business became a central goal of many local Black organizations like the Booker T. Washington Black Business Association, the local NAACP, the Detroit Chapter of the Negro Business League, the Nation of Islam, Albert Cleage’s Freedom Now Party, and the Citywide Citizens Action Committee.⁴⁰² However, there was broad debate as to whether Black entrepreneurs should try to break into the white corporate-

⁴⁰⁰ Luke Bergmann, *Getting Ghost: Two Young Lives and the Struggle for the Soul of an American City* (University of Michigan Press, 2010) 49-50.

⁴⁰¹ Soon after Martin Luther King’s Great March to Freedom in Detroit on June 23, 1963 (during which he premiered his “I Have a Dream Speech”), the role of Black citizens as contributors to Detroit’s local economy became a rallying point for Civil Rights demonstrations staged throughout the city, including a successful citywide boycott of Kroger Supermarkets due to complaints of hiring discrimination and rent strikes’ organized by CORE on behalf of the Tenants’ Rights Movement. According to Suzanne Smith, local activists organized demonstrations to increase Black employment opportunities in white-owned businesses and to encourage the establishment of more Black-owned businesses, Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 2009, 56.

⁴⁰² Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 56. The Motown Record Company is perhaps the most famous Black economic success story to emerge from the city during this tumultuous moment. According to Suzanne E. Smith, Motown accomplished precisely what Malcolm X and the Freedom Now Party advocated at the city’s Grassroots Conference in 1963: “Black economic independence that did not rely on the industrial base of the city—auto production—to survive.”

controlled economic system in Detroit or construct a separate Black economic sphere that catered exclusively to the city's Black residents. Motown was often placed at the center of this debate. Many looked to media mogul Berry Gordy as a model of Black entrepreneurship while others critiqued the record company for its integrationist enterprises and attempts to cross over into the white mainstream—which many Black Detroiters feared would lead the corporation to abandon investment in Black urban life.⁴⁰³ These debate over Black business development were only exacerbated in the aftermath of the 1967 Rebellion after additional sectors of the city were destroyed or vandalized amidst the chaos.⁴⁰⁴

Demands for community control, in this instance, were integrally related to support for Black capitalism and self-determination in economic development plans. After 1967, the Citywide Citizens Action Committee helped establish the ICBIF and the creation of a Black housing and land development company that would “enter into the rehabilitation business, buy out slumlords, subcontract with Black builders and Black workers, and develop affordable

⁴⁰³ Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 1999, 69.

⁴⁰⁴ In July of 1965, The Booker T. Washington Trade Association held its thirty-fifth anniversary banquet. The keynote speaker was Dr. Andrew F. Brimmer, assistant secretary for economic affairs in the U.S. Department of Commerce. In his speech Brimmer proclaimed that the erosion of racial segregation was weakening the strength of the Negro middle-class. Betty De Ramus, a who would become a contributor to *CPT*, wrote in *The Michigan Chronicle* that some audience members were dismayed with the noted economist's argument that "segregated facilities and neighborhoods have been the best things that ever happened to a lot of Negro businessmen and professionals, but they can't depend on segregation any longer. And most of them aren't prepared to change." Reverend Albert Cleage of the Freedom Now Party, the creator of the Shrine of the Black Madonna Church, and a *CPT* guest, was a leading figure in 1960s Black Detroit, hoping to use the pressure created by the Rebellion to demand community control of urban renewal as well as private and public funding to spur Black economic growth. Goldberg, “Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the ‘Short Black Power Movement’ in Detroit,” 168.

housing cooperatives in the inner city.”⁴⁰⁵ The ICBIF sponsored projects that hired primarily Black employees and catered to Black citizens; they were required to even contribute a portion of their profits to charities oriented towards Black welfare.⁴⁰⁶ Black economic development was not only a topic of concern for local Black business circles but also a political platform in a national context. Government policymakers demonstrated growing enthusiasm and legislative support for Black business endeavors. President Nixon even signed an executive order, which created the office of minority business enterprise (OMBE) and thus institutionalized his Black capitalism campaign slogan. Through enterprises of organizations like the New Detroit Committee and the ICBIF, Detroit became a center point in these broader debates about Black capitalist development.⁴⁰⁷ Speaking at the National Black Economic Development Conference,

⁴⁰⁵ Michael C. Weston, “Economic Development Corporations,” *The Business Lawyer* 25 (1969): 219–26.

⁴⁰⁶ This was covered by *CPT* frequently and became a main focus in discussions of the city’s Black middle-class. Their first major project was the establishment of Detroit’s first Black-owned bank, the First International National Bank, and by 1975 had established a cadre of other Black-owned businesses: a stamping plant, a large scale food-processing plant, a lumber yard, and a fiberglass manufacturing organization. According to ICBIF vice-president and another *CPT* guest, Karl Gregory, “this company has raised over \$9.5 million for inner-city businesses and started or assisted 200 minority-owned companies, whose contribution to Detroit has been \$35 million in assets and 1100 new jobs.” Later that year, Albert Cleage spearheaded The Federation for Self-Determination which brought together Detroit revolutionaries like Ken Cockerel and Mike Hamlin, Karl Gregory of the ICBIF, Congressman John Conyers, Marxists activists like Grace Lee Boggs, Rennie Freeman of the West Central Organization, CCAC, and CORE, as well as moderates like Robert Tindall, featured earlier in the Black Vote segment. These disparate figures of local import were united towards community control and “effective development with self determination.” They worked collectively to use their influence to safeguard Black community business projects and put pressure on municipal organization and government funding agencies to support local Black business initiatives. Karl Gregory, Daniel Braunstein, and Norton Seeber, “Corporate Viewpoints—Interviews with Top Managers: Interview with Walter McMurtry,” *Interfaces* 5, no. 2 (February 1, 1975): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.1287/inte.5.2.11>. Goldberg, “From Landless to Landlords: Black Power, Black Capitalism, and the Co-Optation of Detroit’s Tenants’ Rights Movement, 1964-1969.”

⁴⁰⁷ The National Black Economic Development Conference in April 1969 was held in Detroit and featured presentations from prominent Black economists and Black Power advocates

held in Detroit in 1969, economist Robert S. Browne argued that gaining national control was unlikely but “local development projects, small business programs, job training, consumer education, vocational guidance, school improvement and other community programs” as both useful to African Americans and non-threatening to the national [white] power structure.⁴⁰⁸ Not all Black economists were in line with Browne, as many other activists—especially radical Black socialists discussed in the next chapter—felt that endorsing Black capitalism was only perpetuating the systemic exploitation of Black citizens. James Forman, for instance, presented his “Black Manifesto” at the conference, maligning the “human misery of Black people under capitalism and imperialism” and derided Black business enthusiasts as “Black Power pimps and fraudulent leaders.” He instead proposes a “socialist society, a cooperative society, a communal society.”⁴⁰⁹ To fund such a society, Forman demanded reparations from Christian Churches for “the centuries of exploitation and oppression which they had inflicted around the world.”⁴¹⁰ In this way, Detroit became the center for two major strains of the slavery reparation movement—that expressed by the Black Manifesto, which aligns more with the League of Revolutionary

throughout the nation. Speaking at the conference Robert S. Browne expressed that the quest for economic self-determination was halted by the lack of Black access to “huge personal wealth, the top twenty two major corporations, the military-industrial complex, the federal and state apparatus, the federal legislative apparatus, and the crime syndicate... This lack of access to the instruments of power, supplemented by white America’s vicious racial prejudice toward Black people has led to our perpetual impoverishment.” Robert E. Weems, *Business in Black and White: American Presidents and Black Entrepreneurs in the Twentieth Century* (NYU Press, 2009) 129.

⁴⁰⁸ Edwin M. Epstein and David R. Hampton, *Black Americans and White Business* (Dickenson Publishing Company, 1971) 414.

⁴⁰⁹ Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century* (Routledge, 2014) 184.

⁴¹⁰ James Forman was a was an American Civil Rights leader active in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, and the International Black Workers Congress. See: James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (University of Washington Press, 1972) 545. James Forman, *Control, Conflict and Change: The Underlying Concepts of the Black Manifesto* (National Association of Black Students, 1970).

Black Workers discussed in the next chapter, and the efforts of Detroit's own Ray Jenkins covered by *CPT*.

In their on-going facilitate to aid Black economic uplift, *CPT* produced a feature on "Economic Self Determination" which included interviews with Dr. Karl Gregory, director of ICBIF and ACCORD, a Black development group, and Chairman of the Board of the aforementioned First Independence National Bank. Walter McMurtry, Director of ICBIF, also appeared to promote local "Black capitalism" and the efforts of their organization to launch Black businesses (including a Black-owned Supermarket that unlike Kroger, would hire Black employees). The Man-on-the-Street interviews in this episode ask viewers to discuss the concept of Black economic development. Another episode includes a segment "The Poor Pays More," which presents findings from a consumer survey conducted by Project Focus Summer Hope which proved that "the poor do, indeed, pay more" than whites for goods and services. Unfortunately, neither of these episodes were available for viewing in the archives and my references here rely upon program archival documents.⁴¹¹

In these segments, the show demonstrates a fervent commitment to Detroit; the guests chosen to speak on the program broadly support the implementation of Black-controlled community initiatives to revitalize the inner city and appear critical of potential Black flight. In this way, *CPT* works to champion the Black citizens they feature, safeguard the city's cultural legacy, produce a stage for public discourse and civic education, and re-constitute a local Black public sphere for Detroiters to encounter entertainment fare and political debate. In doing so, *CPT* producers position themselves in leadership roles for a dislocated Black city, using the television medium to aid in the uplift of those less fortunate through program content decisions.

⁴¹¹ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 253.

Through Maddox behind the scenes and Brown on camera, *CPT* provides a Black spokesperson to instruct viewers, Black young male viewers in particular, how to model themselves. Through the above-discussed core segments on “the Black Middle-class,” “Making of a Rioter,” and “the Black Vote,” in addition to the show’s weekly mix of Black-focused “Grapevine” events, News updates, mock commercials, and in-studio entertainment performances, *CPT* produces an imagined citizen that is knowledgeable in Black artistic and intellectual history, invested in Black economic business growth, and supportive of separatist development of the local Black community through educational endeavors and networked support for Black uplift initiatives.

Conclusion

CPT programs not only aimed to re-educate TV viewers on issues hindering Black progress towards socio-economic advancement—namely economics and ineffectual educational programs—but to operate as instructional materials that could be distributed in other local contexts. Scholars Tommy Lee Lott and Mark A. Reid approach the nationally broadcast *Black Journal* as an extenuation of Black independent cinema and a crucial part of Black film history. Rather than situating it within a televisual milieu, each of these scholars, independently of one another, connect *Black Journal*’s emphasis on documenting Black struggle and celebrating Black culture from a Black perspective to independent film movements like the LA Rebellion. Meanwhile, scholars like Christine Acham, Devorah Heitner, Gayle Wald, and Berretta Smith-Shomade discuss *Black Journal* as a forum that negotiated Black politics through the television medium for a mass audience—an endeavor which happened through Black public affairs media as much as shows like *Good Times* and *Julia*. *CPT*, like *Black Journal*, operates both as a form

of documentary cinema highlighting everyday Black struggle as well as part of a television genre that negotiates the politics of representation through entertainment (edutainment if you will). However, segment features like “The Making of a Rioter,” “Economic Self Determination,” “The Black Soldier” and “The Poor Pay More” were also produced as educational content that could likewise be screened in local schools and community forums to re-educate Black citizens on important topics concerning Blackness left out by mainstream curriculum. This points to the multiple-use value of television and its possibilities in local contexts; for these local broadcast-activists, Black television programming was always already an educational interlocutor, working to re-imagine Black citizenship for a growing Black political base in the city.

As the final hour and a half segment went to air on January 22, 1969, *CPT* reconstructed the show’s formula to produce a review of “The Black Revolution.” Here, the program rehashes a narrative of Black historical thought and celebrates Black figures that guided the trajectory of Black revolutionary action in the nation. These figures include: Chrispus Attucks, Frederick Douglass, John R. Lynch, Hiram R. Revels, Blanche Bruce, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Rosa Parks, James Meredith, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown. The episode’s featured documentary segment focuses on the crisis in urban slum areas in the city and the community organizers developing plans and creating interest among the Black communities to revolutionize current city conditions. The segment features community organizers including Frank Ditto of the East Side Voice of Independent Detroit, Christopher Alston of the Forrest Park Citizens Planning Group, and Henry Rodgers and Edward Bwall of the Urban Design Development Group. The episode rallies Black students, activists, and political representatives to discuss the important concerns facing a

revolutionizing Detroit including police-community relations, Black pride, and the future of Black education. In doing so, the series ends by advocating for the development of Black Studies, an increase in the role Black citizens play in the media, and a whole scale shift towards Black control of local institutions. The series ends with a demand for “Black control of Black minds,” indicating that whites are incapable of providing Blacks with either the curriculum or the leadership that is needed to effectively “alter the patterns of negative self-image.”⁴¹² In this way, *CPT* ends by reviewing the contributions the series has made towards community control and sets an agenda that subsequent media projects might take up in the struggle for a liberated Black Detroit. As Gilbert Maddox puts it, “The response of the communication industry to Black demands for freedom and dignity will help to determine the future course of the Black revolution. It can help to mold white public opinion toward the viability of the new militancy, and direct the Black masses toward goals of more constructive and effective militancy so that the revolution may operate within the framework of democratic values. Both commercial and public television have an essential role to play.”⁴¹³

CPT was initially not renewed for funding for another season in 1969, yet went back on air on in 1970 re-titled *Detroit Black Journal (DBJ)* to coordinate with the nationally broadcast program and today is entitled *American Black Journal*. It continues to air weekly on Detroit Public Television, hosted by Stephen Henderson.⁴¹⁴ Under the banners of *Detroit Black Journal* and *American Black Journal*, the series continued to serve as a training ground for Black journalism and TV production, provide a platform to celebrate Black culture, and negotiate economic and political concerns crucial to the local Black population. Many of the hosts of

⁴¹² Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 234.

⁴¹³ Maddox, *A Study of CPT*, 234.

⁴¹⁴ Henderson was also the Editorial Page Editor of *The Detroit Free Press* until 2017.

Detroit Black Journal would find subsequent success on national television. In addition to Tony Brown's long broadcast career, *Detroit Black Journal* host/producer Ed Gordon would likewise go on to produce content for BET and host a series of news programs on that cable network.

Still airing today on WDIV-TV Detroit, the series underwent significant shifts in format and featured a range of hosts over the course of its forty-eight year run.⁴¹⁵ These format and content changes reflect differing perspectives on what media should do to best serve the Black population. George Martin, for instance, took over hosting duties and continued to cover critical issues while increasing the musical content of the programming. When social activist Ron Scott came to the program as host in 1975, *Detroit Black Journal* expanded hard-hitting interview segments. Important guests in this period included Stokely Carmichael, Sun-Ra, and Louis Farrakhan. In 1979 to 1984, under the leadership of producer Juanita Anderson and host Ben Frazier, the program shifted to a documentary style that featured monthly topical documentaries rather than in-studio interviews and performances. Topics included Black Mothers, Drugs, Local Crime, and Labor Strikes. As host from 1984 to 1988, Ed Gordon returned *DBJ* to an interview-style format. From Gordon's tenacious interviewing style emerged a tough yet friendly relationship with his interviewees, most noticeable in numerous hard-hitting interviews with Jesse Jackson during that period. Under the title *American Black Journal*, Darryl Wood and then Ken Martin continued to highlight the skills and talents of many of the nation's leading Black public figures. Stephen Henderson, has continued the legacy of staging rigorous Black political

⁴¹⁵ I am counting forty-eight years in 2018.

discussions and highlighting news stories relevant to Detroit's majority Black population.⁴¹⁶

CPT demonstrates how civic demands for community control and strategies for self-determination interconnected with Black public affairs television. Content analysis and program documents demonstrate that *CPT* used television to image a Black urban future comprised of economically self-sufficient young men educated in Black history and filled with Black pride. While *CPT* included women in discussions of Black life in the city, their appearances were more frequent in entertainment or Grapevine segments. This emphasis on male uplift perhaps reflects the gender politics of producers, Maddox and Brown. However, as Black Power worked to overturn hegemonic structures of politics, economics, and culture and replace them with Black-centered structures across the nation, re-defining gender roles was a necessary part of the Black revolutionary project on a local, national, and global scale. Of course, Black Power organizations in cities throughout the US, valued Black female leadership at different levels and Black womanhood was configured differently within the various strains of Black Power advocacy. Black radical feminists did openly criticize misogyny within the Black Power movement and such critiques do hold weight in Detroit.⁴¹⁷ According to Todd C. Shaw, women headed many

⁴¹⁶Another co-host, Reginald Wilson, became president of Wayne County Community College in the early 1970s and eventually became senior scholar emeritus for the American Council on Education. Two of the show's writers Betty DeRamus and George Martin (also known as Bill Black) became prominent journalists, and stage manager Herb Boyd became a noted scholar in African American Studies. Hal McKinney was well on his way to international stature in the world of jazz, and though members of his quintet are not individually credited, the combo appears to include at least two other renowned musicians: trumpeter Marcus Belgrave and saxophonist Thomas "Beans" Bowles.

⁴¹⁷ Here I am referencing Black radical feminist thinkers like Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and bell hooks. For more on the history of Black women in Black Power history see: Collier-Thomas, Bettye, and V. P. Franklin, eds. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*. NYU Press, 2001. Farmer, Ashley D. *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*. UNC Press Books, 2017.

grassroots social welfare organizations in Detroit.⁴¹⁸ However, the leaders of Black Power organizations in Detroit—from the militant to the moderate—were almost exclusively male. In Detroit, I would hypothesize this stems from the deep divisions of working-class labor that separated male labor at the automotive factories with female domestic labor—a topic I will explore further in the next chapter as I discuss the League of Revolutionary Black workers, which by and large positioned female labor as a secondary component within a Black-led revolution. Nevertheless, if *CPT* is imagining a future for Black citizens, it is one in which Black men increase business and political power while Black women are still relegated to cultural and domestic spheres.

Furthermore, the series documented important local protests for Black voter action, school reform, business development, and access to improved housing conditions. Yet, it did so by providing a “Black and proud” male spokesperson to both demonstrate Black citizenship ideals and distill them to a viewer base via edutainment; both through Brown’s direct address and entertainment segments. In doing so, *CPT* used media as a platform to build and strengthen Black infrastructure that combined the business leaders, community activism agendas, and artistic energies of Black Detroit in a concentrated way to force an ideological unity around Black uplift.

While most other Black public affairs programming have dissipated over the years, the demand for Black television in Detroit has persevered. In fact, demands for Black programming to meet the needs of an increasingly Black metropolis only increased and grew more intensive in subsequent years. Moving forward to the next chapter, I build on this discussion of community

⁴¹⁸ Shaw, Todd C. *Now Is the Time!*, 6.

control and these early conceptualizations of Black infrastructure to consider how Black Star Productions imagined the revolutionary role Black networks could play in challenging systems of urban subjugation of Black citizens. I demonstrate ways *Finally Got the News* documented crises in local space from perspectives unexplored by the previously discussed television and film projects. Unlike *CPT*, *Finally Got the News* advocates a reconstruction of the entire US economic system, drawing from Black Nationalist ideals and a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy.

Chapter 3

Black Star Presents *Finally Got the News*: Screening Black Radicalism in Detroit

The only kind of resolution of the problems facing Black people and other oppressed people in this country is going to have to come through a level of revolutionary change being induced. The League's practice, we think, also reflects an awareness of the fact that continued adherence to and continued reliance upon capitalistic principles and imperialist principles is of course anathema, the antithesis of anything that relates to decency, justice and freedom for mankind. So we are explicitly Marxist-Leninist. We are also of course cognizant of the fact that this peculiar oppression affects Black people; we call ourselves the Revolutionary League of Black Workers and we have to deal with the racial component as it operates in terms of producing and maintaining exploitation in this society. It's equally clear that Blacks, objectively, represent the vanguard of the struggle. It's our position that workers represent the vanguard of this Black vanguard, by virtue of the strategic point that they find themselves located in the critical aspect of the operation of the capitalist system.

– Ken Cockrel, monologue in *Finally Got the News* (1970)

In 1969, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers collaborated with a newly formed Detroit Newsreel film production collective to produce a sixty-minute documentary on the Detroit labor movement from the perspective of Black workers operating at the point of production. The resultant film, *Finally Got the News (FGTN)*, documents League efforts to build an independent Black labor organization that, unlike the UAW, would respond to workers' grievances about Black labor exploitation, and convert Detroit's rebellious momentum into a locally led revolution—beginning with Black unionization and ending with a total reorganization of economic power in the US in alignment with Marxist principles. Interweaving footage of League protest activities, the assembly line, Detroit's sprawling industrial landscape, and lecture-like monologues by central League members, the film connects League activism to a broad range of contemporaneous social issues for working-class Black Detroit; from police violence to exploitation of women in the Detroit labor force. Assembling this footage together, the filmmakers draw upon documentary techniques, akin to Third Cinema aesthetics, to situate the League's radical politics within a local milieu of civil unrest and an international context of

revolutionary action. In doing so, the film envisions a homology between labor exploitation and the socio-spatial inequality that drives development decisions in Detroit's post-Rebellion milieu. Yet it also imagines "Detroit" as a uniquely situated place where the revolutionary machinations of a majority Black city could break the exploitative practices of capitalist development everywhere.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers first emerged as a coordinating body of local RUMs, or Revolutionary Union Movements, in the late 1960s [Figure 3.1]. The First of these groups, DRUM, was an organization of Black autoworkers at the Dodge Main assembly plant, demanding collective concessions from the Chrysler Corporation and the United Auto Workers, which did not provide adequate attention to the needs of Black workers. The protest that spearheaded DRUM was led by future League member, General Baker, at the Dodge Main Plant, in which he and several other Black militants led a walkout of 4000 workers over concerns of assembly line speedups. Coordinating additional demands among workers, DRUM was thereafter formed and staged series of successful wildcat protests among Black autoworkers in the fall of 1968.⁴¹⁹ News of DRUM spread quickly and gave way to ELRUM, (Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement), CRUM (Chrysler Revolutionary Union Movement), and FRUM (Ford Revolutionary Union Movement at the River Rouge and Huber Foundry). It moved beyond the auto industry to postal workers, (UPRUM) health workers (HRUM), and Detroit News workers (NEWRUM). Coordinating RUM activism, and comprised mostly of Wayne State intellectuals and DRUM activists, The League was dually informed by Marxist-Leninism and Black Nationalism. Their core objective was to advocate for the city's Black labor force. By

⁴¹⁹ A wildcat refers to strike actions undertaken by organized workers without official union leadership's authorization, support, or approval. In the case of the League, they organized outside of the UAW (the primary recognized union for automotive production in the city).

1970, The League had solidified its position as the guiding force for Black radicalism in the city, superseding the Black Panther presence, and designing political strategies for working-class empowerment to play out through revolutionary action. However, the League likewise aimed to build upon the Black worker movement to galvanize citywide support for Black protest, propel local Black leaders to positions of political power in unions and within civic government, and ultimately restructure industrial-economic relations, first in Detroit, and then in oppressed communities everywhere.⁴²⁰

After learning about DRUM and League activism, members of the radical documentary collective, New York Newsreel (NYNR), decided to make a documentary about the League's political organizing actions and establish a counter-hegemonic film movement in Detroit. The city's highly visible labor struggles, its prominent Black radical community, and long history of class and racial tensions, made it an ideal site for radical filmmaking.⁴²¹ This film project, at least at its outset, seemed mutually beneficial for Newsreel and the League. NYNR was able to expand its base, establishing a significant local branch for the growing documentary movement across the country. Meanwhile, the League could publicize their organization and protest activities locally, while also learning film craft. It was then hoped the revolution would expand outward nationally and perhaps internationally. However, over the course of the filmmaking process, internal tensions within the Detroit Newsreel group and an increasingly fraught interracial relationship between DNR and the League led to the official dissolution of the partnership between the two institutions. Soon after, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

⁴²⁰ League member Kenneth Cockrel was elected to Detroit City Council in 1977.

⁴²¹/ For a broader history of Communism and Marxism in Detroit see: Christopher H. Johnson, *Maurice Sugar: Law, Labor, and the Left in Detroit, 1912-1950* (Wayne State University Press, 1988). Also, Angela D. Dillard discusses other iterations of Black radical thought and Marxism in: *Faith in the City*.

seized control of the project, claiming ownership of the production equipment and film footage. With the aid of defected Newsreel members, the League finished the film and established Black Star Productions, a division of the already established League-run Black Star Publications, to distribute it and produce any subsequent film projects the League might take on—though none were ever completed.⁴²²

The League film consequently constructs the meaning of “Detroit” from a strategic vantage point within Detroit’s central industry at a pivotal moment in urban history, a time of increased automation and worker displacement, and a moment in which Black radicalism gained increasing influence in civic governance and public culture. Detroit, an emergent Black city, was viewed by the League as an ideal staging ground for a revolution—and this revolution could be projected across the nation, and perhaps the world, through film distribution. Detroit at this time still boasted the highest concentration of manufacturing jobs in the United States and the majority of blue-collar employees within Detroit’s factories were Black. For the League, building a Black media network in Detroit to spread Black political perspectives was a means to transfer this struggle beyond the factory and imagine an empowered Black urban future. The

⁴²² Spearheaded by Mike Hamlin in 1969 and managed by Helen Jones, Black Star Publications was one of the first Black-owned printing houses in Detroit. They primarily printed newsletters and periodicals affiliated with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The league also owned a Black Star book store. While no literature has confirmed this, I hypothesize Black Star directly references Black Star Lines, a shipping line incorporated by Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1922. While Garvey was critical of socialist ideology as a key to Black progress, he was an early advocate of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Garvey, Marcus, and Robert A. Hill. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. VI: September 1924-December 1927*. University of California Press, 1989. DeBurg, William L. Van. *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*. NYU Press, 1997. Garvey, Amy Jacques. *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Africa for the Africans*. Routledge, 2013.

resultant film did construct an image of Black empowerment that was celebrated by radicals around the world, turning the labor activists in the League into media darlings. But it consequently removed the League from the project of local revolution. In this way, expansive goals of national revolution led to internal friction amongst League members, and the ultimate dissolution of Black Star Productions.

As Daniel Widener argues in *Black Arts West*, geography shapes both “forms of domination and the arts of resistance.”⁴²³ Throughout this dissertation, I consider ways the production of local Black media negotiated, contested, and resisted socio-cultural change as the city’s spatial imaginary shifted from post-war boom to post-Rebellion decay. This chapter analyzes *FGTN* and the League’s dual goals for Black citizens to seize industrial technology. It also examines the way the League, and member John Watson in particular, conceptualized film technology as the means to achieve a new future for Black Detroit that centered on increased Black mobility in local space and an end to Black labor exploitation. However, unlike other media projects discussed throughout this dissertation, *FGTN* has reached audiences far beyond local viewers in the 1970 because it was distributed through Newsreel's national channels, primarily to radical student groups and leftists in major cities with activist bases. It has been discussed in the writings of a range of scholars, theorists, and historians, including Georgakas and Surkin, Thomas Waugh, Fred Moten, Fredric Jameson, and Chris Robé.⁴²⁴ These scholars either champion the film as a signifier of New Left/Radical filmmaking, or approach it from an

⁴²³ Widener, *Black Arts West*, 11.

⁴²⁴ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*; Georgakas, Dan, “Finally Got the News and the Making of a Radical Film”; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (U of Minnesota Press, 2003); Waugh, *Show Us Life*. Jameson, Fredric, “Cognitive Mapping,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347–57.

urban history perspective as documentation of the League's activism. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's record of the city's Black revolutionary union movements in *Detroit I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (1975), is perhaps the text that focuses most extensively on the League, positioning the film as a significant exemplar of the League's investments in Black cultural and artistic production.⁴²⁵ While all of these scholars, Sturkin and Georgakas in particular, inform my reading of *FGTN*, they are inattentive to the future Black Star productions planned to contribute to Detroit-based media infrastructure through the production and distribution of Black radical media.

In this chapter, I draw from existing scholarship and original archival research on the League to contextualize their film practice within local post-Rebellion labor activism, a Third-Worldist Newsreel cinematic paradigm, and the local documentary practices discussed thus far in the dissertation. In doing so, I read the film as an iterative example of local citizens imagining a radical form of urban change through media. The League worked tirelessly to control their media brand and saw this control as crucial to Black liberation. As such, my discussion of League operations will rely heavily on the primary texts and recorded words of League members to most accurately capture their strategic investments in film as an educational tool for radical change. I consider how the League collaborated with, and often challenged, Newsreel's plans for the film to ensure their localized imaginary of urban life, and its correlatives in Black labor politics,

⁴²⁵ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*. To borrow the words of Dhanveer Singh Brar, Georgakas and Surkin's 1975 study, republished in 1998, "made conscious decisions to privilege the League's own accounts of their politics during the peak of their activities in the city. Rather than presenting the League in the customary form of historical knowledge, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* is a text almost active in the production of the radicalism it depicts." Dhanveer Singh Brar and others, "Blackness, Radicalism, Sound: Black Consciousness and Black Popular Music in the USA" (1955–1971), 160.

translated to film. I then analyze the ways in which the resulting film presents concentric circles of Black radicalism. It understands Detroit as a crucial node in ongoing processes of Black urban revolution due to its ties to automotive production, urban life more generally as a site of Black working-class struggle, and the development of a Black media network via Black Star as a weapon to mobilize the diffuse masses through the League's framework of self-representation first locally, then globally. In this formulation, *FGTN* emerges as a unique example of Black independent cinema for the ways it presents "Detroit" as physical location that was immobilizing Black progress, but had the unique potential to become a structuring agent of Black mobility through radical, collective action.⁴²⁶

In contrast with the Black media productions described in previous chapters, *FGTN* advocates Black Marxist radicalism, rather than self-deterministic Black capitalism, as the means to a thriving Black future in Detroit. Here, we see the quelled radical impulses of *CPT* find a voice; there are neither crisis management strategies to calm white viewers about Black uprisings nor elements of edutainment to make Black politics more palatable to those the viewers considered less advanced in their political awakening. There are no middlebrow white sponsors to appease. Instead, the League imagines a form of Black media infrastructure to catalyze Black revolutionary enlightenment, and uses film to ignite labor protest and revolt among the Black working-class. To borrow Ken Cockrel's words, film was sought as a means to induce a level of revolutionary change in the city—and perhaps the nation. However, by shifting the emphasis away from localized radical organizing to reach a broader audience of radicals through film

⁴²⁶ By mediated Black mobility I mean, first, that media had the capacity to connect Detroiters living in various parts of the city through cinematic address. However, I also argue that film and television model ways in which Black citizens engage with and understand their city akin to LeFebvre's conception of representational space. Media instructs Black citizens how to move through representational space in Detroit but also functions as a spatial practice.

distribution, they lost traction in their political organizing within the city. Thus, through a historical analysis of Newsreel/Black Star alongside a textual analysis of their completed film, I show how local Black media infrastructure and a revolutionary future for Detroit was imagined, produced, and ultimately disbanded, within a Black radical framework.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Framework of Detroit Radicalism

As part of its core historiographical project, *FGTN* captures the interrelated effects of industrial production and discrimination on Detroit's Black labor force in the 1960s. According to the "Committee for Urban Thinking," Detroit's dependence upon the economic "monoculture of automobile production" precipitated the city's nearly complete planned obsolescence as experienced half a century later.⁴²⁷ By the time of the Rebellion, the city had already sustained more than a decade of de-industrialization and suburbanization. In the 1950s, tens of thousands of inner-city jobs were lost to decentralization, as automotive plants and ancillary facilities relocated to suburban areas and rural outskirts. In the two decades preceding the Rebellion, nearly one out of every four white Detroiters moved to the suburbs. Meanwhile, Detroit's Black population doubled. According to Joe Darden, these trends reinforced one another, "as increasing Black in-migration generated even more white out-migration."⁴²⁸ Unemployment among Black Detroiters was also double that among whites, and Black workers were three times as likely to be relegated to unskilled or service work.⁴²⁹ Detroit labor activist Martin Glaberman estimated that by 1970, the Hamtramck plant was seventy percent Black while the union local (UAW Local 3), the plant management, and the Hamtramck city administration was dominated by older, white,

⁴²⁷ Daskalakis, Waldheim, and Young, *Stalking Detroit*, 10.

⁴²⁸ Daskalakis, Waldheim, and Young, *Stalking Detroit*, 10.

⁴²⁹ Wypijewski, JoAnn, "Pounding Out A Drum Beat," *New Left Review*, April 1999.

Polish-Americans.⁴³⁰ Without advocates in the UAW, Black workers bore the brunt of post-war restructuring and increases in automation. As white workers were more likely to be hired for skilled positions, they were reciprocally more likely to be protected from layoffs as companies downsized. As automation replaced physical labor, Black workers concentrated in unskilled, highly dangerous jobs, were the ones replaced by machines.

The radical newsletter *The Inner City Voice* (ICV) was founded in 1967 by a collective of Black plant workers and socialist Wayne State University students as a means to both respond to the treatment of Black citizens in establishment post-Rebellion media and the on-going exploitation of Black workers in local factories. Dodge plant workers and radical activists General Gordon Baker, Ron March, and Mike Hamlin, and Wayne State student and intellectual John Watson (who served as *ICV* editor) were among the 30 person *ICV* staff and would thereafter form The League. Before turning to film, *ICV* provided a platform for future League members to articulate their understanding of Black labor exploitation. The newsletter featured reporting of labor activism in Detroit and news of global protest. As a June 1968 issue explains:

Black workers are tied day in and day out, 8 – 12 hours a day, to a massive assembly line, an assembly line that one never sees the end or the beginning of but merely fits into a slot and stays there, swearing and bleeding, running and stumbling, trying to maintain a steadily increasing pace. Adding to the severity of the working conditions are the white racist and bigoted foremen, harassing, insulting, driving and snapping the whip over the backs of thousands of Black workers, who have to work in these plants in order to eek out an existence.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Glaberman, Martin, "Survey: Detroit," *International Socialism*, May 1969.

⁴³¹ Quoted in: Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 18.

The Black workers who were able to maintain employment were often asked to take on higher workloads as a cost-cutting measure. Writing in *Inner City Voice* (ICV), John Watson calls the process by which Black underemployed workers are used to take on tasks normally completed by three workers “niggermation”—converting Black bodies into machines while factory labor shifted to an automated system.⁴³²

Accordingly, as a major hub of American industrialization, Detroit boasts a long history of protest against the unfair conditions on the factory floor. However, Detroit’s large Black “underclass” was excluded from union bargaining prior to the Rebellion. At this juncture, nascent Black Power groups believed that if Detroit’s growing Black population organized, Black labor protest would heavily affect local, national, and even international socio-economic conditions.⁴³³ After forming in 1969, the League’s staff quickly grew to include around eighty central members and a seven person Executive Committee comprised of attorney Kenneth Cockrel, John Watson, General Baker, Luke Tripp, Chuck Wooten, John Williams, and Mike Hamlin. Wooten and Baker were the only members who worked in the factory at the time. Wayne State University students Hamlin, Williams, Tripp, and Watson had worked with Kenneth Cockrel (then a law student) in a Black Nationalist Detroit organization called “Uhuru”—a word that means freedom in Swahili.⁴³⁴ As wildcat protests ramped up in factories, most League members were no longer working on the plant for and were instead spending their time and energies near the Wayne State Campus strategizing for worker rights protests, publishing

⁴³² “To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,” *Fifth Estate*, n.d., 14, Republished in “The Movement,” July 1969.

⁴³³ In addition to the strong presence of the Nation of Islam and Uhuru in the city, Reverend Albert Cleage started a Black Christian Nationalist movement. Precedents of Black radicalism discussed in: Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*.

⁴³⁴ Vincent Harding, *We Changed the World: African Americans 1945-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 171.

ICV, campaigning and pamphleting for the League, and holding meetings to spread socialist ideologies to citizens within and outside of the factory floor. All of these figures contributed to the production of *FGTN*, in varying capacities, either appearing on screen or directing the behind the scenes production of the film.

Of course, the League was not the only Black radical group protesting in Detroit. In late 1967, the Detroit Council of Organizations was founded by Reverend Roy Allen, president of the Council of Baptist Ministers, and drew its membership from middle and upper class Black professionals, trade union members, and community leaders invested in repairing civic relations. They relied upon peaceful and legal means to better integrate Black citizens into the Detroit community. The Citywide Citizens Action Committee (CCAC), formed by Reverend Albert Cleage, attracted over 2,000 Black citizens to community meetings. The CCAC promoted a Black Nationalist, self-determination approach to Black community building with aspirations of citizen-controlled redevelopment planning—more in line with the 1960s Black Nationalism emphasized on *CPT* by Tony Brown. Detroit also had local chapters of the NAACP, CORE (Congress of Economic Equality), and the Black Panthers—which many League members held previous affiliations with.

However, the League's specialized contribution to post-Rebellion activism was their investment Marxist-Leninism as a guiding ideological principle, which steered their endeavors to build upon the city's rebellious energies to strategically combat racism in the auto industry and thereby confront the class-based crux of Detroit's multifaceted crisis. In his landmark, *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*, James Boggs, a Detroit-based Marxist thinker, labor activist, and crucial figure in the local civil rights movement, approached the "Great Rebellion" as the first step towards a totalizing shift in social consciousness grounded in humanist, socio-political

responsibility.

Rebellion is an important stage because it represents the "standing up," the assertion of their humanity on the part of the oppressed. Rebellions inform both the oppressed and everybody else that the situation has become intolerable. They establish a form of communication among the oppressed themselves and at the same time open the eyes and ears of people who have been blind and deaf to the fate of their fellow citizens.

Rebellions break the threads that have been holding the system together and throw into question the legitimacy and the supposed permanence of existing institutions. They shake up old values so that relations between individuals and between groups within the society are unlikely ever to be the same again. The inertia of the society has been interrupted.

Only by understanding what a Rebellion accomplishes can we see its limitations. A Rebellion disrupts the society, but it does not provide what is necessary to establish a new social order.⁴³⁵

The League approached labor organizing as the only way to establish such a new social order among all workers, under the banner of Black leadership. For the League, the roots of Detroit's crisis were deeply embedded in the history of automation and the development decisions of the corporate elite in charge of Detroit's manufacturing base. Thus, organizing a Black worker base was the most effective strategy to dismantle the structures of oppression at work in the factory and the city at large. The film's concluding voice-over explains it best:

Our ultimate intention is to organize Black workers as a whole...proceeding from that basic mass organization, to extend a revolutionary Black organization throughout the

⁴³⁵ Boggs, James, "Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party," in *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*, ed. Stephen Ward (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 198.

community. It is incumbent upon us to foster, join with, initiate, organize and lead Black workers in our common struggle. By being in the forefront of this revolutionary struggle, we must act swiftly to organize DRUM type organizations wherever there are Black workers.

Newsreel and Radical Filmmaking

Jim Morrison, a member of the counter-hegemonic documentary collective, New York Newsreel (NYNR), was transfixed by a series of articles on Detroit's DRUM published by *The Guardian Weekly* in November 1968.⁴³⁶ Like many in the New Left, Morrison was drawn to Detroit's symbolism as a working-class ground zero. He was convinced that the outburst of working-class radicalism in Detroit would not only serve as a meaningful documentary subject, but also an ideal base for Newsreel's growing film movement, which at that time had established ancillary centers in San Francisco and Los Angeles. In a pitch to NYNR, Morrison elaborates:

The Detroit Newsreel will be the first group producing films on working-class reality from an indigenous working-class viewpoint, for national distribution within and beyond the movement ... The Detroit project is thus a departure from national practice to date, in terms of both class and race; a departure that will broaden our practice and bring it into closer relevance to the lives and problems of the American people as a whole.⁴³⁷

NYNR were hesitant to provide advanced funds to Morrison to initiate a Detroit project. Thus, Morrison and six other interested members traveled to Detroit, independent of the Newsreel

⁴³⁶ Martha Glaberman, "Black Workers Organize Dodge Plant," *Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1968; "Detroit Radicals Act," *Guardian* 8 Feb 1969; Robert Dudnick "Black Workers on the March: Special Supplement on Black Worker Insurgency," *Guardian* 8, Mar 1969).

⁴³⁷ Jim Morrison, "Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal)," 1969, Detroit Newsreel; Files of Clippings and Miscellanea, Michigan State University Special Collections.

funding, in early 1969 to gather legal documents and record interviews with Black labor leaders during a DRUM rally. It was hoped the footage gathered during this trip would rally Newsreel support for the project. The intellectual wing of the recently formed League Central Staff Executive Committee (John Watson, Mike Hamlin, and Kenneth V. Cockrel) were particularly on board with Morrison's ideas, seeing film as a productive means to transmit DRUM's message to masses of Black workers and supportive leftists.⁴³⁸ In Detroit, however, the NYNR members were quickly confronted with the complex maneuverings of race and labor politics in a cityscape wracked with economic decline and aggressive white flight, which sharply conflicted with their previous assumptions about working-class coalition activism.

The Newsreel filmmakers interested in Detroit had first come together in 1967, after Jonas Mekas and Melvin Margolies assembled a group of activist filmmakers from the New York Underground to discuss the production of a radical political film that would challenge the mainstream media's depiction of recent political events, namely the March on the Pentagon.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Mike Hamlin was a truck driver for the Detroit News and co-founder of *Inner City Voice* along with John Watson. He ultimately earned his Masters in Social Work and taught courses on the history of Black labor in the Africana Studies department of Wayne State University. He has published a personal narrative of his work with the League in Michael C. Hamlin and Michele Gibbs, *A Black Revolutionary's Life in Labor: Black Workers Power in Detroit* (Detroit, Mich.: Against The Tide, 2013). Hamlin passed away in 2017. Kenneth Cockrel Sr. was the legal council for the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Cockrel retired from the Council in 1982 and returned to private legal practice. He passed away in 1989. John Watson was among the organizing members of UHURU, a revolutionary Black nationalist/socialist action cadre formed by Black students at Wayne State University in 1963. There he met other future league members like Luke Tripp and General Baker. Uhuru exposed Watson to socialist theorists, from Marx to Fanon. In 1965, he began as editor of *Vanguard*, a theoretical journal published by the recently formed Afro-American Student Movement. For more see: Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*.

⁴³⁹ Jonas Mekas, "On Radical Newsreel" (Third World Newsreel: 40 Years of Radical Media, n.d.), http://www.twn.org/digihome/monograph/mekas_ms.aspx. Reprinted from Jonas Mekas. *Movie Journal: the Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971*. (New York:Macmillan, 1972) 305.

The objective was for a group of politically likeminded artists and activists to pool their resources to construct a counter-hegemonic film. The meeting at the Filmmaker's Cinematheque on December 22, 1967 instead culminated in the commencement of a radical film collective, or more specifically a "newsreel service," that would "provide an alternative to the limited and biased coverage of television news."⁴⁴⁰ According to Mekas, "the news that we feel is significant—any event that suggests the changes and redefinitions taking place in America today, or that underlines the necessity for such changes—has been consistently undermined and suppressed by the media. Therefore we have formed an organization to serve the needs of people who want to get hold of news that is relevant to their own activity and thought."⁴⁴¹ Or as Marilyn Buck and Karen Ross of San Francisco Newsreel put it: "in our hands film is not an anesthetic, a sterile, smooth-talking apparatus of control. It is a weapon to counter, to talk back to, and to crack the façade of the lying media of capitalism."⁴⁴²

In a pronouncement that echoed the surrealist movement's approach to filmmaking in the 1920s, Robert Kramer declared of Newsreel: "We strive for confrontation, we prefer disgust/violent disagreement/painful recognition/jolts—all these to slow liberal head-nodding and general wonderment at the complexity of these times and their being out of joint."⁴⁴³ Newsreel likewise strove to develop a global network of radical film production, also distributing films on uprisings in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa in their US base cities.

⁴⁴⁰ Jonas Mekas, "On Radical Newsreel" (Third World Newsreel: 40 Years of Radical Media) Date Unknown, http://www.twn.org/digihome/monograph/mekas_ms.aspx. Reprinted from Jonas Mekas. *Movie Journal: the Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971*. (New York:Macmillan, 1972) 305.

⁴⁴¹ Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 305.

⁴⁴² Fruchter, Noel, "Newsreel," *Film Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1968): 43–48.

⁴⁴³ Michael Renov, "Newsreel: Old and New. Towards An Historical Profile," *Film Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1987): 24; MacKenzie, *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures*; André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1969).

Newsreel's approach to training League members in film practice was both aesthetically and ideologically informed by these preceding movements. Yet, as I will soon discuss, it was also the discrepancies between globalized radical ideologies and the specific contours of Detroit's Marxist movement that created an internal crisis that clashed with broader NR practice.

Nevertheless, upon the advent of the Newsreel collective in New York, Jonas Mekas noted: "The Newsreel films will reflect the viewpoints of its members, but will be aimed at those we consider our primary audiences: all people working for change, students, organizations in ghettos and other depressed areas, and anyone who is not and cannot be satisfied by the news film available through establishment channels."⁴⁴⁴ In fact, the pamphlet developed during the first meeting of Newsreel in 1967, details the hope that Newsreel could engender different social formations to make their own radical films from their specific socio-cultural positioning.

It is not practical for a group in New York to make a film about the Oakland demonstrations ... or the Detroit Rebellion. Each city should not be sending footage to us. They must make their own short films aimed at fulfilling the same needs as ours. Therefore, one of our highest priorities is to aid in the formation of such news-film groups around the country: by sending experienced people, by sharing technical information, by creating a relatable and flexible distribution apparatus.⁴⁴⁵

Though not discussed in academic writing on Newsreel, it is clear from this early document that the revolutionary energies circulating in Detroit and the mainstream coverage of the Rebellion were important factors in Newsreel's development and collective objectives. Essentially, the

⁴⁴⁴ Jonas Mekas, "On Radical Newsreel."

⁴⁴⁵ Scott MacKenzie, ed., "Initial Statement of the Newsreel, 1967," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Univ of California Press, 2014), 463.

salient point of this excerpt was that Newsreel was always invested in empowering “the local” through filmmaking.

This was often easier said than done, as filmmaker egos, political conflicts, and financial strain often forestalled this objective. However, forging collaborations with communities engaged in political struggle was always built within Newsreel’s framework. While Morrison’s Detroit project did not find universal support with the New York collective, his interest in expanding Newsreel’s reach beyond its New York location was a core component of Newsreel’s underlying ethos. In fact, many NYNR filmmakers argued that the organization’s first priority should be setting up hubs of alternative news in other North American cities with strong ties to radicalism, thereby creating a global network for film distribution and establishing local media institutions that could productively effect social change based on the respective needs of each Newsreel city. By 1970, Chicago, Boston, Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington DC, San Francisco, Ann Arbor, London and Kingston, Ontario all had Newsreel branches.⁴⁴⁶ These branches attempted to network with both local activist projects and global revolutionary discourse—with uneven success in each case.

⁴⁴⁶ Speaking of the development of their branch, San Francisco Newsreel’s organizing members, Marilyn Buck and Karen Ross, declared, “This society is one of spectators, who live and perceive through the news media, particularly the visual media. People’s lives revolve around the assumptions, which are made, by which channel they watch or what movie they choose to see. And all the TV channels and American films speak from the same mouth of control and power.” San Francisco Newsreel thus strove to provide alternative wellspring of information for citizens to consume, thereby forcing the re-distribution of socio-political power. Norm Fruchter et al., “Newsreel (1969),” in *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (Oxford University Press, 2016), 551. Note: San Francisco Newsreel was established in 1968. Now operating under the banner of “California Newsreel, it is only surviving Newsreel branch other than Third World Newsreel (Which developed out of New York Newsreel in 1968). Little has been published on the history of Newsreel branches outside NY, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

David James argues that Los Angeles Newsreel's "rapid politicization, the closeness with which it worked with the Black Panther Party, its failure to complete and distribute *Repression* (1970), and the core member's move into factory organizing—must be understood in the context of the history of the national Newsreel movement as a whole as well as the international wave of early 1970s guerrilla cinemas, the Third Cinemas of which it was in part the inspiration."⁴⁴⁷ Cynthia Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* likewise analyzes a range of ideas, art forms, and cultural rituals of a group of "African Americans Latino/as Asian Americans, and Anglos who, inspired by the events in the decolonizing world, saw their own localized plight in global terms. Writers, filmmakers, hospital workers, students, and grassroots activists turned to Third World anticolonial struggles for ideas and strategies that might aid their own struggles against the poverty, discrimination, and brutality facing people of color."⁴⁴⁸ Looking at the cultural productions of a disparate selection of activists of color, Young traces the mobilization of Third Worldist political thought through different strains of 1960s radicalism.⁴⁴⁹ Specifically, Young argues that radical US drew from transnational politics to inform their cultural engagements and conversely, produced films, political texts, and cultural performances that galvanized political activism and fomented a political ideology that bridged "Third Worldist" anticolonial struggles and domestic civil/civic

⁴⁴⁷ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 2005, 132.

⁴⁴⁸ Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Duke University Press, 2006) 2.

⁴⁴⁹ This includes the textual reflections of Robert F. Williams, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and Harold Cruse during and following their travels to Cuba; the unionization efforts of hospital workers through Local 1199; the linkages between the filmmaking collectives Newsreel and Third World Newsreel; the development of Angela Y. Davis as a political intellectual; and the film practice of L.A. Rebellion school of filmmakers.

rights struggles.⁴⁵⁰ The New York filmmakers comprising the Detroit Newsreel initiative, including Peter Gessner, Stu Bird, and Rene Lichtman, brought with them a commitment to counterhegemonic aesthetics and a shared knowledge of revolutionary film history beyond their local context.⁴⁵¹ Like the rest of their Newsreel brethren, they hoped to introduce films, free of charge, to audiences often overlooked and unreached by political activists. In general, Newsreel filmmakers strove not for the fly-on-the-wall directed observation tactics of contemporaneous documentary movements (like *cinéma vérité* and Direct Cinema), but instead for didactic engagement with a politicized audience. They hoped to educate, as well as rally, viewers around issues of social justice.

⁴⁵⁰ In doing so, however, she also produces a unique transmedia, transcultural text that explores both the dynamics of media uses within racially-motivated activist groups and situates these groups along a relational continuum, demonstrating how different social formations were informed by the same Third-Worldist political theories and how those politics materialized in different forms of artistic expression. Young, *Soul Power*, 2.

⁴⁵¹ Of course, Newsreel was not the first film collective dedicated to revolutionary struggle. Since the early 20th century, filmmakers across the globe have conceptualized media as a means to elucidate crisis and have advocated for film forms that challenge the offerings of the mainstream culture industry that perpetuate capitalist hegemony. From the Kinoks in Russia, to the Film and Photo League in the 1930s US, citizens have long used cinematic technologies to capture, and often puncture, the political realities of everyday life. For instance, Dziga Vertov brought Marxist documentaries about the socialist revolution to peasant communities in the rural countryside. Vertov denounced cinema's reliance on other art forms (music, literature, theatre), instead positioning film as a science that could be effectively deployed to decipher reality and present reality to viewers. In the US context, the Film and Photo Leagues of the 1930s were dedicated to reviving Vertov's investment in the camera's ability to capture "film truth," Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch's projects aimed to "eliminate fiction and get closer to life," using a mobile camera to capture contemporary Parisian life, and perhaps more broadly, genuine human experience. According to Louis Marcorelles, "the real world forgot how to look and listen. We pass over things, we use people, we look beyond them or we project our own problems and our own desires on to them. [Cinéma vérité] teaches us, once again, the kind of rigorous, open observation which, through its very existence, fights and improves the increasingly poor fiction that the mass media put out daily to build up our personal mythology." Louis Marcorelles and Nicole Rouzet-Albagli, *Living Cinema: New Directions in Contemporary Film-Making* (Praeger, 1973), 95. Also, for more on connections between Newsreel and preceding US documentary film practices see: Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left* (Arno Press, 1980).

Upon arrival in post-Rebellion Detroit, the aforementioned Newsreel members made connections with a variety of local radical organizations in addition to the League; the 5th Estate, the SDS Collective, student groups at Wayne State, the local branch of the Black Panthers, noteworthy local figures like Martin Glaberman and John Sinclair, and members of Spartacus.⁴⁵² Returning to New York with twenty-two hours of preliminary footage, Morrison began soliciting increased support for the establishment of the Detroit collective. In the original proposal submitted to NYNR, Detroit Newsreel (DNR) endeavored to: 1. Produce, execute, and distribute a 60-minute feature on the League and its practice, 2. Establish a Detroit office with a full-time staff to distribute a full set of Newsreel prints and 3. Recruit individuals from the Detroit area to become full time “Detroit NR people, eventually building a DNR composed of local people with radical “working-class politics.”⁴⁵³ Although NYNR was open to the project and impressed by the preliminary footage, the branch still declined to provide the funds needed to finance a full-length documentary film. According to Rene Lichtman, this hesitancy stemmed largely from Morrison’s positioning outside the core nucleus of the Newsreel organization and NYNR’s lack of contact, up until that point, with working-class minority politics.⁴⁵⁴ Morrison belonged to the anarchist yippie faction of Newsreel and had few contacts with serious funding power.⁴⁵⁵ An

⁴⁵² Lichtman, Rene, “Newsreel in Detroit,” 1972, 4, American Radicalism, Special Collection, Michigan State University.

⁴⁵³ Detroit Newsreel Collective, “Newsreel Report,” found in *Detroit Newsreel: Clippings and Miscellanea*, American Radicalism Collection, Michigan State University Library Special Collections.

⁴⁵⁴ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*; Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Ahmad, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind*.

⁴⁵⁵ Renov, “Newsreel,” 273. Renov discusses the various political factions that comprised Newsreel. Yippies were affiliated with the Youth International Party and offered “a chaotic highly irreverent and stylized blend of protest politics, street theatre, absurdist comedy and countercultural idealism.” Morrison, for his part, was not part of the intellectual elite of

orphan of a working-class background, he had gone airborne in the army before working odd jobs to make ends meet—from acting to selling drugs. As Morrison began turning Newsreel members on to the idea of shifting focus to the working-class reality, the organization signed off on the Detroit plan—as long as Morrison’s group secured their own funds. A desperate Morrison took fundraising into his own hands in an “ill-fated hash-smuggling scheme” that netted him a ten-year sentence in a Canadian jail.⁴⁵⁶ According to Georgakas, Morrison served over three years before escaping from an honor farm when he learned parole was not an option. He remained a fugitive as of 1974 and was given a screen credit as a “political prisoner” in *FGTN*, despite his absence during filming [Figure 3.2].⁴⁵⁷

Soon after Morrison’s arrest, the main body of NYNR emboldened by Morrison’s enthusiasm and backed by more influential NYNR member George de Pue, gave the group a small stipend to set up shop in Detroit with NYNR’s blessing.⁴⁵⁸ According to Lichtman, the Detroit project attracted a lot of excitement, as it was the first time Newsreel began positioning itself as a working-class, issue-oriented collective. They aimed to draw its membership from the entire local movement in Detroit, which even in its student contingent had a unifying base in industrial labor. In the proposal submitted to NYNR, they observe that parallel to the RUM movement in the auto factories in Detroit, “The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense is doing light industrial and community cadre organizing within the perspective of their projected United

Newsreel. For More: Brian Ward, *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 104.

⁴⁵⁶ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 1998, 113. Rene Lichtman, “Newsreel in Detroit.” Date Unknown (approx. 1972). *Detroit Newsreel: File of Clippings and Miscellanea*, 197AD, The Saul Wellman Papers, Michigan State University Special Collection on American Radicalism.

⁴⁵⁷ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit I Do Mind Dying*, 114.

⁴⁵⁸ The actual funding source from NYNR was never disclosed in DNR documents I had access to nor in Georgakas’s narrative.

Front Against Fascism. In addition, the Revolutionary Youth Movement factions in SDS will be carrying on a summer workshop and doing preliminary community organizing in the city.”⁴⁵⁹

It was hoped Detroit Newsreel could serve as the city’s central producer of alternative media, linking the city’s various activist organizations and supplying them with informational documentary content of radical happenings elsewhere. As a flyer Detroit Newsreel distributed to announce their presence in the city stated:

GM, FoMoCo and the National Bank of Detroit, to name a few, control the media the same way they try to control everything else. They show us only what they want us to see, the way they want us to see it. They are never going to tell the truth about people who are making a revolution against their power. That’s why there is Newsreel.

We make movies. Our movies are not made to keep people down and quiet. We don’t try to fill people up with a lot of fantasy bullshit. Our movies are part of the revolution. That is why you don’t see them on the late show.

Our movies try to turn people on to their own lives and how they can be better and more free. We try to turn people on to the reality of America — the whole death-trip profit system that oppresses all of us and especially the Black, brown, and yellow peoples in this country and around the world. Most important, we try to turn people on to the fact that they can fight back, that people are already fighting back, and that they are going to win.

We don’t just make movies, we take them to the people where they are— at rock concerts, in high schools and colleges, in neighborhoods, in bars and theaters—anywhere we can meet people, show the movies and rap with the people about the moment.

We need people to turn us on to more new places where we can do this. If you can dig it, come over and rap with us tonight or call us later.⁴⁶⁰

As demonstrated here, using film to dialogue about contemporaneous politics was a core objective of the Detroit group. However, once set up in the city, the production of a film on

⁴⁵⁹ Morrison, “Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal).”

⁴⁶⁰ “Detroit Newsreel Promotional Flyer,” 1971, Box 1, Folder 11: Black Star Production Materials, Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

“white racism as the critical internal obstacle of the workers movement in Detroit” became their core focus.⁴⁶¹

Ideally, the production of the first DNR film was to coincide with a “film skills workshop,” inculcating local movement people into the Newsreel collective and training them to produce their own content.⁴⁶² Although the Revolutionary League of Black Workers would be a primary subject of the documentary, the original proposed film aimed to examine the ways both white and Black militants worked to change labor practices while combatting racism. However, this plan over-estimated their networking potential in Detroit and overlooked the tensions and structural differences that existed among civic organizations therein. The transplanted NYNR members quickly divided into two distinctive factions with different understanding of the weight and priority of each of DNR’s core objectives, causing a great deal of in-house friction. According to Rene Lichtman, “internally it felt as though the group was doomed from the beginning.”⁴⁶³

Most of the individuals involved in Newsreel in the late 1960s supported the Black Panther/Weatherman thesis that the second American Revolution would be led by a relatively small group of elite professional revolutionaries, which Marxists called lumpen proletariat. While interested in Detroit’s working-class, this sector of DNR was particularly invested in imbuing Detroit’s political scene with Panther/Weatherman politics. This group was also far more interested in setting up Newsreel film screenings to enliven political agitation within Detroit’s student communities and coordinating events with the city’s White Panther Party than contributing to the production of *FGTN* alongside the League of Revolutionary Black

⁴⁶¹ Morrison, “Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal).”

⁴⁶² Morrison, “Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal).”

⁴⁶³ Lichtman, “Newsreel in Detroit,” 11.

Workers.⁴⁶⁴ This group was led by George de Pue, who became the “theoretical guru” of the Detroit Collective.⁴⁶⁵ Stu Bird, Rene Lichtman, and Paul Gessner, meanwhile, believed their purpose in the city was to construct a documentary that would accurately represent the League and visualize the group’s specific ideological approach to the labor movement. According to Gessner, the League was key, not only to understanding the revolutionary potential of Detroit as a city, but also the nation at large, as “organizing at the point of production as the League was, means organizing at the jugular vein of the organism itself.”⁴⁶⁶ Their plan was to use the small \$5000 budget and film stock (of “dubious quality”) they were given by NYNR and efficiently develop a film the League could readily use for their own organizing purposes.⁴⁶⁷ In their Newsreel correspondences, Stu Bird and Rene Lichtman essentially perceived this divide as one between an elitist interest in Newsreel film as a key into in hippie/liberal politics of the white student movement on the one hand, and an investment in using film as a resource to help working-class Black citizens mobilize against localized oppressive forces on the other.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ The White Panthers were a far-left, anti-racist, white American political collective founded in 1968 by Pun Plamondon, Leni Sinclair, and John Sinclair. It was formed in response to an interview in which Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, was asked what white people could do to support the Black Panthers. Newton replied that they could form a White Panther Party. The counterculture era group took the name and dedicated its energies to “cultural revolution.” They were also heavily invested in psychedelic counterculture; drug experimentation, rock music (sponsoring the group the MC5), and free love.

⁴⁶⁵ According to Lichtman, de Pue was both able to converse easily with the “jet-setter” crowd and fit in with the “lower-east-side” radicals. He had an extensive background in extremist activism, with ties to the Communist Party and the Progressive Labor Party. He was well versed in Marxist theory. Lichtman, “Newsreel in Detroit,” 2.

⁴⁶⁶ Gessner, Paul, “Letter to Dan Georgakas,” July 1, 1972, 4, Box 1, Folder 13, Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives, 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Georgakas, Dan, “Finally Got the News and the Making of a Radical Film.”

⁴⁶⁸ Stu Bird and Rene Lichtman. “The Rip Off.” March 20, 1970. *Detroit Newsreel: File of Clippings and Miscellanea*, 197 AD, The Saul Wellman Papers, Michigan State University Special Collection on American Radicalism. Its important to note that archival documents on Detroit Newsreel and *Finally Got The News* are almost exclusively written from the perspective

In 1970, the National meeting of Newsreel collectives was held in Detroit, and members of other branches, San Francisco in particular, seemed impressed by DNR's working-class activism. Other newsreel collectives were historically close to SDS and the Panthers, and their ties to SDS led to a lot of student/campus activism. As such, they were excited by the networking possibilities in Detroit and the outreach being done with the local student population.⁴⁶⁹ Yet, for Lichtman, Bird, and Gessner, the collective's emplacement in Detroit increasingly raised significant questions about the activist policies of the Newsreel organization as a whole and the intended audience of Newsreel films. "Does a media group make propaganda in a political vacuum, to whom does it respond? How does it set its political priorities?"⁴⁷⁰ In Detroit, these Newsreel members learned that while a few films documented Panther activism, they otherwise didn't have films that were directly relevant to working-class communities, especially ones of color. Most were geared towards students, liberal professionals, or white intellectuals sympathetic to the Panthers. As such, many Newsreel films resonated with the 5th

of the members sympathetic to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and who stayed in the city to finish the film project after the disillusion of Detroit Newsreel. Absent from the historical record are the personal recollections of George de Pue and the members of the Detroit Newsreel project that felt the production of *Finally Got the News* was of secondary importance to spreading the Newsreel agenda. As such, the historical narrative is skewed towards the experiences of Lichtman, Bird, and Gessner.

⁴⁶⁹ *Off the Pig* (1968) was produced by San Francisco Newsreel and copies were given to The Black Panther Party to show at recruitment events. Los Angeles Newsreel was contemporaneously filming *Repression* (1970) on the Panthers and state attempts to stifle their organizational reach. Most DNR members were optimistic that a similar relationship could be set up with Detroit organizations.

⁴⁷⁰ Lichtman, Rene. "Newsreel Detroit Collective" found in *Detroit Newsreel: Clippings and Miscellanea*, American Radicalism Collection, Michigan State University Library Special Collections, 8.

Estate Group and the White Panthers, but were of less use to Black autoworkers at the core of the city's revolutionary potential.⁴⁷¹

For instance, Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and deputy chairman of the national BPP was assassinated in his home while sleeping by a tactical unit of the Cook County, Illinois State's Attorney's Office in conjunction with the Chicago Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation on December 4, 1969. After, George de Pue and Ellin Hirst of DNR organized a Black Panther benefit to bring the “white movement together around materially helping the newly formed Committee to Combat Fascism.”⁴⁷² They also put together the Repression Conference held at Saint Joseph's Church, January 30, 1970, which included invited speakers Robert Williams, former President of the Republic of New Afrika recently returned from exile in China, Emory Douglas, Minister of Culture for the Black Panthers, and Ken Cockrel. The conference brought the tensions between the League and the Panthers to a head, as Cockrel called out the disparate approaches to social change in his speech “From Repression to Revolution.” In the speech, he specifically declares:

We've represented and related to members of the Black Panther Party here and elsewhere. But we feel that the principal responsibility of persons who are concerned about doing political work is that they first of all have an obligation to conduct themselves in such a way as to avoid incarceration, because the primary responsibility of revolutionaries is to be about the business of doing revolutionary work. And that means that your first responsibility is to do everything in your power to avoid becoming a defense

⁴⁷¹ Lichtman, “Newsreel Detroit Collective,” 6.

⁴⁷² Stewart Bird and Rene Lichtman, “To the National Newsreel Collective,” March 20, 1970, 2, Detroit Newsreel; File of Clipping and Miscellanea, Michigan State University Special Collections.

organization.⁴⁷³

The League, here and elsewhere, were frustrated that Newsreel provided monetary and organizing support to the Black Panthers, while claiming to be under-funded and having little resources available to aid the League in their organizing work.

Newsreel films made in other cities, like New York and Los Angeles, often focused on presenting an empathetic look at different radical political groups and the events they organized, from the Black Panthers, to (white) student activist groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Nonviolent Organizing Committee (NOC). While the majority of DNR personnel wanted to inject their Panther-inspired politics into the local scene in order to produce similar documentary collaborations, The League believed that the Black Panther Party was moving in the wrong direction and that a successful movement could not be based upon the lumpen as they lack a potential source of power. They instead argued that Black workers were the most promising base from which to build a successful Black movement because of the potential power derived from ability to disrupt industrial production.⁴⁷⁴ The League further opposed armed protest in the streets and the uniformed, ritualistic behaviors of the Panthers. They instead opted for an organizing strategy aimed at building coalitions among average citizens, the working-class Black citizens of Detroit in particular, and hoped to use film to communicate their agenda directly to interested viewers in factories, union meetings, community centers, and educational institutions. *ICV* and Wayne State's *South End Press* provided access to publication materials to produce pamphlets, posters, flyers and other written texts that could be

⁴⁷³ Cockrel, Kenneth V., "From Repression to Revolution" (Repression Conference, Sponsored by Newsreel Detroit, Saint Joseph's Church, Detroit, MI, January 30, 1970). Cited In: Cockrel, Kenneth V., "From Repression to Revolution," *Radical America*, Black Labor, 5, no. 2 (1971): 82.

⁴⁷⁴ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*.

distributed in the streets, the factory floor, and among students. However, they were drawn to DNR, believing the didacticism of film could reach a wider audience without garnering negative attention from the white establishmentarian media that constantly harangued the Panthers. While DNR wanted to operate as a unifying institution for radicalism in the city, they never could reconcile the ideological divergences between the Panthers and League and bridge these groups through a productive media coalition.

Reflecting on his experiences in Detroit in 1972, Rene Lichtman argues “the important things to observe are the internal workings of the collective—insofar as they reflect the fragmentation of the left as a whole—and the description given of the problems a new leftist from New York has in trying to relate to a stable unglamorous city like Detroit.”⁴⁷⁵ Here Lichtman first references the broader sociological processes that led New Left coalitions to splinter into discrete radical groups in the 1970s. As with Newsreel, the white, middle-class, male power-core of New Left activism was ultimately challenged by the reemergence of feminist, sexuality, and gender-based politics. Many of the political radicals of the 1960s shifted efforts away from student organizing and anti-war protests by the mid-1970s, instead focusing on issues such as environmentalism, and reinvesting in the democratic process.⁴⁷⁶ However, more pertinent to this study, Lichtman’s reflections reference the tremendous difficulties his cohort of upper-middle-class white leftists faced trying to integrate into the Detroit political scene.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ For a more in depth look at the New Left see: McMillian, John and Buhle, Paul (eds.). *The New Left Revisited* (Temple University Press, 2003). Also discussed in: Robé. Chris, “Detroit Rising: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Newsreel, and the Making of Finally Got the News.”

⁴⁷⁷ Lichtman, “Newsreel Detroit Collective,” 6.

It took us a long time to realize that this was not New York. In New York, the political life was one of constant events, demonstrations, marches, hitting the streets, there was very little, that we knew, ongoing discreet political work being done. In NY, everything was geared to showing a revolutionary presence, to running home after a big march to see if you made the 6 o'clock news. That you knew you had done something. In Detroit things were very different. We tried a few rallies downtown but the pigs always ramped on Blacks, so we stopped that. We never understood the kind of activities Ad-Hoc were engaged in, all this work with Libs and Pigs... We didn't understand the League fully, how it moved, how it built resources, skills etc.⁴⁷⁸

Unlike the attention-seeking strategies of New York activists, many League members were cautious about negative ramifications of reckless media attention, and were skeptical about white filmmakers constructing their public image. They thanked the lack of arrests of League members, at least in part, to their avoidance of the mainstream press and their low-key public image. In general, many League leaders were skeptical about Newsreel's motives in setting up base in the city, but allowed the relationship to move forward, primarily due to John Watson's enthusiasm for the film project.

Throughout the initial months of filming, the class, race, and ideological divisions between the white Newsreel filmmakers and the Black working-class radicals in Detroit rendered their collaborative relationship tenuous at best. DNR struggled to traverse the insider/outsider binary and could not adopt a localized framework for navigating the city. They did not want to surrender their previously established political affiliations to fully immerse themselves within the League's political perspective—or at least the perspective that John Watson wanted to

⁴⁷⁸ Lichtman, "Newsreel Detroit Collective," 8.

promulgate through the film. In classical ethnographic film, in order to underwrite the authority of the film's sociological work, the filmmaker necessarily inscribes a distance between the "us" of the filmmaker and the "them" of the Other.⁴⁷⁹ In doing so, the filmmaker's typically white male body disappears behind the camera, transforming first hand experience into "third person disembodied knowledge."⁴⁸⁰ Newsreel films documenting radical Black subjects do not necessarily endeavor to produce third person disembodied knowledge, but rather let the subjects speak for themselves. However, the major problem that emerged in Detroit is that while ideologically DNR wanted to open a space for Black subjects to speak, not everyone was completely on board with the specifics of what Black Detroiters of the League wanted to say. In particular, the film opened up questions as to whom controlled the League's image and to what end was it being mobilized.

Furthermore, the racial discrepancies between the white newsreel filmmakers and the Black League produced divergent understandings of what a radical local media network should be in terms of both long-term objectives and everyday practice. In *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, Georgakas and Surkin document the deeply rooted skepticism towards the documentary filmmakers from the League's perspective. A few core members of the League, helmed by John Watson, "understood the tremendous outreach a film could provide for organizing workers" and tried assuage concerns among the rest of the organization.⁴⁸¹ However, many others were still doubtful that a film movement could be an effective means to transmit revolutionary ideology. The League was likewise concerned that workers would be frightened away from participating in

⁴⁷⁹ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 66.

⁴⁸⁰ Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, 66.

⁴⁸¹ Georgakas, Dan, "Finally Got the News and the Making of a Radical Film." 156.

DRUM due to the presence of white men wielding cameras and surveilling radical activities. Considering the use of “riot” footage in trial proceedings and the reactionary way in which (white) news outlets represented Black citizens in the aftermath of the Rebellion, these fears were decidedly warranted. Thus, DNR members were constantly reminded to keep their presence minimal and remain quiet during all meetings. Mike Hamlin, who was among League members sympathetic to the film project, recalls:

I had to escort the White photographers to all the sites they filmed because Blacks would jump on them. The first time they went out to the League headquarters, a guy jumped on him and beat him up. So after that, whenever they went out to shoot one of our sites, I would go. It didn't make any sense. Our rationale was if you want to kick some white's ass, there are some racists over there, don't mess with these people; they're helping us.

That issue was always there to the end.⁴⁸²

Georgakas and Surkin further indicate that there was some concern the film would be apprehended by police or other repressive state agents gathering intelligence about their proceedings and the materials used against them. Such concerns were not unfounded, as materials were confiscated and destroyed during the production of Los Angeles Newsreel's *Repression* about the Black Panther Party. Anxious about the public learning too much of their internal goings-on, League members outside the core intellectual wing would often fail to tell DNR when political meetings were to take place, also deliberately concealing references to many group member's acceptance of violence and “by any means necessary” attitudes.

⁴⁸² “Revolution at the Point of Production: An Interview with Mike Hamlin of DRUM and The League of Revolutionary Black Workers.” *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, Volume 2, Number 1, Autumn 2013, 99-112. (110).

When intragroup tensions, coupled with negative pressure placed on the group from local organizers, came to a head on March 10, 1970, DNR decided to officially disband. Stu Bird, Rene Lichtman, and Paul Gessner wanted to remain in Detroit to finish work on the film they had already collected footage for. They likewise felt a political responsibility to stay in Detroit where many organizations had come to depend on the distribution of Newsreel films and feared that losing the income from rentals 300 to 400 dollars a week would seriously jeopardize the completion of *FGTN*.⁴⁸³ George de Pue relocated to Ann Arbor, with some members (Barbara Stone and Jane Capellaro) joining him, and others left Michigan altogether. According to a letter written by Bird and Lichtman reflecting their experiences in Detroit, the departing members suggested that they (Bird and Lichtman) should fly to the San Francisco Newsreel office to finish the film. "They questioned the politics of the film and argued that working in an environment where there was ongoing practice and available technical assistance would be beneficial. Rene argued against the film's going anywhere outside of Detroit for any length of time on the basis that the film should reflect the practice of the League and not the practice of SFNR."⁴⁸⁴

Hearing rumors of the DNR dissolution and concerned that former Newsreel members would leave with the film footage and equipment; the League seized control of all cinematic materials, claiming ownership of the property on March 12, 1970. Jane Capellaro reflects back on the incident:

There was a bang on the barricaded door and I went over to see who it was. I believe there was a peephole where I could see her or else I could only hear Nancy's voice asking

⁴⁸³ Bird and Lichtman, "To the National Newsreel Collective," 2.

⁴⁸⁴ Bird and Lichtman, "To the National Newsreel Collective," 2.

me to open the door. I did and behind Nancy [last name unknown] were the league members who came in and took over the office. They came into the office and walked out with any equipment they could carry, like cameras, a shotgun, but of course not the large machine for editing films...I remember running the couple of blocks over to the commune where the other Newsreel members lived but that was in disarray too.⁴⁸⁵

Lichtman likewise recalls that while working on the film at the Newsreel house, “a large contingent of large League members walked into our editing basement (I was only one there) and simply unplugged the equipment and walked out with it.”⁴⁸⁶ In a subsequent interview with Chris Robé, he further adds, “They just took over the means of production. They didn’t want the film to leave Detroit.”⁴⁸⁷ Asserting Newsreel owed them \$900 in damages, they refused to hand over the equipment and film stock. Watson discussed the League’s displeasure with Newsreel’s reckless outreach practices with Lichtman at length, who readily came to agree with Watson’s appraisal of the situation. As noted in Lichtman and Bird’s report on the events to NYNR:

The league says, based on accurate evidence, that DNR has been untogether, irresponsible, and has participated in dangerous actions against Black people and that we of the League are creating our own propaganda organization based upon our priorities, and that you, Detroit Newsreel, have the material resources—the means of production, which you are misusing politically. So we are taking control of those resources.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Jane Capellero, “Untitled,” n.d., <http://www.newsreel.us/NR@SLC/archives/Capellaro.htm>, *The News Reel Reflections: Historical Materials and Notes*.

⁴⁸⁶ Bird and Lichtman, “To the National Newsreel Collective.”

⁴⁸⁷ Robé, “Detroit Rising,” 150.

⁴⁸⁸ Bird and Lichtman, “To the National Newsreel Collective.” 6.

Lichtman and Bird struck a deal with Watson. They agreed to help the League train members in film craft and subsequently set up a propaganda arm to distribute any future League films.⁴⁸⁹ While Paul Gessner was not part of these negotiations, he too was invited to finish the film along with Lichtman and Bird.

As these remaining DNR members learned of Watson's desire to build a propaganda arm for the League and work actively towards self-representation, they realized that DNR as a collective had been too infatuated with their own outreach objectives and therefore consulted too minimally with the Black movement in the city. Writing to New York Newsreel in 1970, Lichtman and Bird note their affirmation that the League should set the Revolutionary agenda in the city and the terms of the on-going struggle should be dictated by Black leadership.

We understand the militant vanguard role of Black workers in a revolution in America and the role of workers in general at the point of production. The League is moving on many levels to seize power in Detroit. We also feel that the League and its politics will be the basis of a national Black proletarian organization. The League recognizes and understands completely the importance of a propaganda arm growing as quickly as it is growing. We understand the role we can play in helping that propaganda arm become strong and vital.⁴⁹⁰

Thus, Lichtman and Bird committed to keeping the DNR office open along with five members of the League as staff and immediately begin training league members in filmmaking. Thereafter,

⁴⁸⁹ Peter Gessner did not author the letter to New York Newsreel explicating the changed relationship with the League after the departure of de Pue and his Newsreel affiliates. However, Lichtman and Bird reference the League's admiration of Gessner and their hope he would continue with the project. In a letter to Dan Georgakas, Gessner likewise echoes Lichtman and Bird's contention that the film exists for the League and their internal organizing purposes.

⁴⁹⁰ Bird and Lichtman, "To the National Newsreel Collective." 5.

they would recruit regionally and nationally for the collective. Under League leadership, they planned to make collaborative films and establish internal education programs to benefit Detroit citizens. They would also struggle within National Newsreel for a “collective political consciousness to combat liberalism, professionalism, organizational chauvinism, male chauvinism, and white skin privilege.”⁴⁹¹ The League Central Staff hoped Newsreel would agree to distribute the film nationally, but that they would be able to retain use of the film for their internal organizing purposes. For Lichtman and Bird: “to assert our ownership rights over the film would be an example of organizational chauvinism, racism, and false consciousness. What is important is that the revolution be created and distributed to as many revolutionary organizations as possible, whether they are called Newsreel or not.”⁴⁹² The remaining DNR members reviewed existing film materials with Watson, approaching the project with a new flexibility, incorporating his feedback and insights. After the completion of the film, they agreed to focus on the League training program so the League could teach others and sustain the media program independently of DNR members. They also planned to assist League members in writing, filming, and editing a series of short films on issues relevant to League outreach strategies—control of schools, housing, hospital, and workers.

Reflecting on this moment, the remaining DNR filmmakers see *FGTN* as a transitional moment for documentary as a field, a final shift away from US documentary media production being exclusively controlled by white people and the technical skills of filmmaking being exclusively practiced by white folks. Historically, film production companies, which were primarily white controlled, have very rarely entrusted media production entirely to Black casts

⁴⁹¹ Bird and Lichtman, “To the National Newsreel Collective.” 9.

⁴⁹² Bird and Lichtman, “To the National Newsreel Collective.” 5.

and crews. Even Black public affairs programs that claimed a degree of independence, still struggled with white media infrastructure. *Haney's People* was limited by ABC's lack of investment in Black public affairs and *CPT* by the limited funds provided by the New Detroit Committee and the Detroit Educational Television Foundation. Thus, the Newsreel filmmakers approached this organizational shift towards Black local control optimistically:

More and more Black and third world political groups are going to have to seize the tools of communication which have been denied to them and break the dependence on white media specialists...I think *Finally Got the News* represents both a breaking of a new ground and simultaneously an endpost of some kind. At the same time it signals the end of white filmmakers making films about other people's struggles, it re-opens a whole area and direction long ignored by the New Left—that of the lives and importance of ordinary working people in this country. It should mean the end of leaping from one “fashionable film” or organizing project to the next, the end to the strange, almost endemic need some of us have of being “where the action is.”⁴⁹³

Here, Gessner positioned *FGTN* as the first step towards a radical and sustainable media network; rather than just a “fashionable film” on the hot topic in Detroit; “The League.” While the white filmmakers were still crucial to the production, Black radicals took control of the image-making process and set terms for the future of the production. For John Watson, learning film craft was a necessary step in the direction towards an autonomous media infrastructure for the local Black community and such media was reciprocally crucial for the instantiation of Black community control. In an interview with *The Fifth Estate*, Watson was asked what white radicals could do to support the League in their endeavors. He suggests that white citizens could serve as

⁴⁹³ Gessner, “Letter to Dan Georgakas.”

office and logistical support to the Black-led revolution. Yet, of critical interest to this dissertation, he notes:

The league would like to begin to move in to the production of films so we can have more vehicles for the re-education of Black people to the true nature of the system. However, at the moment we don't have the resources, and the administrative staff doesn't have the time to put into that kind of project. White radicals who are really interested in doing something could get together and figure out how to beg, borrow, or steal these kinds of photographic equipment.⁴⁹⁴

This attitude governed his approach to the completion of *FGTN*. For Watson, once the League established they would be the producers, it mattered less who provided the camera or who edited the film. The League, with Watson at the helm of the project, had creative control and oversight; *FGTN* was going to be a Black Star film; distributed under the banner of The League's new distribution company. In this way, The League was working to instantiate new infrastructure to promote the dissemination of Marxist Black Power ideologies and network with other radical agencies in the city to enact civic change.

Filming *Finally Got the News* and Radical Detroit Media

In many respects, *FGTN* operates in tandem with the other documentary projects discussed in this dissertation, as all were designed to counter the image of Detroit and its Black citizens produced by the mainstream media. However, while the production of Black public affairs programs like *CPT* and *Free Play* played a significant role in creating an alternative

⁴⁹⁴ "To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," 10.

mechanism for Black visibility in the city, their adherence to broadcast standards rendered them unable to fully address the endemic racism that structured the local media industry itself. By 1970, *CPT* host and producer Tony Brown had become the president of the National Association of Black Media Producers and charged all but four Detroit radio and television stations of being “racist controlled.”⁴⁹⁵ The group contested the racist stations’ right to use public airwaves, as they continued to ignore demands for Black employment in television and radio production and the creation of programs “relevant to the Black community.”⁴⁹⁶ The association further advocated a boycott of advertisers affiliated with the accused stations, hoping that by stopping “the source of the money, we will stop the source of racism.”⁴⁹⁷ While Black Detroiters, including League members, supported Brown in his struggle to increase Black control via boycott, they ultimately wanted more than inclusion in existing systems of representation—they wanted to completely overturn the structures of power that kept Black voices silent and Black struggles invisible.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers idealized the production of their own media and the development of a Black media infrastructure as a significant component of a local struggle to control the means of communication and representation within a broader battle against Black exploitation. In this instance, however, the goal was not to use media to instantiate Black uplift endeavors and promote Black business development in line with middle-class respectability. Instead, The League saw the development of new channels for media production

⁴⁹⁵ *Inner City Voice*, Volume 2 Number 6, June 1970. “Blacks Fight Racist Control of Media” page 11.

http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/League/513.LeagueofRevolutionaryBlackWorkers.InnerCity.June.1970.pdf

⁴⁹⁶ “Blacks Fight Racist Control of Media,” 11.

⁴⁹⁷ “Blacks Fight Racist Control of Media,” 11.

and distribution as essential to building a Black radical base to support the economic restructuring of society as a whole. Reorganizing the engines of American industrial labor would consequently lead to a shift in economic control, leveling the power of white elites and building worker solidarity. Yet, as is repeatedly the case in Detroit, imagining a new future for the city that could be negotiated through media activism was easier than producing the media itself.

FGTN was largely shot guerilla style around Detroit, infusing the film with local iconography as well as Newsreel conventions of imperfection. Third Cinema and Cinema Novo filmmakers embraced an aesthetic of imperfection, arguing for a political cinema that would address issues of poverty through the very impoverishment of their style. In *FGTN*, the camera is unsteady, the sound inconsistent, and the editing choppy. But as Bill Nichols suggests, “revolutionary art was sloppy inaudible art” and in this case, intentionally so.⁴⁹⁸ Informed by Third World Cinema and Underground film practices, Newsreel films often diverged from or strategically countered the sophisticated training of the experienced filmmakers.⁴⁹⁹ Many Newsreel films even aimed to mirror battle footage “to shock, stun arrest, horrify, depress, sadden, prod, demand.”⁵⁰⁰ The Newsreel style that persisted into the DNR/League collaboration was meant to operate as an affront to the gloss of Hollywood and conventional news media aesthetics, eliding the visual pleasures such media served up for its passive audiences.

However, the shift in production grounded the film more directly in the League’s imaginary of Detroit, its citizens, its spatial properties, and its projected political future. The League seizure of Newsreel equipment forced Gessner, Lichtman, and Bird to work closely with the League to re-conceptualize the content and structure of *FGTN*, re-positioning it within a

⁴⁹⁸ Nichols, *Newsreel*, 62.

⁴⁹⁹ Young, *Soul Power*.

⁵⁰⁰ Fruchter, “Newsreel” 43.

localized Black framework. Comparing the film proposed to NYNR and the final product illustrates just how significantly the politics of the League and the group's emplacement in Detroit impacted the development of the project. For instance, the original film planned to focus on the history of labor in Detroit, tracing how "unionist tendencies within the UAW led to the evolution of a narrow "business" unionism that bargains the interests of skilled workers against those of production line workers, and in effect, the interests of older workers against young, whites against Blacks."⁵⁰¹ To deliver this information, the film was to include commentaries by a diverse range of Detroit's populace; "old and young, Black and white, will recount the 30s and 40s, and describe present conditions. The visual element of these sections will be period stills and footage and present actualities, intercut with very brief synch interviews" on the topic of racism in the Detroit labor force. The proposal further states the film intended to "present this [The League's] organizing work through interviews in action with organizers, workers, and their wives, with both synch and voice over silent actualities."⁵⁰²

The culminating film does intermix voice over commentaries with actuality footage, yet the framing of the end product shifted to accentuate League politics. At Watson's behest, the proposed focus on a multiracial, working-class history of Detroit was reduced to emphasize the history of Black exploitation under capitalism, with deep roots in the Fordist labor system. This modification, as well as the mode of the League/Newsreel collaboration, is most abundantly clear in the film's opening. John Watson insisted that the film contain a history of slavery in the US, from colonial times to the present conditions of factory exploitation in Detroit. Gessner and Bird attempted to convince Watson that there were limitations to what could be done in a sixty-

⁵⁰¹ Morrison, "Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal)."

⁵⁰² Morrison, "Newsreel Detroit Project (Proposal)."

minute film, arguing it would be difficult to incorporate such an extensive history within the documentary's temporal parameters. Watson insisted on the premise. Eventually Gessner and Bird came up with a creative montage to open the film, which provides a history of the American slave trade and frames contemporary industrial practices as mere extensions of an on-going system of racially structured subjugation. Here, the film cuts to a collage of paintings, drawing, photographs, and written documents related to the slave trade. In line with Third Cinema aesthetics, the film dynamically manipulates the framing of these documents to the sound of an Afro-Caribbean drumbeat.⁵⁰³ The camera rapidly zooms in, pans left and right, and pivots the images in circular motions to produce a jarring affect on the viewer. Revolutionary filmmaking for Brazilian director Glauber Rocha poetically blends documentary techniques with experimental narrative style that foregrounded (a masculinist) violence. As Rocha indicates: "Cinema Novo: more than primitive and revolutionary, it is an aesthetic of violence. Here lies the starting point for the colonizer to understand the existence of the colonized. Only by becoming conscious of the colonized one's possibility, violence, that's the only way the colonizer can understand, to his horror, the power of the culture that he exploits."⁵⁰⁴ In a similar vein, the history of slavery in *FGTN* not only entails violent and powerful content, but also is presented to the viewer as aesthetically violent. While not overtly advocating a violent uprising, the film is structured to confront the working Black viewer, exposing them to the structures of capitalism that exploit them.

⁵⁰³ Fred Moten discusses the sonic and tonal properties of the League's film in Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (U of Minnesota Press, 2003) 171-232.

⁵⁰⁴ Glauber Rocha "An Esthetic of Hunger", trans. Randall Johnson and Burnes Hollyman. *The New Brazilian Cinema*, 70.

Likewise, the film's jarring aesthetic works to render the white-collar viewer conscious of their complicity in structures of racist subjugation. The objective was to not entertain or edutain an audience, but rather to use discontinuity editing and images of local revolutionaries to awaken viewers to the revolutionary potential of a Black labor force. The opening montage leads seamlessly into images of labors strikes in the early part of the 20th century, photographs from the women's Suffragette movement, and then to Black factory workers and tradesmen, building a direct correlation between the oppression of Black slaves and the oppression of Black workers in industrial modernity. Here, the film intercuts shots of Diego Rivera's four-wall "Detroit Industry: mural on the walls of the Detroit Institute of Arts to graphically correlative shots of workers in the factory [Figures 3.3 – 3.4]. It is filmed to appear as if Rivera's painting, which includes images of Black workers on the line, has come to life. This visual continuum further leads to images of Black citizens being physically assaulted by white police officers in the streets of Detroit, as they rise up and struggle against the violence of their oppressors. Graphic matches connect footage of flames emerging from heated steel in the factory and city spaces ablaze [Figures 3.5-3.6]. This likewise connects labor exploitation directly to the "rioting" in 1967, implying that the Rebellion was a historically motivated extension of the enduring Black turmoil of oppressed workers. Familiar images of tanks driving down Woodward Ave., Detroit's main drive, are complemented by shots of major Detroit institutions (The Hudson Company, The Detroit Bank), vandalized. The montage ultimately fades into the film's title card, "Finally Got the New..." The title was derived from the slogan chanted at DRUM rallies: "Finally Got the News, How Our Dues are Being Used." [Figure 3.7] Thus, the film, from its outset, seeks to provide both a hyper-local focus on the industrial conditions that contributed to the city's post-Rebellion crisis and an image of Detroit's position

within a broader transnational structure of capitalist development that necessarily relied upon Black exploitation. Looking back on the era, Georgakas recalls that the filmmakers would not have come up with or included the opening montage if not for the insistence of the League members to connect factory oppression with slavery. Yet, “as creative and engaged filmmakers, they were pleased with the outcome.”⁵⁰⁵

To further crystallize the central claim of the visual montage, the film cuts to an interior long shot of John Watson in his house standing in front of a collage of transnational revolutionary figures: Che Guevara, images from the uprising in Angola, General Mao, and Malcolm X. This framing situates him, and consequently the film, within a global politic of revolution and Marxist ideology [Figure 3.8]. This framing itself is not unique; *Off the Pig*, the 1968 project of San Francisco Newsreel, likewise begins with still photos of Black Panthers set to a drum beat soundtrack, before cutting to static interviews with Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver also strategically positioned in front of revolutionary posters. *Repression* from the Los Angeles Newsreel branch opens with a montage of images of Black citizens, imprisoned and on city streets, set to an Ornette Coleman free jazz recording. Thereafter, Masai Hewitt begins to discuss the historical and economic structures that led to the enslavement of Black citizens that consequently gave rise to current social conditions. He is framed behind a similar backdrop of revolutionary posters. *FGTN* may share these aesthetic flourishes and framing devices, but the dialog and visuals of this film remains grounded in localized structures of oppression and Black labor—which moves the film away from the content objectives of other Newsreel films. After a silent pause, Watson begins to verbally corroborate the preceding montage:

⁵⁰⁵ *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 2:2, 22.

Black workers have historically been the foundation stone upon which the American industrial empire has been built and sustained, it began with slavery over 400 years ago when Black people were captured in the west coast of Africa, and then shipped to America, or what was then the colonies, and used to produce surplus value. Under slavery, the surplus value that was extracted from Black people was enormous in the fact that the only thing they got back for it was food, a minimal amount of shelter, and a minimal amount of clothes, just enough to procreate and produce another generation of slaves. That is, the capital used to built industry in Europe and America came out of the cotton industries, out of the textile industries in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And from the basis of that industry, railroads developed, steel developed, and all the various other elements that went into the development of a modern economy. The process of the extraction of surplus value has continued in this country, and it has been especially hard on Black people, just as it was in the beginning of the development of capitalism not only in American but throughout the world, Black people provided the foundation stone—and that is true today. You don't find too many Black people as white-collar workers. You don't find too many Black people who are skilled tradesmen.

In this narrative, Detroit was never an “Arsenal of Democracy” for the Black people who inhabit its parameters. Detroit, instead, was the epicenter of racial oppression under conditions of industrialization and urbanization. As Watson continues speaking, the film cuts to images of Black workers on the assembly line. Accompanying this footage of Black workers toiling, Watson’s voice-over contends that modern capitalism has always been fueled by the “transformation of Black sweat and blood into finished products.” The filmmakers demonstrate the brutality and chaos inflicted upon Black lives that are intrinsically connected to the order of

line operations. Black Detroiters function as part and parcel of a highly industrialized machine, and with proper organization, the Black autoworkers could use their mechanical power to stop working and change the way the machinery of industrial development runs. The opening sequences thus use didactic mixtures of monologues and montage to disorder the perceived capitalist logic of labor production in industrial modernity.

In *They Must Be Represented*, Paula Rabinowitz asserts that what is at stake in the production of radical documentaries are the “status, meaning, and interpretation, and perhaps even control of history and its narratives.”⁵⁰⁶ Watson evidences this claim emphatically. His recurring monologues and off-screen directions for the DNR filmmakers not only project a bold Marxian revision of Black cultural and economic history in the United States, but also intervenes directly into local historiography, offering a counter hegemonic way to understand the city’s recent Rebellion. This is made clear in the representation of Detroit history constructed by the introductory segment, which traces Black labor from slavery to the present, and as I will soon discuss in greater depth, the extended tracking shots of Detroit’s post-Rebellion landscape. These sequences produce a Black spatial imaginary of Detroit history long occluded from local film culture. Namely, Detroit’s well established (white controlled) news stations and sponsored-film industry conditioned viewers to adopt moral and social conditions that would contribute to increased work efficiency and endorse a model for effective citizenship, predicated on white-Black racial segregation, in consumer-driven modernity. Prior to this moment, representations of Black workers were largely left out of local media projects, further concretizing the city’s deeply entrenched structures of racist exclusion. Noting that such damaging representations of Black people has “brainwashed” whites into believing in Black savagery and inferiority, Watson hoped

⁵⁰⁶ Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (Verso, 1994), 7.

the monologue segments of *FGTN* would operate as a form of “re-education.” *FGTN* demonstrates that while Black bodies have been transformed into machines of industry, long immobilized by the structures of automation, Black labor can still speak.

From the opening of the film, the League serves as the controlling agents of the film’s diegesis. Watson particularly insisted the film have a teaching rather than observational orientation, leading to the inclusion of several long, lecture-like monologues about the unjust working conditions for Detroit’s Black community from the League’s Executive Committee (Watson, Wooten, March, Baker, and Cockrel). They guide the camera around the city and talk the viewer through the League’s understanding of labor politics. Although it was Watson’s first foray into film production, he was aware of the uneven history of Black representation and wanted *FGTN*, and any subsequent projects the League might take on, to counter the damaging stereotypes promulgated through conventional representations of Blackness.

These monologues further capture, in strategic ways, the different roles and civic investments core members of the League took on. In the film, each Committee member is shown demonstrating their key role within League operations and how their activist practice could positively impact Detroit if the League-led revolution advances. For instance, the opening monologue performed by John Watson sets him against a global collection of Marxist philosophers. Watson is widely discussed as a leading figure of the intellectual wing of the League.⁵⁰⁷ A Wayne State University student and publisher of the *Inner City Voice*, he was devoted to bringing League politics to a broad audience through traveling, publishing, and

⁵⁰⁷ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*; Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (Univ of California Press, 2016), 43–35.

writing.⁵⁰⁸ Attorney Ken Cockrel, who had defended Black citizens charged with “ludicrous crimes” during the Great Rebellion, speaks to the camera in his office where he works as legal council for the League [Figure 3.9].⁵⁰⁹ Cockrel, along with Watson and Hamlin, enacted plans for broad community organization that entailed “mass education and agitation through rallies, use of the media, demonstrations, legal tactics in court, the structuring of the labor Defense Coalition to show the class nature of this system and the role of the state apparatus within it.”⁵¹⁰ These various strategies all put emphasis on having Black citizens seize control of their public image and have Black workers in positions of power from which they could speak to (and on behalf of) Black Detroiters. Meanwhile, Ron March, running for UAW Trustee No. 10 as the League’s candidate, appears in *FGTN* in front of political fliers advertising his campaign [Figure 3.10].⁵¹¹ This subsequently serves as a counterpoint to the intercut sequences of Ford union

⁵⁰⁸ In Watson’s own words: “The In 1968, Watson and other Marxist-Leninist thinkers in the city expanded the project started at the *South End* and developed *The Inner City Voice*, a Black owned and operated radical newspaper that strove to advocate for Black Detroiters in politics, art, and culture. Baker would thereafter be instrumental in organizing RUMs and leading Black protest at Dodge and elsewhere across the city, relying upon Watson for print communications. was created in response to certain adverse conditions that Black militants had found in Detroit and in the country as a whole, conditions stopping the further development of a permanent and powerful revolutionary movement among Black people.” Developed by Marxist-Leninist students at Wayne State University in May 1967, the first issue went to print (following the July insurrection), in September of 1967. For more: Watson, John, “Black Editor: An Interview (1968),” *Radical America* 2, no. 4 (August 1968): 30–38.

⁵⁰⁹ After the collapse of the League in 1971, Cockrel seriously considered making a bid for Detroit’s mayoral position in 1973 but decided against it at that time. His political career advanced in 1977 when he successfully won a seat on the Detroit City Council. He is the subject of another local documentary, *Taking Back Detroit* (1979), which examines the politics of three socialist leaders who hold prominent civic positions in the city.

⁵¹⁰ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 172.

⁵¹¹ In fall of 1968, DRUM ran Ron March, a member of DRUM's core organizers, for the local's trustee position. While March did not win, he pulled in forty percent of the vote, further incentivizing Black workers to fight for more labor rights. Finishing first out of twenty-seven candidates, March ran on a platform that called on Black workers to stop paying union dues. In

leaders discussing their opposing plans for Detroit's labor development in a large, isolation board room framed within a long shot [Figure 3.11]. In this way, the League both advertises his candidacy and stresses the necessity of Black representation in local politics. Chuck Wooten is featured driving through the city, all the while speaking to the camera about the monotony of the line and the toll labor takes on workers. Wooten and General Baker coordinated in-plant protest activities for the League and worked to directly improve conditions on the factory floor. Wooten, in particular, was the League's man on the street, an assembly line worker with closer ties to the laboring class. Unlike Cockrel and Watson who frame Black labor from a Marxist-Leninist theoretical perspective, Wooten uses his screen time to reflect upon the individualized experiences Black workers encounter in the city and their strained emplacement in Detroit's de-industrializing milieu [Figure 3.12].

The previously shot footage of white workers in Detroit and their contributions to the city's urban history was not entirely deleted from the film, but was ultimately reduced to a three-minute segment, framed by John Watson's commentary. Here, Watson attempts to recruit local white workers to the Black-led deconstruction of industrial operations in the city. During this segment, images of white, men, women, and children living in crowded housing is accompanied by twangy banjo music. Self-identified white workers are heard on the soundtrack as the film cuts to shots of white laborers on the assembly line. The white voices speak to their experiences, migrating to Detroit to work in the factories from the south, as Detroit auto companies offered factory laborers a higher wage than comparable employment opportunities elsewhere. However, their words are contextualized within the broader Black revolution. They serve to illustrate

the run-off election the following month, Regional Director George Merelli arranged for a large bloc of retirees to get to the polls.

Watson's argument that white laborers are confused about their relationship with Black struggle. Watson's voice-over monologue argues that the Rebellion evidenced white racism towards Black citizens, showing how white Detroiters were fearful that Black people were taking their jobs, diminishing housing conditions, and denigrating public spaces in the city. Watson quickly dismisses this version of urban history, instead listing ways in which the Black struggle is beneficial to all workers. In his words:

White workers just don't understand what is going down and they end up becoming counter revolutionaries, even though the contradictions they face every day should lead them to be the most revolutionary. Black people represent the most forward and progressive and militant force inside the plant, which are calling not for...the destruction of the white working-class; the demands, which are being presented, you know, are demands, which are calling for the uplifting of the working-class as a whole. And the actual fact of the matter is that the movement of Black workers is a class movement, it's calling for a total change in the relationship between workers and owners all together. And what it's saying is that certainly, you know, with all the shittiest and lowing paying jobs in the plant, certainly we don't want to be the most exploited people in the plants, but we aren't calling for anybody to be exploited. We are calling for the elimination of exploitation in the plants. We're calling for the elimination of racism in the plants. We are calling for the elimination of any kinds of conditions inside the plants which are bad for the basic health and enjoyment of life ... We are not calling for a situation in which white oppressors will be replaced by Black oppressors, we are calling for the ending of oppression all together. Basically, the reason they are racist is...that they are afraid that the little bit of a niche they have in society is going to be lost. Here we are trying to

demonstrate to them that rather than being against the Black movement and being enemies of the Black movement, that they should be in favor of the Black movement and supporters of the Black movement because the things that the Black movement is doing inside of industry is actually in their interest. The kinds of demands and the kinds of movements, you know, Black people are making inside of the plants, are not inimical to the interests of the average white worker.

As Watson explains it, white workers might live in Detroit and work at the factories within the metro Detroit region, yet Detroit is a Black city that only functions *because* the majority Black labor force serves as the fuel that keeps the city running. As Black workers are the “vanguard of the vanguard,” they can restructure conditions for the benefit of all the working class. While programs like *CPT* saw media as a strategy to bring Black citizens to more positions of middle-class prominence in civic life; *FGTN* emphasizes a Black working-class as the key to a new Black future for the city. *FGTN* was further open to speaking to white viewership deeply imbricated in structures of racial oppression, but in no way was making accommodations to bridge a racial divide and integrate Black citizens into white working-class life. The goal was to have white viewers support a Black-led labor revolution.

In this way, the restructuring of the film reveals the League’s most integral objective with the resultant production of *FGTN*: to anchor the film’s commentary not with a range of Detroiters, but instead with a selection of intellectually aware and embodied Black figures from their organization—John Watson, Chuck Wooten, Ron March, Mike Hamlin and Ken Cockrel. This brings visibility to emergent Black leadership and Black infrastructure in this city. The film also works to visually corroborate their claims, connecting their words to moving images of the factory floor as well as Detroit’s broader post-Rebellion exterior landscape. Notably they are all

also Black *men*. In these lecture sequences, the film vocalizes the politics undergirding Detroit's crisis from a position of embodied Black masculine authority. The voices of women are heard at the end of the film—a sequence I will address in greater depth—but the woman's voice presented in that sequence is disembodied and disconnected from the Black leaders in the League. While League members provide control the film sequence and offer direct address, the role of women in the revolution is more tenuous. In nearly all cases discussed in this dissertation so far, women have a place in a Black mediated future, but that place is still secondary to the paternalistic leadership roles that Black men like Watson or Tony Brown would assume.

Documentary at the Point of Production

Filming the assembly line in conjunction with League monologues about urban exploitation, *FGTN* provides an image of labor that strategically disrupts the rationalized order of systematic and vertically integrated factory operations. In doing so, it also calls attention to the structures of labor at work in the cinematic production of idealized American citizenship and (white) middle-class mobility. The US mainstream media industry has long borrowed from Fordist methods of automobile manufacture. As Janet Steiger notes “Hollywood’s mode of production has been characterized as a factory system akin to that used by a Ford plant, and Hollywood often praised its own work structure for its efficient mass production of entertaining films to fulfill the studio owners’ goals of profit maximization.”⁵¹² By 1914, Henry Ford himself had developed a motion picture unit with the exact purpose of using film to document his pioneering system of automotive manufacture, the assembly line, and bring his new product to

⁵¹² Janet Steiger. “The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930” David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1985), 90.

masses of potential consumers. Fred Colvin went so far as to argue in his 1913 *American Machinist* article, "It is impossible to give an adequate description of the general assembly of the Ford automobiles, as this could only be done with a modern moving-picture machine."⁵¹³ Thus, Ford applied Taylorist rationalization methods to engineer films as the company engineered cars. Filmmaking quickly became a significant branch of mass production at the Ford Highland Park plant.⁵¹⁴ From this point forward, film was relied upon to capture the efficient and systemized narrative of automotive manufacture and the mobility of the resultant product afforded consumers, both local and foreign [Figure 3.12].

Film also relied upon the manufacture of idealized worker-citizens for the region. While the promise of industrial jobs with the automotive industry first drew diverse populations to Detroit in the early 20th Century, the auto companies were integral in establishing the systems of power, control, and segregation that would dictate working and living conditions in the city during the second half of the twentieth century.⁵¹⁵ In order to maintain productivity and worker complacency, the Ford Motor Company began offering employees a record high five-dollar-a-day wage in 1914 and was indiscriminate in hiring practices.⁵¹⁶ Thus, immigrant, rural poor, and minority workers relocated to Detroit and clamored for factory jobs. Prior to and during the

⁵¹³ Steiger, "The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930," 118.

⁵¹⁴ While Fredrick Taylor, used time and motion studies to improve the efficiency of the work force, Ford and subsequent automotive companies would create efficient production through machinery and the mechanization of human labor. For a more in-depth discussion of Fordism also see: Burrows, Roger and Gilbert, Nigel and Pollert, Anna (ed.) *Fordism and Flexibility* (Macmillan, London:1992).

⁵¹⁵ Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (Macmillan, 2007); Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2012); Lee Grieveson, "Visualizing Industrial Citizenship," in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (Oxford University Press, 2012), 107–23; Grieveson, Lee, "The Work of Film in the Age of Fordist Mechanization."

⁵¹⁶ Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production*, 252.

course of employment, workers had to submit to extensive background checks and surveillance conducted by the Company's Sociological Department. Established in 1916, the Sociological Department was to:

Teach American ways and customs, English language, the duties of citizenship, council and help unsophisticated employees to obtain and maintain comfortable, congenial and sanitary living conditions and ... exercise the necessary vigilance to prevent, as far as possible, human frailty from falling into habits or practices detrimental to substantial progress in life.⁵¹⁷

Specifically, the Sociological Department sought to deter alcohol consumption and sexually deviant behaviors that inhibit the productivity of the workers on the assembly line and attitudes that question the authority of the company.⁵¹⁸ As Terry Smith noted, "the failure of the sociological department to go far enough in social control, made it clear that more subtle and widespread forms of ideological persuasion were necessary to the continuance of their interests."⁵¹⁹ Although Smith does not mention filmmaking, media produced by Ford and other corporations in Detroit, endeavored to pick up where the sociological department left off and used media to govern worker complacency. While *FGTN* was not necessarily a direct response to this specific history of media governance and surveillance, the film does respond to the forms of sociological control that Ford developed and enforced in the city. The voice over narration allows Black workers to challenge the idealization of contained, "good worker" behavior and the methods used by their employers to control Black lives.

⁵¹⁷ Terry E. Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) p. 48. Also see: Gramsci 216.

⁵¹⁸ Smith, *Making the Modern*, 48-49.

⁵¹⁹ Smith, *Making the Modern*, 51.

Namely, in *FGTN*, technology does not work to construct an image of efficiency and mask the invisible labor that goes into the production of American modernity, but rather deconstruct the exploitative cost of human mechanization and decontextualize the forward motion of line work. League monologues candidly discuss the effect of decentralization and automation on Black citizens, while the cinematography visualizes the mechanized processes by which the assembly line routinizes Black life in the city. Here, the camera captures the impressive systemization of production developed by Ford and lauded by industrialists. However, the key difference here is the accompanying Black worker voice over. As the different focal members of the League address conditions in Detroit, *FGTN* repeatedly cuts to shots of workers in the steel division assembling vehicle parts inside the Ford River Rouge Complex [Figure 3.14]. One scene in particular, overlays narratives from Wooten and March describing the tedium, compulsory overtime demands, and dangerous working conditions of the line, while the film cuts between shots of different stages of automobile manufacture, from steel cutting to welding engines. While white management included in the wide-shot scenes use their gaze to control plant operations and monitor Black labor, the *FGTN* soundtrack gives Black workers the opportunity to deconstruct the gaze of white power and explain the lived logistics of automotive work. As cogs, they work not towards a finished product but an endless sequence of isolated motions.

Within *FTGN* it is clear that the workers are contributing to automotive production, yet it is never explained exactly what they are doing, why, and how. Instead of demonstrating what workers do for Ford, GM, or the other auto firms, the film uses these scenes to give voice to what labor does to the worker—the damage, the toll, the blues. Of course, line workers were not in need of explanation as to how their jobs worked, but they needed to be made aware of the

exploitation that rendered them cogs in a larger machine. Local audiences might have been able to recognize the assembly plant shown in the film. Yet, for a wider audience, Ford just as easily stands in for all the factories in the area: GM, Chrysler, and Buick in Flint. The workers are thus not shown making cars, but operating as technology; machines within Detroit's renowned assembly system. Essentially, the assembly line has played a monumental role in both the development of cinema, the development the modern industrial city, and the development of Detroit's (shifting) spatial imaginary. The film's dual focus on factory exploitation on the line and radical League monologues, re-humanizing the workers, produces a significant reclamation of perspectival power.

Driving Visions of Black Detroit

In Detroit, control of the auto industry and control of Detroit's visual landscape have always been interrelated enterprises. As such, *FGTN* works to re-imagine Detroit through the empowered perspective of the Black working-class driving through the city. In a sequence midway through the film, *FGTN* demonstrates Chuck Wooten's, and by extension the League's, mobility in "local" space. Here, the filmmakers document local streets in Black Detroit while Wooten discusses the League's plans to take back the city. Tightly framed shots of Wooten in the driver seat produce an intimacy with him as representative of the League and the working people of Detroit [Figure 3.15]. Wooten is the embattled male subject, who has access to city streets and the narratives of the working-class. However, in a city with a long history of Black exploitation and police brutality, navigating the streets is a dangerous enterprise and also makes him vulnerable. Through this sequence, I recognize both the power of Black visibility through filmmaking and ways white power contains Black subjects and limits Black mobility.

In terms of urban planning, Detroit was a city structured to promote automobility and simultaneous curtail Black movement. As previously introduced, the city was spatially designed to accommodate the large swaths of workers emigrating from the south during the Great Migration. Detroit likewise was constructed to accommodate automotive transit—within the city and out towards the suburbs. The process of expansion and sprawl, known as metropolitanization, was rendered possible by the technological impresses of transportation, communication, and energy which were rapidly developing in Detroit, allowing people to live further and further from the city’s downtown center. These conditions account for Detroit’s vast size. In fact, the square footage of Manhattan, Boston, and San Francisco can easily fit within the city’s boundaries—with room to spare [Figure 0.16]. Peaking in the 1920s and continuing throughout the 20th Century, Detroit’s metropolitanization happened on a larger scale than elsewhere in the United States. In the interwar period, Ford pushed this process along by building a factory beginning in 1919 on the outskirts of the city, a region then dubbed Fordson. Ford’s construction of the River Rouge Complex dramatically exacerbated the process of decentralization, which started in 1909 when Ford moved his Piquette Avenue plant from Detroit to Highland Park, another small industrial city within the boundaries of Detroit. Speaking of the transition away from a downtown headquarters, Ford stated, “I don’t like to be in the city... It pins me in. I want to breathe. I want to get out.”⁵²⁰

However, not all citizens were granted access to the same mobility Ford celebrated. While the major auto firms continued to shift away from the city towards the suburbs, Black citizens were strategically stopped from traversing city lines. For instance, in 1927 Ford

⁵²⁰ Barrow, Heather B., “The American Disease of Growth: Henry Ford and the Metropolitanization of Detroit, 1920-1940,” in *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe*, ed. Robert D. Lewis (Temple University Press, 2008), 205.

facilitated the annexation of Fordson and Dearborn. The area formerly comprising Fordson was soon inhabited primarily by a hodgepodge of blue-collar immigrants. Yet, the virulently racist Dearborn government was steadfast in the strategic exclusion of Black families. As such, Black families were relegated to inner city areas and Black workers were forced to commute, if possible. As Heather B Barrow has shown, “Metropolitanization was never a simple matter of growth at the fringe paralleling growth at the center. It was, rather, a matter of resources being transferred from the city to the suburbs.”⁵²¹ However, the effects of this would not be fully felt until after the 1950s. Between 1950 and 1970, the city lost 100,000 automotive jobs while its suburbs gained 40,000.⁵²² While city planning tried to anticipate the automotive boom they did not plan for industrial decentralization. By the 1960s, the “physical fabric of the city began to show holes: brown fields that lay fallow, partly polluted, and vacant housing lots. Once-lively buildings including dozens of downtown buildings were left completely empty and fell into severe disrepair, sometimes having lost all of their glass.”⁵²³

Amidst this process of spatial decline, the automobile served as a vehicle to not only navigate the sprawling city, but also make sense of its shifting racial, socio-economic, and architectural design. 20th Century public policies in Detroit almost exclusively favored automobility. In the post-war era, civic funds were directed to the construction of expressways to facilitate automobile traffic and access to suburban communities. These policy decisions were enforced to the detriment of public transit and inner city neighborhoods, many of which were at this time demolished to make way for freeway construction. The Oakland-Hastings (later Chrysler) freeway destroyed Detroit’s Black enclave. Meanwhile, John C. Lodge Freeway ripped

⁵²¹ Barrow, “The American Disease of Growth,” 202.

⁵²² Barrow, “The American Disease of Growth,” 203.

⁵²³ . Barrow, “The American Disease of Growth,” 205.

through the increasingly Black area around Twelfth Street and Highland Park. Soon after, the Edsel Ford Expressway led to the demolition of almost 3000 more buildings. While many residents were relocated to the Jeffries and Brewster Douglass Public Housing Projects, the city did little to help relocate business and homeowners dispossessed by the destruction of Black Detroit. By 1950, “423 residents, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 vacant lots had been condemned.”⁵²⁴

According to a report published by the Detroit Housing Commission in 1946 entitled *The Detroit Plan: A Program for Blight Elimination*, “Detroit, like other major cities of the nation, is faced with the problem of decay at its heart. To the initiate in the problems of a metropolitan area, the story of blight needs no explanation. All are familiar with basic characteristics: the decline of property values, the flight of old residents, the increased ratio between tenants and home owners, and the growth of slums.”⁵²⁵ Subsequent urban renewal projects thus sought to eliminate neighborhoods perceived as “slums.” In Detroit, the old-standing Black communities of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley around Hastings Street were the targets of slum clearance, pushing Black families out of the city center.⁵²⁶ Yet the city government and urban planning division did little to curtail decay escalation on the outskirts of town where many Black citizens were forced to reside as downtown development continued.⁵²⁷ According to Sugrue, in the

⁵²⁴ Jeremy Williams, *Detroit: The Black Bottom Community* (Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 10. Also see: Steve Babson, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (Wayne State University Press, 1984).

⁵²⁵ *The Detroit Plan: A Program for Blight Elimination* (City of Detroit, Office of the Detroit Housing Commission, 1945); Barrow, “The American Disease of Growth,” 216.

⁵²⁶ Both neighborhoods were bounded by Brush Street to the west and the Grand Trunk railroad tracks to the east. The two communities were separated by Gratiot Avenue, with Black Bottom stretching south to the Detroit River, and Paradise Valley bordered by Grand River to the north.

⁵²⁷ Manning, *Redevelopment and Race*; Thomas, *Mapping Detroit: Land, Community, and Shaping a City* (Wayne State University Press, 2015); Darden, *Detroit*.

aftermath of freeway construction, neighborhoods on the periphery were not much more than a “no man’s land of deterioration and abandonment.”⁵²⁸ In general, Black life in Detroit was not only governed by in-plant exploitation but organized and re-organized around the shifting economic needs of Detroit’s big three automotive corporations: Ford, GM, and Chrysler, who were in close conversation with the city’s municipal leaders and urban planners. Post-War changes in the automotive industry and the socio-spatial makeup of the Metropolitan region left the majority of Black Detroiters unpaid, under-employed, and devoid of the emplaced communities from which they previously developed strong localized cultures.⁵²⁹

By the late 1960s, a driver was able to pass through vast sections of the city at sixty or seventy miles per hour on submerged, limited access highways [Figure 3.16]. According to Ann Friedberg, driving transforms the mobilized pedestrian gaze with new kinetics of motored speed and with the privatization of the automobile ‘capsule’ sealed off from the public and the street. But the visibility of driving is the visibility of the windshield, operating as a framing device.⁵³⁰ Likewise, in *Parallel Tracks*, Lynn Kirby draws on Wolfgang Schivelbush’s study of railway transit and “panoramic perception” to argue that as a machine of vision and an instrument for conquering space and time, the train is a mechanical double for the cinema. Kirby links the “virtual” spatiotemporal mobility offered by the cinema, one heightened by the physical stasis of the spectator, to the experience of train travel. In this instance, the window frame mediates the perception of space for the passenger; “the traveler sees the objects, landscapes ... through the

⁵²⁸ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47.

⁵²⁹ Paradise Valley and Black Bottom were vibrant spaces for blues, jazz, and big band music. Ernest H. Borden, *Detroit’s Paradise Valley* (Arcadia Publishing, 2003); Lars Olof Björn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920-60* (University of Michigan Press, 2001); Williams, *Detroit*.

⁵³⁰ Friedberg, Anne, “Urban Mobility and Cinematic Visuality: The Screens of Loss Angeles - Endless Cinema or Private Telematics,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 184.

apparatus which moves him/her through the world.”⁵³¹ While automobiles do not move quite as quickly as trains, they share similarities as mediating technologies of modern vision. In Detroit, one necessarily sees the world through the automobile and physically navigates the city through automobilitic perception. This transformative spatial development is visualized in *FGTN*—yet crucially from a Black perspective.

In *FGTN*, the framing device of the automobile window both provides insights into working life as inner city residents commute to factories now located on the outskirts of town and politicizes the act of commanding post-industrial space. At the outset of the film, two early-morning shift workers journey along an empty expressway at rapid speeds while listening to Joe L. Carter’s blues song on the soundtrack, perhaps intended to emanate from the radio inside the car. Driving eastbound on I-94, the pair pass the Uniroyal Giant Tire, a Good Year billboard, the Ford River Rouge Complex, the Dodge Main Plant, and an auto transport trailer [Figure 3.17-3.20]. This sequence leaves little doubt that Detroit is a city constructed around automobility and the iconography of automotive history. The scene’s accompanying song written by Carter in 1965, while a worker on the Rouge assembly line, further sets up shots of the Detroit urban landscape: “Please, Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line. / I said, Lord, why don’t you slow down that assembly line? / No, I don’t mind workin’, but I do mind dyin’.”⁵³² Here, the assembly line does not merely refer to the automotive plant but the city that runs on automotive fuel—both spatially and visually. Furthermore, blues music historically blends African American folk music with the rhythms of everyday life in working-class urban modernity. As Reiland

⁵³¹ Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1997), 45. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Univ of California Press, 2014).

⁵³² This Carter refrain further inspired Georgakas and Surkin’s *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*.

Rebeka puts it, “urban blues, then jazz, and later rhythm & blues sonically signified city life, with its emphasis on regional customs, social conventions, communal rhythms, street noises, factory sounds, and, of course, new technologies—especially the amplification of electrification of instruments.”⁵³³ In this sequence, the rhythms of Black exploitation are challenged in both film and soundtrack by Black radical commentary about a new future for the city centered on worked empowerment.

Iain Borden argues that “the association between urban car driving, freedom and democracy is predicated on a sense of social mobility, automobiles let people get on in life, furthering their economic, cultural and personal achievement.”⁵³⁴ In Detroit, automobility is a governing presence; it both enslaves citizens within systems of mechanized labor and provides their sole means of navigation around it. If you don’t have a car, you really don’t have any opportunity to move. Intervening in this logistical reality of automotive dependence, the League does not merely demonstrate how the automotive industry has impacted the development of the Detroit landscape, but aligns visual control over the city’s landscape with Black radicalism. *FGTN* actively provides a driving vision of local space oriented around Black movement in a city where policy decisions structurally inhibit Black mobility.

Prior to 1968, few Black citizens in Detroit had access to cameras to capture the city from a Black frame. However, the mobile urban gaze is a common characteristic of nearly all the documentary films shot in and about Detroit from the early 20th century to the present. Writing on his 2000 documentary *Requiem for Detroit?* George Steinmetz divisively calls this technique

⁵³³ Reiland Rebeka. *Civil Rights Music: The Soundtracks of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Lexington Books), 2016, 113.

⁵³⁴ Iain Borden, *Drive: Journeys through Film, Cities and Landscapes* (Reaktion Books, 2013), 17.

“drive-by shooting,” syncing Detroit’s iconicity as the center of the automotive industry and as the frequent leader in homicide rates within the United States. Here, notable local residents or characters within the film act as guides, navigating the city’s contentious visual terrain and discussing local concerns as the camera gazes through the window of a moving automobile. While in 1914 Colvin contended the only way to understand the automobile factory is with a film camera, in 1968 and onward, the only way to film the city with any sense of spatial understanding is with an automobile. And as *FGTN* re-educates viewers on factory labor, it likewise re-configures the systematic socio-political control of Detroit through the mobile gaze. This film is one of the first instances in which tracking shots of the city’s expansive post-Rebellion urban spaces are provided from a mobile Black perspective and contextualized by local Black citizens for their own self-representative purposes.

As the film progresses forward from this point, it traces the interrelated politics of automotive reform and urban change. As such, moving forward I hope to highlight not only how the League structured “Detroit” from the point of production, but how the politics of a mobile perspective affected the film’s afterlives as the League attempted to build a network, of both radicalized citizens and media products, predicated upon mobilized Black vision.

Beyond the Point of Production

According to Ben Highmore, “perhaps the most common analogy for characterizing ‘everyday life’ within modernity (its uniformity, its dullness and so on) is the assembly line. What makes the assembly line such a telling exemplification of everyday modernity is not the specificity of the factory environment, but the generalized condition that it points to: ‘plodding’,

‘monotony’ - the emptiness of time.’⁵³⁵ Or as one of Watson’s monologues explains: “this motherfuckin’ guy has got to go to that motherfuckin’ job every motherfuckin’ day of his goddam life. You go to that brother and ask him what does he want and he will tell you – I want to get out of this motherfuckin’ dirty-ass job.” Intercutting scenes of labor monotony on the line with protest endeavors, the League designs to offer that “guy” a way to get out, or at least a means to change the conditions of the “dirty-ass job” in the first place.⁵³⁶ The film is designed to thus serve as a mechanism to induce such a revolutionary change and draw attention to labor’s role in Detroit’s crisis.

In *FGTN* and elsewhere, League members acknowledged that the problems facing Detroit were not limited to the factory floor. For instance, as they articulated in a letter to the UAW: “All around us our houses rot, our schools are inadequate, the streets and alleys are overrun with rodents and kill-crazy police, decent food and clothing or medical and dental care is beyond our reach, our children are sent off to war and we have no hope of ever changing any of this if we continue to follow the established leadership and to accept the established order of this society. We are making the revolution, Walter Reuther, and we will win.”⁵³⁷ To win, the League emphasized that the politics of labor protest must begin at the point of production and thereafter move outward. In “To the Point of Production,” a 1969 interview with John Watson, he drives this point home:

The most important power you have is the power to close down the plant...assuming control of the means of production essentially means that you are at the first stage of

⁵³⁵ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2002), 8.

⁵³⁶ Scenes demonstrate League protesters chanting against at UAW policies in unison (“UAW means You Ain’t White” and “Finally Got the News, How Our Dues are Being Used”).

⁵³⁷ “Open Letter to Walter Reuther, From the Central Staff of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.” (Undated, the folder covers 1969-1972), Ken Cockrel Papers, WSU Archives.

assuming state power...[However,] Workers are not people who live in factories 24 hours a day. They all go home and live somewhere in the community. We have found that its almost an inevitable and simultaneous development that as factory workers begin to get organized, support elements within the community are also organized...therefore we have an overall analysis which sees the point of production as the major and primary sector of the society which has to be organized and that the community should be organized in conjunction with that development.⁵³⁸

For the League, the concerns of housing, corruption, and police brutality were thus of secondary importance to struggles on the factory floor and consequently appear to many as an afterthought in the film—a point I will soon address in greater depth.

The League was fiercely divided on *how* to design a revolution beyond the point of production and this division ultimately caused the League's dissolution.⁵³⁹ The League Executive Committee concurred on protest strategies to challenge the structure of corporate control in the auto industries. They likewise agreed upon the utility of Black Nationalism and Marxist-Leninism to inform their conceptualization of capitalist enterprise. However, the League's participation in community activism beyond labor organizing became a hotly debated topic among core leadership. Watson, Cockrel, and Hamlin wanted to branch the League towards other interrelated ventures including a Black media network – while Wooten and Baker thought the first and final priority should be industrial reform. The question of who is included in labor or industrial reform would also become a key point of tension within the League, especially as female labor was excluded from the League's primary approach to factory protest. Of course, as

⁵³⁸ John Watson, "To the Point of Production (Radical Educational Pamphlet)," 1970.

⁵³⁹ Writing from the perspective of Baker, Wooten, and Tripp, Ahmed's essay discusses the League split in 1971, see: Ahmed, "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."

FGTN was primarily the brainchild of the former group, the film's concluding segments focus on Detroit struggles outside of the Big Three and their ancillary factories. In doing so, the film implicitly calls attention to the deepening schism within the organization.

Cockrel firmly believed that “everything flows from the point of production” and that the rest of society is “hung onto that.”⁵⁴⁰ However, his attention was dually directed towards improving life in the communities where workers reside. In Cockrel's monologue, he argues that a revolutionary organization necessarily has a responsibility to address to the problems of the “ghetto”—housing, poverty, unemployment, police brutality, and police corruption. Thus, once the League establishes control of the factory, he asserts that they must begin to connect labor struggles to expansive political needs of all citizens. In an interview with *The Washington Post* on February 20, 1973, Cockrel elaborates on Detroit's enduring crisis:

What the people living here want—the under class, if you will—is a viable community in which the quality of their lives is at least consistent with the minimal standards of decency, humanity and justice. Physically much of Detroit is a disaster. You can drive up 12th street and see 50-caliber machine gun bullet holes in the buildings, grim reminders of the 1967 riots. You can drive up Gratiot Avenue and see rows of boarded up buildings. Or up Woodward Avenue, which some Detroit's call their Fifth Avenue, and see abandoned stores, sleazy shops, and adult film theatres.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ “Our Thing is DRUM” Pamphlet. Box 3, Folder 9, Dan Georgakas Collection, Wayne State University Archives.

⁵⁴¹ “Life Quality is Key: Detroit Struggles to Save Itself,” Box 2, Folder 7. Ken and Sheila Cockrel Collection, Detroit, A12, Col. 1 – *Washington Post* Staff Writer, Susanna McBee, Feb 20, 1973.

Accordingly, he called for restructuring of the city's political system, applying Black Nationalist and Marxist rhetoric to his legal practice, and supporting the development of political organizations that could work in conjunction of the League to assume power in the city.

During and after Cockrel's work with the League, he also provided legal council to victims of police brutality. He successfully defended members of the Republic of New Afrika accused of shooting two police officers at the New Bethel Church in June 1970, discussed in Chapter Two. He also won the acquittal of James Johnson for the July 15, 1970 murder of two foremen and a job setter at Eldon Avenue Axel and Gear in Hamtramck, despite an all-white jury. Through these high-profile cases, Cockrel called attention to racial imbalances in the justice system. Contemporaneous to League activism, Cockrel became the leader of the 1971 citizen protests against the Detroit Police Department's STRESS (Stop the Robberies-Enjoy Safe Streets) Unit. Colloquially called the "genocide unit," STRESS harassed and intimidated many innocent African American families in 'defense' of the city. They were responsible for twenty-two civilian casualties, twenty-one of them Black, and over 5000 illegal raids in Black neighborhoods—a topic I pick up on in Chapter Four.⁵⁴²

Unsurprisingly, then, following Cockrel's monologue in *FGTN*, the film documents protests at the Highland Park Police Station over the murder of Danny Smith, a nine year-old Black child gunned down by a police in April 1970. Smith had been struck in the chest by a stray bullet by two DPD officers, Thomas Aranyos and Donald Carlson, as they were pursuing a teenager on charges of grand theft auto. This sequence begins with shots of women waiting at a

⁵⁴² Steve Babson, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (Wayne State University Press, 1986), 174. Furthermore, Cockrel's successful defense of Hayward Brown, who was accused of shooting a Detroit police officer, hinged on demonstrating that Brown fired in self-defense because the actions of the STRESS unit had created a climate of fear among Detroit's African Americans. Coleman Young disbanded the STRESS unit when he became mayor in 1974.

Detroit city bus stop, the site where Smith was gunned down and the starting point of a May 5th March to the Highland Park City Hall. At this point, the film switches to a female voiceover narration explaining the circumstances of Smith's death and the involvement of the League in rallying with the Black community to demand the two officers involved in the shooting are brought to justice. The scenes of organized protest are intercut with shots taken at Smith's funeral. One shot, in particular, is taken from behind the back of a police officer sitting on a motorcycle as Black protesters defiantly march in the street in front of the officer, carrying signs that decrying police brutality ("Cops Kill").

The sequence ends with the female detailing the working condition for Smith's family—a shift that recognizes the crisis beyond the factory that League members like Cockrel and Watson hoped to shed light on. This sequence details how Mrs. Smith has to ride the bus to her job as a nurse's aid and work for "sheer bread and butter need." Meanwhile, Mr. Smith had been laid off from Ford's.⁵⁴³ Her mobility is restricted even further than that of Wooten and the other workers with access to automobile vision. The film thereafter transitions into a short segment on the hyper-exploitative treatment of women in the Detroit labor force, as like the "majority of her Black sisters, Mrs. Smith has to work." This sequence articulates that while the male factory worker is highly exploited, female workers are relegated to lower-paying and temporary jobs in service work positions (chamber maids, janitresses, floor and wall washers). Meanwhile, most white women who work hold white-collar jobs; they are often clerks and secretaries in "offices Black women clean when white women go home from work." Black women are "the last hired and first fired." According to the film, "57% of Black women" between the ages of twenty-five

⁵⁴³ It is a Michigan colloquialism to add possessive grammar to businesses names. As such, one wouldn't work for Ford but at Ford's or Chrysler's.

and fifty-four have to work as compared to 41% of white women. Tying back to the factory struggles, the film argues that “secret labor studies” show that considerably more women will soon be working in factory positions. The narrator presents the assumption that women will more likely be hired for such jobs because their desperate need for work means they will be “less militant going into work.” Ultimately, the film argues that Black women are essential to the struggle, as “more than anyone else in the workforce, they know what it is like to be laid off.” A tracking shot in a local grocery store, likewise follows women as they select goods—demonstrating the granularity of female working knowledge [Figure 3.21]. As stated in the film, women are expected to simultaneously hold low-wage working positions and attend to their domestic duties, which is also a form of unpaid labor.

It is women, in this instance, that offer a walking vista of the city and its spaces separate from male mobile perspectives of local space.⁵⁴⁴ Here, the film recognizes the invisible effects of Black exploitation on women and families. Yet, critically, the female voices are still rendered invisible. Unlike the League members given privileged direct address, it's unclear who the woman speaking is. She does not speak to the camera as an embodied or embattled subject. Her role in the labor protests appears isolated from the rest of League efforts. Essentially, the League was uncertain how to connect their organizing to other forms of labor exploitation within Black community life and effectively represent this ambivalent aspect of their politics to viewers.

Scholars who have examined *FGTN* often critique this segment as ill-fitting tokenism that appears like a footnote to an otherwise strongly written visual essay about Black exploitation. Some scholars ignore this section of the film altogether. More frequently, scholars approach the

⁵⁴⁴ This concept of women's mobility in walking shots is also visible in Haile Gerima's LA Rebellion film *Bush Mama* (1975).

“afterthought” treatment of women within the broader struggle of Black workers as indicative of the deep internal contradictions of the League and its inadequate understanding of gender politics. As Georgakas and Surkin cheekily put it, “There was no lack of roles for women in the League as long as they accepted subordination and invisibility.”⁵⁴⁵ In general, the League has been critiqued as chauvinistic, homophobic, and openly hostile to women’s liberation as a white movement of secondary importance to Black-led labor struggle. Of course, not all members of the League were this reactionary and the League did include a “women’s committee.” A few women were consulted and accepted as contributors to Black Star Publications and Black Star Productions, participating in arts, education, and fundraising initiatives. Yet, their role was always to support rather than lead the organization.⁵⁴⁶ Georgakas and Surkin ascribe Forman, Cockrel and Hamlin as particularly open to including women’s perspectives in League decisions, yet their inclusionary politics were still a minimal priority and small exceptions to broader gender schematics in the League.

In Chris Robé’s article on Newsreel and *FGTN*, he states that male chauvinism pervaded the League and their inability to include women was a significant part of the group’s collapse. He likewise argues that it also was a significant contributing factor in the dissolution of Detroit Newsreel, as many Newsreel members were clearly frustrated with DNR leaders, as well as League members, for failing to train or include women in the film project. According to Robé’s research, the League “wanted that scene—a scene dealing with Black women—because they were getting a lot of pressure from their own group. They were being criticized [for] not having

⁵⁴⁵ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 224.

⁵⁴⁶ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 142. Also see: Detroit Revolutionary Movements Records, Box 1, Folder 36, at the Wayne State Archives.

more women involved and talking about oppression of Black women workers.”⁵⁴⁷

Furthermore, this was not an isolated problem within the Detroit movement. As Kobena Mercer has shown, the broader Black Arts and Power movements of the 1960s were severely inhibited by their inability to account for and include a multiplicity of voices. Accordingly, the question of “authenticity” that pervades Black artistic productions and political activism has “often been reduced to a question of who does or does not belong to the Black community.”⁵⁴⁸ Instead of championing a specific construct of ethnic uniqueness, which might be policed into a “minority” discourse, Kobena Mercer promotes a syncretism of multiple cultures and histories that might destabilize ethnic, racial, and sexual boundaries. In the League’s film, while women are recognized in this moment, the Black community leading the Black activist charge was nevertheless embodied as male and working-class.⁵⁴⁹

My research corroborates the findings of Robé, Mercer, Georgakas and Surkin; the League definitely was male-focused and the treatment of women in the film does read as an afterthought. While I agree that this scene still appears markedly out of place within the broader flow of the film, there is still some underexplored nuance to this section of the film and what it does to draw attention to invisible labor in the city. Up to this introduction of women, the film promulgates intellectual Black masculinity as the answer to contemporaneous white power structures. There is a clear dissonance between the arguments made by embodied male voices and the women included at the end of the film, whose concerns read as issues of lesser importance. The film includes shots of Black women on busses, gazing out the window, yet it

⁵⁴⁷ Robé. Chris, “Detroit Rising: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Newsreel, and the Making of Finally Got the News,” 147.

⁵⁴⁸ Kobena Mercer. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 243.

⁵⁴⁹ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 54.

does not provide a reverse shot of what they see. Here women don't drive the mobile frame; they are static passengers in the movement of Black Detroit. However, in doing so the film draws attention to women as a situated product of this system in which they are at a loss of control.

This segment brings a more expansive view of Detroit urban life and the spaces citizens occupy outside of the factory. Within this segment, the film follows unnamed female citizens through a hospital, office, grocery store, funeral home, and along city streets. It demonstrates the racialized and gendered dynamic of such spaces. Namely, unlike the seizure of mobility enacted by the male League members, female women are dually imprisoned in Detroit's capitalist-patriarchal infrastructure. I do not want to celebrate the League for this minimalist nod to women's struggles as a significant radical intervention into the city's gendered labor binary. Yet, I do read the scene as a brainstorming session as to how the League could relate to broader socio-cultural issues within the city as it moves forward; from police brutality to the place of women within the city's shifting urban milieu. Unlike the segments detailing the strategies of wildcat strikes and in-plant protest, which the League had already successfully accomplished, the League provides no clear answer or plan of action to address female exploitation—it just imagines it somehow must be done as part of the revolutionary project. The League recognizes that urban struggle extends beyond the factory walls and that future films could explore such topics in greater depth under the banner of Black Star Productions.

Black Star Productions: Developing Black Media Infrastructure

Following the completion of *FGTN*, Watson and the remaining members of Detroit Newsreel worked to expand League participation in cultural production and community organizing. Representatives from the League traveled with the film to Europe, networking with

radical collectives interested in the League's project. Meanwhile, under Watson's guidance, the recently formed Black Star Productions moved forward with plans to expand their radical film library. Black Star's broad objective was to "produce and distribute films dealing with the most crucial and pressing social issues of our times."⁵⁵⁰ According to initial fundraising documents, Black Star identified themselves as "committed to the idea that the task we have undertaken and the efforts we expend are critically important both educationally and politically. The information which is provided in the mass media is superficial, distorted, and reactionary. Our goals are simple; to provide for the masses of people an efficient means through which information may be obtained, used and passed on, which will provide an understanding of the necessity of change, for the collective benefit of all people."⁵⁵¹

This was not the League's first foray into counter-revolutionary news and Black Star was itself an offshoot of the League's print-publishing endeavors. Throughout the League's history, the central staff had been comprised of both militant plant workers and out-of-plant intellectuals who published RUM strike materials and revolutionary treatises. The print distribution of League ideas began when John Watson took over editorial duties for Wayne State's student newspaper in 1967, renaming it *The South End* from the *Daily Collegian*, to reflect the working-class sensibilities at the South End of the Wayne State Campus. What had been a more or less ordinary student newspaper became a radical broadside under Watson's leadership. According to Heather Ann Thompson, Watson never hid his plans to turn Wayne State University's newspaper into a voice for revolution. At the time, WSU had 68.9 percent of all the Black students attending the

⁵⁵⁰ "Detroit Newsreel Promotional Flyer."

⁵⁵¹ "Black Star Promotional Bulletin," 1971, Box 1, Folder 11: Black Star Production Materials, Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

three biggest universities in the state, and many worked in the factories to support their education.⁵⁵²

For Watson, having access to their own press that could print League documents and other revolutionary literature was essential to the cause, but that objective was easier proposed than accomplished. As Watson notes in a 1968 interview:

No one will do the job for us. The white left—youth culture has over four hundred newspapers but most of them are full of bullshit, even the better ones will publish the drug culture one issue and the revolution the next. The record companies and other capitalists use those papers for their big festivals to create pop culture heroes. Our own newspaper, *The Inner City Voice*, had to go to ten different printers because after each issue, the all-white printers' union would threaten the printers with a strike if he brought out any more issues. Now we had to go about buying our own presses and training ourselves in every facet of production... We need permanent organs. The mass media only wants to glamorize the most adventurous and frivolous actions of the movement.⁵⁵³

As such, the League eventually gained access to their own press and began publicizing a broad range of materials pertinent to the cultural, social, and political revolution. These publications

⁵⁵² Thompson, *Whose Detroit?* Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 56. Within the city's radicalizing milieu, Black radicals utilized access to the printing press to produce leaflets for distribution at the Dodge Main plant, condemning both the Chrysler Corporation and the UAW for "demoralizing the integrity of the Black individual." Through these organizing tactics, On May 2, 1968 more than 4,000 workers walked out of Dodge Main over speed-ups on the assembly line, effectively shutting down plant operations. Seven workers, identified as "leaders" were fired. The five white leaders were able to get their jobs back, unlike the Black leaders, General Baker and Bernie Tate. General Baker responded with an open letter to Chrysler in the June issue of *Inner City Voice*, indicting Chrysler for its racism.

⁵⁵³ John Watson. "Interview with Dan Georgakas," 1970, Box 4, Folder 4: Black Star Productions; Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

(*ICV, The South End*) strove to “tell it like it is” and counter the reports of post-Rebellion violence in the mainstream press that too often vilified Black citizens as the source of the city’s growing urban crisis. “Around the *Voice* there is a conglomeration of activity. We have our office in a large building with our own coffee house and with our own school, teaching Black history and now courses in Marxism-Leninism. The coffee house is very popular with the community. Also housed in the same building is the new publication, the *Black Student Voice*, which coordinates the activities of the spontaneous groups that have been formed in inner city schools.”⁵⁵⁴ Black Star, as they called the operation, also aimed to set up a bookstore and a press to publish Black literature. The objective with all of these endeavors was “to be a positive response to the Great Rebellion, elaborating, clarifying, and articulating what was already in the streets, as well as to be a “vehicle for political organization, education, and change.”⁵⁵⁵

Publishing the *Inner City Voice* and *The South End* was a significant accomplishment that allowed the League to publicize their own revolutionary objectives and imagine a revolutionary Detroit through art, literature, and poetry. “We had studied the history of the Russian Bolsheviks and found a specific pamphlet by Lenin called “Where to Begin,” written in 1903, before he wrote *What is to be Done?*, where he described the role a newspaper could play. A newspaper was the focus of a permanent organization; it could provide a bridge between the peaks of activity. It creates an organization and organizes the division of labor among revolutionaries.”⁵⁵⁶ The paper enabled workers to articulate the conditions of their own experiences and develop a network of communication throughout the plants. Luke Tripp, who worked with Watson at the *South End* and the *Inner City Voice*, further believed that owning and operating their own news

⁵⁵⁴ Watson, “Black Editor,” 33.

⁵⁵⁵ Watson quoted in Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 65–66.

⁵⁵⁶ Watson, “Black Editor,” 31.

mechanism would enable them to bypass the alleged objectiveness that the mainstream mass media claimed while not reporting on the realities of Black life and Black activism in the city. Yet, for Tripp and Watson, the newspaper was not sufficient to dismantle the misinformation propagated through the corporate controlled mass media. The intellectual wing of the League hoped to produce film and television that could likewise network with the local community and counter the oppressive forces of the white-controlled media apparatuses. However, at this juncture, Black Detroiters had few opportunities to access to film equipment or media training. Watson thus saw Detroit Newsreel's interest in the League as a convenient way to engage with the means of production and take first steps towards the creation of a film production company.

For the League, it was crucial that Black Star also existed outside the control of local broadcast agencies and corporate forces. With their publication division, they were able to speak without concerns of viewer sensitivity, upsetting sponsors, or appeasing integrationist political reformers. This is featured in *FGTN*, which traces the process of printing manuscripts at the Black Star facilities, capturing footage of Black workers composing radical articles, the mechanics of the printing press as the documents are produced en masse and close-up shots of the resulting materials. Titles shown include "DRUM Slate: League Calls for Broad Community Support in Union Election" and "Fight UAW Racism." Subsequent shots document these materials being distributed at DRUM protests. Black Star controlled and displayed all means of production and distribution. As discussed in previous chapters, by 1970, Detroit had a handful of Black public affairs programs broadcasting Black perspectives on critical issues facing local residents. *CPT* highlighted Black talent and endorsed Black community advancement, making a positive step in the mediated civil rights struggle in the city. However, their moderate investment in middle-class Black respectability politics clashed with the League's investment in the radical

social transformation that could be engendered by Black labor struggle. In this way, *FGTN* was able to provide a contentious understanding of what Rebellion meant for Detroit and a more politically assertive glimpse at the lived conditions in the post-Rebellion city than other Black media emerging at this time. For example, while Black public affairs television shows, like *CPT*, often included segments shot on location in Detroit, such footage was later synthesized into program features, framed by hosts, broadcasting from an established studio setting. These programs had to be approved both by series producers and the station's community reviewer board. Thus, while *CPT* was a landmark in terms of increasing racial diversity on television and formed a crucial platform to broadcast local political issues, talents, and histories of interest to "Black Detroit," they still offered a tempered understanding of what a Black Detroit could mean. Black Star's documentary frame, on the other hand, hoped to construct a revelatory presentation of Detroit from the mobile gaze of workers at the center of labor struggle.

The first objective of Black Star was to distribute *FGTN*, which reached a variety of intellectual, art, community, and student circles around the US. According to correspondence documents, commercial distribution of the film was very low, yet community, political group, and educational institution rentals were high. In addition to screenings around Detroit, requests from the film arrived from a variety of institutions including: Northern Illinois University, the Sociology, the Sociology Department at University of Washington, Payne Institute, Bowling Green, Central Michigan University, Foundation for Documentary Films (Encino, CA), Media and Methods, State University College in NY, Orson Welles Cinema Film School, Claremont Colleges, University of Connecticut, National Black Economic Development Conference, the Graduate Employees Union at Penn State, the Industrial Workers of the World Chicago Branch, Oakland Youth International Party, Biri Films (Norway), and United Church Board for

Homeland Ministries. Jane Fonda even wrote to request a copy of the film for Jean Luc Godard.⁵⁵⁷ This motivated Watson and Black Star to push forward with plans to expand film distribution beyond *FGTN*. As corporate leaders in the plants had ties to the white-owned corporate media outlets, Watson always considered it an absolute necessity to produce and distribute alternative media sympathetic to struggle as a means of galvanizing support for Black protest. This alternative community infrastructure that Black Star endeavored to develop was as part of the same counter-mechanics. Nevertheless, the Black Star projects initiated after *FGTN* have often been left out of scholarly discourse about the League.

In particular, Watson planned a series of filmed lectures on Black Studies with President Keast of Wayne State University. These films, Black and white, 16 mm, and forty-five minutes to an hour in length, were designed for “educational programs in schools, colleges, community and political organizations, which lack funds for the development of the kind of Black studies programs which larger, richer, universities can afford.”⁵⁵⁸ Watson was also corresponding with Margaret Morgan on of the Curriculum Committee at the Black Studies Center of Claremont Colleges about this endeavor. James Foreman was the proposed Lecturer for the series, while Black Star Publications would print study guide pamphlets for viewing students.⁵⁵⁹

Simultaneously, Black Star negotiated a reciprocal exchange agreement with Unitele Films, an

⁵⁵⁷ Box 1, Folder 8, Black Star Publications Correspondences January 1970 -March 1971. Box 1, Folder 9, Black Star Publications Correspondences April - June 1971, including “Letter from Jane Fonda,” May 27, 1971. Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

⁵⁵⁸ Watson, John, “Letter to Margaret Morgan, Curriculum Committee, Black Studies Center, The Claremont Colleges,” April 13, 1971, Box 1, Folder 8: Black Star Productions; Correspondances-1970-March 1971, Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

⁵⁵⁹ Box 1, WSU Folder 8 Correspondence 1970-March 1971. Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

Italian distribution company that made the film *Al Fatah-The Palestinians* about the Palestinian revolution. They further produced an English language soundtrack for the documentary. Attentive to radical documentaries produced elsewhere, Black Star were looking into the distribution rights for the “Lumbumba and Congo Struggle films,” and planned two films on conflicts in Angola. The League were likewise in talks with Jane Fonda to produce a documentary on Rosa Luxembourg.⁵⁶⁰

However, the Black Star project that made the most pre-production progress was *Junk*, a documentary about drug abuse in Black neighborhoods. Though never completed, Lichtman and Bird planned to stay in Detroit to help fundraise for the drug film and contribute technical assistance in shooting and editing. They hoped that by the end of *Junk*, Black Star Productions would have a fully trained staff to carry out all the other productions moving forward.⁵⁶¹ *Junk* seemed an ideal topic for the next project, as pervasive drug circulation was taking a significant toll on the economic conditions, community relations, and health in local Black inner-city neighborhoods. In *We Will Return*, Ahmad quotes Grace Lee Boggs’ contention that urban crisis can be attributed to the inability of the Black left to politicize Black youth and organize a political response to the war on drugs: “The main weakness of the Black left has been its inability to focus on the youth, who are burdened by a very high unemployment rate and are targeted by the drug culture. Until the divorcement of the Black left from the youths is addressed,

⁵⁶⁰ “Black Star Productions Letter,” January 13, 1971, Box 1, Folder 8: Black Star Productions; Correspondances-1970-March 1971, Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives. After seeing *FGTN*, Fonda was turned on to the revolutionary project of the League and was distributing the film among her revolutionary contacts, including Jean Luc Godard.

⁵⁶¹ “Poster for Drug Film,” n.d., Dan Georgakas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University Archives.

there is likely to be no real advancement in Black radicalism.”⁵⁶² Black Star Productions wanted to take action to address these charges. According to preliminary production documents, “Heroin use in Detroit reached epidemic proportions a few years ago and the number of addicts grows daily.”⁵⁶³ Their estimates suggest over 30,000 addicts in Detroit.

These documents further indicate that the proposed film would argue that middle-class white drug users can be shunned or isolated due to drug use and it doesn't affect the broader conditions of life in white community spaces.⁵⁶⁴ However, Black drug use and the drug trade that supports it has negatively affected the broad community and the circumstances of life therein. Immobilized in the inner city, Black drug users don't have anywhere else to go. “Blacks have lived with the plague for more than two decades and are rightly enraged when a narcotics Bureau official says it was a problem but it was one we could live with. There is simply no comparison between the magnitude of the drug addiction and the programs.” Black Star further argued that because heroin abuse disproportionately affected Black low-income users, the city had less investment in creating programs to alleviate the medical crisis of addiction and instead intensified anti-crime laws to penalize Black users. Examining a range of other anti-drug films, Black Star found few that considered addiction within Black communities and none that adequately provided strategies for effective community action. According to the League; “We hope through this hard hitting emotionally packed film to provide viable alternative for the thousands of young people addicted to heroin and more for the thousands of young people who are potential drug addicts and abusers. We hope to provide the overall community with enough

⁵⁶² Muhammad Ahmad and John Bracey, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind: Black Radical Organizations 1960-1975* (Charles H Kerr, 2007), 22.

⁵⁶³ “Poster for Drug Film.”

⁵⁶⁴ “Poster for Drug Film.”

factual information (physical and psychological) about drugs and the drug addict to enable them to take some community action.”⁵⁶⁵ With the idea of the drug film and the section of *FGTN* on female labor, one can see an expansive glimpse of what Black media infrastructure could mean for the city. The objective with this project was not just to reach radical networks or Black workers, but build on their worker activist base to ignite broader levels of civic change for an oppressed underclass, including women to a greater degree. Black Star wanted to produce an educational film network that spoke directly to Black citizens from Black citizens, thereby working towards community led change.

However, Black Star’s financial deficiencies combined with the deepening divide among League’s central staff regarding the future objectives of the organization and organizing work outside of the plants, culminated in the breakdown of the League and its corresponding media endeavors. According to fundraising documents, Black Star needed money for “equipment, raw stock, processing and lab expenditures and purchase of prints... The cost of establishing and maintaining distribution of these films, sometimes exceed the dedication of our most devoted workers.”⁵⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the League struggled to balance a myriad of moving parts. Former League Member, Ernie MKalimoto Allen describes the situation:

There was the "Cortland office," main center for worker organizing; the "Linwood office," whose Parents and Students for Community Control as well as International Black Appeal were housed; the "Dequindre office," where the Black Star Bookstore and an abortive community organizing project were launched; the "Fenkell office," headquarters for the Black Star Printing operation. There were also geographically

⁵⁶⁵ “Detroit Newsreel Promotional Flyer.”

⁵⁶⁶ “Black Star Promotional Bulletin.”

separate offices for Black Star Film Productions, the Labor Defense Coalition, and UNICOM, a community-organizing center. To outsiders the operation appeared quite impressive; rank-and-file insiders often saw it as an organizational and bureaucratic nightmare.⁵⁶⁷

Without the raw materials for production and full support from the League, *Junk* never went into full production. While developing broad plans for community control of Black communities, and carving out community spaces around Wayne State's campus for Black cultural discourse to circulate—from the Black Star Bookstore to the Black Star Press—, League members lost the ability to maintain control over their own organizational apparatuses.

Black Star Beyond Detroit

Detroit as you know is a motherfucker, and I feel too that the very fact of the League, and the thinking and work behind it, was and still is by example the most serious revolutionary force in the country, and this gut fact extends beyond films, splits, and white movement craziness.

-Rene Lichtman Letter to Dan Georgakas, July 1, 1972.

While public affairs programming like *CPT* and documentaries like *The Black Eye* spoke to a decidedly local audience, *FGTN* and Black Star Productions had the capacity to rally support for the League beyond the city. Nevertheless, the divisions within the League only solidified following the completion of *FGTN* when Watson's focus shifted to traveling with the film to spread its radical message and develop Black Star. Watson's focus, in this way, moved away from the point of production to the peripheral effects of exploitation. Watson had a clear investment in using the film to bridge collaborative networks among national and international

⁵⁶⁷ Allen, Ernest M. K. Kalimoto, "Detroit: I Do Mind Dying, A Review" 11, no. 1 (February 1977): 23.

radical communities. Yet, these attempts to transcend the local revolution, allowed the local revolution to disintegrate.

Newsreel films sought political response.⁵⁶⁸ As such, post-screening discussions were integral to Newsreel's sociological project of raising political consciousness and galvanizing radical politics through film form. They shared with Third Cinema and Soviet Montage, the ideology that imperialist cinema was promulgating cultural and economic oppression in local space, which needed to be negated and replaced by a new politically, engaged film form. Screenings were held locally at Wayne State University, a hit among radical students. It had less of an impact, however, on working-class audiences of color outside of the factory protests. Even with factory workers, they could easily grab a pamphlet after work or talk to a co-worker about radical ideas; it was also harder to congregate a large mass of citizens off-site, if they were already overworked from their factory jobs and needed time to spend with family.

Cynthia Young has shown in her analysis of Los Angeles Newsreel's films on the Black Panther Party, that radical aesthetics betrayed an understanding of working-class tastes and increased the distance between the already politically conscious middle-class viewers and the films' target audience: the working-classes. Newsreel often addressed an idealized working-class identity that bore little relation to reality and often-bypassed working-class audiences altogether. Detroit Newsreel and the League also bypassed considerations of intersectional identity politics when articulating their radical agenda—especially the role of women pay in society and may play in the envisioned revolution. However, according to Chris Robé, “the contradictions inherent within the League and Newsreel should not be read as central dysfunctions of these

⁵⁶⁸ Leo Braudy, “Newsreel: A Report,” *Film Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (December 1, 1968): 48–51, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4621426>. 49.

groups. Instead, they need to be understood symptomatically as the contradictions that encumbered all New Left organizations, to one degree or another, at the time as well as many Third Cinema–inspired endeavors due to the inequities perpetuated by capitalism”.⁵⁶⁹

While subsequent poverty statistics demonstrate the failure of Nixon era radicalism to take hold and overturn the city’s oppressive economic and social structures, the history of Detroit Newsreel and its breakdown has been seen as an early portent of “failure” for a matrix of political groups to accomplish their socio-cultural objectives: Newsreel (at least as it was conceived in the late 1960s), Detroit’s League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and more generally, the New Left.⁵⁷⁰ According to Ammad, “the contradictions that surfaced within the LRBW are related to the questions of social responsibility, sexism, and humanism; questions which have not adequately been addressed in the city’s African American community yet.”⁵⁷¹ Frederic Jameson ascribes this conflict to the impossibility of making socialism in one city when socialism must be a broader transnational concern. Jameson suggests that as the League began to think beyond the parameters of a “unique local model,” making a film as an iterative exemplar of their activism, which could speak to labor crisis elsewhere made complete sense. However, he contends that when they shifted their focus away from Detroit organizing, they became media stars.

Having acceded to a larger spatial plane, the base vanished under them; and with this the most successful social revolutionary experiment of that rich political decade in the United States came to a sad un-dramatic end. I do not want to say that it left no traces behind,

⁵⁶⁹ Robé. Chris, “Detroit Rising,” 153.

⁵⁷⁰ While texts, such *Detroit I Do Mind* approach Detroit Newsreel as a sign of the New Left’s failure, I put “failure,” in quotation marks because we need new metrics to access radical local media beyond success and failure.

⁵⁷¹ Ahmad and Bracey, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind*, 278.

since a number of local gains remain, and in any case every rich political experiment continues to feed the tradition in underground ways. Most ironic in our context, however, is the very success of their failure: the representation—the model of this complex spatial dialectic—triumphantly survives in the form of a film and a book, but in the process of becoming an image and a spectacle, the referent seems to have disappeared, as so many people from Debord to Baudrillard always warned us it would.⁵⁷²

Appearing in magazine spreads, TV specials, and at screenings for other Newsreel films like *Community Control*, *Black Panther*, *Repression*, *Off the Pig*, and *El Pueblo Se Levanta*, the League were transformed into symbols of radical possibility that endeared them to American leftists and European intellectuals. Yet, their selective celebrity in Leftist circles did not engender social change for their cause at home. They became affiliated with the media spaces they appeared, which was more often than not a media space they did not control. Essentially, *FGTNN* captivated intellectualist circles around the US and Europe, but increasingly distanced the League from Detroit and Black Detroiters, the center of their revolutionizing base and burgeoning media network.

For Jameson, the spatialization of a radical Detroit imaginary, that was necessarily local, ended up self-imploding when the League looked beyond the local. I would contribute to Jameson's estimation that the city's problems were too unwieldy to contain with the League's resources. Radicalizing the factory was a step, but the city's economic, spatial, and political crises extended far beyond the point of production. While they were developing multi-pronged

⁵⁷² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 414.

strategies of community action, there was not enough money, support, or logistical training within their Black network to comprehensibly revolutionize “Detroit,” let alone the world.

By 1972, the League had significant support from within Detroit’s working-class community, but could no longer mobilize large numbers of Black workers. The DRUM rallies mustered support from fatigued Black workers who knew first hand the tolls of exploitative labor practices. However, the same workers were often less invested the ideological objectives of Marxist Revolutionary practice. According to Mohammed Ammad, Luke Tripp would try to teach the principals of Marxist-Leninism to Black workers after closing hours, but struggled to incite the same level of intellectual fervor as goal-oriented Black protest. “Tripp, not knowing how to break theory down into everyday language, would bore the workers, who often went to sleep in class.”⁵⁷³ *FGTN* perhaps did a better job at emplacing the need for Marxist-Leninism within a graspable Detroit context. However, at the time of its completion, League members began to splinter into different ideological factions. Watson, Cockrel Hamlin, and James Forman were spending more time outside of Detroit, making press statements and giving interviews for (white) radical newspapers.

Thomas Waugh’s has noted that: “Newsreel’s foray into Detroit’s union and radical politics in the late sixties was never judged by any of the participants to have been an unqualified success.”⁵⁷⁴ Yet, according to Fredric Jameson, “successful spatial representation today need not be some uplifting socialist-realist drama of revolutionary triumph, but may be equally inscribed in a narrative of defeat.”⁵⁷⁵ The film produces a powerful Black imaginary of Detroit at a time when Black workers were attempting to shift the balance of power in their favor. The League

⁵⁷³ Ahmad and Bracey, *We Will Return in the Whirlwind*, 270.

⁵⁷⁴ Waugh, *Show Us Life*, 154.

⁵⁷⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 415.

and Black Star ultimately had big dreams to use media technology to transform Detroit's depressed reality and enact plans for change, but they fell victim to the same processes of erasure and obsolescence that befell Detroit's auto industries and deindustrializing landscape. They too were incorporated as yet another strain of failure in the city's enduring narratives of decline. Despite the strong message and visuals it offers, *FGTN* stands as a critical trace of the city's mediated past, celebrated by scholars but otherwise too often disremembered.

Nevertheless, I contend that while *FGTN* did not have the revolutionary impact its creators intended, it also stands as a vivid example of cinema as community action, a substantial attempt to negotiate how processes of decentralization and deindustrialization affect Black mobility. The film reflects Black desires to achieve power over civic space, change industrial conditions, and liberate Black lives from these structures of control. Finally, it not only provides a discourse on Detroit's history of Black radicalism, but also remains a provocative example of Black filmmaking that has been surprisingly absent from histories of Black cinema. Manthia Diawara defines Black independent cinema as "any Black-produced film outside the constraints of the major studios. The filmmakers' independence from Hollywood enables them to put onto the screen Black lives and concerns that derive from the complexity of Black communities. Independent films provide alternative ways of knowing Black people that differ from the fixed stereotypes of Blacks in Hollywood."⁵⁷⁶ Likewise, as Stuart Hall suggests, popular media is deeply entangled in a "struggle over hegemony," and constitutes a space in which the changing configurations of cultural power are negotiated, reified, and perhaps, resisted."⁵⁷⁷ Thus, while most histories of Black cinema focus on productions of Race films and Blaxploitation, with the

⁵⁷⁶ Diawara, *Black American Cinema*, 7.

⁵⁷⁷ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Routledge, 2015), 403.

notable exception of the LA Rebellion, *FGTN* is a crucial example of Black filmmakers articulating their own social conditions and identity politics outside the influence of Hollywood in a decidedly local context—that of Detroit.

While they were not able to create a sustainable independent network of media control or the Black media infrastructure they had hoped, the League demonstrates how Black citizens approached media as a significant component in the process of remaking a Detroit for a liberated Black citizenry based on local reclamation of mobile vision and starting at the point of production and moving outward. Like *CPT*, it introduces a range of issues that hinder Black mobility in local space, but here the film uses the theme of automobility rather than class mobility (or middle-class ascension) to change civic control of local space. The film and the dreams of subsequent media infrastructure shows how the League was driving towards making a new Detroit—a project that would be taken in new directions with WGPR-TV as the city solidified Black Power.

Chapter 4

WGPR-TV: Black Broadcasting for a Black Detroit

*“We don't believe anybody else can do as well presenting black culture as we ourselves” -
William V. Banks, WGPR, INC. President⁵⁷⁸*

*“For Many years blacks have looked at television but have never been included as part of it.
What we're doing is true community access television for the Black community”
-George E. White, WGPR, INC. Vice-President for Programming⁵⁷⁹*

In the 1970s, Detroit's majority Black population hoped that the shifting political tide ushered in by the election of the city's first Black Mayor in 1973 would lead to a “New Detroit” that could catalyze lucrative Black social and economic development in the post-Rebellion city. Mayor Coleman Young's election was seen as an emblem of hope for Black citizens in Detroit, a sign that after decades of neglect and mistreatment Black Detroiters would finally have an advocate in city hall.⁵⁸⁰ That same year also saw the election of Detroit's first majority Black city council and the FCC licensure of the nation's first Black owned and operated television station, WGPR-TV 62 Detroit. Along with the Black-led city government, the station anticipated a new broadcast landscape for Detroit, offering entertainment, job opportunities, and public service programs targeted for Black citizens to facilitate the city's uplift.

As a network designed to broadcast programs produced by local Black citizens, WGPR-TV provided viewers with a Black spatial imaginary of the emergent Black city. This chapter provides a focused study of WGPR-TV's early developmental stages to evidence how the dream of Black media infrastructure materialized in Detroit and the struggles of local citizens to maintain it. I contend that WGPR-TV constructed Black media to operate as urban infrastructure,

⁵⁷⁸ “First Black TV Has High Hopes,” *The Herald Palladium* Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, MI, June 26, 1975, 28.

⁵⁷⁹ “First Black TV Has High Hopes,” 28.

⁵⁸⁰ Darden and Thomas, *Detroit*, Chapter 9.

strengthening the flow of information and services in the city to the benefit of all citizens—but minorities in particular. In a city wracked with narratives of decline and institutional failure, WGPR-TV demonstrates the localized ingenuity and community strategies developed to sustain a Black media network despite both the instability of local UHF television and the on-going depletion of opportunities for business development and economic advancement in the post-Rebellion city. I assert WGPR's struggle to establish Black media infrastructure and project positive representations of Detroit, re-constructed a sense of Black community identity. When Dr. William V. Banks bought WGPR, he was investing in a means to challenge stereotypes of Black life through Black-produced programs. Yet he was also intervening in a racialized system of power that administered the way information circulated on political, technological, and aesthetic levels, further facilitating the operations of city life. WGPR-TV promulgated a re-imagining of post-Rebellion city space organized around Black social advancement, designed by Black cultural and political figures. While the station never reached the levels of profitability and institutional stability Banks and his associates anticipated, this study reveals how Black media infrastructure was conceptualized as an integral component of a post-Rebellion future.

WGPR-TV first hit the local airwaves on September 29, 1975, engendering significant fanfare as the nation's first Black station, and even more significant technical and economic difficulties. According to a 1973 *JET* article, the station aimed to design programming that would “provide in-depth penetration into the problems, goals, aspirations and achievements of Blacks and related ethnic groups. WGPR-TV will be entertaining, educational, and totally committed to community and public service.”⁵⁸¹ However, within months, WGPR-TV was forced to make a series of programming compromises and budgetary cuts to remain on air.

⁵⁸¹ “1st Black TV Station Broadcasting in Color,” June 28, 1973.

Although the station was never fully able to accomplish most of the original broadcast goals, it continued to develop localized Black programming designed by and for Black citizens. Throughout its twenty-year existence, WGPR worked hard to sustain enough of a profit to operate in Detroit's recessed market and produce an on-going stream of content that proliferated local Black visibility in an otherwise white-dominant televisual sphere.

During this timeframe, WGPR-TV expanded Black media ownership beyond individual texts or films towards building Black communications infrastructure that would cater to Detroit's majority Black urban audience. In this way, WGPR-TV realized many of the institutional goals for Black media autonomy that Gilbert Maddox envisioned but was never able to develop. WGPR-TV was clearly influenced by existing Black programming on WDIV-TV Channel 56 and nationally broadcast programs like *Black Journal*, *Soul Train*, and *Soul!*. It likewise reached a broader audience than *Finally Got the News*, which courted a niche audience open to didactic explorations of Marxist theory intermixed with Black urban life. WGPR-TV aimed to expand Black media in the Detroit market beyond minimally watched public affairs programs or radical educational content to broadcast Black entertainment and news from local Black perspectives around the clock. WGPR-TV strove to build up Detroit as a Black metropolis and a center of national Black enterprise—endorsing Black business ventures, promoting local Black entertainers, and supporting urban renewal projects that worked in the interest of the city's Black residents. Though conditions were far from ideal, WGPR-TV positioned itself as a crucial facilitator of Black discourse within broader processes of socio-spatial change that were otherwise out of the control of the local polity.

In many ways, WGPR-TV's fight to stay afloat during this period is paradigmatic of the struggles faced by local minority media operations and local UHF broadcasters in most televisual

markets dominated by corporate-backed VHF stations. Yet I argue WGPR-TV also serves as a discursive counterpoint to the broader narrative of Detroit's post-Rebellion urban crisis—a period in local history largely associated with rising crime rates, economic recession, and accelerated architectural decline. The planned obsolescence of a Fordist industrial landscape and the subsequent shift to a decentralized model of production largely facilitated the disappearance of Detroit housing, business, institutions, and economic opportunities—all of which disproportionately affected Black citizens.⁵⁸² Even with the arrival of a Black city government in the 1970s, the corporate structures that controlled the majority shares of Detroit businesses, as well as state and federal governmental bodies that set most policy parameters for the city, still treated Black citizens as extensions of urban detritus or remnants of the de-industrialization processes that ravaged urban planning in the city. The majority of WGPR-TV's political and economic woes likewise resulted from corporate disinvestment in city affairs. Despite the city's growing Black political base, localized Black media did not appear particularly lucrative to investors or advertisers. While garnering initial support from major Detroit companies, WGPR-TV received less advertisement backing than the seven other local stations. WGPR, INC. managed to operate with a small profit margin, but it was the personal and political commitments of employees that kept the station afloat during its near two-decade lifespan. Because of their efforts, WGPR-TV gave Detroiters a space to produce a wealth of creative content promulgating

⁵⁸² Here, I am referencing the concept that cars were built to only last a few years and then must be replaced with newer models. The same applied for Ford factory structures. Indeed most of Detroit was planned to be malleable. Detroit's housing and architectural markets were constantly shifting to provide owners the newest homes—which ultimately led to suburban developments. See: Galster, George. *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 215.

Black self-representation while working to develop Black infrastructure for a city perpetually longing for economic and social sustainability.⁵⁸³

Moving forward, this chapter first positions the station's development within the social landscape of a majority-Black Detroit and within broadcast environments that were predominately white. I then highlight influential cases of Black media entrepreneurship in order to contextualize WGPR-TV founder Dr. William Venoid Banks' efforts to construct the nation's first Black owned-and-operated television station.⁵⁸⁴ I further examine case studies of WGPR's primary programming trends (dance shows, religious broadcasts, ethnic programming, and news/public service content) to demonstrate the strategic mechanisms station management employed to keep WGPR-TV economically afloat and the materialization of the station's ideological underpinnings which guided programming directives.

Unfortunately few tapes of WGPR-TV programs have survived to visually evidence local Black programming and citizen participation in content creation. To save on cost and minimize resource allocation, WGPR-TV shot all of its programming on videotape and often recorded over previously used footage. This degraded the image and sound quality for broadcast, yet akin to many other amateur and public access endeavors, superior aesthetic value was easily sacrificed if it meant content could make it affordably to air. This habit contributed to the current archival lacuna of WGPR-TV programs and footage of Black life in the inner city. Tapes have also been

⁵⁸³ By sustainability, I mean the stabilization and improvement of economic conditions for citizens increasingly wracked with poverty and a lack of social opportunities for Black citizens to network and form community bonds. This was likewise due to the broad isolation of neighborhoods as Detroit's population continued to decrease.

⁵⁸⁴ Within this chapter I cannot trace a complete, detailed account of the WGPR's entire history. However, the station remained on air in Detroit until 1994—the same year Coleman Young ended his tenure as Detroit's mayor. During those subsequent years, the station went through significant programming changes, most of which were instantiated to keep the station afloat.

lost as a consequence of television's broader ephemerality and the inconsistency of archives to host television programs as part of a historical record.⁵⁸⁵ Consequently, through my research, I have had significantly more exposure to the station's popular programs, such as *The Scene* (1975-1987), while other programs have been entirely lost over decades.⁵⁸⁶

Compensating for the lack of a complete visual record of WGPR-TV programming, this chapter draws upon archival research into Detroit city records, newspapers, and magazines reporting on the station's emergence and recent efforts to museumize WGPR's cultural and political legacy. In doing so, I construct a robust account of WGPR-TV's history and articulate its significance as a form of Black civic infrastructure. Whenever possible, I emphasize evidence gleaned from extant WGPR-TV program tapes and original station records. I likewise draw extensively from quotes collected in both Dr. Banks' autobiography *A Legacy of Dreams* and articles in the Black press in which he comments on the station. WGPR-TV produced programs, and imagined the possibility of future programs, within a Black spatial imaginary that challenged local white discourse, but also used the development of media infrastructure to confront broader racialized systems of capitalism, politics, education, and land-use philosophy. I position local television as a means to more deeply understand Black responses to urban change and the role of Black media infrastructure in shaping the imaginaries of everyday life in the post-Rebellion city.

Life in 1970s Detroit

⁵⁸⁵ Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation."

⁵⁸⁶ The final episode of *The Scene* aired in December of 1987. In 1988, the show returned as *The New Dance Show* hosted by RJ Watkins and remained in the WGPR-TV lineup until the station folded. The program continued on local UPN affiliate CW50 Detroit until 1996.

During the 1960s, Detroit's total population decreased from 1,670,144 to 1,511,482. However, the Black population increased by thirty-seven percent (98,511 more Black residents).⁵⁸⁷ By 1970, Detroit had become forty-four percent Black and by mid-decade, the first metropolitan city of its size with a Black majority.⁵⁸⁸ Since 1970, Detroit has transformed into a city where, according to John Hartigan, "Blackness is locally dominant: Black Power shapes the politics; Black dollars and Black fashion define the landscape of consumption."⁵⁸⁹ This is absolutely not to suggest whiteness was irrelevant in Detroit. As Thomas Sugrue has shown, it was white corporate disinvestment in Detroit industry and correlative processes of decentralization and suburbanization that proliferated the economic and spatial decline of the city. White power still maintained a presence in the post-Rebellion city and white corporate power still retained control over a majority of Detroit businesses. Furthermore, the number of Black Detroiters trapped in poverty rapidly increased during the 1970s. The decentralization of the automotive industry, paired with the oil crisis of 1973, dramatically reduced available

⁵⁸⁷ Kurt Metzger and Jason Booza, "African Americans in the United States, Michigan and Metropolitan Detroit," Working Paper Series (Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University, February 2002), <http://www.cus.wayne.edu/media/1356/aawork8.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁸ The population was specifically 43.69 percent African American and 55.5% White in 1970. "1970 Census of Population" (U.S. Department of Commerce, March 1973), https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1970a_mi-01.pdf, Census of Population and Housing. By 1980, the Black population had increased to sixty-three percent, largely due to increased white flight patterns. According to statistical data on residential dissimilarity, in 1980, seventy-five percent of the city's residents lived in segregated neighborhoods. Also discussed in: Darden, *Detroit*, 78. Other majority Black cities included Baltimore, New Orleans, Washington DC, and Atlanta. John Herbers, "Census Finds Blacks Gaining Majorities In Big Cities," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1981, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/16/us/census-finds-Blacks-gaining-majorities-in-big-cities.html>.

⁵⁸⁹ John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 16.

employment opportunities in industrial fields.⁵⁹⁰ Thus, Black Detroiters hoped to identify and produce new fields of industry to boost employment rates for the city's residents.

The onset of a new "Black capitalism" in the 1970s did correlate to an increase in Black professionals finding positions as corporate managers and public-sector administrators compared to previous decades. The shift to a majority Black population increased opportunities for Black residents to participate sectors of civic life they had previously been excluded from. While the aforementioned conditions of poverty restricted Black mobility at the time of Coleman Young's election, there was hope in the early 1970s that a majority Black city with a Black-led government would develop infrastructure to further enable Black business gains, increased access to equitable housing and education, and decrease incidents of judicial discrimination and police brutality. By 1978, Detroit had a majority Black city council and Black citizens were the heads of nearly all civic institutions in the city.

The most iconic sign of Detroit's status as a "Black" city came in 1974 when Coleman Young took office [Figure 4.1]. In 1973, Coleman Young ran for Mayor against the "law and order" candidate, Police Commissioner John Nichols. While Nichols pledged to continue the work begun by Roman Gribbs, eliminating crime in Detroit's streets, Young promised to reform the Detroit Police Department to ensure officers followed legal procedure and to increase diversity on the force. STRESS, in particular, became the central touchstone of the Mayoral election and a signifier of Black Detroit's increasing power to challenge institutionalized white supremacy. STRESS (Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets) was a hundred-officer anti-robbery unit of the Detroit Police Department developed by Nichols in January 1971. STRESS was assigned to perform (mostly illegal) raids in "high crime" areas to reduce the growing crime

⁵⁹⁰ Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, *Detroit Divided*, 8.

epidemic in the city's Black neighborhoods. STRESS tactics typically consisted of plain-clothes officers trying to lure potential assailants to commit crimes—a clear form of illegal entrapment—or entering premises where drugs were presumed present with no warrant necessary. However, STRESS was more infamously known for perpetuating acts of brutal violence against Black locals and exacerbating already tenuous relations between Black residents and the majority white police force. During their two-year tenure, the STRESS squad carried out execution-style killings of 22 men, 21 of whom were Black. According to a 1973 Article “In high-crime areas, STRESS officers have authority to stop practically everybody and anything that moves. They do, generally with their guns out. They are advised by their superiors that police men are likely to wind up dead.”⁵⁹¹ As such, the STRESS policy was to shoot first and ask questions later. Black Detroiters rallied behind Young and his central campaign promise to disband STRESS, registering to vote in record numbers.

Black voters were likewise drawn to Young as a local Detroit success story, a former Black Bottom resident turned UAW organizer who stood up to Detroit's white power structure. Young helped organize the National Negro Labor Council in 1951. The following year, Young was called by Senator Joseph McCarthy to testify before the House on Un-American Activities. According to June Thomas Manning, “Young startled congressional representatives when he refused to cower before them and fearlessly lectured them for mispronouncing the word Negro.”⁵⁹² Phonograph recordings of Young's remarks soon circulated throughout Detroit's Black neighborhoods, turning Young into a local folk hero. Capitalizing on this status, Young was successfully elected to the state senate in 1964, before setting his sights on the Mayor's office.

⁵⁹¹ “STRESS: Detroit's Hard-Nosed Answer to Crime,” *Albuquerque Journal*, February 4, 1973, Sunday Edition, 28.

⁵⁹² Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 150.

Following his election, Coleman Young entered office as an unapologetic, straight-shooting champion for his Black constituents; a leader who wanted to rectify the city's history of inequality and aid Black advancement through redevelopment efforts.

However, his public persona and policy stances reinforced the ideological divide between the Black city and the white peripheral suburbs. In both historical records and contemporary recollections, Young engenders strongly discordant reactions—typically divided down racial lines. For many, if the “riots” were not the final nail in Detroit’s coffin that proliferated Detroit’s decline and necessarily catalyzed a white exodus to the suburbs, Coleman Young’s election sealed in the city’s doomed fate. For others, Young was the best leader the city ever had, the only one able to activate a Black Power base, which consequently led to his strong approval ratings throughout his near twenty year tenure as Detroit’s mayor. However, his unparalleled political popularity within the city limits was not enough to repair the damage of years of racial injustice and economic peril. He is what Thomas calls a “messiah mayor.” “Frozen out by erratic and then declining federal dollars, hemmed in by growing suburbs and buffeted by continual population and economic decline, these mayors turned to visible if shallow symbols of progress. In Detroit, Young promoted new office buildings and riverfront development as effective antidotes to urban decline.”⁵⁹³ The series of redevelopment projects sponsored by Young, such as the Detroit Renaissance Center, brought piecemeal success. Yet, “the cumulative results of industrial and commercial decline, population loss, increasing poverty, and racial conflict” rendered it difficult to enact sustained change for impoverished city residents. Media projects discussed thus far—especially those of crisis management—demonstrate visible possibilities for progress that amounted to fewer success stories. Like Young, Black media producers were inhibited from

⁵⁹³ Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 152.

enacting the long-term changes to remedy Detroit's urban crisis. However, Black media history, WGPR-TV included, demonstrate greater depth than often afford to Young's tenure in the popular imagination; citizens approached Black media development with a complex understanding of urban life, an ingenuity to work around restrictive barriers, and a sincere commitment to improving conditions of citizen welfare.

At the time Young was elected, the Detroit Mayoral office was already lacking financial and staff resources, plagued by incessant statewide questioning of the mayor's jurisdiction over public policy, and limited by Michigan's pre-dominantly white corporate interest groups. According to a 1973 *Jet* article, "Blacks in Detroit have gained significant political power, beyond that of Blacks in most major US Cities. But in the business world, despite some encouraging signs, they have only developed the ability to influence decisions still made largely by whites."⁵⁹⁴ Likewise Ken Cockrel argued that, of course, Black people should be interested in increasing Black Power, but they should not be deluded enough to think that political power materially attends to their needs. "We are still basically a people struggling to overcome our economic situation, and right now, in Detroit, politics is the only lever available to Blacks. Its the only game in town for Blacks."⁵⁹⁵ While I would not challenge Cockrel's assessment of Detroit's dire economic situation, I submit that media appeared as another lever available to Black citizens to challenge the distribution of economic power, especially with the establishment of WGPR-TV..

While the mention of "WGPR-TV" does not catalyze the same degree of divisive intensity among Detroiters as "Coleman Young," WGPR-TV's "success" was likewise predicated

⁵⁹⁴ Scott McGehee and Susan Watson, *Blacks in Detroit* (Detroit Free Press, 1980), 60.

⁵⁹⁵ McGehee and Watson, 43.

upon the dedication of its Black staff and the enthusiasm of Detroit's Black viewers; many of its "failures" were resultant of suburban/corporate (white) indifference to its economic and ideological project. Furthermore, both WGPR and the Young Administration persevered in their attempts to improve the city's infrastructure as a means of improving life for its Black citizenry from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s. WGPR-TV's first broadcast was facilitated by the political negotiations of Detroit's Black leaders, including Coleman Young, the ideological determination of its creative agents, and the economic sacrifices of its founder William V. Banks. It emerged at a time when the intersection of Black Power politics aligned with an opening in the televisual landscape for Black content. Its ascendancy was not only temporally conditional upon changes in the Detroit population, but also spatially contingent on economic shifts in 1970s Detroit.

Dr. Banks, New Black Capitalism, and the Dream of Black Media Infrastructure

As detailed in his autobiography, *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of William Venoid Banks*, the early life of Dr. Banks fits the broader historical patterns of the Great Migration [Figure 4.2]. Born the son of a sharecropper in Geneva, Kentucky in 1903, Banks first journeyed to Detroit at the age of 16 in search of work in the auto industry. He found part time positions at various plants in the city (Ford, GM, Briggs) and worked to put himself through school at Detroit City College (now Wayne State). He later earned a law degree from the Detroit College of Law. By 1950, Banks had become a prominent labor defense attorney, respected political advocate, and an ordained minister with the Detroit Baptist Seminary. It was at this point he founded the Free and Accepted Modern Masons (hereafter referred to as "the Masons"), a now 350,000 member, national non-profit, Black Christian fraternal organization, dedicated to

purporting the moral and financial uplift of Black citizens. Drawing from Mason assets and political connections, Banks bought the debt-ridden GPR-FM, (Grosse Pointe Radio), in 1964 for an estimated \$40,000.⁵⁹⁶ At this time, Black citizens owned less than one-half of one percent of all US broadcast properties. Thus, Banks became the first Black resident to own a radio station within Detroit's city limits, the second in the state of Michigan, and only one of approximately thirty-three in the nation.⁵⁹⁷

While Banks had no previous experience with radio, he saw a political need, as well as a financial opportunity, in broadcasting content designed by and for the city's growing Black population. This is not to suggest that broadcast companies were otherwise unaware of or indifferent to Detroit's growing Black population. On the contrary, Black Detroiters played a significant role in the local radio industry, as performers, listeners, and occasional content producers. The home of Motown Records and boasting a long tradition of Black jazz and gospel music, Detroit radio was a significant distributor of local Black cultural production and often courted Black audiences through the radio broadcasting of Black music and news series.⁵⁹⁸

Detroit was likewise home to several pioneers of Black radio performance including deejays Ed Baker and Van Douglas.⁵⁹⁹ However, Black citizens in Detroit, as elsewhere in the US, were still

⁵⁹⁶ There are divergent records of this amount. This figure was that recorded by Banks in his own writing. Sheila T. Gregory, *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (University Press of America, 1999), 133.

⁵⁹⁷ For a discussion of preceding Black broadcast developments see: Johnson, "A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV." She reports also that at the time there were no Native American TV stations and only 2 radio stations. There were five television stations with Latino owners. WBNB in the Virgin Islands and WSVI in St. Croix preceded WGPR. According to a 1975 article by Bill Adler, there were over 7000 radio stations in operation at that time. Bill Adler, "TV 62 Great New View," *Ann Arbor Sun* October 15, 1975 page 9-13.

⁵⁹⁸ Björn and Gallert, *Before Motown*. Horace Clarence Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), 123–34.

⁵⁹⁹ William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Temple University Press, 1999).

largely excluded from opportunities in radio broadcast development and operations management. As a 1978 *Black Enterprise* article put it, “unfortunately, the history of Black-owned radio, in general, is not an impressive one. It was only in 1949 that Jessie B. Blayton, the country’s first Black accountant, bought WERD-AM, a previously white-owned station in Atlanta, Georgia, making history and Black-owned stations were slow to develop thereafter.”⁶⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Detroit played a prominent role in the national history of Black radio production, which directly informed the civic imaginary of Black culture in the city and the practices of local Black television production thereafter. When WGPR-TV went on air in the 1970s, it borrowed labor practices, on-air talent and staff, program content, and an understanding of urban audiences from the correlative radio station. The broader history of nation television shares production traditions with radio broadcasting, as TV shows often modeled content ideas and production practices on those from parent radio stations.⁶⁰¹ The creation of local Black television has a specific indebtedness to the financial achievements, organization/operation structure, and aesthetics of Black-owned radio in the Detroit market.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Earl G. Graves, “Blacks in Communications,” *Black Enterprise*, July 1978.

⁶⁰¹ Here I do not intend to create a singular causal link between the production of television and radio. Rather, I am trying to say that television content did not spontaneously materialize in popular culture; one of its primary antecedents was radio. Black radio aimed at Black residents informed the financial, organization, and aesthetic structure of emergent Black television.

⁶⁰² The first broadcasting network in Detroit to create programming with Detroit’s Black population specifically in mind was WJLB. The station went on air as WMBC-AM in 1926, an independent radio station in the pre-network era with content aimed for Detroit’s growing Black population. Booth Broadcasting, founded by John Booth in 1939, was an enterprise with goals of expanding the Booth family’s cultural empire—John Booth’s father Ralph Herman Booth was part of the early ownership of the *Detroit News* and a contributing founder of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Although Booth was himself white, he purchased WMBC, changing the call sign to WLJB-AM, and continued to broadcast soul and urban contemporary music for Detroit’s growing Black populous. While featuring Black deejays, few people of color were hired for upper management positions at the station. Booth Broadcasting subsequently proceeded to purchase stations throughout Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio including WMZK-FM, which aired

Upon purchasing WGR, Banks quickly changed the call sign to WGPR: Where God's Presence Radiates, and developed a mixture of talk show programming, popular R&B and gospel content—capitalizing on the surging success of the Motown sound. The station also aired ethnic programs in Spanish, Italian, Greek, Polish, and Arabic.⁶⁰³ The formerly bankrupt station returned approximately one million in annual income under Banks' leadership, primarily through the sale of affordable advertising spots to small local firms and merchants—from insurance companies to fish markets.⁶⁰⁴ While this impressive profit margin validated Bank's economic investment, the 1967 Detroit Rebellion reified his ideological conviction in Black radio as a form of alternative communication that could challenge white hegemony. WGPR-FM provided a space for the all-Black roster of DJs to broadcast perspectives of Black life that countered those in local as well as national reportage without reprisal. With one exception: observing the pervasive degradation of Black citizens in the mainstream press, Banks strictly forbade all of his

foreign language programs aimed at Detroit's sizeable immigrant population. In 1979, WJLB took over WMZK's FM call sign and continues to broadcast an urban contemporary format from it. WCHB-AM, meanwhile, began broadcasting Black radio programming out of neighboring Inkster in 1953. Though likewise geared towards Black listeners, WCHB was owned by Bell Broadcasting Company—one of the earliest radio stations in the US to be built from the ground up by Black owners, Dr. Wendell Cox and Dr. Haley Bell. In addition to R&B hits, the station played gospel music, jazz, talk shows, and a children's show aimed at the city's Black youth. The range of content covered by Bell Broadcasting would subsequently serve as a model for Banks as he pioneered television. Gholz, Carleton, "The Scream and Other Tales: Listening for Detroit Radio History with the Vertical File," in *21st Century Perspectives on Music, Technology, and Culture: Listening Spaces*, ed. R. Purcell and R. Randall (Springer, 2016), 12–32.

⁶⁰³ When WGPR went on air, Banks switched towards a TOP 40 urban music format, aided by the popularity of the Motown Sound. In the 1970s and 1980s, WCHB played primarily disco and soul records. WCHB signed on an FM sister, 105.9 WCHD, in 1960, which later changed its calls to WJZZ and became Detroit's most popular jazz station. 105.9 FM is still co-owned with the AM station by Radio One as WDMK. Bell and Cox were themselves dentists before radio pioneers. Bernie Hayes, *The Death of Black Radio: The Story of America's Black Radio Personalities* (iUniverse, 2005), 89.

⁶⁰⁴ Burrell, Hugh, "The Scene Dance Show," *Michigan Chronicle*, November 30, 2011, sec. D.

employees from making any disparaging remarks about any Black citizens on air. If they disobeyed this command, they would be immediately fired from the employ of WGPR. Or as he put it in his autobiographical writings, “You don’t realize the way the white police department has been treating Black people in their own communities. Women, men and children have been treated as if they were dirt under the feet of these white policemen. I am saying that if you cannot be on the air without talking negatively about Black people, then I will relieve you of your duties and find someone else to take your place.”⁶⁰⁵ This was a practice Banks carried forth to TV management.

Bank’s dual focus on promulgating, and perhaps policing, Black unity and business development aligned him with broader Black Nationalist goals. According to Christina Acham, “one of the key edicts of Black Nationalism, in any of its renderings, is the importance of back self-sufficiency, especially Blacks’ ownership of their own businesses.”⁶⁰⁶ Black capitalist agendas also surged in the 1970s, with government agencies such as Nixon’s OMBE (Office of Minority Business Affairs) working to give Black middle-class professionals greater access to small business loans. The driving belief of Black capitalism was that increasing minority business development would lead to economic vitality in inner city communities and lessen the threat of future civil disturbances. According to Manning Marable, “Black capitalism” connotes “the accumulation of capital by individual Black entrepreneurs; strategies designed to maintain Black control over the Black consumer market in the U.S.; collective programs to improve the

⁶⁰⁵ Sheila T. Gregory, *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (University Press of America, 1999) 138.

⁶⁰⁶ Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and The Struggle for Black Power* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), 61.

economic condition of all Blacks within the overall framework of US capitalism.”⁶⁰⁷

However, even with greater government support for Black business development, Black entrepreneurs still struggled to enter into already underperforming markets. As scholars like Marable and bell hooks have argued, Black capitalism typically worked to increase wealth for the Black middle-class and did little to improve conditions for low-income citizens. It lacked the radical resistance necessary to thwart existing white-controlled economic and political structures that maintain racial oppression—a lesson that WGPR-TV learned while trying to produce Black cultural content.⁶⁰⁸

As Acham further notes, “Black society has traditionally improvised, finding alternative venues for and modes of political and social action; in the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans used television, among other sites for such purposes.”⁶⁰⁹ While Banks had a financial stake in a variety of profitable Black enterprises, he likewise saw media as more than just business—WGPR was a means to promote positive statements about Black civic life, while serving as an agent of Black political and economic exchange. Banks wanted to expand the financial and ideological project of local Black radio towards the establishment of a Black television station, visualizing improved Black channels of communication. As Banks put it, “we are no longer accepting white interpretation of Black civilization.” Instead, through television, “Blacks will be

⁶⁰⁷ Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society* (Pluto Press, 2000), 124.

⁶⁰⁸ According to bell hooks, an essentialist-based Black nationalism is an “inadequate and ineffective response to the urgent demand that there be renewed and viable revolutionary Black liberations struggle that would take radical politicization of Black people, strategies of decolonization, critiques of capitalism, and on-going resistance to racist domination as its central goals. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Routledge, 2014), 33.

⁶⁰⁹ Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 55.

able to portray their civilization in the light of their interpretation of it.”⁶¹⁰ Developing Black media infrastructure in the context of WGPR entailed representing Black civilization through Black interpretations of it, but also challenging systems of power that govern emplaced broadcast networks.

In 1972, WGPR, INC. took advantage of an opening in the local broadcast market to achieve this goal. Prior to the 1970s, there were six television stations operating out of Detroit, three UHF and three VHF, with the signal of CKLW-TV in Windsor, Ontario, also reaching viewers in the city limits.⁶¹¹ While Banks would be the first station owner in Detroit to cater specifically to the city’s Black population, he was not the first to have their sights on Black Detroit as a television consumer base—that was Richard Eaton. In 1964, Eaton owned a collection of radio and television stations in Washington DC, Maryland, Virginia, and Ohio (Cleveland). However, he gained national attention for the development of WOOK-TV in the DC market, a station expressly designed to cater to the city’s Black audience. In September 1962, Eaton reported to *Broadcasting* that he planned a "heavy emphasis on news, both national

⁶¹⁰ William K. Stevens, “Struggling First Black Owned, Operated TV Station Has Found Road Rough in First Four Months,” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, January 1, 1976, sec. D.

⁶¹¹ NBC was the first major Network to purchase a VHF television station (WWJ-TV, channel 4) in the Detroit Market in March of 1948, followed within the year by ABC (WZYZ-TV, Channel 7) and CBS (WJBK-TV, Channel 2). The first UHF station in the city was WTVS (Channel 56), established for the purposes of public broadcasting under the direction of National Educational Television in October 1955. Wayne State University aligned with fourteen other educational bodies in the region to form the Detroit Educational Foundation to oversee WTVS, Channel 56, and produce educational programming, including *CPT*. With transmissions designed to reach viewers beyond Pontiac to the north, Chatham, Ontario to the east, Ann Arbor to the west, and to Monroe, south of Detroit. The next UHF station developed was WKBD-TV (Channel 50), owned and operated by Kaiser Broadcasting Corporation. WKBD specialized in sports broadcasting—airing high school, college, as well as professional sporting events and competitions. Otherwise, their programming consisted of syndicated television shows and old movies. They produced no original content until 1968 when CKLW cut children’s shows and the Bill Kennedy program. WKBD picked up these shows and their popularity increasing station profits significantly. Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 8.

and local, with special attention to Washington's Negroes."⁶¹² Though himself white, Eaton saw profitability in niche market programming for minority listeners and viewers. Eaton's programming goals were not without controversy, as prominent Washington community leaders, including representatives of the Urban League and NAACP, expressed trepidations to FCC Chairman Newton Minow and Commissioner Robert Lee that WOOK-TV would merely perpetuate Black stereotypes. *Jet* magazine derided the station for having come up with "...only a menu of gutbucket music and commercials" and having "...hired no trained newsmen and failed to develop citywide programs aimed at improving conditions. He quickly agreed to sit down with the representatives of prominent Black organizations every month or two "to see if anything on the station was distasteful."⁶¹³ With the ultimate success of WOOK in the DC market, Eaton saw the potential to establish similar stations in other cities with sizeable Black populations, namely Detroit and Baltimore. In 1964, he applied to pick up the license of WJMY-TV (Channel 20), a small UHF station broadcasting out of Allen Park, MI, an industrial suburb southwest of Detroit. However, legal and financial difficulties forestalled Eaton's plans for a WOOK studio development in Michigan.⁶¹⁴ Meanwhile, Aben Johnson, a white real estate developer, purchased WXON-TV (Channel 62) in the northern suburb of Walled Lake, MI in September 1968 and later Channel 20 from Eaton. On December 9, 1972, Johnson—who was not producing on-air

⁶¹² "Equipment Problems Delay WOOK-TV," *Broadcasting*, February 18, 1963, 25-126.

⁶¹³ K.M. Richards, "History of UHF Television," <http://www.uhftelevision.com/articles/wook.html>; Leslie H. Whitten, "D.C. Civil Rights Leaders Protest Negro Oriented TV Station," *The Washington Post*, n.d., sec. A3; "Confidential," *JET*, 1963; "Equipment Problems Delay WOOK-TV," *Broadcasting*, February 2, 1963.

⁶¹⁴ Tests were made periodically of the new transmitting facilities; this resulted in the now-debunked urban legend of WJMY never having transmitted more than its station identification slide.

content at either station at the time—decided to merge his investments towards the production of WXON-TV at Channel 20. He put the UHF dial position for Channel 62 for sale.

Banks and his associates at WGPR-FM radio quickly assembled materials to apply for an FCC license to purchase Channel 62. Banks had long had his sights set on television but failed to find the financial backing to buy a station at full value. He, and his associates at WGPR, did not want to let another opportunity slip by. Vice President of WGPR, INC, Ulysses Boykin elaborated on their struggle to enter the broadcast industry at a 1977 hearing of the Black Congressional Caucus:

The owners [of WXON] were willing to sell this station for \$1 million. We asked the Ford Foundation to loan us the money, but were turned down because of a change in policy. This is no reflection on the Ford Foundation because they loaned \$500,000 to Dr. Haley Bell, whose family owned WCHB in Detroit, to buy station KWK in St. Louis, Mo. But what happened there was that when we came along to ask for a similar loan—those loans were interest free—they had changed policy regarding making loans for media. So then we went to four Detroit banks and asked them to loan us the money. They also turned us down. The owners of TV Channel 20 had a construction permit but had not been able to get on the air. An inquiry was made to the FCC, who told the owners that they had to proceed to put the station on the air or surrender the construction license. It so happened that the owners of channel 20 and 62 got together. Aben Johnson of channel 62 told me that he and Richard Eaton had agreed to join forces and put channel 20 on the air, and he would abandon channel 62. WGPR then filed an application to be awarded channel 62. We promised if we were granted the license we would provide on-the-job training for minorities, produce and program shows related to the problems of the

minorities, and provide shows for syndication to the other TV stations about Black people.⁶¹⁵

The license application emphasizes the public service a Black television station would provide for the city's growing Black community. As James Panagos, the sales directors for WGPR commented in a 1975 interview, "There are no Black programs available in syndication and so we have to create our own; [and] we accept it as a challenge."⁶¹⁶ The station accordingly planned programming, much of which would coordinate with their radio programming that would start at seven AM sign off at eleven PM on weekdays and later on weekends. In line with all the other media discussed in this dissertation, neither Banks nor anyone affiliated with the creation of WGPR-TV had any experience in film or televisual production prior to the first broadcast. Most of the TV employees had a background in radio, if any broadcast training at all. Nevertheless, Banks was confident that WGPR, INC could productively rely on radio broadcasting skills and a collective commitment to the station's vision to secure a successful transition to TV production. After all, the major national television Networks likewise began as radio before creating affiliations within the new medium. However, the logistics of installing and governing the transmission of televisual broadcast signals required a series of further diplomatic maneuvers or challenges to the contemporary power structure of Detroit—all of which were informed by racial politics.

⁶¹⁵ United States Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, Transportation: Subcommittee on Communications. *Television Broadcast Policies Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate, Ninety-fifth Congress, first session ... May 9, 10, and 11, 1978.* Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off. 319.

⁶¹⁶ Douglas E. Caldwell, "First In United States: Black-Owned TV Station in Detroit," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1975.

WGPR history elucidates that the technological processes of media development are deeply imbricated in political and economic procedures that are further intertwined with the complex structures of racialized bureaucracy in both the city and beyond its limits. WGPR, in this way, existed not because it was an anomalous Black-owned station in the US, but because it was connected to broader structures of Black Power located in a city with growing Black cultural and political clout. For instance, in order to meet the necessary steps to receive license approval, Banks reached out to the FCC's first Black commissioner, Benjamin Hooks. In 1973, the FCC stipulated that they would approve the WGPR-TV license as long as WGPR, INC was able to secure written commitments from advertisers to fund operations for one year. Having already asked several area foundations and banks for loans with little success, the Supreme Board of Directors of Dr. Banks' fraternal organization agreed to loan \$385,000 to WGPR, Inc., leaving \$125,000 to be raised. Thereafter, Banks asked two Detroit banks to loan WGPR, Inc., \$55,000 each. According to Boykin:

We were told by the Detroit Bank & Trust that they would give us a letter of credit in the amount of \$55,000 to be used when all of the other money we had raised was spent. We were told by FCC Commissioner Benjamin Hooks that this would not be acceptable. Dr. Banks and I came to Washington and discussed the problem with Commissioner Hooks. He suggested we go to the four auto-mobile manufacturers and ask them to give us advertisement commitment letters pledging to spend \$25,000 each during the first year of the station's operation and \$125,000 was committed. The advertisers included Sears Roebuck, General Motors, Chrysler Motors, Ford Motors, K-Mart, American Motors, and

Stroh's Brewery.⁶¹⁷

Banks' decision to reach out to Hooks, an ally in the struggle for increased Black representation in the broadcast industry, allowed him to pass the first major hurdle to ownership.

Banks then had to negotiate signal reach when designing to build the station downtown. If the station were developed in a central city location, the broadcast signal would be in violation of an international communications treaty with Canada. Banks thus reached out to John Conyers and Charles Diggs, Detroit's two Black congressmen. They agreed to renegotiate the treaty with Canada on WGPR's behalf. Soon after, General Motors halted construction, protesting that the broadcast signal would interfere with one of their buildings. Banks again reached out to his Black political contacts to negotiate city ordinances and allow for a taller tower that would boost an uninterrupted signal. While UHF signals generally had more dialing and transmission difficulties than VHF stations, Banks conjectured that from this broadcasting position, 95% of the TV sets in the Detroit area can receive UHF—making it one of the highest penetrations in the country.⁶¹⁸ Once the signal negotiations were finalized, the International Masons purchased a converted warehouse at 3140-3146 E. Jefferson and the adjoining lot in Rivertown, a neighborhood on the city's near east side.⁶¹⁹ Traditionally the Rivertown neighborhood was reserved for light industrial facilities and warehousing. However, by the mid-1970s, Rivertown was the subject of broad redevelopment plans to expand business growth to neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. In particular, the Young Administration and his business affiliates

⁶¹⁷ Subcommittee on Communications. *Television Broadcast Policies Hearings*, 320.

⁶¹⁸ Caldwell, "First in United States."

⁶¹⁹ A 125-foot microwave tower was constructed on site and a second 1,000 was leased in the northern suburb of Royal Oak, MI at the corner of 8 Mile Road and Inkster Road to boost signal reach to outlying suburbs. Subcommittee on Communications. *Television Broadcast Policies Hearings*, 320.

devised plans to build a cluster of casinos along Detroit's River Front, east of downtown in Rivertown. These casinos never materialized, but their initial plans allowed for the construction of the microwave tower increasing televisual signal reach. Locating the new station in Rivertown, further contributed to the atmosphere of positive change and economic revitalization manifest in Detroit at that time under a new Black city government with sights on Black business expansion.⁶²⁰

WGPR-TV was at its most basic level a collection of signals transmitting information to residents through technological processes. However, as a Black station WGPR could also collaborate with other emergent Black businesses in the city to promulgate a re-imagining of post-Rebellion city space, designed by Black cultural and political figures. Detroit in the 1970s had a growing Black political base but was still struggling to gain economic control in local space. As a *Detroit Free Press* article put it; "the preponderance of white owned businesses in Black neighborhoods leaves Blacks with little control over prices of goods, the conditions of neighborhood stores, who is hired, where profits are reinvested or whether money spent in their community remains there."⁶²¹ CPT and Black Star Productions shared Bank's dream for Black-controlled systems of representation. However, WGPR stood apart because it possessed the capitalist foundation to maintain and sustain a profitable Black communications network at a

⁶²⁰ Young continued to propose the legalization of gambling and Casino Development in Detroit during his over twenty-year tenure as mayor. This struggle was continued by his successor, Mayor Dennis Archer, hoping the casinos would serve as a form of job creation for the city. A referendum was passed in 1994, approving three casino developments. However, none of these were Black-owned-or-operated. The MGM Grand Casino, GreekTown Casino, and Motor City Casino opened in 2000. See: William Neill, *Urban Planning and Cultural Identity* (Routledge, 2003), 144. The Young Administration had a litany of investments in Detroit economic revitalizations and saw the construction of edifices such as The Renaissance Center, the Millender Center Apartments, The Harbortown Complex, and 150 West Jefferson Building. Some of Young's development plans are discussed in: Widick, *Detroit*, 236–58.

⁶²¹ McGehee and Watson, *Blacks in Detroit*, 43.

precise moment when Detroit was shifting to a Black-controlled system of governance.

Producing Black Media Content

The licensure of the first Black American television station engendered a good deal of excitement. Dr. Banks was invited to dine at the White House as a guest of President Nixon, granted a key to the city of Detroit, and the budding station was covered widely in the press, from *JET Magazine* to the *New York Times*. Many expressed hope that the TV station's success would catalyze the development of minority stations in other US cities with diverse populations. However, the reality of constructing, financing, and programming an independent television station, especially with a Black staff that had previously been excluded from the television industry, soon sunk in. A succession of conflicts arose from the station's technical inexperience and the financial as well as political constraints of building a studio from the ground up in a city that historically excluded Black citizens from access to the controls of media infrastructure. I.

According to Station Manager, Tenecia Gregory, "The first thing we learned was we didn't know a heck of a lot about what you need for a TV station... We did not realize how expensive television was. Every business has situations to overcome, but Black business has more."⁶²² Upon the station's development, *The Detroit Free Press*, reported:

Black capitalism in Detroit has had a long and unsuccessful history. There were more Black-owned businesses in downtown Detroit in the 1870s than now. According to Walter McMurtry, as many as 90 percent of all new businesses fold in their first five

⁶²² Howard Rontal, "Channel 62 a Year Later: Still Learning to Walk Before It Can Run," *The Detroit Free Press*, August 22, 1976. Banks did in fact hire a white salesman.

years. Plagued by under capitalization, lack of management experience, locations in deteriorating neighborhoods, unpredictable business cycles, and bank officials, who knowing all this grant costly loans only under the tightest conditions, the success ratio for new Black businesses is even lower.⁶²³

For WGPR, in particular, building costs far exceeded initial estimates. Projections for equipment, programming, and staff expenditures were far too high for their limited financial plan. Beyond the initial investors, Banks struggled to find additional economic support for the station. When asked in 1978, what advice he would offer other Black citizens interested in Black media ownership Bank joked: “get a white salesman, because white industry as a whole, isn’t going to buy from a Black. When the orders come in, all the other problems will be solved.”⁶²⁴

Another significant concern arose during the hiring process. While WGPR was hesitant to hire white technicians over Black ones, they could rarely find Black candidates who had experience with televisual equipment—a problem formerly encountered during the development of *CPT*. The very few Black citizens working in the television industry were not sufficiently convinced of WGPR’s viability to risk their stable employment elsewhere. As such, Banks agreed to hire a few white employees with the expressed contractual stipulation that they train Black employees in media production, setting up an internship program to facilitate this process. It was hoped that newly trained minority technicians would take staff positions as new shows developed. In many cases, Black candidates without previous experience took jobs with WGPR as technicians eager to be part of the promising new station, and simply did their best to learn the trade on-site. Ken Bryant Jr., the director of the first *Big City News* telecast, and current CBS

⁶²³ Rontal, “Channel 62 a Year Later.”

⁶²⁴ Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 92.

62/CW50 Producer, was once such employee that fell into his job. As he tells it: “They hired me at WGPR to be a cameraman, but when the day came for them to go on the air, they had not hired a director. Someone to direct the ‘Big City Newscast.’ And I didn’t have any directing experience. I watched Joe Spencer direct the newscast and I said wow I think I can do that...I actually directed the very first broadcast they put on the air.”⁶²⁵

In a *Legacy of Dreams*, Banks recalls that he also grew supremely untrusting of the motives of some core staff members and was concerned they were using hiring for kickbacks. He thus, decided to hire his daughter Dr. Tenecia Gregory as station manager. While Gregory, a teacher, had absolutely no experience in broadcasting, he innately trusted her managerial instincts. Under her leadership, station personnel were cut from 75 to 48 employees, reducing payroll by \$563,000 (from \$884,000 to \$312,000).⁶²⁶

Generally, Bank’s dream of Black media infrastructure was realized through networked exchanges with other Black leaders who held positions of cultural, political, and economic capital. The challenges posed to Black media infrastructure was undergirded by the broader economic landscape that encouraged small advancements in Black capitalism, while larger systems of exclusions—like inadequate job training for Black citizens and unequal educational access—prevailed to hinder whole-scale Black advancement. WGPR-TV was ultimately able to negotiate a position within Detroit’s media landscape, putting intrapersonal connections, funding sources, political policies, and employment strategies in place to aid in further Black media

⁶²⁵ Carol Cain, “WGPR-TV62’s Imprint Lives On,” accessed December 5, 2016, <http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2014/02/07/wgpr-tv62s-imprint-lives-on/>.

⁶²⁶ Matthews, C.L. “Detroit’s WGPR: Struggling Start for Black TV,” *Black Enterprise*, November 1976, 76. For more on the financials of the station see: Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV”; Gregory, *A Legacy of Dreams*. Jean Williams, “WGPR-TV Revenue From Labels Rising,” *Billboard*, December 4, 1976.

developments. The small crew of dedicated individuals at WGPR-TV would likewise help get the station off the ground and then it was assumed that as profits rolled in, the training programs and payroll lists would expand [Figure 4.4]. However, with these structures in place, the next big question for WGPR became, “what programs would be both profitable for the station and enriching for the city viewers?”

Programming Local Black Television

While signal reach and station promotion bolstered the potential for WGPR to effectively reach an audience, programming functioned as a visible mechanism of Black media infrastructure—communicating ideological objectives of content producers and bringing positive representations of Detroit life to air. As part of the FCC application documents, WGPR-FM programming director George E. White and sales director James Panagos consulted with community leaders through personal interviews and questionnaires to ascertain community needs and problems in the Detroit Black community in an effort to provide strategic programming to target local concerns [Figure 4.5]. They also conducted a general audience survey using a sample of 233 selected citizens at random from the Detroit telephone directory. Through these efforts they identified nine major problems they hoped to tackle with their programming lineup. The interrelated problems of “drugs and crime” was the number one, far the most commonly cited urban trouble in the report. Others included:

2. Lack of communication between races
3. Unemployment
4. Inadequate housing
5. Poor city services
6. Better police protection/end to police brutality
7. Improved Black business development
8. Poor schools

9. Increased Black pride⁶²⁷

Speaking to *Billboard* in 1976, White notes, “Detroit’s population is approximately 52% Black or about 600,000. Although we recognize that our audience wants show business type of programming as evidenced through our mail polls, we feel that its also necessary to be able to offer other types of Black programming...We are faced with a dilemma because there just doesn’t seem to be any other Black programming around. We are in the process of creating our own.”⁶²⁸ Thus, WGPR-TV began to the process of designing both informative and entertaining community programs.

WGPR-TV was clearly influenced by existing Black programming on Detroit’s WDIV-TV Channel 56 like *CPT* and nationally broadcast programs like *Black Journal*, *Soul Train*, and *Soul!*. They hoped to produce similar fare to inform and entertain a local populace.⁶²⁹ In addition to four hours of televised church service each Sunday and regular news broadcasts, planned programs included *Crime Alert*: a fifteen-minute daily announcements of unsolved crimes in the Detroit area, asking for citizen help with apprehending suspects; *Never too Late*: a thirty-minute Adult education instruction program; *Community Calendar*: a fifteen-minute log of upcoming city events; *Job Mart*; a weekly assessment of job opportunities in the Detroit area; *Speaking of Sports*: a sports re-cap hour hosted by Bill Humphries; and *Drama Time*: a show in which local performers act out significant moments in Black history. A more expansive program roster is included in [Figure 4.5].

⁶²⁷ Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 51

⁶²⁸ Williams, “General News: WGPR-TV Revenue From Labels Rising,” 27.

⁶²⁹ While Black public access shows were produced in urban centers in the 1960s and 1970s, they typically appealed to educated, middle-class, Black viewers. Meanwhile, entertainment or variety shows like *Soul Train* courted a wider range of viewers and were more successful nationally and locally. Heitner, *Black Power TV*; Christopher P. Lehman, *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television* (McFarland, 2008).

However, the logistics of producing and financing content proved more difficult than anticipated. Producers worked diligently to assemble Black on-air staff and pledged that at least sixty percent of its programming roster would be conceived and produced by local Black talent. Ideally programming would increase to ninety percent local Black productions, with at least two thirty-minute newscasts per day. However, these plans were too big; too unrealistic. The town's top TV stations with major network affiliations couldn't even afford to co-produce ninety percent of their programming. Thus, WGPR-TV was forced to prioritize. As the first WGPR-TV airdate approached, only *Detroit Crime Alert*, *Big City News*, and *Speaking of Sports* were broadcast ready. The rest of these programs were put on hold for the following month or until the station had a solid foundation with the current lineup. In the meantime, the station was constrained to broadcasting mostly B-movies, syndicated programs, and cartoons. Initially WGPR anticipated a daily broadcast schedule beginning at 7:00 AM and signing off at Midnight. However, delays in studio construction caused the station to push back the start time to 9:30 AM and the end time following the evening film (between 10:00 PM and midnight), with the premiere week interim programming set from noon to 10:30 PM.

The first week schedule included:

12:00 PM: *Big City News*: Amyre Porter and Pal D'Que Reporting
12:30 PM Galaxy Theatre Film
3:00 PM *Felix the Kat*
4:00 PM *Abbot and Costello*
4:30 PM *Get Smart*
5:00 PM *I Spy*
6:00 PM *Rawhide*
7:00 PM *Speaking of Sports*
7:30 PM *Big City News*: Jerry Blocker and Doug Morrison Reporting
8:00 PM Movie

With a preliminary schedule set, at noon on September 29, 1975 Channel 62 went live with a brief message from President Ford congratulating WGPR on this “auspicious and historic occasion of having a first Black TV station:

Congratulations to WGPR-TV and the men and women who helped to make it a reality. I’m particularly proud that this Black-owned television station in the continental US will be in my home state of Michigan. I’m also proud to join in this salute to the men and women who will be associated with WGPR in serving their community. I commend WGPR for the innovative programming it has planned and for its efforts to become actively involved in community affairs. Most importantly, WGPR will serve as a symbol of successful Black enterprise. This is truly a landmark, not only for the broadcasting industry, but for American society. I want to see more of this kind of progress. I wish the management and staff of WGPR success in this exciting new venture. I only wish I could be with you in person as WGPR goes on the air.⁶³⁰

President Ford’s ringing endorsement was followed by a recorded message from Michigan Senator Robert Griffin. Yet, before the first news broadcast went to air, the station hit technical difficulties and the picture cut to Black. After moments of panic, WGPR-TV was back on. However, this initial glitch set the tone for the rest of the day. For instance, News Director Jerry Blocker went on air later than anticipated and was about thirty seconds into the newscast before the sound cut out. As Vice President of Programming, George White, put it: “Somebody could have pulled the plug as a joke or it could have been an equipment problem... All I know is there was near panic in the studio. There was no sound for about 40 seconds, which seemed like

⁶³⁰ Gerald R. Ford, “Videotaped Message to WGPR,” July 9, 1975, President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies, Box 11, Gerald R. Ford Presidential library, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252397.pdf>.

forever, since the whole world was watching.”⁶³¹ Other technical glitches pervaded; picture distortion, blackouts, uneven sound, and advertisements that did not play all the way through. Blocker recalls: “It was a nightmare. I never want to go through that again in my life.”⁶³²

The station gained technical competency moving forward. However, the initial setbacks set a tone for the remainder of WGPR-TV’s existence; despite high hopes for the successful expansion of Black media infrastructure, the station continually struggled to maintain a presence in Detroit’s televisual market. The primary financial inhibitor to program expansion was an inability to sell advertisement spots—as previously stated, the majority of white-owned businesses in Detroit were not financially motivated to fund Black media. Unlike *CPT*, which survived due to its affiliation with the Public Broadcasting network [and thus the hour program didn’t need to sell advertising spots], WGPR had to rely on Black capitalist structures in the city—a risky venture in a time of intensifying economic instability and white corporate disinvestment in urban space. Within a month of the initial broadcast, only a few of the projected community access shows made it into production: *Teen Profile*, *Something Special* with host Jim Ingram, *Detroit Crime Alert*, *The Scene*, *Rolling Funk* and *Morning Party*. Due to unforeseen financial strain, major cutbacks and staff reorganization followed. By mid-November, the twelve-person news team was sliced in half and the noon *Big City News* broadcast cut. By August 1976, the remaining team was cut to four people.

Many employees, including anchors Amyre Makupson and Jerry Blocker, had left steady-paying jobs to join WGPR-TV, believing that being a part of the station’s emergence

⁶³¹ Barbara Reynolds, “First Black Station Is On the Air,” *The Chicago Tribune*, March 18, 1976.

⁶³² Larry Gabriel, “Mixed Signals: WGPR, the Nation’s First Black-Owned-and-Operated TV Station Never Fulfilled Its Potential,” *The Detroit Free Press*, November 27, 1994, Sunday Edition.

meant supporting an important moment in Black history. Blocker, in particular, was the only member of the station to have previous experience in television, giving up his anchor job at Channel 4, WXYZ-TV Detroit. Yet, the optimism of what WGPR could accomplish deteriorated along with its dreams of original programming. Employees and station supporters were devastated. As Amyre Makupson (nee Porter) recalls: “Jerry [Blocker] called and asked me to come back in. When he said that’s it, the [midday] news is over,’ he all but had tears in his eyes he felt so badly that he had to lay us all off.”⁶³³ The evening news would forge forward, with reporter Susan Fowler hired to deliver Black perspectives on changes in Detroit through the 1980s. Meanwhile, anchor Makupson joined *Morning Party* as a volunteer host; hoping the gig would bolster her experience in television and lead to future opportunities. This was relatively standard practice for the new station; many other former employees volunteered to work unpaid overtime or agreed to forgo paychecks to ensure the station could afford to stay on air. By spring 1976, Programming VP George White, was forced to cut his own show, *Morning Party*. Meanwhile, Makupson began to host another talk show entitled, *Porter House*, in 1976; it lasted one month and then Makupson left WGPR for an anchor position at Channel 50. Blocker also left the station within the year, deciding instead to work on Michigan Secretary of State, Richard Austin’s Senate campaign.

⁶³³ *American Black Journal*, the current incarnation of *CPT*, included interviews with WGPR staff to promote the WGPR exhibit at the Charles H. Wright museum and the William V. Banks Museum opening at the WGPR-FM building in Rivertown (the original location of the station). Amyre Makupson appeared on *ABJ* to promote the museum in January 2018. “Williams V. Banks Broadcast Museum & Media Center / Family Health Fair and Taste Fest,” *American Black Journal* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Public Television DPTV, January 7, 2018), <http://www.dptv.org/blogs/american-Black-journal/1718-william-v-banks-broadcast-museum-media-center-family-health-fair-and-taste-fest/>.

Another major setback to the station's goals was the collapse of the projected series, *A Time to Live*. For the most part, WGPR-TV filled its original programming roster with non-fiction fare; talk shows, public forums, news reports, and dance media. Non-fiction or unscripted programs—what I'm categorizing as part of the city's documentary milieu—fashioned a more authentic representation of the Black city and fostered a dialog with Detroit's Black spectators; but more importantly, such programs were very cheap to produce. However, the station really hoped that once they began to turn a profit, they could shift their programming roster to include scripted series featuring Black characters. The station quickly began developing *A Time to Live*, which was set to debut as the first Black soap opera to air in the US. The daily series was hyped in initial press reports celebrating the nation's first Black network and had potential to be picked up in other regions with significant Black populations. Accordingly, WGPR sunk a good sum of their budget in the project. Set in a Detroit bar, the show was to focus on "Detroit urban Blacks" and feature local Black actors. Regular characters were to include a former prostitute, a corrupt judge, and the female owner of a professional basketball team.⁶³⁴ Preliminary rehearsals were held, yet an irreparable contractual dispute between two of the show writers ended the soap's development. The cancellation, along with on-going budgetary concerns, curtailed WGPR-TV's dream of expanding Black media infrastructure beyond the local and moving the Black spatial imaginary beyond documentary realms to occupy the space of fiction as well.⁶³⁵

As the years progressed, new content projects came and went. *Rolling Funk* and *Candy Store* were cut by 1977. Yet, 1977 saw the debut of *Digg's Washington Forum*, a report on events in national and state politics from Michigan Senator Charles' Diggs (D), the first Black

⁶³⁴ "Black TV," *Newsweek*, September 29, 1975.

⁶³⁵ The arrival of cable television would carry through on a goal envisioned by WGPR. For more on this history, see: Smith-Shomade, *Pimpin' Ain't Easy*.

politician elected to Congress from the state—and a figure who helped enable the station’s development through political advocacy. *The Scene* remained the station’s most popular fare, airing until 1987, when it was cancelled and replaced by *Contempo* in 1988 and *The New Dance Show* hosted by RJ Watkins in 1990. *Morning Report*, a morning-news, talk and variety program with regular segments on healthy eating and entertainment events in the city, filled the slot left vacant by *Morning Party*. Sports Programming—broadcasts of college basketball games, in-studio wrestling matches, and reports from horse races—increased. The dream of 24-hour programming was ultimately accomplished—making WGPR the first station in the Detroit Market to remain continuously on air. However, this goal was fulfilled by the “All Night Movie” block, in which a selection of b-films from the 1930s through the 1950s, were played during late night hours. A film staple from 1978 onwards, was the “Auction Movie” slot on Thursdays, 8:00 PM to 10:00 PM (later also airing Saturday mornings, Saturday afternoons and Monday nights). Hosted by Fred Merle, the featured film of the week was intercut with phone-in bids for products ranging from jewelry to appliances and furniture.

Johnson, who discusses the preliminary program line-up in her 1979 Master’s thesis, concludes that; “WGPR-TV fell victim to its own enthusiasm and inexperience. It’s unreal programming goals set up levels of expectations within its audience that could only mean disillusionment with anything less.”⁶³⁶ The station promised “innovative programming produced by Blacks for Blacks. It delivered old movies, westerns, and cartoons now in syndication from

⁶³⁶ Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 98. Johnson’s dissertation is an invaluable resource on station programs that are now lost. With a 50-year gap between her thesis and my own dissertation, I am able to pick up the traces where she left off and add a theoretical model that considers not only the station, but also its role in Detroit’s urban change.

decades gone by.”⁶³⁷ In this way, the station primarily remained afloat through creative strategies to fill airtime and infrastructural connections to other forms of minority power. When unable to sell advertising spots to businesses, the station instead sold timeslots to Black ministers and religious broadcasters affiliated with the radio station. Airtime on Saturday nights was reserved for Ethnic programming, from the *Arab Voice of Detroit* to the *Romanian Variety Hour*.⁶³⁸ Largely filmed outside of the WGPR-TV studios and financed by the host communities, these programs courted listeners of cognate programs on WGPR-FM and often found a larger viewership than in-station projects. Many significant figures in Black popular culture also volunteered their time to provide their station with an interview or performance, including Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, BB King, James Brown, Billy Dee Williams, and Mohammad Ali.

Among the syndicated programs aired, *Rawhide*, which featured Raymond St. Jacques in 1965 (1959-1965), *I Spy* starring Bill Cosby (1965-1968), and the PBS family drama *Up and Coming* (1979-1981), were among the few network shows, which station executives felt included acceptable Black representation. Meanwhile, other nationally broadcast Black public affairs programs were picked up: James Brown’s *Future Shock* (1976-1979), *Black Forum* (1989-2003), *For You, Black Woman* (1978-1979), and *Today’s Black Woman* (1982). WGPR likewise received co-producing credit on Cleveland’s WEWS-TV show *Black on Black* (1976)—which it aired weekly. In this way, despite programming concessions, WGPR-TV still worked to curate a Black spatial imaginary. By 1979, WGPR-TV used one of its weekly movie slots to air the *Black Film Showcase*. Hosted by Karen Samuels, who would also serve as station News Director, the *Showcase* included films featuring Black casts and Black filmmakers, providing biographical

⁶³⁷ Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 99.

⁶³⁸ *Yugoslav Variety* and *The Balkan Show* were other such productions. Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 66.

information on the history of Black media talent and including guest discussants when possible. Mostly race films from the 1930s and 1940s, screened films included *Song of Freedom* (1936, UK feature starring Paul Robeson), *Lying Lips* (dir. Oscar Micheaux, 1939), *Ten Minutes to Live* (dir. Oscar Micheaux, 1932), *Blood of Jesus* (dir. Spencer Williams, 1941), *Sepia Cinderella* (dir. Arthur H. Leonard, race musical, 1947), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927, silent), and *Boarding House Blues* (dir. Josh Binney).⁶³⁹ Samuels now serves as the director of the William V. Banks Broadcast museum and the primary custodian of WGPR-TV history. While WGPR-TV would be strongly guided by a paternalistic figure, Banks, it differs from other Black media projects in this dissertation in granting Black women an active voice in development decisions. *CPT* would later have a female producer (Juanita Anderson, 1981-1984), but a significant portion of WGPR-TV's on-air talent and behind-the-scenes positions went to local Black women.

While most programming goals were not met, and only a small percentage of broadcast tapes saved for posterity, records of programming and histories of station achievements—significantly assembled by the William V. Banks broadcast museum—evidence the Black spatial imaginary of Detroit and efforts of local citizens to proffer counter-images of resilience, resourcefulness, and style. Local programs functioned as the soft power of media infrastructure, negotiating Black discourses amidst processes of socio-spatial change mostly out of the control of the local polity. WGPR-TV's lack of high production values and its range of low budget

⁶³⁹ Other screened titles as identified in weekly "TV Listings" from 1976 *Detroit Free Press* issues include: *Scar of Shame* (dir. Frank Perugini (white) Silent Race film, 1927), *Dirty Gertie from Harlem U.S.A* (dir. Spencer William, 1946), *Go Down Death* (dir. Spencer Williams, 1944), *Killer Diller*, (dir. Josh Binney, feat. The Clark Brothers (tap dancers), Nat King Cole, Moms Mabley, Dusty Fletcher, Butterfly McQueen, the Andy Kirk Orchestra and the Four Congaroos, 1948).

content may not be a detriment to station history. On the contrary, the station's continuous display of Black citizens engaging in everyday activities without sensation, produced primarily by local citizens operating within broader structures of emergent Black municipal power, re-constituted the imaginary of a Black Detroit. Pamela Wilson utilizes John Fiske's concepts of "localizing" and "imperializing" powers to analyze Native American televisual activism. For Wilson, Media represents localized interests, using the powerful channels of information dissemination available through the press, radio, and television to gain the sympathy of a wide national audience.⁶⁴⁰ Localizing interests here are the "relatively weak, bottom-up efforts by local groups, such as Native American tribes and local communities, to control their immediate everyday social conditions rather than to dominate other social formations."⁶⁴¹ WGPR-TV likewise represents the localizing struggles of Black producers to shift the balance of representational and economic power in Detroit. Yet their efforts could not overcome their financial limitations and compete on the same level as pre-existing media infrastructure in the city with government subsidized funding or major corporate backing.

In 1977, Ulysses Boykin, Vice President of Civic Affairs and Public Relations at WGPR-TV, spoke to the Senate Subcommittee on Communications at the FCC Minority Ownership Conference, making suggestions on how the fledgling station and other potential stations owned by minorities likewise could make headway in the media industry.⁶⁴² He

⁶⁴⁰ Pamela Wilson, "All Eyes on Montana: Television Audiences, Social Activism, and Native American Cultural Politics in the 1950s." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 16 (3-4), pp. 325-356.

⁶⁴¹ Wilson, "All Eyes on Montana," 343.

⁶⁴² Before beginning work at WGPR-TV, Boykin was a contributing columnist to *The Michigan Chronicle* and was an editor and part owner of the *Detroit Tribune*, the largest African American newspaper in Detroit during the interwar period. Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2001), 199.

advocated the creation of an agency similar to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting to help secure venture capital to provide some production funding for minority licenses.⁶⁴³ Other core suggestions were to investigate rating services practices and their impact on minority media products and to offer incentives to investors, including cable television, to promote minority ownership in broadcasting. Boykin further asserted that: “We are now planning to ask 100 of the leading firms to commit themselves to spend \$50,000 each in advertising for the next 12 months. This would help us keep our pledge to produce saleable shows and provide trained, experienced minority workers for the broadcast industry. This is not charity. We provide viewers and they can receive benefits.”⁶⁴⁴

By 1979, WGPR-TV was operating with a slim profit margin. However, Boykin’s efforts to expand support for local minority broadcasting never came to fruition. The station still continuously struggled to produce Black content and train new Black broadcasters in the industry, drawing from the staple sources of income—religious programming and syndicated series—to finance the enterprise. Nevertheless, they constantly aimed for increased Black entertainment and to improve local representational politics. I, thus, turn to four programming directions that were integral to WGPR’s vision for socio-cultural progress in Black Detroit, in order to more clearly elucidate the ways in which station negotiated entertainment, an interest in social welfare, and Black business development, with the few resources they had at their disposal. I will specifically consider *Big City News* as an example of the station’s public service content; *The Arab Voice of Detroit* and other programs that forged connections with Detroit’s other ethnic populations; *Gospel Time* and the station’s deep investment in religious

⁶⁴³ Benjamin Hooks, “Black Broadcasters Woes.” *The Skanner*, Portland, Or, 01 Sep 1977: 2.

⁶⁴⁴ Hooks, “Black Broadcasters Woes”

programming, and the station's most popular series *The Scene* and other participatory dance shows that shift the popular image of Black Detroit for a local audience. In this way, WGPR ran counter to other stations, which almost exclusively engaged with Black citizens during crime reportage segments. WGPR-TV instead brought minority citizens to the forefront, highlighting Detroit life from the church, to the schools, to the dance floor.

Big City News and Re-Envisioning Ethical Reportage

While budgetary concerns curtailed WGPR-TV's plans for expansive public service and educational programming, the station never ceased to champion Black perspectives of city life and civic events, especially those ignored by other network programs. Programs like *Teen Profile* gave local area high school students a platform to produce, direct, and host content of particular concern for Detroit's youth [Figure 4.6]. *Detroit Crime Alert* provided breaking stories that affect Detroit's neighborhoods as reports developed. Other pitched shows that did not make it air, such as *Detroit Leadership*, *Senior Citizen Forum*, *Never too Late*, and *Rap Line*, also planned to broadcast community engagement news, educational content, and public service information. However, *Big City News* was WGPR-TV's primary means to broadcast informational content to Detroit Black audiences [Figure 4.7].

Political communications specialist Matthew R. Kerbel describes news features airing on Detroit's local network affiliates as an "endless assortment" of fire, murder, assault, shootouts, and accident stories.⁶⁴⁵ While Kerbel speaks to coverage in the 1990s, these reporting habits were set during the Rebellion era and only worsened as the 20th century progressed. Local newscasts proliferated the moral panic over inner city criminality, violence, and the destruction

⁶⁴⁵ Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses*, 2009, xvi.

of urban space—often overemphasizing Black involvement in criminal activity, from drug use to gun fatalities.⁶⁴⁶ Unfortunately, few records of *Big City News* broadcasts survive. Yet, recent accounts by station personnel and contemporaneous press coverage of the program all confirm that the main objective of *Big City News* was to combat the damaging imaginary of Black Detroit promulgated through sensationalized news aired on other stations. *Big City News* aimed instead to bring their audience informative stories that either champion the accomplishments of Black citizens and civic organizations or expose forces that negatively impacted Black urban development. Street Reporter Terry Jones claims “Some stations think only Black criminals, athletes, or entertainers are newsworthy, but we [Black citizens] also solve crimes, think and run cities. We [*Big City News*] highlight our good contributions.”⁶⁴⁷ Or as Jerry Blocker, News Director, told the *Ann Arbor Sun* in 1975 “We’ve been trying to show a lot of the things that are actually happening in the city where people are trying to do something either in their community or in the city as a whole...The “Big City News” will demonstrate that and not just in a “goody-two-shoes way.”⁶⁴⁸

This is not to say that WGPR-TV did not cover breaking news or major crimes stories at all—just as the eighth television station in Metro Detroit, to compete meant to offer something different. The station could not afford to cover the breadth of content offered by other stations, especially those with major network backing. Yet it was precisely because WGPR-TV did not perceive themselves as accountable to suburban viewers that they reworked how “Detroit” and

⁶⁴⁶ Jeremy H. Lipschultz and Michael L. Hilt, *Crime and Local Television News: Dramatic, Breaking, and Live From the Scene* (Routledge, 2014).

⁶⁴⁷ Bill Adler, TV 62 Great New View, *Ann Arbor Sun* October 15, 1975, 9-13. “Nation’s First Black-Owned TV Station Hopes It Offers an Alternative” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 24, 1976, B4. Jones hosted a program called “Women’s World” for WGPR-FM. At the time she was a graduate of Wayne State University.

⁶⁴⁸ Bill Adler, “TV 62: Great New View.”

its majority Black citizenry were framed for television. As Blocker continues, “People can be nasty if they want to be. And if you don’t look as if you belong, they don’t have to relate to you or your TV camera. I wouldn’t think that we’ll have that kind of problem. We’ll be able to relate just because of the Black thing itself. If we can’t do that, then we’re not doing the job.”⁶⁴⁹

Essentially, Blocker contends that WGPR-TV would be able to create a bond with citizens in front of camera and capture aspects of newsworthy events that would otherwise be inaccessible to white news crews. Indeed, it was the mission of WGPR-TV to break through the barrier of skepticism that Black citizens still held towards television news in the post-Rebellion era.

Thus, *Big City News* assembled a cast and crew of Black journalists to expand Black broadcast coverage. Evening anchorman and News Director Jerry Blocker was the first Black newsperson in the state of Michigan, hired by WWJ-TV Channel 4 as a weekend anchor following the 1967 Rebellion. He brought Anna Booker with him to the production team at WGPR. Blocker’s co-host on the evening edition of *Big City News*, Doug Morison, got his start with WGPR-FM and for WEXL-AM, an Urban Gospel station broadcasting to the Detroit area out of Royal Oak, Michigan. Investigative reporter Richard Morris was a radio reporter at WJLB-FM. The morning edition of the news featured anchors Makupson and Pal D’Que, the first all-women news team in the state. D’Que was a recent graduate of Wayne State with a dance background. While Makupson was locally born, she held positions at WSM-TV in Nashville and WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. before returning to Detroit in 1975 to take a position as director of public relations for Head Start, the Michigan Health Maintenance

⁶⁴⁹ Bill Adler, “TV 62: Great New View.”

Organization. She was soon thereafter hired by WGPR-TV.⁶⁵⁰ According to the Ann Arbor Sun “Meteorologist Sharon Crews personifies the type of no-waste energy necessary at a newborn TV station, and is a former professional model and a graduate of North Carolina.”⁶⁵¹

Generally, anchors including Porter, Darryl Wood, Sharon Crews, Susan Fowler, and subsequent news Director Karen Hudson Samuels, made a mark at WGPR-TV and subsequently continued to make significant contributions to the local broadcast industry.

Nevertheless, when *Big City News* first hit the air, they did so with big goals, and as was the pattern at WGPR, even bigger technical difficulties. Most setbacks were specifically due to the staff’s unfamiliarity with the station’s new technology. As previously mentioned, one major difference that set WGPR-TV apart from all other Detroit stations, was the use of videotape instead of film. The News crew also was equipped with portable mini-cameras. While these cameras were not capable of live broadcast, they enabled much quicker editing and transmission times than film (which required processing). In a city where lingering fears of urban rioting and police brutality were pervasive, having the technological capacity to transmit breaking information to citizens expediently was a major asset. However, first day on air, the tape

⁶⁵⁰ “Amyre Ann Makupson | The HistoryMakers,” accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/amyre-ann-makupson-40>. In 1977, Porter, married name Makupson, joined WKBD-TV as a news anchor and public affairs director. At WKBD-TV, she hosted “Morning Break,” the station’s daily talk show, and produced and anchored a five-minute newsbreak. In 1985, Makupson co-anchored WKBD’s “Ten O’clock News” and anchored “Eyewitness News at 11” on WKBD’s sister station, WWJ-TV.

⁶⁵¹ While the majority of technical staff lacked experience with visual media, senior Camera operator Paul Jeffries had previous experience with Allied Films and Wilding Pictures from Chicago. *Big City News* also gave starts to anchors like Darryl Wood who would continue to work in the local broadcast industry. Wood is now an award-winning broadcaster with experience in public and commercial television and radio as a talk host, producer, and announcer. He is the host and producer of “Run to Win: The Darryl Wood Show” heard on Salem Communication’s Detroit radio station WLQV.

cartridge machine jammed. "With no backup and no way to fix it fast, we were in deep trouble," Said Blocker. As he pointed out to viewers Monday, getting accustomed to new equipment is one of the hazards of putting a new station on the air. The problem was solved by Tuesday morning but, as Blocker reports, "we decided not to do the noon news to give ourselves more time to get the bugs out for our later newscast."⁶⁵²

This also points to the enduring flexibility of WGPR to modify programming in response to both shifting news patterns and technological constraints. Like the afrofuturist projects described previously, WGPR-TV used the limited technology available in resourceful and creative ways to produce new images of Black Detroit. Despite a less than ideal start and substandard working conditions, WGPR-TV provided in depth coverage on topics *Big City News* felt the inner city audience needed to see and hear. This included the proposed closing of schools in the city, the rising anti-Black mood in congress, the enduring legacy of redlining, community improvement projects, fraud schemes aimed at local Black residents, and noteworthy violations of civil and women's rights.⁶⁵³ As *The Ann Arbor Sun* remarked, WGPR-TV succeeded because despite technological or economic limitations, the station "communicates itself, through its on-air staff, with a warmth, a naturalness, one rarely finds on TV and which, in our opinion, transcends the momentary distraction of equipment."⁶⁵⁴

Ideally, *Big City News* was to coordinate with other community service programs to acquaint Detroit citizens with response procedures if they encounter crime and promote community policing and crime intervention. For example, a proposed show, *The Heartbreakers*,

⁶⁵² Bill Adler, "TV 62: Great New View."

⁶⁵³ Mike Duffy, "Viewers Luck Out with No-Frills News," *The Detroit News*, March 10, 1982, Wednesday edition; Barbara Reynolds, "First Black Station Is On the Air."

⁶⁵⁴ Bill Adler, "TV 62: Great New View," 61.

would narrate a true crime scenario in the city, filmed in the specific location where the crime was committed. Police officers, witnesses, and neighborhood residents would participate in the narrative unpacking of the event, detailing the circumstances that led to the crime and proposing resolutions to avoid future crimes. In this way, WGPR-TV would not merely report criminal activities, but work to understand and visualize both the underlying causes of criminal activity and effects crime has on lived experience. Such programs—those produced as well as those cut for budgetary concerns—represent the discursive imagining of televisual activism that the station envisioned. These programs imagine Detroiters not as criminals and victims, but as citizen-participants in negotiated efforts to improve civic life through televised Black imaginaries of city space.

Gospel Time on WGPR-TV

In its radio days, WGPR-FM was dedicated to programming a mixture of rhythm & blues, jazz, soul, “ethnic” music, and gospel. On Sunday mornings, church service and gospel records were prioritized—the station bore a call sign that stands for “Where God’s Presence Radiates” after all. Thus, it comes as little surprise that when WGPR-TV struggled to find the funds necessary to expand their programming repertoire, they turned to religious programming to fill airtime. WGPR expanded local coverage of church and gospel services, while also broadcasting a sizable selection of both local and syndicated televangelist programs.

WGPR's investment in televangelism also stemmed from Dr. Banks' own religious convictions and the Christian values of the Free and Established Modern Masons.⁶⁵⁵ Dr. Banks, who himself was affiliated with a southern Black Masonic lodge prior to 1950, established the Masons as a means to expand the membership of fraternal organizations to non-white Christian citizens, particularly in northern US cities. The governing objectives of the Masons directly informed the operational politics of both the radio and television stations. Namely, WGPR demonstrated overlapping investments in modeling Christian values, the economic advancement of its members through cooperative business action, and the perpetuation of Black social uplift. In their words, "IFAMM's [the Masons] purposes are moral, financial, benevolent, and charitable leadership with the focus to serve the present age, hence Modern in the name. Since our beliefs are firmly rooted in the Bible, our members are taught to be charitable and of service to all mankind. We try to induce an ethical way of life, which brings about those improvements necessary to the construction of good, clean respected citizenship. Their "cardinal principles" were specifically:

- Promote better understanding and coordination.
- Improve such fields of thought which tend to ensure sound judgment.
- Install in the minds of youth the necessity of intellectual progress.
- Regard all that tends to develop character and wholesome personality traits.
- Establish only such assets or liabilities, which are within the financial range of the membership.⁶⁵⁶

WGPR too aimed to install "intellectual progress" among its viewers through televisual programming and their iteration of "progress" was necessarily tied to the promulgation of

⁶⁵⁵ For a history of the "electronic church" see Ward Sr., Mark. "Introduction." In *The Electronic Church in the Digital Age: Cultural Impacts of Evangelical Mass Media [2 Volumes]: Cultural Impacts of Evangelical Mass Media*, edited by Mark Ward Sr., xvii–xxvii. ABC-CLIO, 2015.

⁶⁵⁶ Illustrious James O. Dogan, 33° - Supreme President/CEO, "About Ifamm: Sp/Ceo Welcome Message," We are International: A Progressive 21st Century Fraternal Order, n.d., <http://internationalmasons.org/spceo-welcome-message.html>.

Christian beliefs. In other words, broadcasting church services or religious discussion programs fit the ideological goals of Banks and his fellow Masons as outlined above. However, the final cardinal principle speaks even more directly to the economic convenience of religious programming for the struggling station. Church programs came with a built-in audience, were very cheap to produce, and purchase for syndication. As George White notes: “Well, lets face it, Dr. Banks is not only a lawyer, but also a minister. And we believe in the right of everyman to petition god in his own manner. But we probably would not have had as much religious programming on this station if it were not for economic reasons. All of that religion is paid religion. That’s the route that many of the smaller UHF statins are taking.”⁶⁵⁷ Thus, WGPR-TV devoted almost all of Sunday TV schedules to filmed church services, gospel performances, and syndicated televangelism.

WGPR-TV produced their own programs as well, such as *Gospel Time*, an hourly music performance program which aired each Sunday at 7:30 and midnight, with repeat episodes interspersed throughout the week to fill programming voids [Figure 4.8]. *Gospel Time* was hosted by Rev. Robert Grant and featured taped segments with local gospel performers and interviews with prominent figures in Gospel music. As with many programs on WGPR-TV, *Gospel Time* originated as a radio program hosted by Grant, before switching to a televised broadcast format. As Detroit boasts a rich Gospel tradition, the show was able to provide greater visibility to local performers and churches.⁶⁵⁸ Similar to *The Scene*, *Gospel Time* drew from national models of televising Black gospel performance and modified them for a local scale.

⁶⁵⁷ Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV,” 59.

⁶⁵⁸ Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel*; Hugh Burrell, “The Memory Train...Detroit, Gospel Music Mecca,” *The Michigan Chronicle*, June 27, 2007, sec. News; Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music* (University of Illinois Press, 2015).

Gospel Time was particularly influenced by the nationally syndicated *TV Gospel Tim*—in terms of both name and content. The taping for *TV Gospel Time* commenced in fall of 1962 in New York City. However, the premise of the show was to travel around the nation, filming Gospel performances at prominent churches in cities such as Washington DC, Charleston, South Carolina, and the Georgia cities of Macon, Augusta, and Columbus. This brought visibility to diverse churches while sparing them the travel costs of visiting a stationary studio. The Detroit iteration of this type of Gospel series did not move around the nation. However, *Gospel Time* did work to include the voices of venerable gospel performers from sites around Detroit and celebrate the city's most praise-worthy hits.

While WGPR-TV broadcast the largest number of Christian-oriented programs in the Detroit market, the tendency towards strategic televangelism was not unique to WGPR-TV. It was employed by WGPR-FM before it as well as a range of UHF stations across the nation. Indeed, mass media—from the printing press to the television set—always included religious sermons in their technological address for both economic and ideological reasons. According to Quentin Schultze, since the advent of the medium of television, the “electronic church” has been consistently used to disseminate religious content to the masses; a way to expediently bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the largest audience of people possible, with little expenditure on the part of producers.⁶⁵⁹ For many individual preachers, it was also a means to garner exposure for their religious institution. Televised representations of religion likewise had a central role to play in the educational dissemination of political ideals through from the 1950s onward—for both Black and white residents. As discussed in previous chapters, the Black church in Detroit had

⁶⁵⁹ Quentin J. Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

long been a political apparatus for increasing Black Power and spreading the edicts of Black Christian Nationalism, as demonstrated by the efforts of figures like Rev. C.L. Franklin, Rev. Albert Cleage, and City Councilman Rev. Nicholas Hood of the Plymouth Congregational Church. However, televised gospel performance also introduced Black visibility to the television medium in a time before Black citizens had penetrated entertainment barriers—especially as many Motown artists, such as Aretha Franklin, had backgrounds in gospel performance. According to Gayle Wald, *Gospel Time TV* was the “nation’s first series to use “all-negro” talent exclusively, from singers and musicians to models and announcers.”⁶⁶⁰ The national series reinforced old stereotypes about Black people as naturally religious, yet it still managed to do so in a time when Black citizens were largely excluded from broadcasting in any form. By the mid-1970s, gospel music had become a multi-million dollar industry and the increased televisual exposure to the Black church was lucrative.

WGPR-TV consequently bore a strong local reputation as a distributor of religious media. In addition to *Gospel Time*, WGPR aired CL Franklin broadcasting from New Bethel Baptist Church, *Faith for Miracles*, hosted by Richard and Cleta Brookes—who introduced themselves each week as “the happiest couple on television”—sermons from Hicks Temple, and *The Spirit of Detroit*, hosted by George and Shirley Bogle from the Faith Gospel Temple in Detroit. WGPR-TV also included syndicated church broadcasts from Melodyland Church in Anaheim, CA and Holy Cross Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA. The inclusion of (white) syndicated televangelist programs including *Jim Swaggert*, *Jack Rehbarg*, and the *PTL Club*, was primarily a means of making financially rewarding program decisions while committing to

⁶⁶⁰ Gayle Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (Beacon Press, 2007), 191.

the Christian values of the Masons. In 1982, the Metropolitan United Methodist Church bought an hour air slot on WGPR-TV for \$1200 and aired a documentary about itself, helping raise \$405,000 to secure the Church's budget and missionary funds by the next Sunday service. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, it was the first time an individual church used broadcast television to reach its respective congregation.⁶⁶¹ In this way, WGPR-TV was not only fulfilling Bank's religious mission and raising funds for the station, but networking with other local Christian institutions to serve their missions as well.

The turn to religious content on WGPR-TV was simultaneously a strategic maneuver to address programming voids with limited capital investment on the part of the station, attract a broad base of Christian viewers (both Black and white) to the station, and reinforce a broader history of Black representation through gospel performance that resonated particularly strong in the Detroit market. Banks' material and spiritual connections to religious institutions further helped fund the expanding Black media network and embed Christian values into the station's imaginary of Detroit's future

"Ethnic" Programming on WGPR-TV

Another significant practice WGPR-TV borrowed from their radio counterpart was broadcasting what the station called "ethnic" music and variety programs. Airing in a block each Saturday evening, such variety programs included *The Arab Voice of Detroit*, *Dino's Greece*, *Polish Panorama*, *Balkan Variety*, *Romanian Variety*, *Lebanon-Middle East*, and *Middle East Television*. In 1977, while religious programming filled the morning and evening slots, the

⁶⁶¹ "Detroit Church Raises \$405,000 by Producing Television Show," *The Baltimore Sun*, November 28, 1981, Saturday edition, sec. A9.

nighttime slot was reserved for the “Arabic Movie” of the week.⁶⁶² In a 1976 *Detroit Free Press* article, BettyLou Peterson notes that the station planned from the outset to dedicate Saturday afternoon and evening programming to different “ethnic” communities. This would begin with a program for the “Latino Community” at 3:00 PM and move forward with Greek, Italian, Polish, and German shows. Ultimately, many of these shows gained additional slots throughout the week, especially when airtime needed to be filled. The arrival of cable television to the Detroit market in the 1980s opened up more spaces to encounter programs targeted towards ethnic communities. As Hamid Naficy has shown, the consolidation of cable television and its provision of lease-access to clients along with governmental regulatory practices requiring the opening of public access channels to minority productions and enabled the increased specialization of television and audience segmentation.⁶⁶³ This correlatively caused an increase in ethnic, transnational, and diasporic programming reaching US viewers. However, before the ascension of cable, and other than the *Polka Hour* broadcast on the local educational television network, WTVS-TV Channel 6, WGPR-TV was the only station in the Detroit market that engaged Detroit’s immigrant and diasporic populations. Such programming ideally created affinities with underserved “ethnic” populations in the Metro Detroit region and provided televised community space for a diverse range of European and Middle Eastern immigrant communities to produce customized content. As with the religious programming on WGPR-TV, this form of niche entertainment was considered both a public service and a cost-saving mechanism. Lease access programs were independently funded and produced by Fred Merle,

⁶⁶² In TV listings in *The Detroit Free Press* this is listed as “Arabic Movie,” other local listings print it as “Arabic Movie Time”

⁶⁶³ Hamid Naficy, “Narrowcasting in Diaspora: Iranian Television in Los Angeles,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (NYU Press, 2003), 376–401.

often outside of WGPR-TV facilities. This means they required little cost expenditure on behalf of the station and brought a built-in audience to the broadcasts.

One such program was *Dino's Greece*, hosted by Dino Koukoulas, airing Sundays at 6:00 PM on WGPR-TV. In a pitch to "Ethnic MarketGroup Division" of MarketGroup Inc. based in neighboring Southfield, MI, *Dino's Greece* was described as a "kaleidoscope of the music, drama, peoples, ideas, places, and history of an ancient and modern Greece translated with the perspective upon today's America." It was a "new television series, which will appeal to everyone who has visited Greece and been curious about Greek culture and the Greek contributions to American history." Nevertheless, to frame the magazine-format program, the Ethnic MarketGroup first defined "ethnicity" as a "condition of belonging" or a form of community pride. More importantly, they describe "ethnicity" as having "far-reaching manifestations in our modern society. Ethnicity has played a pivotal role in recent social change; it has evolved into a political idea and a mobilizing principle."⁶⁶⁴ In this way, WGPR-TV hoped to capitalize on increasing visibility of "ethnic" communities in the city, while also recognizing the political potential such communities could offer to the city and as viewers/supporters of other WGPR-TV produced content.

Of the "ethnic" programming on WGPR-TV, *The Arab Voice of Detroit* was arguably the best known and longest running series. It began as a radio program on WGPR-FM in the late 1960s and continued as a television program until host Faisal Arabo retired following the CBS purchase in 1994. The program discussed significant news from the Middle East, highlighted local events of interest to citizens of Middle Eastern descent, and broadcast excerpts from

⁶⁶⁴ This language was borrowed from book reviews for: Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan: *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

Middle Eastern plays, music, performances, and films. The series oscillated between English-language commentary and Arabic performance. Examples of program content include:

- November 1982. “Modern-day Kuwait, music by Om-Khalth-oum from Egypt, play by Ghawarr, developments in the Middle East crisis. With Faisal Arabo.
- September 24, 1983, Saturday: Saddam Ussian, president of Iraq “Bagdad through the 40s;” musical play, “Lulu; Singer Fairuz; belly dancing; Arabic news and song.
- 08, October 1983, Coverage of Foreign Minister of Iraq Tariq Azzis’s speech before the United Nations; love show from Cedars of Lebanon in Dearborn; our folklore; belly dancers; songs.
- Oct 1 1983, 1Mustafa Al-Aaeid, Egyptian minister of the economy and firing trade; dedication of the new Mr. Addai Chaldean Church in Okabark City attended by the patriarch of the Chaldean Church in Iraq; songs with Munir Bashir; belly dancing⁶⁶⁵.

While the series featured content from a range of countries in the Arab world, Arabo designed the show with a Chaldean audience particularly in mind. According to Andrew Shryock, by the 1990s, the Michigan Chaldean community consisted of more than 100,000 people of Iraqi descent who “live in the Metropolitan Detroit area...most members of Detroit’s Chaldean community trace their ancestry to a single town, Telkaif, in northern Iraq.”⁶⁶⁶ Unlike most Iraqis, Chaldeans are Christians, members of a special rite of the Roman Catholic Church, called the Chaldean rite, from which they derive their name. “Members of the community are known in the Detroit area for their successful practice of the retail grocery business, in which Chaldeans have been involved since their earliest days in the United States.”⁶⁶⁷ Here, it is important to note that while WGPR-TV was invested in “ethnic” access programming, all programs on the station—produced in studio or not, upheld Christian values, including the *Arab*

⁶⁶⁵ Excerpted from *The Detroit Free Press* TV Guide listings.

⁶⁶⁶ Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, eds., *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 577.

⁶⁶⁷ Mary C. Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan* (Michigan State University Press, 2005).

Voice of Detroit. Ultimately, such series demonstrate the ways, in which WGPR-TV did open up the imaginary of Detroit beyond Black spaces, including disparate voices in its address to the city—yet voices which always necessarily coordinated with Banks’ vision for a progressive, Christian society contained within Black leadership.

The Scene

Thirty seconds to air time, dancers,” director Nate McKalpain shouts to the 50 dancers fidgeting under the studio lights. Daphne Andrews licks her hands, smooths the back of her bangs of hair at each side of her face and along with her partner, Big T-Anthony, carefully edges to a spot in the front line of dancers directly in front of the camera. Production assistant Kay White holds up a cardboard sign that says “START DANCING!” “I WANNA BE ... be on ‘The Scene’” starts ricocheting from loudspeaker to loudspeaker around the room. One hundred sets of fingers start snapping on the beat. And McKalpain hollers, “Get down, dancers.” Daphne and the other kids do their best to “get down” and inch their way up in front of that camera where their friend watching at home will be able to get a good look at them in their best clothes, doing their best dances, giving it their best shot. The clothes range from gangster gray suits and derbies to Bruce Lee kung-fu outfits to slacks and sweaters that any mother would be proud to send her kids to school in. The dances include the Earthquake, the Kangaroo, the T-swing and the Socket. “The competition on the dance floor is a good thing,” says emcee Nat Morris. “It’s one of the big reasons for the show’s success. Dances that they are doing in discos now started on this show six months ago. We’ve been breaking new dances in Detroit since the day we start a year ago, and that’s why people watch the show—to see what dances people on The Scene are doing.”⁶⁶⁸

As the television station was gearing to debut its localized version of *Soul Train*, Ray Henderson and Nat Morris were tapped by producer Joe Spencer to host. Henderson was a prominent deejay at 107.5 WGPR-FM. Morris, a long time friend of Henderson, moved from Flint to Detroit in 1972 to fill in a deejay shift. If anywhere, the radio talents of WGPR-FM translated to televisual success, it was on *The Scene* [Figure 4.9]. The show debuted On October 13, 1975 and quickly became the station’s most popular show. Everyday, kids in Detroit would

⁶⁶⁸ Hamid Naficy, “Narrowcasting in Diaspora: Iranian Television in Los Angeles,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (NYU Press, 2003), 376–401. 7F.

rush home to watch *The Scene* showcase the city's biggest soul/r&b/funk hits, freshest dance moves, and hottest new looks. Hundreds of local teens also flocked to the Jefferson Avenue studio each week hoping to get their chance to appear in front of the camera. By August 1976, less than a year after its debut, *The Detroit Free Press* was estimating an 80,000 daily viewership and a four percent share of the ratings for *The Scene*.⁶⁶⁹ Later that year, another *Free Press* article provided a more conservative estimate of their viewing audience of about 30,000.⁶⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it was the one WGPR-TV program that attracted record labels and national clothes retailers as advertisers—leading to a near doubling of revenues over the show's first six months. CBS Motown, RCA, Atlantic, and Nashboro all advertised during the show. In 1976, George White even claimed the “popularity of *The Scene* had grown to a point where retailers and manufacturers are reporting increased record sales following each episode.”⁶⁷¹

Contemporaneous press coverage and retrospective narratives from show participants provide a range of explanations for the show's success. In addition to the sponsorship of record labels, talent coordinator Johnny Bradley lured noteworthy guests and local celebrities to perform. Nat Morris constantly tried new performance formats and implemented strategies to keep the dances current, the talent hot, and the kids at home tuning in. When the disco craze caught fire, *The Scene* shifted some of its emphasis from R&B records towards disco. As disco faded, Morris incorporated emergent hip hop tracks. In 1976, White commented on the ways the series accommodated dancer and viewer taste patterns; “We have gotten so far into disco that we are now playing several long versions of disco records. We find the kids seems to enjoy dancing

⁶⁶⁹ Howard Rontal, “Channel 62 a Year Later: Still Learning to Walk Before It Can Run,” *The Detroit Free Press*, August 22, 1976, 31.

⁶⁷⁰ Dave Zurawik, “Camera's On: Get Down, Start Dancing,” 7F.

⁶⁷¹ Jean Williams, “WGPR-TV Revenue From Labels Rising,” *Billboard*, December 4, 1976.

to longer versions of tunes.”⁶⁷² However, *The Scene*’s popularity must partly be attributed to the savvy formula established by Don Cornelius, producer of the hit dance program *Soul Train*, which *The Scene* was continually in conversation with.

Detroit television had broadcast other dance television programs in the past. In particular, the Windsor station, CKLW-TV produced *Swingin’ Time*, hosted by Robin Seymour, which featured (primarily white) area dancers and boasted guest spots from some of Motown’s most prominent artists—Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and The Jackson 5. However, it was the broadly embraced *Soul Train* that WGPR-TV explicitly sought to emulate. *Soul Train* too had its origins in the genre of televised dance shows like *American Bandstand*, *Shindig*, and *Hullabaloo*.⁶⁷³ These shows were quite popular with American teen audiences and featured guest-performances from celebrated music acts. While many of the featured teens borrowed steps initiated in Black communities—the Watusi, Barracuda, the Monkey, etc.—the dancers that appeared on the show were almost exclusively white.⁶⁷⁴ While white performers also gained exposure through *American Bandstand*, Black musical acts had a difficult time getting on the white-oriented series—unless they already had a rare top-40 crossover hit. Thus, Don Cornelius conceived of the Chicago-based *Soul Train* as a vehicle for Black artists to perform their emergent hits in front of local Black dancers. With the rising popularity of Black music in the late 1960s, emerging in particular from Midwestern labels like Motown in Detroit and Chess

⁶⁷² Williams, “WGPR-TV Revenue From Labels Rising.”

⁶⁷³ Chicago even had local dance shows like *Red, Hot, and Blue* that featured local teens dancing to hit records.

⁶⁷⁴ Lehman, *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television*, 23.

Records in Chicago, Cornelius felt he was in a prime position to make this dream of Black soul television a profitable reality.⁶⁷⁵

Of course, neither Don Cornelius nor Nat Morris were the only entrepreneurs working to bring Black popular music to televised audiences. For instance, *The Nat King Cole Show* (1956-1957) debuted in 1956 as a fifteen-minute primetime program that featured Cole performing alongside popular music acts—both Black and white.⁶⁷⁶ Black Public affairs programs, which emerged in the 1960s, typically had performing guests that promoted the newest sounds from the R&B charts.⁶⁷⁷ The advent of *Soul Train* in Chicago likewise had predecessors in other local markets. From 1969 to 1972, the New Orleans-based *Walt Boatner Show* showcased Black teens dancing to hit records. Chuck Johnson's San Diego-based *Soul Time, USA* and Nashville's *Night Train* hosted by Johnny Jones and the King Casuals likewise predated the Chicago series. However, these other programs did not penetrate the wide viewing audience that *Soul Train* managed in Chicago.⁶⁷⁸ Christine Acham further anchors *Soul Train*'s popularity to a longer oral tradition of African American storytelling. Music was always used in work songs as a subversive means of escape. Likewise, in WWII America, Black radio stations became an arena for

⁶⁷⁵ Wald, *It's Been Beautiful*.

⁶⁷⁶ While the *Nat King Cole Show* is often cited as the first network series to star an African American, Black performers had been appearing regularly as guest stars on variety programs since the medium's incarnation. Performers like Bob Howard, Hazel Scott, and Billy Daniels had hosted their own programs. Donald Bogle argues that Nat King Cole was the first to host a show when the medium's future was assured and fewer risks were taken with weekly programming—perhaps because Cole was less controversial than many other contemporary Black performers emerging in the era of rock n' roll like Little Richard and Chuck Berry. Donald Bogle, *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 74–75.

⁶⁷⁷ Murray Forman, *One Night on TV Is Worth Weeks at the Paramount: Popular Music on Early Television* (Duke University Press, 2012), chap. 5.

⁶⁷⁸ Gayle Wald further considers *Soul!*, hosted by Ellis Haslip, in conversation with *Soul Train*. While both series booked many of the same performing artists, *Soul!* tapped more directly into New York's political and art scene, alienating many urban viewers in other markets.

community announcements and Black business advertisements – a platform for Black independent music. The 1950s saw the emergence of the Black personality deejays, which according to Nelson George were “inheritors of the oral tradition.”⁶⁷⁹ In this way, *Soul Train* and *The Scene* are manifestations of a longer tradition of Black popular culture, adapted for the television medium.⁶⁸⁰

The Scene particularly borrowed Cornelius’s formula of mixing local Black dancers with national Black performance.⁶⁸¹ Dancers would line up outside the studio and were quickly put into pairings—with volunteers in the hottest outfits and boasting the best moves given priority. *Soul Train* choreographer, Clinton Ghent, recalls, “We’d exchange partners until we got it

⁶⁷⁹ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (Penguin, 2003).

⁶⁸⁰ Perhaps *Soul Train*’s early success can thus be attributed to a combination of factors: Cornelius’s controlling vision for the series that drew from his radio contacts to bring big talent to the small show, its emplacement in Chicago—a densely populated urban center with a large Black market, the support of local television station WCIU-TV, its connection to African American cultural traditions, and the show’s emergence at an opportune time when Black cultural production was moving increasingly into the mainstream. With the combination of these factors, *Soul Train* premiered on August 17, 1970 as an overnight smash.

⁶⁸¹ Also like *The Scene*’s hosts Nat Morris and Ray Henderson, Don Cornelius got his start in Black radio. While working as an announcer, disk jockey, and news correspondent at WVON-FM Chicago, Don Cornelius began hosting parties with Black recording artists at local clubs and schools for Black teens, with Record Labels providing acts free of charge to appear for promotional purposes. Hosting the parties with fellow WVON deejay, Joe Carr, Cornelius recalls the project feeling like a train moving around various parts of the city, from which he drew the name *Soul Train*. Cornelius joined Chicago station WCIU-TV in 1967 as host of a local public affairs program *A Black View of the News*. The UHF station, not dissimilar to WGPR, had a broadcast schedule consisting primarily of religious programming and ethnic oriented shows—the only station in the Chicago market with local public affairs programs broadcasting to the city’s large Black population. When Cornelius pitched *Soul Train* as a live television program to the station in 1970, he was given an immediate green light to run it as he wished and left him with sole ownership of the enterprise. Though starting with a small budget, the daily, Black and white, series was an overnight success in the city. Black teens from around Chicago travelled downtown to line up in front of the Board of Trade Building, hoping to gain entry into the tiny studio on the forty-fourth floor and ultimately in front of the WCIU-TV cameras. It was there that Cornelius developed the content structure—which *The Scene* and other subsequent local dance shows would mimic.

coordinated, until it looked right. It was like a working puzzle.”⁶⁸² Once the selected dancers were organized around the dance floor, the show would begin. Cornelius would introduce a song off to the side of the stage, then an off-camera staff person would point to the teenagers, signaling them to start dancing and away they went. Filming proceeded, segment-by-segment, with new dancers called forth to the studio as the taping progressed—dancing to hit records and live musical guests.

As *Soul Train*'s popularity grew, so too did the celebrity cameos. In 1972, *Soul Train* attracted Johnson Products as a sponsor. With major corporate funding, *Soul Train* garnered a national syndication deal—placing the show in seven other major cities with large Black populations, including Detroit. With this success, Cornelius moved the series out of Chicago and to LA, expanding its syndication market and shifting the show from local phenomenon to a national institution.⁶⁸³ While the Chicago series had its share of popular music guests, *Soul Train* in its Hollywood home crossed racial barriers, featuring a selection of popular white musical guests from Elton John to David Bowie—superseding *American Bandstand* as the quintessential platform for emergent music acts.⁶⁸⁴ *Soul Train*'s national success further led to a broad range of local and national Black dance shows—many of which were picked up in syndication by WGPR-

⁶⁸² Lehman, *A Critical History of Soul Train*, 31.

⁶⁸³ It was in its new Hollywood home that the series developed the signature “*Soul Train* line” –a feature borrowed for *The Scene*.

⁶⁸⁴ White pop artists and white dancers were never refused a spot on the show, yet few ever bothered to appear until *Soul Train* went mainstream. Despite its national platform, *Soul Train* always prioritized dancers and performers of color. In this way, the show cultivated the terms of Black style and cultural production for decades to come. As one of the longest syndicated programs on American television, *Soul Train* re-imagined the way Black teens were represented in mainstream culture, working to construct a positive image of a middle-class Black community unified through “love, peace, and soul.” It was both the financial success and display of Black cultural pride that *The Scene* looked to model when designing their own incarnation of a *Soul Train*-esque dance program.

TV. WGPR not only aired its original dupes *The Scene* and *Rolling Funk*, but also *James Brown's Future Shock*, airing out of Atlanta, and *The Get Down*, from New Orleans. The shows were relatively cheap to produce, as dancers appeared on a volunteer basis, and they gave substantial visibility to Black performing artists, which encouraged label support.

In the most basic yet critical terms, for Detroit, the difference between *Soul Train* and *The Scene* was that *The Scene* was a local program featuring local talent for local viewers and *Soul Train* featured stars performing for a national Black imagined community. *The Scene* was essentially structured to not compete with the national *Soul Train*, but rather complement the series with opportunities for local participation.⁶⁸⁵ While offering similar dances moves and songs, its local ties engendered a dialogic relationship with the audience—who could actively go see performances, dance themselves, get to know the dancers, or perhaps buy *Scene* inspired clothing from local vendors. *Soul Train* and its sponsors capitalized on the mainstream recognition of Black viewers as targeted consumers, or as QuestLove puts it, “Don [Cornelius] was selling Afrocentricity in a bottle and we were buying it up by the ton.”⁶⁸⁶ Detroit thusly capitalized on the success of the *Soul Train* model to similarly sell Black business to local viewers. Eric Weisbard argues that *Soul Train* “took the trivializing but permissive qualities of television, anchored them to a promotional version of cultural nationalism, and in the process, along with urban contemporary R&B radio, redefined the Black mainstream.”⁶⁸⁷ Building on this claim, I argue that *The Scene* drew from urban contemporary radio and *Soul Train* aesthetics to not only celebrate a “promotional version of cultural nationalism,” but also a localized version of

⁶⁸⁵ I say national because *Soul Train* continued a local version of the program.

⁶⁸⁶ Questlove, *Soul Train: The Music, Dance, and Style of a Generation* (Harper Collins, 2013).

⁶⁸⁷ Eric Weisbard, “How Do You Solve a Problem Like a Mainstream? Charting the Musical Middle,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2015): 253–65.

Black popular culture. *The Scene* was a visible presence for Detroit's Black population that connected the abstract space of televisual performance with accessible experience and local places. The station's policy of trying to keep the community involved led to Morris selecting about forty new dancers each day from the couple of thousand application cards piling up in boxes all over the studio. In this way, local high schools were always structured into the production of the series and many dancers, such as Fast Freddy, quickly became local icons. As WGPR newscaster Shaun Robinson and later host of *Access Hollywood* puts it, *Soul Train* "was a national show and so we didn't have any real connection with those people. Here for us, with *The Scene*, you got to see people you knew from school or there was a chance you would run into them at a mall. So it was a real sense of community"⁶⁸⁸

Thus, while the lasting and wide-reaching cultural impact of *Soul Train*, as well as its influence on local media production in Detroit, cannot be overstated, its shift to a nationally syndicated structure based in Hollywood recalibrated the show's fundamental character—opening up a space for localized iterations like *The Scene* to emerge. As Gayle Wald describes;

Soul Train tapped into the growing commercial market for Black pop in the 1970s, epitomized by the success of Motown Records, which touted itself as "The Sound of Young America." ... *Soul Train* was a self-consciously entrepreneurial enterprise, in line with Berry Gordy's Motown. The program indeed anticipated the geographical trajectory of the Detroit-based record label when in 1971...it moved its operations to Los Angeles. The show's westward migration confirmed *Soul Train*'s power as a cultural arbiter, but it also conflated Black success with the abandonment of local Black communities, which were then confronted the forces of deindustrialization that would lead to the

⁶⁸⁸ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 177.

concentration of poverty in the inner city.⁶⁸⁹

Dr. Banks' underlying objective for WGPR-TV was Black economic re-development for the city—instilling Black infrastructure in the wake of white and Black flight. While the city remained fertile ground for Black creativity, a pattern emerged in which prominent Black businesses and business people that achieve moderate success thereafter left the city. While “Black flight” is definitely not a phenomenon unique to Detroit, the ravages of racialized urban disinvestment were perhaps more intensively experienced in Detroit than in other major US cities. Correspondingly, a bond formed among those citizens, many of whom remained hopeful like Banks that a better city for Black residents would emerge alongside Black infrastructure that did not abandon the city.⁶⁹⁰

The Scene's local success may also be attributed to Morris's flexibility to adapt to changing cultural trends and station politics. While dear friends, chemistry between Henderson and Morris did not manifest in the live broadcasts. As Morris tells it, “it was a basic total disaster because they just put us up there. No scripts, [it was a] ‘you guys just play off each other’ type of situation.”⁶⁹¹ This did not happen with ease and Henderson returned to radio six months later, leaving Morris the sole host of the program. By 1979, Morris also became the sole producer of the show, instilling new features like the “Triple Spotlight Dance” and the “Scene Circle.” “I approached the president/general manager about taking over the production of the show because it had gotten very stagnant and the station hadn't seen fit to make anymore investments in it. In

⁶⁸⁹ Wald, *It's Been Beautiful*, 14.

⁶⁹⁰ Gayle Wald argues that *Soul!* hailed viewers as a racialized group linked by shared knowledge, experience and affective investment. WGPR-TV similarly hailed Detroiters via these attributes in addition to a shared commitment to the future of Black Detroit.

⁶⁹¹ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 161. Castelnero, a WNIC Detroit Radio producer, here draws from interviews and his own personal nostalgia to construct a historical record of popular local televisions in Detroit—with a few pages dedicated to *The Scene*.

March, they allowed me to basically become the producer of the show in that I would buy the props and pay the staff to try and take the show a step up or to another level.”⁶⁹² Nat Morris Productions took the show from a live five-day-a-week broadcast to a taped program Monday through Thursday, with live Fridays. He would often tape two additional programs on Friday to save production costs—those would play Mondays and Wednesdays. Tuesdays/Thursdays would be repeats. Originally the program featured whatever records were popular, with an occasional artist popping in once in a while. It was ultimately a bit too simple for Morris. “I did begin to develop a different format...I wrote it really, after not being able to watch the show. I thought it was kind of boring just sitting there watching kids dance. It was like the same 20 or 30 kids for an hour, especially when you had no guests. This [new] format opened up with a scenario that included some kids ‘taking the dance floor’ for different featured segments.”⁶⁹³ Morris also included a new rap theme for the series opening:

Well, it’s six o’clock and it’s time to rock.
 We rock nonstop till seven o’clock.
 We don’t stop, we don’t stop.
 We rock, rock, rock all around the clock.
 Hip hop, hippity hop.
 We jam, jam on.
 Dancers come from all around
 To throw down in this here Geektown.
 The latest steps, the latest styles,
 Pretty faces and pretty smiles.
 It’s six o’clock and time for *The Scene*.

While Cornelius was reluctant to feature hip-hop performers, Nat Morris embraced new genres whole-heartedly.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹² Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 162.

⁶⁹³ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 162.

⁶⁹⁴ “*The Scene* played a crucial role in breaking Detroit artists and more importantly, laying the seeds for club adulation of techno music.” Louisiana Brown, “The Get-down Funky-Soul Glory

George White further attributed *The Scene*'s local success to "Electronic Sociology... people in the suburbs or anywhere can sit in their living rooms and see more than just the dances. They can see how young Black people are living, the life-style. That's another part of the show's success. Just turn on the TV in the comfort and safety of your living room."⁶⁹⁵ While White here is trying to explain the broad appeal of television, the show's emplacement in Detroit imbues his comments with an eerie resonance. Detroit, at the time of the show's debut, incurred the highest crime-rates in the nation, garnering the nickname "The Murder City." The divide between an increasingly prosperous white suburbia and a Black urban center grew deeper. In this formulation, the show became a central access point for the city's emergent cultural landscape—projecting a counter-image of Black Detroit to that on the mainstream news for viewers who physically chose to remain outside the city for "safety."

What White doesn't hint at, is what the show meant for locals who participated in weekly performances. The first dancers selected to show off their moves on *The Scene* were found by reaching out to local kids in housing projects, like the Martin Luther King Public Housing Project, nearby the Jefferson studio. However, as the show gathered steam, young Detroiters from around the city sent in application letters and showed up at the studio space hoping to join in on the party.⁶⁹⁶ Gordon Casterlnero's *TV Land Detroit* commemorates Detroit pop culture

That Was 'Soul Train,'" *Medium* (blog), August 28, 2016, <https://medium.com/@louisianabrown/the-glory-that-was-soul-train-273e630d8da4>.

⁶⁹⁵ Dave Zurawik, "Camera's On: Get Down, Start Dancing."

⁶⁹⁶ La Wanda Anner, Moses, Mary Lu, Kelli Hand, Dwayne Page, Diaz Dabney, Blair, Miyon Bryant, "Clark Kent," sisters Diane and Yvonne Gooden, Maria Kwiatkowski, Pam Thomas, Deborah Thompson, Cheryl Peoples, Moses, Montez Miller, Fast Freddy, Lorenzo Colston, Daphne Williams, Lawanda Grey, Tina Nelson, David Humphries (aka "Hump the Grinder") and Sheila Spencer. Some "Scene" dancers, like LaWanda Gray, Keith Bledsoe and "Miss Energy," also appeared regularly on *The Scene*'s successor, "The New Dance Show," hosted by R.J. Watkins whose company also produced that show.

through interviews with iconic figures affiliated with celebrated Detroit television programs as well as local fans, dedicating a few pages to *The Scene*. According to Judith Kempt, “To the kids we were stars. When we’d go to the mall, people were always pointing their fingers saying, ooh they dance on *The Scene*... We all poked fun at it on a regular basis, but there we were, glued to the television, unshakable... Everybody watched it — whether they were the types who wanted to be on the show or whether they were the people who wouldn’t be caught dead on it.”⁶⁹⁷ Wally Harrison likewise recalls; “it was a lighter side of Detroit because that was back in the time when they were still having some gang problems. At Friday, from six to seven it was *The Scene*. I’ve met guys in gangs, and once they found out I worked for *The Scene* they were like “Look man, we could be doing something that’s probably wrong, but at six o’clock we stop to go watch *The Scene*.”⁶⁹⁸ While *The Scene* may not have directly reduced gang activity in Detroit, as this statement indicates, it did have a unifying impact for Black Detroiters—despite socioeconomic status in the city.

Producers may have jumped at the opportunity for national syndication if the opportunity had been offered to them, yet the show’s enduring iconicity is integrally related to its long-standing entrenchment within Detroit’s cultural scene. The majority of guests were local acts trying to promote their records, such as Al Hudson and the Soul Partners and Ready for the World. Major recording artists, many of whom got their start in the Detroit market, would also stop by studios before performing at local venues—yet this too was conceived of as a form of cross-promotion for the venues, artists, and *The Scene*. In Morris’s words:

GPR radio at the time was known for advertising nightclubs. So during the beginning of

⁶⁹⁷ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 164.

⁶⁹⁸ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 177.

the show the nightclub Henry's on Fenkell was bringing in acts like the Manhattans, the Whispers, blues artists like Johnny Taylor ... So all the acts that came into Henry's, Henry brought down to the show for that exposure for his weekend business. So we had the Dells quite a bit out of Chicago; we had all of the Jacksons that put out a record except for Michael. Prince was broke [in] on that show because he had videos that WTV wouldn't play at the time; he never came on, but he had his artist Morris Day on. We had the Spinners on quite frequently, George Clinton without the Parliaments, Gladys Knight, Mary Wilson...Anita Baker was on the show as Chapter 8.⁶⁹⁹

Other noted performers included Luther Vandross, Teddy Pendergrass, the Silvers, The Fat Boys, Curtis Blow, and Vanity 6.

As was the case with all of WGPR's programs, the popularity of *The Scene* was not owing to its high caliber production values. In fact, contemporary retrospectives on *The Scene* delight in the decidedly amateurish aesthetics. The sound was inconsistent, editing errors were frequent, lighting malfunctioned, equipment lagged behind network standards, and the tape quality was often degraded due to repeated use. Yet, the program still left room for aesthetic experimentation. Slow and fast zooms, rapid shifts in focus, alternating angles all corresponded to the movement of the dancers and the beat of the music. As a local station with less accountability to national broadcast standards, *The Scene* was able to play with form and style even more than their *Soul Train* counterpart.

Furthermore, the local success of *The Scene* led to the production of other local-oriented music shows. In October of 1976, WGPR-TV hosted a 13-hour disco telethon to support the NAACP Mississippi Bond Fund. Featuring performances from Kendricks, Ron Banks & The

⁶⁹⁹ Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit*, 168.

Dramatics, the Fantastic Four, and the Howard Lemn Singers, the program netted \$171,000, 75% of which was collected by local NAACP head Joe Madison.⁷⁰⁰ Soon after, the station began producing *Rolling Funk*, a weekly half-hour show featuring locals performing roller disco to popular urban contemporary records.⁷⁰¹ While *Rolling Funk* did not have the longevity or the cultural iconicity of *The Scene*, it too capitalized on aspects of Black popular culture, and promoted them by cultivating a relationship with local participants. Filmed at the Safari Roller Skating Rink in nearby (suburban) Inkster, *Rolling Funk* presented a “startling mixture of soul, sound, and skating” every Saturday. The series was created and produced by Larry Moore, Charles Newsome, and Leonard Johnson, all partners in a local (Black-owned) videotape company, Mobile Video Tape (MVT), which otherwise taped local gospel shows and special events in the Detroit region. Larry Moore, who hosted and directed the series in addition to his co-producing duties, notes in a 1975 *Detroit Free Press*, “we got the idea when we saw the chance to capitalize on something that Blacks have been doing for a long time. We knew we had a winner when we discovered all of the local talent and found out how big funky skating is in Detroit. For the first taping in June we invited about 40 kids and 300 showed up.”⁷⁰² Nelson George further recognizes the significance of Detroit to the emergence of urban skating or “jamming,” noting, “Roller Disco scholars trace its origins back to Detroit’s Arcadia Rink, where Black patrons skated to the music of Louie Jordan and other rhythm & blues artists of the period. But it wasn’t until Brooklyn’s Empire Rollerdom owner Hank Abrami agreed to play a record

⁷⁰⁰ *The Detroit Sun*, Oct. 15, 1976, page 4.

⁷⁰¹ The 1970s roller disco craze engendered a variety of iterations that had different regional names, including soul skating, boogie skating, freestyle skating and shuffle skating.. Nelson George, “Going Back to the 1870s: Skating to Music,” *Billboard*, March 3, 1979, 59. Julia Spalding, “Derby Dancing,” *Indianapolis Monthly*, April 1997.

⁷⁰² Arrington, Carl. “Motown Rollers Strut their Stuff with Funk,” *The Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1975, 4C.

called “Night Train” in 1957 that the seeds for the present interest were planted.”⁷⁰³

The *Detroit Free Press* article further reports with *Rolling Funk*, “top skaters in Detroit area are given the chance to strut their stances weekly. The aces aren’t hard to pick out as they weave through the congested rink, performing cross plus on the corners with lifts, maps and spins thrown in to the beat of the music.”⁷⁰⁴ Each week, skaters would show up for two hours of skating to register enough moves for the thirty-minute broadcast. This allowed for enough material to be edited together, while cutting out the “breakneck falls and big mistakes.” It was ultimately hoped that skaters could be equipped with portable mini-cameras, who could capture the kinetic energy of moving through the rink to the cyclical funky beats for viewers at home. According to Romy Poletti, “music has always remained the prominent feature of roller skating, not only because of its aesthetic function of covering up the unwanted noises of the rink, but also because it negotiates the role of roller skating in popular culture, serving to locate it more broadly in relationship to time and space.”⁷⁰⁵ *Rolling Funk* thus capitalized on popularity of dance programs like *Soul Train* and *The Scene*, yet tying another established form of local Black entertainment culture to the televisual medium. Like the “Soul Train Line,” *Rolling Funk* even

⁷⁰³ George “Going Back to the 1870s: Skating to Music,” 59. Jamming was perhaps the most frequent term for Black rhythmic skating to blues, disco, and soul music. According to Julia Spalding, “Jamming laid the foundation for roller disco, but more than that, jamming came to represent that particular moment in history. The subversive roller skate dance moves characteristic of ‘jamming’ were used to express where the skater was from or where he learned his/her dancing skills. Speaking of “Traditional Regional Styles”, [Bill] Butler writes about how [f]rom city to city, all across the country the way of skating changes along with the way of speaking. I use different styles according to the music. Some music demands the Detroit Stride; other cuts put me into one of the other local motions. These are the most interesting ... the Cincinnati Style, Chicago Style, The East St. Louis Style, The Brooklyn Bounce and The Jersey Bounce.” Romy Poletti, “Residual Culture of Roller Rinks: Media, The Music & Nostalgia of Roller Skating” (Masters of Arts, McGill University, 2009), 51–52.

⁷⁰⁴ Arrington, Carl. “Motown Rollers Strut their Stuff with Funk,” *The Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1975, 4C.

⁷⁰⁵ Poletti, “Residual Culture of Roller Rinks: Media, The Music & Nostalgia of Roller Skating.”

offered, the “Roller Road,” which lined a dozen skaters and allowed them to move through the rink, each showing off a signature move. It was ultimately hoped the show could spread to other markets, telecasting to cities like LA, Flint, Cleveland, Toledo, and Chicago.

Rolling Funk and *The Scene* broke down the barrier between audience and television performer, as local teens viewers were encouraged to vie for their own spot in front of the camera and perhaps control the camera themselves. Speaking of live-televised boxing matches broadcast in the medium’s early history, specifically those of Mohammad Ali, Anna McCarthy argues that the genre “embodied the thrill of collectivity as a cultural and racial alliance, and set the scene for participatory interaction in a politicized sphere of pleasure.”⁷⁰⁶ Her words resonate with the affective relationship developed between local viewers and local dance shows. These images of local participants dancing or skating were among the only representations of Detroit Black spaces and Black youth that existed outside of news broadcasts. The content of these programs was not re-explained and distilled by educated male hosts like on *CPT*. Instead, the local talent spoke for themselves. It allowed Black youth to share and connect as community spaces in the city grew more sparse. At times, the dancing was awkward, and the equipment often failed, but *The Scene* remains the most widely celebrated program in the WGPR repertoire, with tapes still circulating in online forums. So popular were the dance shows that George White worried the demand for dance shows negatively impacted the station’s capacity to produce other Black programming. Whether or not this was the case, the legacy of *The Scene* and its networks of devoted fans persevere, while other WGPR programs have been lost or forgotten.

⁷⁰⁶ Anna McCarthy, “Theatre Television, Boxing, and the Black Public Sphere” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 16 (3-4), pp. 307-323.

Conclusion: Beyond the Dream of Black Infrastructure

While this chapter has connected the programming and infrastructure goals envisioned for the station in its early years to the rise of Black political power and Black capitalist agendas in the 1970s, WGPR-TV continued their struggle to stay afloat through the 1980s and into the 1990s as socio-economic conditions in Detroit only worsened. During that time period, Detroit's broadcast landscape changed significantly. Other local stations began to hire more Black employees behind as well as in front of the cameras—many of whom got their introduction to broadcasting at WGPR.⁷⁰⁷ However, inclusive hiring practices in Detroit did not lead to solid Black media infrastructure. By the mid 1980s, only mild increases in Black media ownership occurred nationally. Black citizens still owned less than two percent of the operating radio and television stations in the United States. As discussed in a 1985 issue of *The Crisis*, “Obstacles to Black ownership of mass media [on a national scale], whether in broadcasting, cable television, newspapers, or other channels, are great and growing greater: prohibitive entry costs, discrimination by advertisers, scarcity of available outlets, and in broadcasting, the abandonment of rules that were designed to prevent excessive ownership concentration and to encourage the

⁷⁰⁷ . For example, Carmen Harlan joined WDIV-TV Detroit (NBC affiliate) in 1978 and quickly rose to a position as lead anchor. Diana Lewis, who got her start hosting *Black Book* in Philadelphia's WPVI-TV, joined Detroit WXYZ-TV (ABC affiliate) in 1977, co-anchoring the evening news with Bill Bonds. Chuck Stokes became Editorial and Public Affairs Director of WXYZ-TV Channel 7, joining the station in 1981. He also hosts *Spotlight on the News*, the longest running local public affairs program in Detroit. Huel Perkins joined Fox 2 News Detroit in 1989 as lead anchor. Daphne Hughes, a *Big City News* producer, became a News Manager and Producer at WDIV-TV Detroit in 1981. She now is the founder of her own production company, Hughes Creative LLC, and produces *American Black Journal*. Tiffany Crawford, a teen anchor on *Teen Profile*, is now the Deputy Press Secretary for the city of Detroit.

entry of minority ownership.”⁷⁰⁸ In Detroit, citizens had simultaneously more access to Black media outlets than most US cities, but also less economic opportunities to initiate new business.

According to census statistics, the total population of the city of Detroit continued to decline correlative to a significant decrease in population density. Yet, the Black population grew during WGPR-TV's tenure in the Detroit televisual market. By 1980, Detroit had a 62.7% Black majority and by 1990, that figure rose to 75.3%.⁷⁰⁹ As the population shifted, the economic disinvestment in the city exacerbated the deterioration of civic infrastructure—housing foreclosures, school closings, architectural decay and abandoned buildings, unemployment, crime, and drug use all increased while social welfare programs and community institutions decreased. Control of city government and municipal institutions remained in the hands of Black citizens despite the sharp decline in business development. The city's economic conditions were undoubtedly worsening, yet the discourses of possibility for Black media infrastructure that dominated in the early 1970s remained in play during this interval. In Detroit, though WGPR-TV was last in ratings in nearly every category, it consistently worked to construct and occupy a Black imaginary of Detroit for local residents to inhabit—which remained an important asset for citizens in the 1980s.

Thus, when the prospect of cable television was proposed to the City of Detroit, city officials and community leaders insisted that only a Black-owned corporation could implement the new media infrastructure into the city effectively and ethically while helping keep control of physical and imaginary space in Black hands. This role ultimately fell to Barden CableVision. According to Yaya Kiuchi's study of Barden CableVision, the company worked to align their

⁷⁰⁸ Nolan A. Bowie, “Blacks & Mass Media: Where Do We Stand?,” *The Crisis*, July 1986, 29.

⁷⁰⁹ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Table 23. Michigan - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990.”

corporate agenda with community uplift plans for Black Detroit. In particular, Barden's first priority was in “providing high-quality and technically sophisticated local origination and public access facilities.”⁷¹⁰ Second, it planned to ensure Detroit residents would “fully partake in public access programming.”⁷¹¹ This meant developing programs that appealed to their Black viewership. Third, by building community access centers, Barden would “attempt to strengthen the idea of neighborhood and community engagement.”⁷¹² Once such ideas were reinforced, Barden's system would become “conduits of communications for the people of Detroit.”⁷¹³ Fifth, Barden promised to provide training, especially for those who were afraid of or unfamiliar with new technologies. Barden specified that as a minority-owned company, “it understood the plight of Detroiters well” and that the company was “in a unique position to comprehend the requirements of persons who are unemployed from the automobile and related industries and those who have had difficulty or no success in securing employment or in learning job skills relevant to today's world of work.”⁷¹⁴ According to Kiuchi, Barden hoped that through its cable system the city would gain “a means to battle hunger and poverty.” This translated to supporting charitable organizations in the city to counter the economic plights of people in Detroit. As Kiuchi puts it;

The company believes that there are significant benefits in placing the power and tools of communication through the electronic media in the hands of local residents.... Access channels are an efficient means of meeting fully local communications needs. These

⁷¹⁰ Yuya Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice: The History of African American Media Democracy* (SUNY Press, 2012), 156.

⁷¹¹ Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice*, 156.

⁷¹² Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice*, 156.

⁷¹³ Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice*, 156.

⁷¹⁴ Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice*, 156.

access channels provide information that is often ignored the mass electronic delivery systems and enable a community to develop a vital exchange of ideas and services... The various active neighborhood and community groups, extensive recreation programs, a strong religious base, excellent municipal services, an elaborate educational system, outstanding entertainment facilities, and the potential for a strong business recovery and growth are example of elements which can contribute to the cable television system for the City of Detroit... Barden Cablevision sees its role as a facilitator of access in the City of Detroit. The goal is to encourage participatory television in every sense of the word by building into the plan for cable service an aggressive community, programming component that will assist the economic development in the City of Detroit.⁷¹⁵

Barden's appeal to city officials worked to demonstrate that they were not interested in merely designing communications technologies for their own economic gain but had a deeper interest in community enrichment and a respect for the citizens of Detroit as participants in the media development process.

The appeals posed by Barden were extraordinarily similar to the goals stated by WGPR-TV two decades prior. Kiuchi notes that many of Barden's development plans strayed from conventional patterns, including the facilitation of job training, social services, and government aid. I contend that while Barden's implementation of cable infrastructure in Detroit appeared innovative on a national scale, their trajectory moved entirely down the same path towards Black media infrastructure begun by other media projects in the city—including *In Your Interest*, *CPT*, *Finally Got the News*, and of course, WGPR, INC. Like Barden, WGPR-TV initiated training programs for local citizens, hoping to ease Black unemployment in the city. In this way, while

⁷¹⁵ Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice*, 157.

WGPR-TV was not unilaterally able to complete its initial plans for city uplift, the station laid significant groundwork towards the development of Black media infrastructure to later be expanded by corporations like Barden CableVision.

On the other hand, the development of Barden posed a challenge to the endemically struggling UHF station. WGPR-TV INC. may have been the first and most influential corporation to develop Black-controlled television in the city, but they were no longer the only game in town. This diminished their impact and the perceived import of the station's operations in public life. Adding another strain to the station's mission, Dr. Banks passed away on August 24, 1985 at the age of 82. Ownership of the station was transferred to acting head of the Free Masons, George Matthews, a retired Union Carbide employee from Niagra Falls, NY. By 1987, Station Manager Tenecia Gregory had been subject to a series of demotions and was ultimately removed as president and general manager by Matthews.⁷¹⁶ Lacking the Banks family's ideological and emotional investment in the station's public service goals, the Masons decided that WGPR-TV no longer met the conditions of their fifth cardinal principal—or economic returns from the station were not substantial enough to justify on-going investment. Thus, they began to tepidly shop the station around in 1986.

⁷¹⁶Bank's Widow, Ivy Banks, and Tenecia Gregory filed a lawsuit against the Masons for wrongful termination, hoping to also regain power over the station from the Masons. Gregory claims in a 1987 *Jet Magazine* article that such restructuring happened without a full vote of the Masons and therefore was invalid. Sales Manager Panagos claimed in the same article: "there are so many unanswered questions. And there was shoddy bookkeeping" rendering it difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of her managerial efforts. As such, it is likewise difficult to parse out the precise politics that led to her demotion. However, Panagos argued that, as women, Mrs. Gregory and Mrs. Banks had no right to stake a claim to helm a male organization [like the Masons] in the first place—a claim which consequently highlights the clear biases station executives held against Gregory as manager in the first place. "Battle Rages for Control of Detroit TV Station," *JET*, July 13, 1987.

The station's news department was dissolved in 1992 after disgruntled employees voted to bring in the United Auto Workers to arbitrate on their behalf during contract negotiations. Those employees were fired for participating in union activities.⁷¹⁷ WGPR-TV President George Mathews cited economic reasons when asked about the firings, but court documents show that WGPR had significant assets at the time. According to Leah Hunter, "this suggests that having minority ownership does not mean that employees are assured a fair wage or union representation. Employees of WGPR-TV, during the tenure of Mathews, complained that instead of support, they were faced with "lies, deception, and inhumane treatment."⁷¹⁸

In 1994, under Matthews' leadership, the Masons sold WGPR-TV to CBS for 24 million dollars. "I think we made a prudent business decision," Matthews told the *Detroit Free Press*. "It's difficult to part with anything that you love. But we don't have the financial capabilities to do what we'd like to here. And we take pride in the fact that we're now making it possible to bring some new jobs to the city of Detroit."⁷¹⁹ The sale of WGPR angered a group of Black investors who wanted to buy the station and operate it themselves until the title of Spectrum

⁷¹⁷ R Prince, "CBS Buys Detroit TV Station," *NABJ Journal* 12, no. 9 (n.d.): 10; Hunter, Leah P. "Overcoming the Diversity Ghetto: Determining the Effectiveness of Network Broadcast Diversity Initiative Programs" (Florida State University, 2014).

⁷¹⁸ Karen Yandle, a former employee, further said of Mathews, "He harassed me until I had no other choice but to leave. I had to face a different dilemma with him everyday." P. Colbert "WGPR Shuts Down News in Employee Dispute," *Michigan Citizen*, November 22, 1992, A3. see: Hunter, "Overcoming the Diversity Ghetto: Determining the Effectiveness of Network Broadcast Diversity Initiative Programs," 100. While WGPR-TV was more willing to give Black women a platform, it is clear from later station battles that the imaginary of Black Detroit and the development of Black Detroit infrastructure were still largely controlled by Black men. Additionally, an ongoing scholarship fund that was established in founder Banks' name was discontinued once Mathews became president.

⁷¹⁹ Mike Duffy, "CBS Wants Station to Keep Roots in Detroit," *The Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1994, sec. A1, A2.

Entertainment.⁷²⁰ Joel Ferguson, a developer from Lansing, MI who led the Black investment group, argued that he could “come in and done a hell of a job” if that offer went through. Angered by the CBS deal, they fought to instead establish WGPR as a CBS affiliate and thus preserve much of WGPR’s trademark programming.⁷²¹ John Conyers tried to stop the FCC approval hoping Black owners could retain some of the Black programming. Conyers argued, “Empowerment of the African-American community must not be lost.”⁷²² While these efforts demonstrate the discursive significance of keeping WGPR in Detroit as a symbol of Black pride and local culture, they were not able to influence the transfer of sale or CBS’s programming decisions. Hoyett Owens, a public relations consultant who worked with CBS to develop its new programming for the Detroit station, stated, “I’m African American, and I’m sensitive to doing what’s right, and CBS is sensitive to going into a city like Detroit and making sure they attract viewers.”⁷²³ Yet, this translated to broadcasting nationally syndicated programs with Black characters rather than including local Black citizens in the development of content and programming decisions.⁷²⁴ Most WGPR programs were cancelled as a result of the sale, while

⁷²⁰ Richard Prince. CBS Buys Detroit TV Station.” *NABJ Journal* 12.9 (Nov 30, 1994): 10’s Forward Spin: The Battle to Keep Detroit’s WGPR” *Black Enterprise* Mar 1995.

⁷²¹ According to a 1995 *Black Enterprise* article on the topic, Ferguson calls WGPR’s decision to sell to CBS puzzling, especially since his offer of \$30 million was substantially more than CBS’s \$24 million offer. In response to the Ferguson offer, WGPR Matthew’s responded: We’re in American, and we certainly have freedom, I cannot tell you who to sell your business to, and you cannot tell me who to sell my business to,” further calling Ferguson a “Johnny-come-lately” as he wasn’t there when the station was having financial difficulties and CBS offered to buy them out. Dan Holly, “The Battle to Keep Detroit’s WGPR,” *Black Enterprise*, March 1995, 23.

⁷²² Holly, “The Battle to Keep Detroit’s WGPR,” 23.

⁷²³ Holly, “The Battle to Keep Detroit’s WGPR,” 23.

⁷²⁴ Hunter, “Overcoming the Diversity Ghetto: Determining the Effectiveness of Network Broadcast Diversity Initiative Programs,” 101.

others like *Greater Grace Temple*, a gospel program, turned to Barden CableVision for airtime.⁷²⁵

In *Watching Race*, Herman Gray argues that the idea of television as “negotiated space—that is, for struggling over meanings—is conceptually rooted in the claim that television occupies a central space in practices of everyday life where important social encounters and cultural transformations are possible.”⁷²⁶ Meanwhile, Christopher Anderson and Michael Curtin claim: “the principle of localism presumes that a modern city can be imagined, in Raymond Williams’ term as a “knowable community,” one with a recognizable identity.”⁷²⁷ They contend that the “modern city is a product, in part, of the many discourses and practices involved in mapping the city, those that give structure and meaning to urban space and that mediate relations between the social groups who inhabit that space.”⁷²⁸ While the station was unable to sustain its grasp on the city’s spatial imaginary—especially in a rapidly shifting broadcast landscape and following the death of Dr. Banks in 1985—the discourses and infrastructure it produced reinforce the significance of WGPR to media history and its import to social groups who inhabit the city.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁵ Larry Gabriel, “Channel 62’s Own Shows Are Endangered,” *The Detroit Free Press*, September 23, 1994, Friday edition, sec. 8A.

⁷²⁶ Gray, *Watching Race*, 133.

⁷²⁷ Milton William Kirkpatrick, *Localism in American Media, 1920-1934* (University of Wisconsin--Madison, 2006), 212.

⁷²⁸ “Mapping the Ethereal City: Chicago Television, the FCC, and the Politics of Place,” Christopher Anderson Michigan Curtin, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 16 (3-4), pp. 289-305.

⁷²⁹ For a broader overview of station history see: Mary H. Johnson, “A Case History of the Evolution of WGPR-TV, Detroit”; James Phillip Jeter, “WGPR-TV, 1975-1995: Rest in Peace (A History of the First Television Station Licensed to Blacks in the Continental USA)” (History Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention, Anaheim, California, August 12, 1996), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED401560.pdf>.

In conducting my research, I have observed one overarching trend in discussions of WGPR: nearly all sources congratulate WGPR-TV on existing at all. As stated in a 1975 *Newsweek* article: “The station has done better than some expected—simply by surviving.”⁷³⁰ Or as a 1976 *Detroit Free Press* article put it: “It hasn’t done everything it set out to do yet, but it has survived—and in a tough and risky business, that’s achievement in itself.”⁷³¹ Despite all its shortcomings, including its eventual sale to CBS, it found the means to leave a lasting impact on viewers and employees. Former staff members of WGPR formed the WGPR-TV historical society and opened a museum exhibit in 2016 at the Detroit History Museum and as permanent space in the William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2017. The staff and supporters of WGPR-TV, who helped develop the museum and attend reunion events, still haven’t abandoned their dream of Black media and the import of its continued curation.⁷³² The work of the WGPR Historical Society to promote station history through social media, local interviews, and appearances on local television—*American Black Journal* in particular—allows the station to reinforce the continued need for minority and community-controlled media infrastructures to intervene in the white spatial imaginary. This is especially true in cities like Detroit that still struggle to challenge systems of racial oppression—in both media space and quotidian life. I argue that WGPR-TV not only stands as an important instance of Black media infrastructure too often occluded from overarching narratives in the fields of media studies and urban studies, but also occasioned a form of participant

⁷³⁰ “Black TV.”

⁷³¹ Howard Rontal, “Channel 62 a Year Later: Still Learning to Walk Before It Can Run.”

⁷³² The WGPR Historical Society, comprised of former employees, also runs a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/wgprmuseum/> and Nat Morris has organized several reunions for *The Scene* regulars. <http://thescenereunion.com/wgpr-tv-62-2/> Morris’s personal website also includes photos and videos of dancers.

historiography that may help scholars and citizens alike reevaluate local television's roles in mediating shifting urban struggles and spatial imaginaries of civic life. WGPR-TV still signifies hope that better things for the city of Detroit, and other Black cities, may yet rise up through local media.

Conclusion

Documenting Detroit's Rebellious Pasts and Potential Futures

It's Time We Knew...
- Tagline to *Detroit* Film Poster (dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 2017)

To commemorate the fiftieth Anniversary of the Rebellion, Kathryn Bigelow released the period docudrama *Detroit* in the summer of 2017. *Detroit* explores the murder of Aubrey Pollard, Fred Temple, and Carl Cooper by police during the uprising of July 1967. Bigelow's film begins with a narration of the Great Migration—cleverly using Jacob Lawrence's paintings to animate this history [5.1 -5.2]. The film then traces the outbreak of violence and the initial containment measures used by the Detroit police department and Michigan state troopers to stifle the insurrection. After scenes of abstracted chaos that decontextualize archival footage, intermixing it with high-intensity reenactment, the film's narrative shifts to focus on the Algiers Motel violence—a battle between unapologetically racist white police, Black unarmed victims, and a Black security guard unintentionally embroiled in the ensuing tragedy.

In press and promotional interviews, Bigelow stated that she wanted to make the film to draw attention to the unrepresented history of Detroit's police violence in the 1960s. She states that her primary goal was to stimulate informed discussion about America's difficult past. "I made this movie in order to provoke reactions... The Algiers Motel story touched me deeply, it is a very important but unknown story, and I felt it needed telling, because a movie can open spaces for dialogue, it can create freedom of speech. In South Africa, there's a lot of talk about reconciliation, but here in America that is not the case."⁷³³ The *Detroit* promotional tour

⁷³³ Clémence Goldszal Baron translated by Helena, "How Kathryn Bigelow Rose to the Top of Hollywood," *Vogue English*, October 13, 2017, <https://en.vogue.fr/fashion-culture/fashion-exhibitions/story/kathryn-bigelow-detroit-movie-director-career/168>.

reinforces the publicity slogan “It’s time we knew” by using Detroit’s historical traumas to reflect symbolically upon the erasure of ugly episodes in urban history from mainstream American memory [Figures 5.3 - 5.4]. Critiquing media coverage that emphasized white safety over the systemic injustice experienced by subjects, Bigelow’s fictionalized reenactments explore the inhumane victimization and torture of Black citizens by a hostile and abrasively racist police force. Bigelow’s film thus reflects the impulse to document Detroit and make sense of the city as a symbol for systemic injustice. In some ways, her re-education of Detroit is grounded in a dichotomy of white anger and black fear that reverses the tactics of crisis management media that worked to quell white fear and black anger. However, Bigelow’s film also forecloses the opportunities for Black subjects of color to speak back to the conditions of oppression. As seen in the post-Rebellion national documentaries like *Summer of ’67: What We Learned*, Bigelow’s film—aimed for broad audiences—further lacks the nuance into local politics that Black citizen-producers were able to address for Black viewers. Ultimately, her film collapses broad processes of urban change and structural racism onto a microcosmic thriller about white state torture and black trauma set at Detroit’s Algiers Motel. Viewing the film as I was completing this dissertation, left me with many questions about Detroit’s iconicity and the enduring legacy of local media. Does Bigelow’s film fail to capture Detroit because it lacks a documentary or experimental frame? Should Black Detroit history be exclusively filmed by Black Detroiters? Why are white filmmakers so entranced with Detroit’s collapse? Why is this film claiming the title of *Detroit*?

Commentators also frequently questioned why Bigelow didn’t just title the film Algiers Motel, as two-thirds of the action takes place there. Perhaps that is because Bigelow and screenwriter Mark Boals couldn’t access the rights to the film’s inspiration: John Hersey’s 1968

bestseller, *The Algiers Motel Incident*. The late Hersey had donated all the book proceeds to African American charities, and his family refused to sell the rights to Bigelow, concerned that Hollywood would merely exploit this traumatic history.⁷³⁴ Yet, I argue Bigelow's film hones in on the Rebellion, and "Detroit" more generally, as a metonym for broader narratives of state-sanctioned violence against black people that are receiving unprecedented media attention, and uses the victims at the Algiers Motel to create an affective and immersive experience for viewers in an of age of enduring police brutality. A second poster for the film even ran with the subheading "This is America," further concretizing the iconicity of "Detroit" as national symbol of urban crisis and a focal point for understanding ongoing racial inequality and discord in the US [Figure 5.5].

The film's address and promotional tactics further presumes an outsider audience, those who did not know this history but find that now, "It's time we knew." *Detroit* works to educate a viewer base that is presumably white and middlebrow. As Angelica Jade Bastien points out in her review, "'Detroit' was directed, written, produced, shot, and edited by white creatives who do not understand the weight of the images they hone in on with an unflinching gaze."⁷³⁵ Like sponsored documentaries produced to make sense of the Rebellion in the late 1960s—as discussed in Chapter One—the film targets a white audience to bear witness to, and confront, racist pasts they have otherwise ignored. The film presumes that the lessons of the Rebellion have been forgotten and that stories of historical Black subjectivity have been repressed. Absent

⁷³⁴ "Detroit: A Film by White People for White People | Cinema | Al Jazeera," <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/detroit-film-white-people-white-people-170813124207182.html>; "In Harrowing 'Detroit,' Kathryn Bigelow Mixes Brutal Facts With Fiction," NPR.org, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/03/540978399/in-harrowing-detroit-kathryn-bigelow-mixes-brutal-facts-with-fiction>.

⁷³⁵ Angelica Jade Bastien, "Detroit Movie Review & Film Summary (2017) | Roger Ebert," <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/detroit-2017>.

from Bigelow's film, however, is a reflection of how the explosive anger—to echo Tony Brown—that emerged in the wake of 1967 provided a catalyst for civic change, spearheaded by Black activists. *Detroit*, like so many other narrative films and documentaries made by “outsiders” before it, showcases rioting without acknowledging Rebellion.⁷³⁶

Bigelow's film does include archival film and television footage of “rioting” in Detroit to corroborate her intervention into Detroit's symbolic history and fill in the representational gaps. This recent cinematic turn to Detroit connects the history of racial violence to contemporary structures of racial inequity. This is far from an unusual strategy. Since the Rebellion, non-local filmmakers have taken clips from local riot coverage to make sense of the interrelated processes of urban violence and socio-economic decline in (Black) inner cities.⁷³⁷ As outlined in the introduction, this gesture is particularly popular with a recent wave of ruin documentaries that use the archival and architectural remnants of Detroit's past to “make sense” of the city's present state of poverty and emptiness. In films such as *Requiem For Detroit? (2010)* and *Detroit: Wild City (2010)*, what remains in the city is largely black devastation and large swaths of unoccupied territory—the former homes of Detroit's white working-class and the institutions they frequented. According to Les Roberts, “the archival reclamation of lost or disappearing landscapes reflects in part a response to the anxieties generated by rapid urban change, with the city's cinematic geographies playing host to discursive spaces of critical historical reflection.”⁷³⁸ The aestheticization of Detroit's historical trauma intermixed with archival footage of Detroit's absented past, featured in ruin documentaries as well as Bigelow's *Detroit*, produces an

⁷³⁶ The only moments of possible protest arrive when black victims refuse to cower before their assailants before being executed.

⁷³⁷ “NPR Podcast: Historian Kevin Boyle On The Dangers Of Seeing Detroit As A Metaphor,” accessed October 14, 2013, <http://hnn.us/article/152899>.

⁷³⁸ Roberts, *Film, Mobility and Urban Space*, 14.

Outsider/Insider binary and thereby constructs an over-determined lament for, and fetishization of, the social, economic, and architectural collapse of an idealized American center.

Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle argue that ruins are predicated on a particular gaze cast upon them. “The beholder defines the ruin, and the ruin could not exist without such creative appropriation. As a result, the ruin is often the playground of speculative strategies that tell us more about the beholder than about the ruin or its original.”⁷³⁹ Looking at the various Detroits imagined in documentaries after the Rebellion, we can see the politics of the producers as well. Gilbert Maddox, John Watson, and William V. Banks are reflected in the media infrastructure they sought to produce. For Jerry Herron, “A ruin is not found it is made: an anti-historical compound of nostalgia and merchandising.”⁷⁴⁰ According to Herron, it is only the tourist that possesses the necessary detachment from the transformative processes at work in the city to define the contours of the ruin. Yet, Black citizens in Detroit perhaps do not share the same nostalgia for what Detroit once was for white residents. Black Detroiters do not hope to return to some pre-Rebellion industrial utopia. Furthermore, Black neighborhoods were always transient and destroyed repeatedly by white urban renewal plans. Architectural and economic decay were a part of Black encounters with city space before and after the Rebellion. Accordingly, Black residents looked instead to a speculative future of Detroit in which Black life could thrive without the imposed limitations of white civic infrastructure.

While Bigelow’s film ends on a bleak note—the acquittal of all charges brought against the police who enacted the execution-style killings during the Rebellion—her stated objective

⁷³⁹ Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Duke University Press Books, 2010), 7.

⁷⁴⁰ Patrick Barron, Manuela Mariani, and Herron, Jerry, eds., “Three Meditations on the Ruins of Detroit,” in *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale* (Routledge, 2013), 34.

was to catalyze a conversation for the present. Ruin documentaries, likewise, position their work on the precipice of a new future that might be born from the ashes of industrial ruination. For instance, the opening narration that accompanies the initial shots of Detroit as ruin in *Requiem for Detroit?* (Julian Temple, 2010) states:

Not since the last days of the Maya have the Americas befallen a transformation so traumatic as that of the Motor City. It seems that time is running backwards. What was once the frontier city of the American dream, the Paris of the Midwest, is now in its strange beauty, the first post-American city. It's a darkly cautionary tale for entire industrial world. But as you listen to the paths of cicadas amongst the wildflowers and prairie that have reclaimed one third of the city, it is possible also to feel you have traveled 1000 years into the future, and that amongst the ruins of Detroit, lies a first pioneer's map to the post-industrial future that awaits us all.

The visuals following the opening dialogue contain a rapidly paced montage of tracking shots of Detroit's desolate and decaying landscape, uncontextualized sponsored, newsreel, and theatrical film footage of 20th century Detroit, and talking-head shots of well-known Detroiters and former locals explicating the city's historic decline. After this intro, the film shows prior mayor Jerome P. Cavanaugh (in office 1962-1970) discussing the wonders of Detroit, a "City on the Move," taken from a promotional film produced in 1965 as a part of an unsuccessful Olympic bid, (although Temple's film makes no mention of the source material). Soon, this footage is projected onto a series of unspecified derelict structures. As [white Detroiter] Eminem's "Lose Yourself" fades in on the soundtrack, this sequence shifts to a disjunctive cacophony of news

bytes presenting Detroit in a state of chaos.⁷⁴¹ Images of abandoned houses, automobiles, and vandalized buildings set ablaze, framed through a distorted lens, contrapuntally correspond with the audio track of Cavanaugh's enthusiastic claims, overlaid upon car alarms, sirens, and gunshots. The spatial and temporal disorder of the archival footage intermingled with the in-your-face shots of dilapidated, abandoned buildings strewn with graffiti produce a graphically disorienting effect. Like the tone of Bigelow's film, the modernist promise of Detroit is rendered as a story of failure and devastation. The celebration of the urban everyday expressed in Cavanaugh's words is visually transformed into a mournful "requiem" for a once thriving urban life—but one that could perhaps be born again if white residents take action to restore what was "lost" in the city.

Svetlana Boym notes that the ruins invite us to think of "past that could have been and the future that never took place."⁷⁴² *New York Times* writer Mark Binelli likewise remarks that "Ruins of Detroit don't make you think of the past, they direct you toward the future. The effect is almost prophetic. This is what the future will end up like. This is what the future has always ended up looking like."⁷⁴³ Yet in Detroit, this is a future invented by the tourist—the outsider—to catalyze a debate on larger transnational processes of de-industrialization as they impact white

⁷⁴¹ Eminem is from Detroit and has become a signifier of the 8-mile boundary that separates Black Detroit from the white suburbs—a line he lived on and migrates between. Yet, he also signifies a trend in Detroit hip-hop where white artists capitalize on Black musical trends, gaining more notoriety than locals. In a city with a majority Black population, it is curious that the biggest names to emerge from Detroit hip hop—Eminem, ICP, and Kid Rock—are all white.

⁷⁴² Svetlana Boym, "Ruins of the Avant Garde: From Tatlin's Tower to Paper Architecture," Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Duke University Press Books, 2010) 58.

⁷⁴³ Mark Binelli, "How Detroit Became the World Capital of Staring at Abandoned Old Buildings," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2012, sec. Magazine, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/magazine/how-detroit-became-the-world-capital-of-staring-at-abandoned-old-buildings.html>.

lives. Detroit, is again, reduced to what the city signifies for the white spatial imaginary. The transformative possibilities that might be reborn from the ashes of history have been emphasized in coverage of the city's recent history as a white re-population of the city is taking place. Detroit has engendered significant attention from creative communities that celebrate the city as a blank canvas upon which they have free rein to re-imagine social order and public space. Attracted by cheap real estate, driven by a sense of civic responsibility, and committed to DIY culture, young, predominantly white, artists and activists are migrating to the city and working collectively to reshape its future. As such, Detroit has again come to stand as both a testament to a rapidly receding bygone era and the possible emergence of a new type of creative urbanity. This narrative of rebirth from the ashes has been a major component of business redevelopment in Detroit in the 2010s—with industries like Quicken Loans expanding substantially in the city—and is the focal point of Mayor Mike Duggan's campaign—the city's first white Mayor since the election of Coleman Young in 1974. However, there is a danger in shifting from black traumatic history to white futurity, because these revitalization projects tend to obscure the intellectual and creative contributions of Black subjects who are too often treated as the casualties of history.

International discourse on Detroit, particularly during the post-industrial era, has been guided in large measure by writers and artists who are not from the city and do not render much local specificity. National or mainstream Documentaries on Detroit might include some interviews with local residents or perhaps a clip from the heyday of Motown, yet largely gloss over the period discussed in my dissertation—moving from the Rebellion to the rise of drugs, gangs, and urban decay in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. With the exception of an occasional nod to “messiah mayor” Coleman Young, the history of Black media that challenges erasure and demands visibility discussed at length in this dissertation rarely factors into the city's current

symbolic status within a white-defined spatial imaginary of the present and the future. As

George Steinmetz puts it:

The enormous variety of visual signatures that characterized the early and middle decades of the twentieth century in the city has narrowed dramatically in the more recent period. In both filmic and ideological terms, Detroit has largely lost control of the way it is depicted. In the voyeuristic pathologization of the city found in Hollywood's urban dystopias and the nightly crime reports, the city's ruination bleeds metonymically into a discourse about "human ruins" who are blamed for the damaged condition of their environment.⁷⁴⁴

Curiously though, when discussing the city's history of self-representation and identification, Steinmetz uses Detroit as a singular agential body. Yet, as my project shows, Detroit is a multifaceted city with a vibrant history of social actors and activists who have long used media to imagine a variety of paths towards positive change.⁷⁴⁵ The Detroit Rebellion did concretize a

⁷⁴⁴ George Steinmetz, "Drive-By Shooting: Making A Documentary About Detroit," *Michigan Quarterly Review* XLV, no. 3 (Summer 2006),

⁷⁴⁵ One notable exception is Rick Prelinger's *Lost Landscapes of Detroit* project. Prelinger, one of the nation's most active and influential archivists of sponsored and ephemeral media, first grew interested in Detroit's sponsored film industry and the activities of the Jam Handy Corporation. His recurrent contact with Detroit's sponsored film industry and his interest in ephemeral media history catalyzed Prelinger to produce his three part series, *Lost Landscapes of Detroit* in 2010. The compilation film presents a pluralistic and diverse collection of sponsored, amateur, and home movies, with a specific emphasis on non-spectacular everyday experiences as filmed by Detroit residents. Screened at various locations throughout the city, Prelinger theorized the series would offer "Detroiters imagery of the city's past, free from any sense of nostalgia, in an attempt to provide subject for contemplation as the people of the city build toward a new future." In doing so, Prelinger strives to preserve the local histories that have been elided by dominant discourse, including footage taken of and by Black residents. Partnering with the Internet Archive, Prelinger has since made sponsored films and local media materials available online, championing free digital distribution of ephemeral media through the public domain and inviting the widest possible audience to view, download, and even repurpose archival media to new and creative ends. Through this active engagement with ephemeral media, Prelinger hopes

need among black residents for self-representation and community reflection. While mainstream media continues to reinforce images of law, order, and potential restoration of former (white) glory, and Bigelow's *Detroit* highlights black suffering and the containment of black bodies, local Black media produced after the Rebellion (the "middle period" for Steinmetz) operated as a significant platform for Black residents to expand and deepen internal debate about the creation of a thriving urban future in a Black city.

While present day news discourses and ruin documentaries ignore the history in between the riots and the ruin, Black local media and filmmakers made (and continue to make) documentaries about quotidian life as a form of sustained Black Rebellion. Of course, local Black documentary is a minor practice compared to the reach of Bigelow's film. Yet, media infrastructure for Black citizen producers has not disappeared. For instance, in 2016, local filmmakers formed The Detroit Film Society, an organization empowering filmmakers of diverse backgrounds in Southeastern Michigan to create and showcase locally made independent films. Likewise, Anthony Brogdon documentary *Business in the Black — The Rise of Black Business in*

that viewing citizens might discover nuanced ways of conceptualizing American culture and history. He argues that "archives are justified through access and reuses, archives preserve the past to intervene in the present, thus making the future possible." Drawing on the work of Larry Lessig and the Creative Commons, Prelinger advocates a shift from a "model of scarcity" to a "model of plenty," arguing that intellectual property gains value primarily through dissemination. The archive uses the digital forum to bring visibility to historically marginalized and neglected films and film practices, thereby elevating their status as socio-historical objects worthy of further study and preservation. By facilitating access to and an active engagement with ephemeral media, in this context, both celluloid film and the industrial city are mobilized to engender a discourse on the construction of a new future. As many of the media texts mentioned in this dissertation—from tapes from WGPR-TV to sponsored crisis management documentaries like *The Black Eye* and *In Your Interest*—have been lost, I hold a minute hope that the preservationist efforts of figures like Prelinger will demonstrate the import of forgotten local media and new copies will resurface. Rick Prelinger, "Ecometaphoric Flow" *Panorama Ephemera*, in Vector's Journal, 2010. <http://panorama.vectorsjournal.org/html/content.php?sectionid=3> Rick Prelinger, "Personal Conversation" Skype, December 1, 2012.

America, 1800s-1960 (2017), follows the trajectory of *CPT* and WGPR-TV in celebrating the historic achievements in Black Capitalism; the film had showings at the Detroit Historical Museum and The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. Functioning in a different format, *American Black Journal* continues to discuss local Black politics and highlight significant moments in Black cultural history in the city. Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, WGPR-TV has organized its own, staff-initiated preservation and display project to save WGPR-TV from further ephemerality and teach community visitors about the history of Black television and radio in the city. My objective has been to emphasize the contributions local Black media made aspire to make the socio-political operations of civic life in the aftermath of Rebellion. While often occluded from mainstream media histories and Detroit histories, local Black documentaries were both materials and tools for the construction of a local Black media infrastructure designed to enhance the material realities of everyday life Detroit.

This is also not to say that the black media makers discussed in this dissertation (and those beyond its scope) were not (or are not) interested in Detroit's unique status or international symbolism. However, they offer significant revision to the popular iconicity of the city. For instance, *Finally Got the News* centers its understanding of Detroit on the broadly acknowledged impressions of the city as the epicenter of industrialization. Yet, in the version of Detroit history constructed by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the automotive industry has the capacity to unify black workers in shared struggle. This consequently made Detroit a major hub of American counter-insurgency, and a potential site for a Marxist-based revolution to be led by Black workers. Meanwhile, WGPR-TV capitalized on Detroit's status as the nation's largest black city with growing Black civic infrastructure to support and foster black creative possibilities for what was imagined to be a Black metropolis.

It would be easy to read each of the projects discussed in this dissertation as dots on a roadmap to failure, documenting projects that never came to fruition, idealistic hopes for a Black future that were never realized, and dreams for long-term stability that were proven unsustainable, leading towards yet another precipice of urban renewal. In a society still controlled by whiten interests and in which Black lives are unevenly affected by educational disadvantage, economic inequality, lack of access to technology, police brutality and poor housing conditions, Black infrastructure remains underfunded and unstable. More inclusive hiring practices did not augment the broadcast content on major news programs, which continued to prioritize displaying police efforts to stop Detroit's intensified gang, drug, and crime problems, rather than citizen efforts to deconstruct what crime means in context of everyday life in the city. Nevertheless, fifty years following the Rebellion, these media projects are still potent examples of citizens making active strides to ignite political, social, and economic change in the city and intervene in white systems of media power that had long barred Black entry. These projects indeed teach us that Black media infrastructure is an important if often unremarked component that links minority media practice with processes of urban development and decline. Like other elements of urban infrastructure, these projects enable more visible operations. These documentary projects contain political lessons on Black capitalism, comment on white crisis management, demonstrate the power of Black radical organizing, and showcase possibilities for local Black art to forge community bonds amidst spatial isolation and architectural decay. And they do so not just in their content, but also in their production and distribution practices.

The local Black media projects described in this project form a documentary archive, material and imaginary, of Black quotidian life in the post-Rebellion city captured from Black perspectives. What I hope to have demonstrated is that local Black documentary history—as a

vehicle for social political, and economic change—is not a narrative of failure, but rather a form of creative survival in which media serves as a central node in a constellation of networks of Black Power and community. In a period and setting largely represented by the repression of Black citizens amidst processes of urban crisis, Black media rebelled, with hopes that better futures could be built from the ashes of the past. That legacy endures.

speramus meliora resurget cineribus, We hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes

--Gabriel Richard, Detroit Official Motto

FIGURES

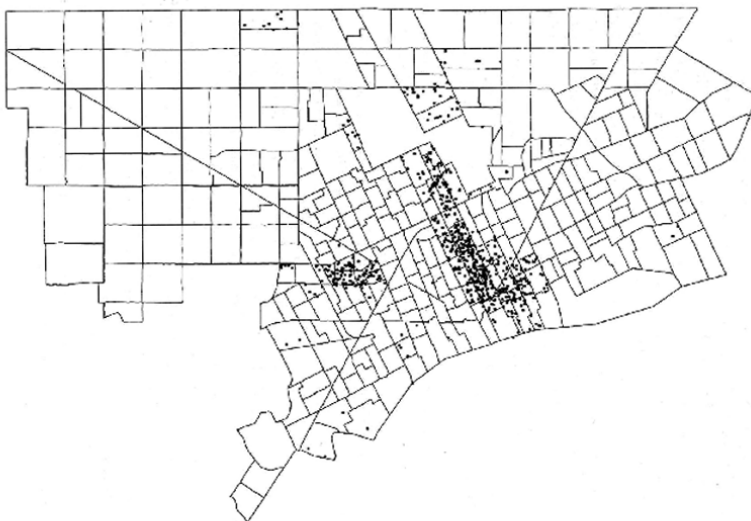
Figure 0.1

Detroit Flag was first designed in 1907 by David E. Heineman and was officially adopted as the official flag with this model in 1948 (pictured here). The official motto is included. The right figure weeps over destruction, while the figure on the right gestures to the new city that will rise in its place. The lower left quarter represents France, which founded fort Detroit and settlement in 1701; The upper right quarter represents Great Britain, which controlled the fort from 1760 to 1796; The lower right has and upper left has 13 represent the original thirteen colonies of the US. Photo taken from The Detroit Historical Society records, Catalog Number 2013.040.387. <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/02E3747C-83BA-4C68-B2F5-807863540900>



Figure 0.2

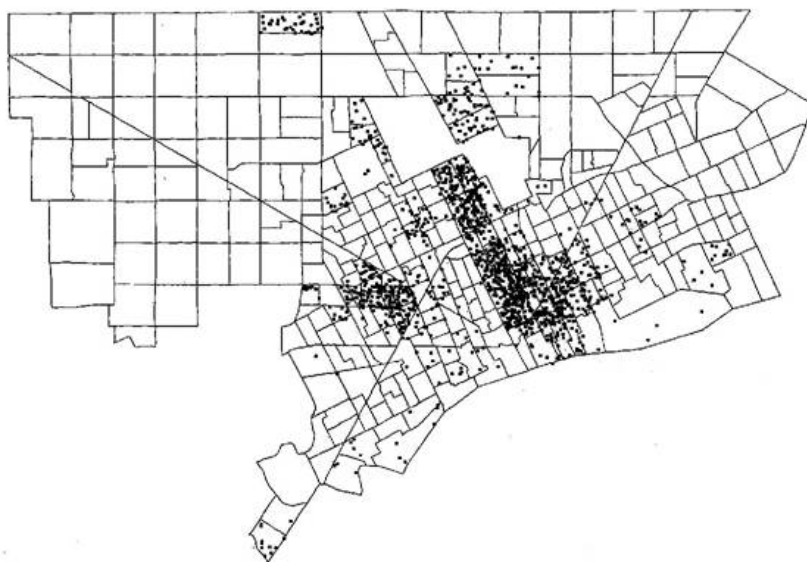
Illustration showing the concentration of African American Occupancy in Detroit in the 1940 Census. Sugrue, Thomas. J. (2005). *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 184.



Map 7.1 (a). Black Population in Detroit, 1940. 1 Dot = 200.

Figure 0.3

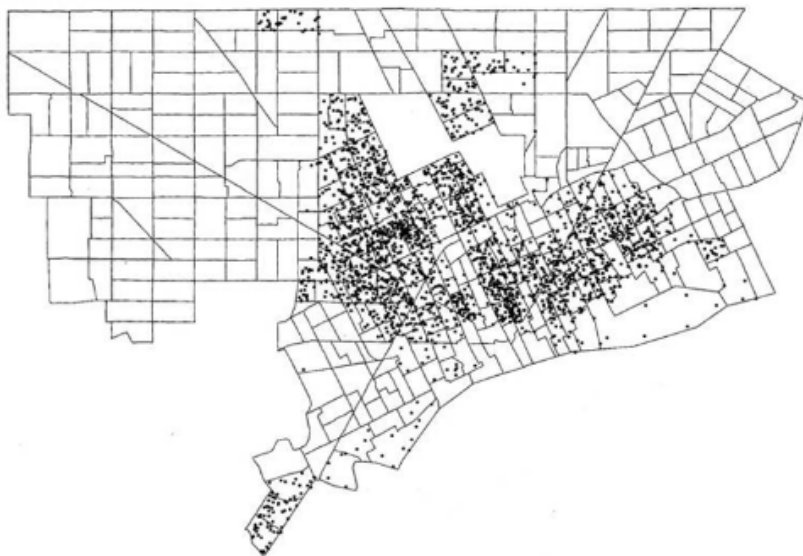
Illustration showing the concentration of African American Occupancy in Detroit in the 1950 Census. Sugrue, Thomas. J. (2005). *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 185.



Map 7.1 (b). Black Population in Detroit, 1950. 1 Dot = 200.

Figure 0.4

Illustration showing the Concentration of African American Occupancy in Detroit in the 1960 Census. Map data based on Census tract. Sugrue, Thomas. J. (2005). *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 186.



Map 7.1 (c). Black Population in Detroit, 1960. 1 Dot = 200.

Figure 0.5

Illustration showing the Concentration of African American Occupancy in Detroit in the 1970 Census. Map data based on Census tract. Sugrue, Thomas. J. (2005). *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 187.



Map 7.1 (d). Black Population in Detroit, 1970. 1 Dot = 200.

Figure 0.6

Color coded Detroit map demonstrating the majority presence of one minority group in different sectors of the city. "Predominant Race by 2000 Census Tract," U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

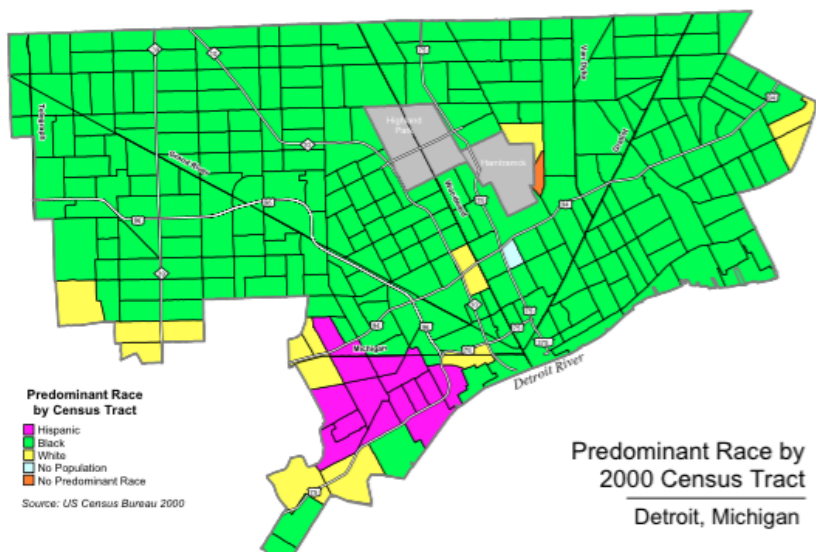


Figure 0.7

Map showing the location of Detroit's historic Black neighborhood in relation to freeway development.

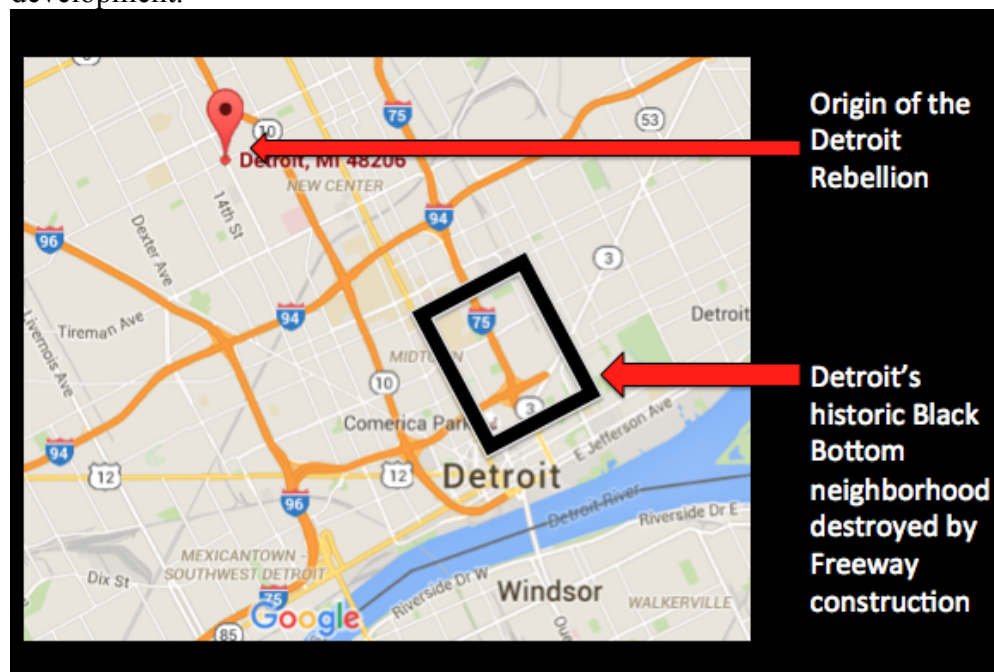


Figure 0.8

Map showing Population Density by Census. 1950 U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

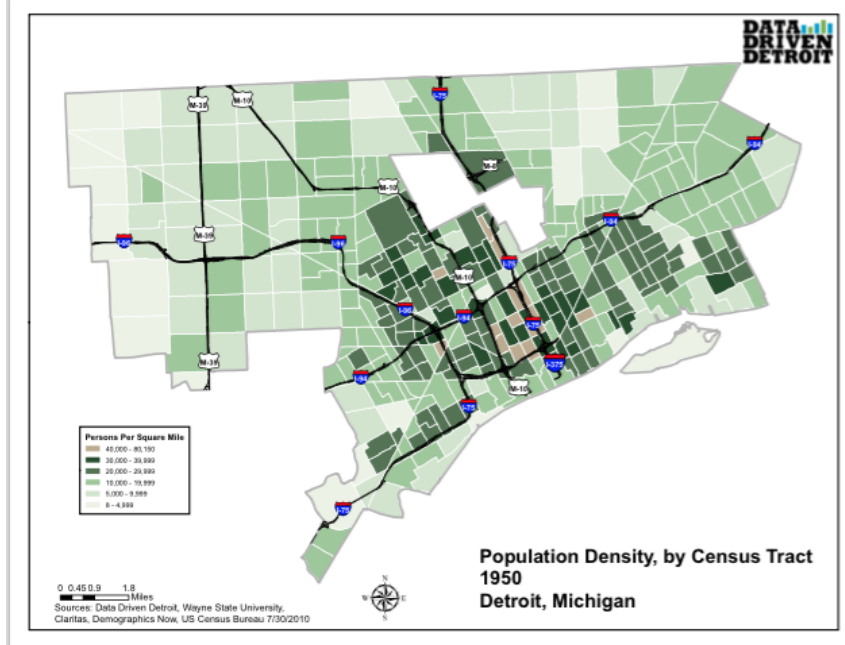


Figure 0.9

Map showing population density by census. 1960. U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

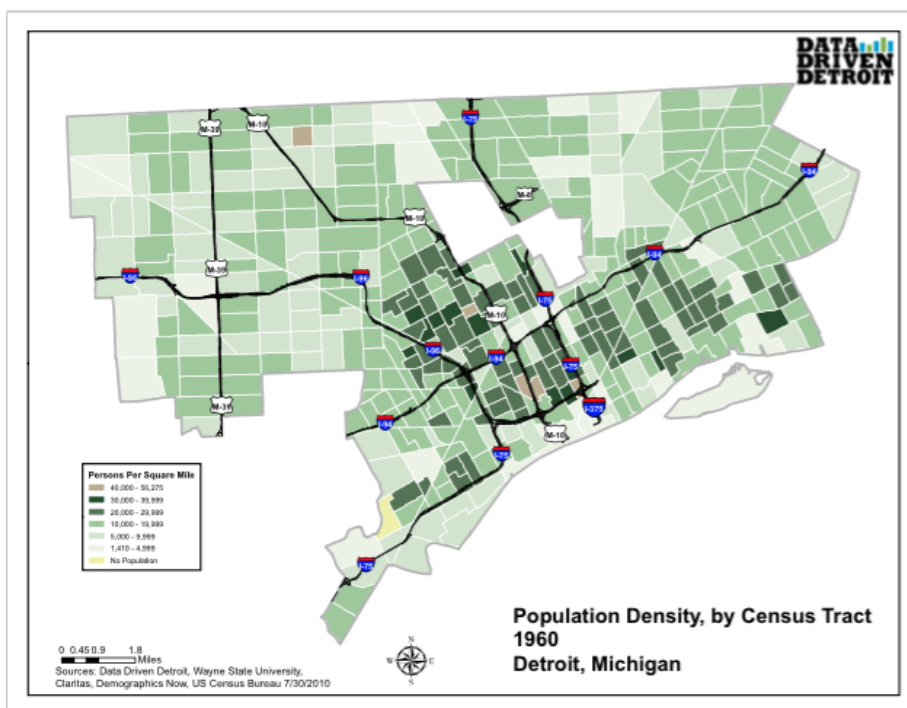


Figure 0.10

Map showing population density by census, 1970. U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

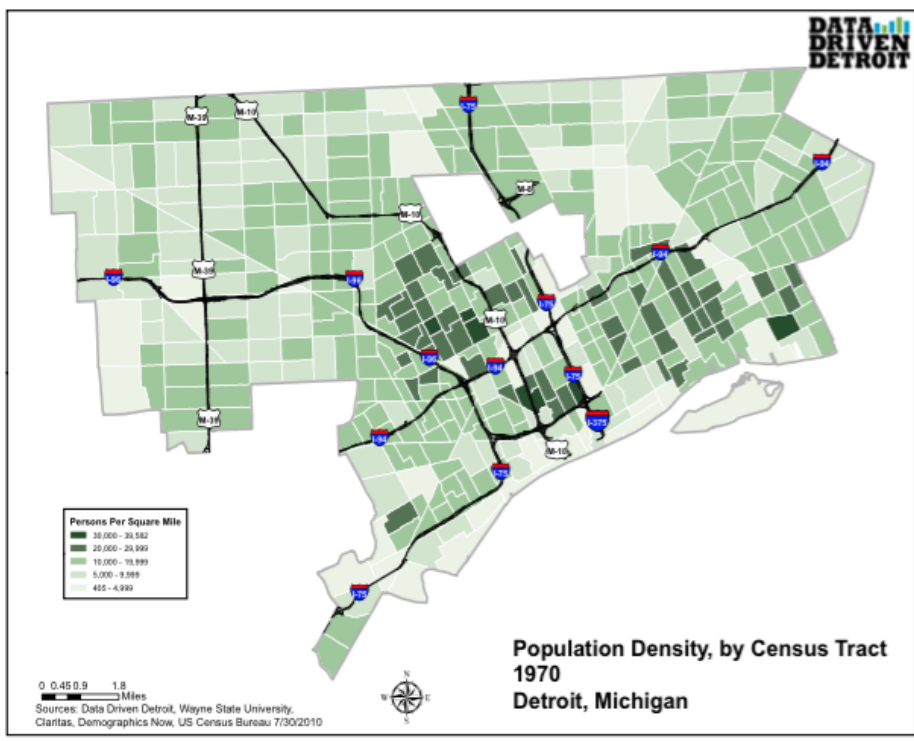


Figure 0.11

Map showing population density by census, 1980 U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

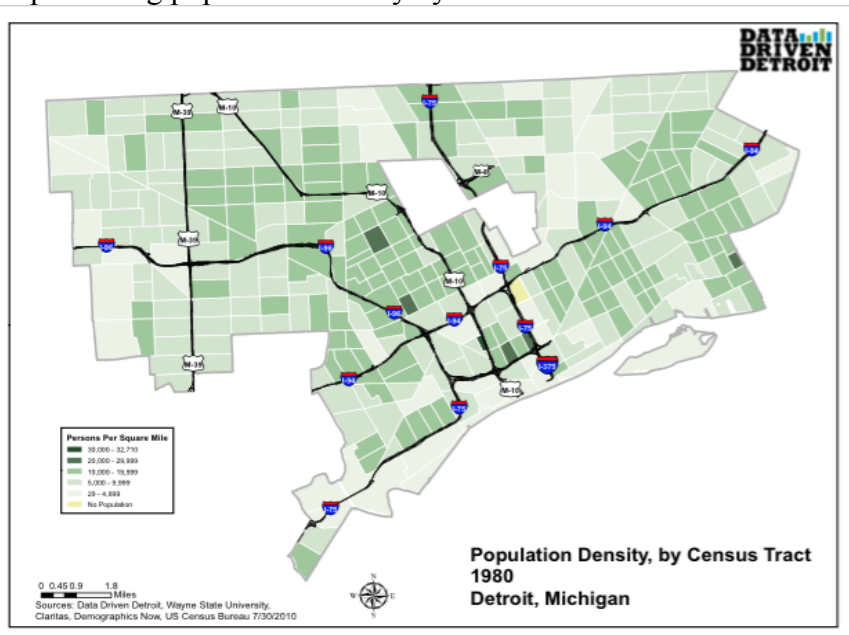


Figure 0.12

Map showing population density by census. 1990. U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.

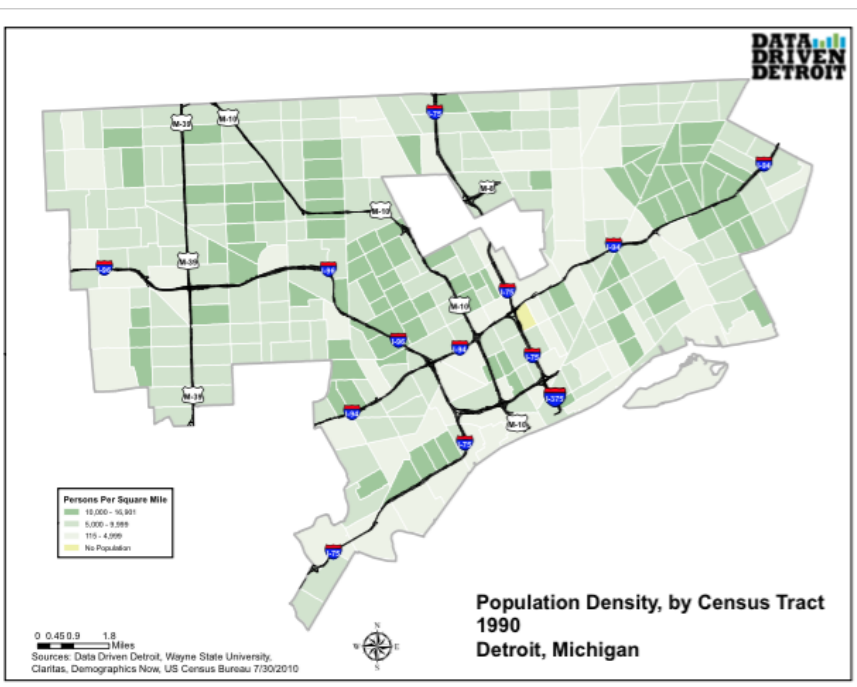


Figure 0.13

Graph showing the shifting population levels of Detroit from 1880-2010. The sharp inclines in the earth 20th century correlate with automotive development. The population declines correlate to white, and later Black, flight out of the city. U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit.



Figure 0.14

Map Showing Percentage of Residential Parcels with an Existing Housing Structure, 2010. U.S. Census Bureau; Data Driven Detroit..

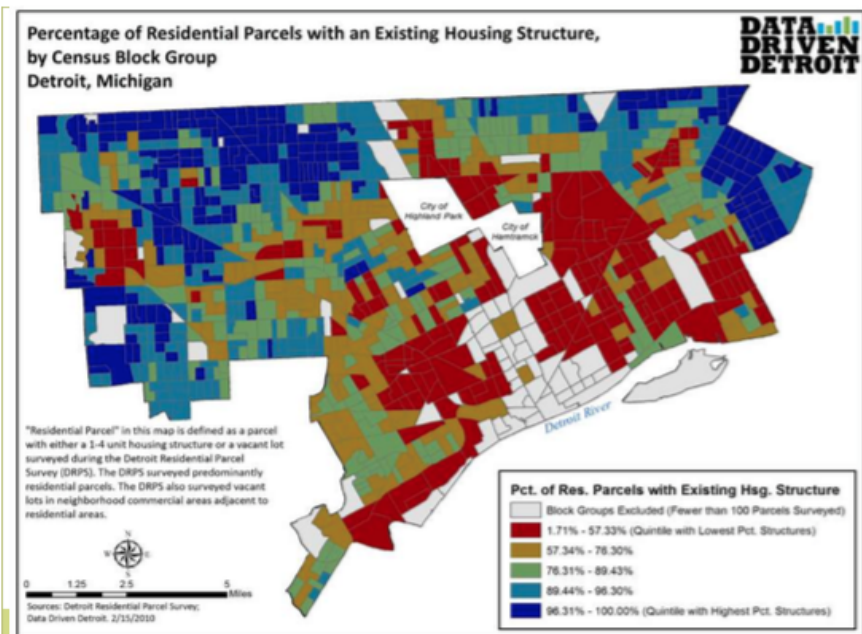


Figure 0.15

Map Comparing Square Mileage and Population of Detroit to other Cities; Boston, Manhattan, and San Francisco, c. 2000. Map designed by Dan Pitera, University of Detroit Mercy.

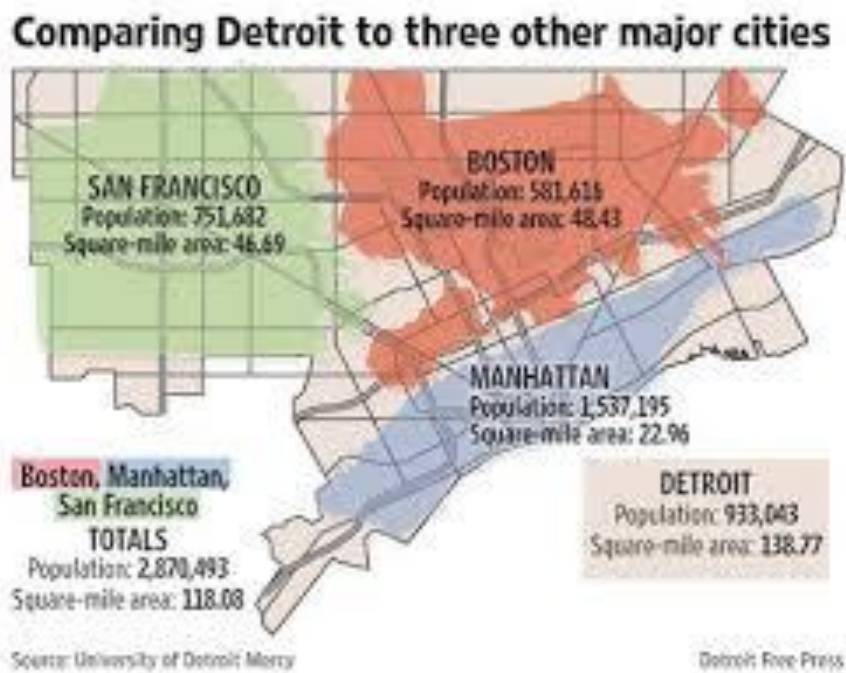
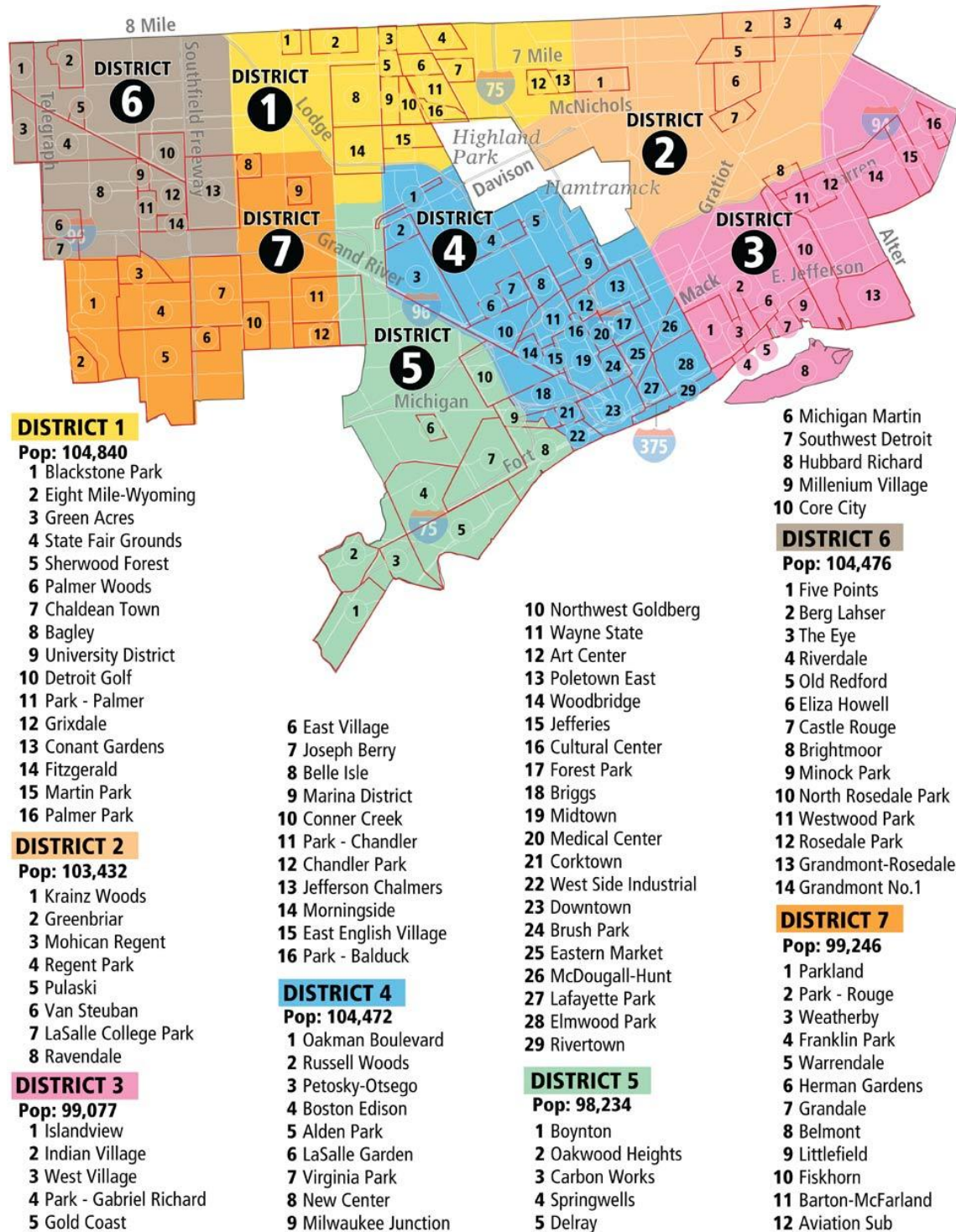


Figure 0.16

Detroit Neighborhood Map, as Organized by District. District 4 includes the historical downtown and center of the city. Courtesy of Data Driven Detroit.

DATA DRIVEN DETROIT'S PROPOSED CITY COUNCIL DISTRICTS



SOURCES: Cityscape Detroit; Data Driven Detroit

KOFI MYLER, MOSES HARRIS AND DAVID PIERCE/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Figure 1.1

The New Detroit Committee. Left to right: Lena Bivens, Archdiocesan Opportunity Program; Ed Carey, President Detroit Common Council; Robert Tindal, Exec Sec NAACP; Richard Huegli, Managing director, United Community Services; Emil Lockwood, State Senate Majority Leader; Jack Wood, secretary-manager, Detroit and Wayne Building Trades Council; Judge Damon Keith, chairman Michigan Civil Rights Commission; Max Fisher, United Foundation chairman; Virgil Boyd, president Chrysler Corp; John Pingel, president Ross Roy Inc; Mrs. Gerald Bright, vice-president, League of Women Voters; Norvil Harrington, Inner City civil rights worker; Ralph McElvenny, president Michigan Consolidated Gas Co.; Joseph L. Hudson, president J.L. Hudson Co (chairman); James Roche, president General Motors Corp.; William T. Gossett, president American Bar Association; Arthur Johnson, deputy superintendent, Detroit Public Schools; Walker Cisler, chairman, Detroit Edison; James B. Ogden, assistant to UAW president Walter Reuther; Allen Merrell, Ford Motor Co., vice-president; John Armstrong, president Darin & Armstrong, Inc.; Rev Malcolm Carron, president University of Detroit; Mrs. Jean Washington, 10th precinct Police Community Relations Committee; Curtis Potter, Mayor Royal Oak; William Ryan, State House minority leader; William Day, president Michigan Bell; Delos Hamlin, chairman Oakland County Board of Supervisions; Rennie Freeman, executive secretary, West Central Organization; Paul Borman, president Borman Food Stores, Inc. New Detroit Committee, 1967 Group portrait of the New Detroit Committee taken outside of the McGregor Memorial Conference Center, Detroit. Photographer Tony Spina. PhotoID: 28577, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.



Figure 1.4

National Guardsmen watch for snipers as members of the Detroit Fire Department battle a fire during the civil unrest of 1967. The Detroit News, "National Guard, Snipers, Arson, 1967" Detroit News Photograph Collection (UAV002691), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.



Figure 1.5

A Michigan State policeman searches youth on 12th Street in Detroit, July 24, 1967. Alternative Press photo.

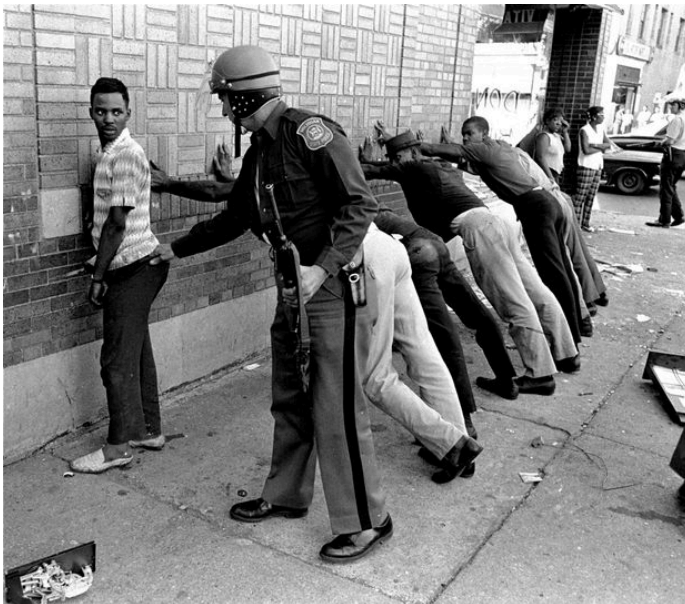


Figure 1.6

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, chaired by Governor Otto Kerner, Jr of Illinois (center, at head of table) released its report in March 1968. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Clarence, Mary, and Robert Bryant. Other members included: John Lindsay, Mayor of New York and vice chairman, Edward Brooke, Senator (R-MA), Fred R. Harris, Senator (D-OK), James Corman, Congressman (D-CA), William McCulloch, Congressman (R-OH). Charles Thornton, Founder of defense contractor Litton Industries, Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, I.W. Abel, President of US Steelworkers of America, Herbert Turner Jenkins, Police chief, Atlanta, Georgia, Katherine Graham Peden, Commissioner of Commerce, Kentucky, David Ginsburg, Commission Executive Director appointed by President Johnson.



Figure 2.1
CPT Hosts Tony Brown, Sandy Lawrence, and Abe Ulmer on set with the *CPT* logo in the background (1968).



Figure 2.2
Producer/Host Tony Brown introducing the topic of the episode on October 23, 1968.



Figure 2.3
The “Git White” Free Your Mind mock commercial from the October 23, 1968 episode.



Figure 2.4 Image from the “Making of a Rioter” segment, Episode 05, October 23, 1968.



Figure 2.5

Images from the “Making of a Rioter” segment, Episode 05, October 23, 1968.



Figure 3.1

Image of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, included as the cover of Dan Georgakas, and Marvin Surkin’s *Detroit I Do Mind Dying*.



Figure 3.2
Credits screen, *Finally Got the News*, 1970

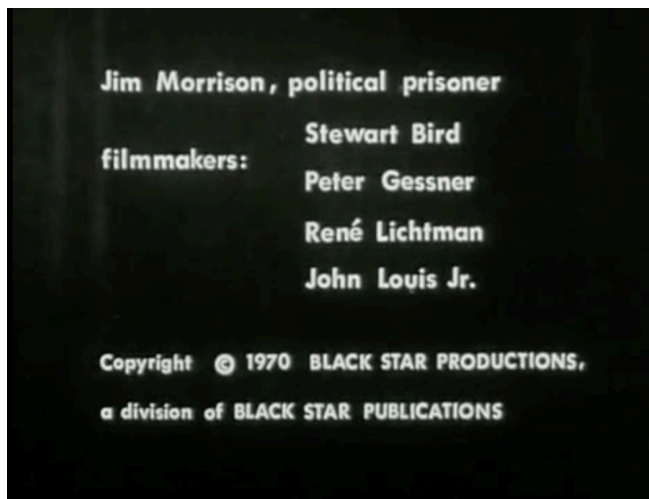


Figure 3.3
Image from *Finally got the News* that draws from the Diego Rivera “Detroit Industry” mural at the Detroit Institute of Arts



Figure 3.4
Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring a Detroit steel worker



Figure 3.5

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring scenes of arson during the Detroit Rebellion



Figure 3.6

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring a Detroit officer wielding a weapon



Figure 3.7

Protest signs at a DRUM rally featuring the slogan “Finally Got the News”

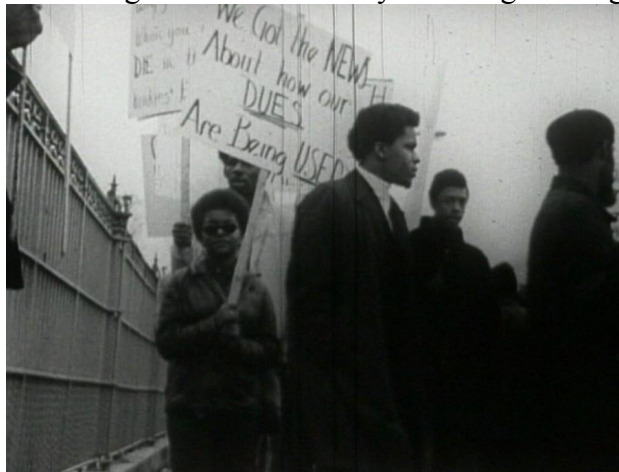


Figure 3.8

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring John Watson's opening monologue



Figure 3.9

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring Kenneth Cockrel Sr.



Figure 3.10

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring Ron March

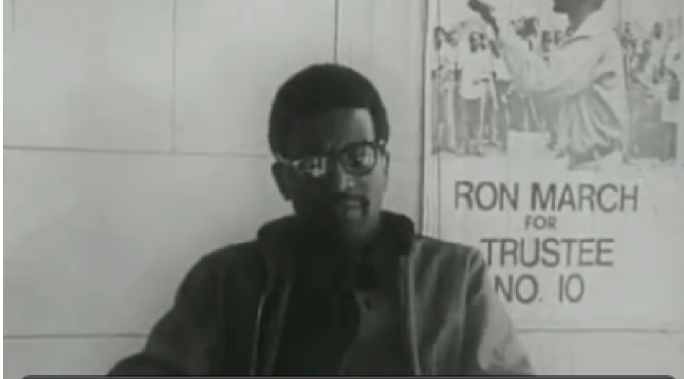


Figure 3.11

Image from *Finally Got the News*, Ford Motor Company Board representatives



Figure 3.12

Image from *Finally Got the News*, featuring Chuck Wooten



Figure 3.13
Ford Motor Company Motion Picture Laboratory, November, 1914



Figure 3.14
Image from *Finally Got the News*, workers on the line

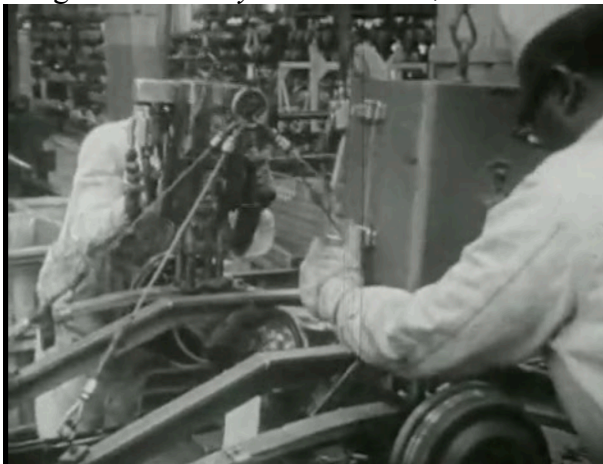


Figure 3.15
Image from *Finally Got the News*, Wooten driving



Figure 3.16
Map of Detroit and showing the location of the Ford River Rouge Plant

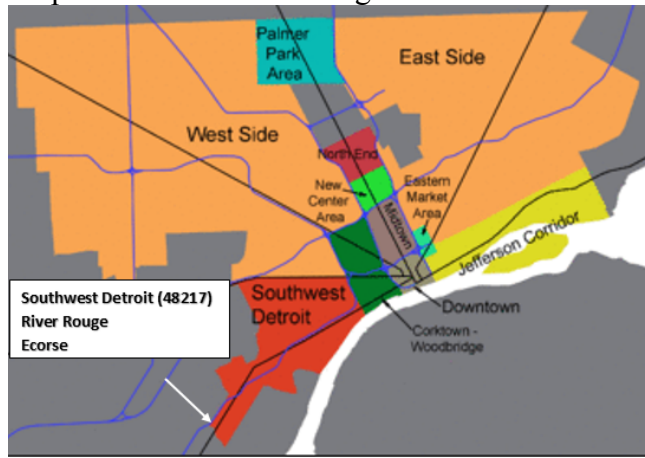


Figure 3.17
Image from *Finally Got the News*, scenes of Detroit's automotive landscape



Figure 3.18

Image from *Finally Got the News*, scenes of Detroit's automotive landscape



Figure 3.19

Image from *Finally Got the News*, scenes of Detroit's automotive landscape



Figure 3.20

Image from *Finally Got the News*, domestic labor



Figure 4.1

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young celebrates a November 1973 election victory in the Detroit Hilton. Photo: Hugh Grannum, Detroit Free Press.



Figure 4.2

William V. Banks, President and Owner of WGPR, Inc. Photo from Detroit Free Press Archives.



Figure 4.3

William Banks, Center, Dark Suit, Was Instrumental In Opening The Nation's First African American-Owned Television Station In Detroit In 1975. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.



William Banks, center, dark suit, was instrumental in opening the nation's first African American-owned television station in Detroit in 1975.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Figure 4.4

Black youth running the camera on *The Scene*. "Black History Month Profile: Detroit's WGPR-TV 62," *The Michigan Chronicle* (blog), February 19, 2014, <https://michronicleonline.com/2014/02/19/black-history-month-profile-detroits-wgpr-tv-62/>.



Figure 4.5
List of Programmed Shows and Descriptions for WGPR-TV circa 1975

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
<i>Crime Alert</i>	A fifteen-minute daily announcements of unsolved crimes in the Detroit area, askig for citizen help with apprehending the suspects
<i>Big City News</i>	A half hour daily news program airing twice daily and dedicated to covering content of interest to Black Detroit that was otherwise glossed over by other stations
<i>Morning Party</i>	An hour long news and talk morning television show hosted by George White with a live audience, 5 minute news recap, and musical guest
<i>Detroit Leadership</i>	Weekly show profiling prominent local Black leaders
<i>Community Calendar</i>	Fifteen-minute log of upcoming events of note
<i>Rap Line</i>	Nightly call in chat show
<i>Job Mart</i>	Half hour weekly assessment of job opportunities in the Detroit area
<i>Never too Late</i>	Adult education instruction program, broadcast in 30 minute segments
<i>Drama Time</i>	Program where local performers act out significant moments in Black history
<i>Strictly Business</i>	Success stories of Black business men
<i>Senior Citizen Forum</i>	News and instruction program dedicated to Detroit's elderly population
<i>Speaking of Sports</i>	Sports re-cap hour hosted by Bill Humphries
<i>Something Special</i>	Political talk show hosted by radio's Jim Ingram
<i>The Scene</i>	Daily local dance variety program modeled on <i>Soul Train</i> . Hosted by Nat Morris.
<i>Rolling Funk</i>	Local roller-skating variety program featuring local talent set to hit records
<i>Gospel Time</i>	Live gospel music performances, hosted by Rev. Robert Grant each Sunday evening
<i>Sing the Hits</i>	Karaoke style variety series
<i>Countdown</i>	Locally-produced Game Show
<i>Tell Terry</i>	Problem-solving show hosted by Terry Jones, modeled on <i>Dear Abby</i>
<i>Corners of Black History</i>	Hosted by Reginald Larrie, a professor of African American History at Wayne State. The series highlights important moments in Black American history, modeled after his eponymous weekly column in the <i>Michigan Chronicle</i> , which he developed into a book in 1971.
<i>Teen Profile</i>	Daily news program hosted by local area teens

Figure 4.6

Photo of teen participants on *Teen Profile*. “Black History Month Profile: Detroit’s WGPR-TV 62,” *The Michigan Chronicle* (blog), February 19, 2014, <https://michronicleonline.com/2014/02/19/black-history-month-profile-detroits-wgpr-tv-62/>.



Figure 4.7

Promotional Poster for, *Big City News*, 1975

ALL NEWS IS NOT THE SAME..

AMYRE PORTER

DOUG MORRISON

SHARON CREW

watch **BIG CITY NEWS**

IT'S DEFINITELY DIFFERENT!

7:30 PM Weekday

WGPR TV62

DETROIT

WGPR-TV ad in the June 12-18, 1976 issue of TV Guide Magazine (Detroit Edition)

Figure 4.8
Promotional Poster for *Gospel Time*, Hosted by Rev. Robert Grant



Figure 4.9
Promotional photo of host Nat Morris posing with dancers on *The Scene*, 1975.



Figure 5.1
Image from *Detroit* (2017), featuring Jacob Lawrence art

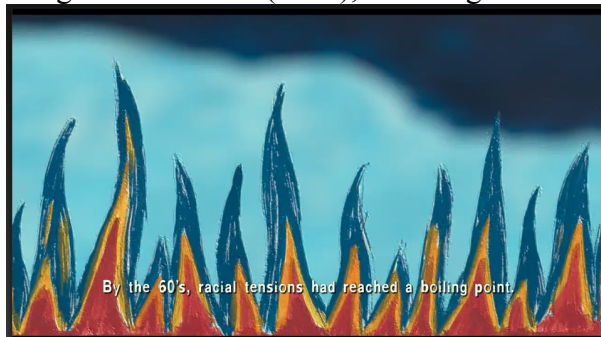


Figure 5.2
Image from *Detroit* (2017), featuring Jacob Lawrence art

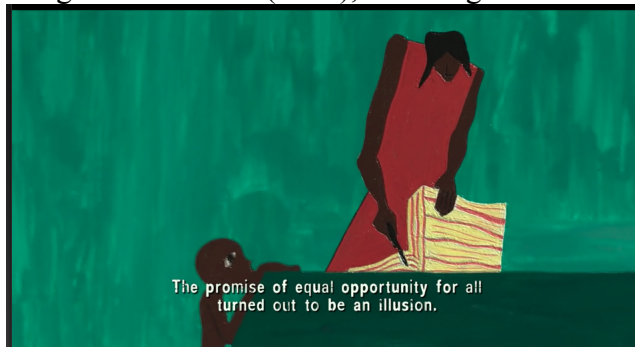


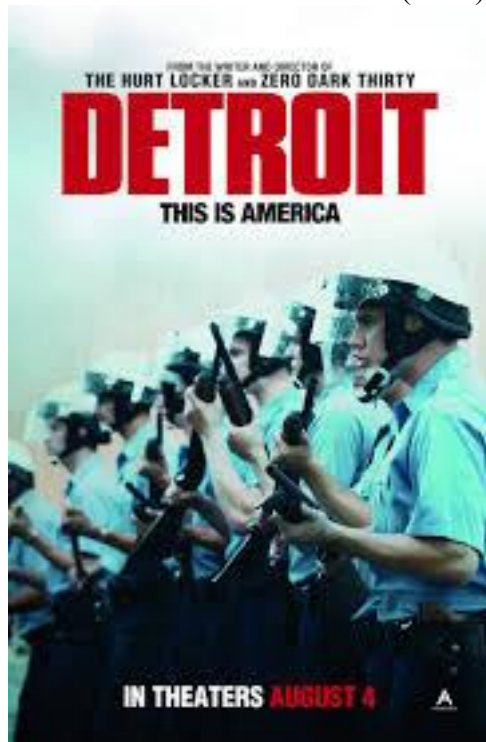
Figure 5.3
Promotional Poster for *Detroit* (2017)



Figure 5.4
Promotional Poster for *Detroit* (2017)



Figure 5.5
Promotional Poster for *Detroit* (2017)



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