NORTHERN REDEMPTION: MARTIN LUTHER KING, THE UNITED PASTORS ASSOCIATION, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On July 25, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. landed in Cleveland, Ohio. Stepping off the plane, the civil rights leader immediately conversed with reporters to discuss SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) new efforts in Cleveland. The SCLC leader was in Cleveland on a speaking engagement as well as to confer with his staff and local civil rights activists in light of the SCLC summer civil rights campaign. The Cleveland Campaign was a part of a Northern Campaign produced by the SCLC after the Federal government enacted the 1965 civil rights legislation.¹ “Dr. King,” the reporter inquired, “what positive results do you expect out of your work here in Cleveland this summer?” The SCLC leader replied: “well, we certainly hope that we can get more jobs, because I think this is the most important need, now, in all of our communities is to grapple creatively with the economic problem—getting more jobs for Negroes who are unemployed and underemployed.”² As a follow up, another reporter posed a question that spoke to—not only the perspective that many Whites shared—but the apprehension and concerns that existed in African American communities throughout the North. “Dr. King, when a riot occurs in a city like Detroit (just days before King arrived to conduct

¹ Adam Fairclough, Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000 (New York: Viking, 2001), 293, “The Voting Rights Act became law, it disallowed literacy tests, “constitutional interpretation tests,” and “good character” requirements in any state or county where less than half the voting-age population were registered voters, or actually voted, in the 1964 presidential election.”
² Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, The Tim Russert Department of Communication & Theatre Arts, John Carroll University.
this speaking tour, on the behalf of his Cleveland Campaign, violent demonstrations erupted in Detroit) that’s considered a model city, what makes you think that something like Operation Breadbasket or this tour that you will conduct tonight will do any good?” King replied, “Well, I didn’t say that it’s going to solve all problems; I don’t say to anybody that I have any kind of miracle in the bag—we’re just hoping that somehow we can give a sense of hope to those who are forced to live in hopeless conditions.”

The dialogue between Martin Luther King and the local Cleveland media sums up his intent in Cleveland. While committed to confronting injustices levied against the local African American population, King was under no illusion that racism and defective slum conditions would suddenly disappear. Instead, King committed himself to relieve the Black plight and massive discontent in the North. King and the SCLC implemented direct-action campaigns aimed at empowering the local African American community.

This study examines a turbulent time in Cleveland, Ohio, when African Americans endured racial inequality and poverty rooted in de facto segregation and discrimination. Racism and poverty led to the 1966 Hough Riot in a predominantly African American neighborhood, which left four African Americans dead. In response, local religious leaders, particularly the United Pastors Association (UPA), prompted by fears of further unrest, a desire for better race relations, and improved economic conditions—reached out to Martin Luther King. The UPA hoped that given King’s new commitment to the Northern struggle, his presence in Cleveland, and his access to national resources would bring about positive change.

1 Ibid.
2 Marc Lackritz, “Hough Riots” (Master’s Thesis, Princeton University, 1968), 16.
When Martin Luther King arrived in Cleveland in 1967, the SCLC leader found a Black community marginalized by a range of racial injustices. Between 1950 and 1967, for example, thirty thousand housing units were built in urban areas, compared to the one hundred and fifty thousand constructed in suburban neighborhoods. Coupled with this, according to the 1960 census, housing in African American communities was substandard. In addition, mechanisms were put in place making it difficult for Blacks to escape these circumstances; that is, housing segregation and economic discriminatory tactics made it difficult for Blacks to acquire adequate housing.³

Unfair hiring practices, too, disenfranchised African American families. In 1965, the overall unemployment rate in the City of Cleveland neared 7.1 percent, compared to eleven point one percent in Black communities. In large part, this disparity was the result of workforce bigotry. In certain industries, African Americans constituted less than ten percent of the workforce. In the building industry, for example, fifty-five African Americans represented an industry that totaled nearly eight thousand employees. The city of Cleveland, too, discriminated against Blacks. With a labor force of nearly nine thousand, African Americans constituted one-sixth of the government workers.⁴

Inferior education perpetuated the plight of Cleveland’s Black community. “Combined with inadequate housing and unemployment, poor education help[ed] to lock the ghetto inhabitants in their impoverished patterns of life.”⁵ The lack of resources and proper attention given to schools in urban communities, in large part, led to intellectual

³ Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 47; Also, Hearing before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Hearing Held in Cleveland, Ohio, April 1-7, 1966, 206, Testimony of Mr. Townsend.
⁴ Civil Rights Commission, 784-794, Staff Report.
⁵ Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 52.
hardships culminating in high dropout rates. Many of the problems grew out of unequal funding and intellectual resources. In Cleveland, students mostly attended schools in their own neighborhoods. For example, in 1965, eighty three percent of public school children attended schools that were predominantly made up of their own race. African American communities received less monetary attention from the Cleveland School Board. For this reason, African American students received less than average education opportunities. In 1965, standard tests scores showed that students at White schools were more proficient than those at predominantly black schools. Moreover, the dropout rate at black schools was higher than those at White schools: fifteen percent of students at predominantly black schools did not achieve their diploma, compared to seven percent at White schools.6

The reality of concentrated poverty and discrimination facilitated feelings of frustrations and despair in Cleveland, even after the Hough Riot. For decades, the White “establishment” (local White politicians and business leaders that dominated local politics and economic) had failed to address race relations and confront discriminatory practices with the utmost urgency.7 In 1967, Martin Luther King and the United Pastors Association developed a summer campaign to address issues plaguing the Black community. They conducted direct-protest actions directed at confronting the status quo—with the intent of forcing social, political, and economic progress. For King, the

6 Civil Rights Commission, 750-755, Staff Report.
Cleveland Campaign served as a small but important struggle midst a larger effort to correct racial injustice and de facto segregation in the North.⁸

After the federal government enacted its landmark Civil Rights Legislation, Martin Luther King began to focus his attention on impoverished conditions in the North. In 1965, after witnessing the conditions that inflamed violent unrest in Watts, Los Angeles, the SCLC leader pledged to undertake a freedom struggle that would address the conditions most responsible for the Northern plight.⁹

King conducted his initial Northern campaign in Chicago. After visiting several northern cities, the organization determined that success inside the Windy City would likely translate to more favorable outcomes throughout the North.¹⁰ Unfortunately, for Black Chicagoans as well as King, this did not hold true. The SCLC’s Chicago Campaign failed to reached its intended goals. For this reason, contemporary observers and commentaries, including Black activist leaders and groups, began to question the effectiveness of King’s Northern struggle as well as his use of passive resistance.¹¹

Under this scrutiny, nevertheless, King did not waiver. In resisting a full retreat from the

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⁹ King, *The Autobiography*, 298-299, “our primary objective was to bring about the unconditional surrender of forces dictated to the creation and maintenance of slums…Chicago was not alone among cities with a slum problem, but certainly we knew that slum conditions there were the prototype of those chiefly responsible for the Northern urban race problem...It was neither I, nor SCLC, that decided to go north, but rather, existing deplorable conditions and the conscience of good to the cause that summoned us.”
¹⁰ James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge & Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 43, “though not a precise program, the “Chicago Plan” did broadly suggest how King and his colleagues would guide the Chicago campaign. Their mission was to end the city’s sprawling slums…they believed their goal attainable. If the Chicago movement could mobilize the black community and forge a “coalition of conscience” backed by Chicagoans of good will, it could spur the city to eliminate its ghettos. Their work would, then, like the Birmingham and Selma campaigns, have national implications and reverberate across the country.”
¹¹ Ibid., 212-213.
North, King resumed his work in Cleveland. He continued the Northern Campaign to confront de facto segregation and concentrated poverty in northern communities.

This thesis engages a relatively new historiography that studies civil rights struggles and protest actions outside the “classical” period (1954-1968). The historians who have embraced this theoretical underpinning have provided a much deeper and nuanced civil rights history, complicating the analysis that has filled the pages of civil rights scholarship for decades. The “long civil rights movement”—a theoretical framework championed by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall—argues that the extraordinary concentration given to the “classical” phase of the civil rights movement disconnects us from, as well as “diminishes” issues and significant struggles that occurred outside the “classical” parameters.12

*Northern Redemption* lends itself to the “long movement” narrative. This thesis joins forces with histories that explore Northern oppression, unrest, and freedom struggles during the middle and late twentieth century. In particular, it contributes to American civil rights studies conducted by historians such as Thomas J. Sugrue. For example, Sugrue explores more than violent demonstrations and the introduction of Black Power in the 1960s. His work, *Sweet Land of Liberty* (2008) examines the history of Northern Blacks and racial oppression, as well as freedom struggles that occurred for decades throughout the North. According to Sugrue, “to understand the history of civil rights—indeed, to understand modern America—it is essential to bring the North back in.” For, “as a battleground in the struggle for racial equality, the North mattered

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In this vein, this thesis builds upon Sugrue and other historians, asserting that the local struggle in Cleveland helps us understand the Black plight and violent unrest throughout the North. It further demonstrates that post-1965 racial politics and freedom struggles constituted more than the emergence of “Black Power.”

The contribution to civil rights scholarship that this thesis seeks to offer is two fold. First, this study explores Martin Luther King’s civil rights actions in Cleveland, a time beyond the “classic period.” Furthermore, Martin Luther King’s Cleveland Campaign is largely unexplored in studies examining the Northern freedom struggle. Most civil rights historians, including King biographers, have ignored the SCLC’s Cleveland Campaign. The effort is usually reduced to a footnote in the study of Martin Luther King’s life of activism. Even in Sugrue’s *Sweet Land of Liberty*, a recent study concerning Northern civil rights, the author examines Martin Luther King’s Chicago Campaign but does not address Cleveland.14

In earlier civil rights studies, historians also ignored the Cleveland Campaign, while Martin Luther King’s efforts in Chicago garnered scholarly attention. In James R. Ralph Jr.’s *Northern Protest*, he produces a detailed history of the Chicago campaign, its failures, the dynamic between King and the local civil rights and political leadership, as

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13 Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House Paperbacks, 2008), xiv, “The commonplace accounts [of the civil rights movement] turn northward only in the mid- and late 1960s, when cities exploded in riots and black power advocates burst onto the national scene. Our accounts of this period are bleaker and briefer, focusing on King’s frustrated attempt to “bring the movement North” to Chicago, the contentious New York City school strikes of 1968; the rise and fall of the Black Panthers, and the infamous battle in the 1970s against court mandate busing in Boston.

14 Ibid., 415-420, in these pages, Thomas J. Sugrue does a good job explaining and circumstances and conditions that led to Martin Luther King’s failure, but Cleveland as a city or campaign is mentioned in these pages.
well as local and national circumstances prevalent in the North during the latter 1960s. Ralph characterizes King’s actions in Cleveland, as an “evacuation measure;” that is, the civil rights leader used the effort to deflect attention from the Chicago debacle. David Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross* dedicates a full-length chapter to the Chicago Campaign. Although he hints at King’s involvement in Cleveland, Garrow does not explore the SCLC leader’s actions. Stewart Burn’s *To the Mountain Top* also fails to offer sufficient historical scrutiny to the Cleveland Campaign; in fact, the work devotes less then a half page to King in Cleveland and reduces the civil rights leader’s actions to a form of “community organizing.”

*Northern Redemption* challenges the lack of scholarly attention given to Martin Luther King’s Northern Campaign in Cleveland, Ohio. This campaign warrants examination for several reasons. First, King and the UPA effectively challenged oppressive and discriminatory mechanisms, which helped produce political and economic progress. Most importantly, King helped mobilize a community that worked to elect its first African American mayor, Carl Stokes. In addition, through the efforts of an economic protest (Operation Breadbasket), the Black community forced some local businesses and corporations to hire African Americans and extend financial transactions to Black entrepreneurs. Second, the success of the SCLC’s Cleveland Campaign

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15 Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 218.
16 Ibid., 218.
reaffirmed the effectiveness of nonviolent direct-action and offered an alternative to the violent unrest that plagued northern cities throughout America.

This study of Martin Luther King in Cleveland draws on a variety of sources including Cleveland newspapers and television news accounts. The thesis also explores Martin Luther King’s landmark speeches and writings, as well as the SCLC papers concerning the Northern shift and the civil rights movement. The papers of Carl B. Stokes are also used. In addition, recent interviews provided by Eric Trickey of the Cleveland Magazine—conducted in 2014 with former SCLC lieutenants—offer insight regarding the inner deliberations and workings of the organization and Northern Movement.

Northern Redemption also engages with scholarship regarding King’s ideological leanings. Historians contend that King’s economic activism during the last years of his life reflected his long and deep radical vision. In Thomas J. Jackson’s From Civil Rights to Human Rights (2007), for example, he argues that throughout King’s years of activism, the SCLC leader harbored radical views regarding economic socialism and government redistribution. “King’s vision of economic freedom was rooted in his intellectual development and early experiences in the Southern black freedom movement.” Jackson goes on to argue that early on King viewed economic obstacles and questions of class as

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19 Interviews conducted by reporter Eric Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Trickey conducted a series of interviews with former living SCLC staff and other civil rights leaders; the interviews were published for a magazine article in light of the 50th Anniversary of Martin Luther King’s I Have A Dream speech; I reached out to Mr. Trickey and after a meeting regarding my thesis project, he agreed to share his sources. In terms of the sources, I have both hardcopy and electronic copies of the interviews.

the most difficult challenges for the civil rights movement. In Cleveland, although King did not employ radical rhetoric during the campaign—advocating redistribution of wealth or social economic policies—the foundation of Operation Breadbasket was rooted in the economic unionism that King advocated since the 1950s. The civil rights leader employed the strike by a critical mass to force discriminatory employers to hire Blacks and increase business transactions with African American entrepreneurs. Operation Breadbasket, as such, was a protest mechanism that King had envisioned as a part of a radical movement, way before 1967.

Michael K. Honey’s *Going Down Jericho Road* (2007) also contributes to the recent historiography on King and human rights as well as his ideological leanings. Honey’s work provides a more detailed analysis of the worker strike in Memphis and the qualities that allowed King to help lead the Sanitation Strike in Memphis. “In reality, King never confined his policies to civil rights…and from an early age he advocated an economic justice agenda that went far beyond civil rights.” According to Honey, King defined integration as political, economic, and social equality. In Cleveland, King endeavored to achieve this integration. He worked to produce a voter registration drive, run an economic boycott, and encourage blacks to elect politicians who would not ignore impoverished and discriminatory social conditions. Consequently, King’s economic activism in Chicago and Cleveland constituted a “dry run” for his social and human rights efforts in 1968.

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21 Ibid., 2.
22 Ibid., 3.
Although *Northern Redemption* seeks to complicate the dominant narrative regarding Martin Luther King’s Northern contribution, my chief aim is to reveal Martin Luther King’s contribution to the civil rights struggle in Cleveland, Ohio. As such, I argue that King’s direct engagement and leadership skills helped galvanize and mobilize the African American community to confront injustices against Blacks. Under King’s direction with SCLC resources, King and black Clevelanders penetrated the wall of discrimination and segregation in Cleveland. In doing so, the local community obtained employment opportunities, integrated white communities, and formed a voting bloc that elected Cleveland’s first African American mayor. With this in mind, I seek to understand: how did Martin Luther King convince Cleveland’s African American community that had only recently erupted in the Hough Riots to embrace nonviolent direct-action protests to achieve economic, social, and political change?

To answer this question, the thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one examines King’s initial encounter with Cleveland’s African American leaders as well as the larger Black community. It explores the plight of African Americans in Cleveland—including concentrated poverty, housing segregation and slum conditions, as well as unemployment and work discrimination. Since King’s actions in Cleveland represented a larger attempt to confront Northern oppression, the chapter also explores the civil rights leader’s Northern shift and his initial civil rights struggle and failure in Chicago. Chapter two chronicles the SCLC voter registration drive in Cleveland and its political mobilization efforts to help propel the African American mayoral candidate Carl B. Stokes to victory. Chapter three discusses Operation Breadbasket. The SCLC-led
economic boycott forced local businesses—especially those that directly profited from the patronage of Blacks in predominantly African American areas—to hire black workers at a proportionate level. In doing so, the chapter looks at the inner workings of Operation Breadbasket, its organizing and mobilization efforts, as well as negotiations conducted with local businesses.

In exploring Martin Luther King’s contribution to the local civil rights struggle in Cleveland, Ohio, this thesis offers a history of race relations and Black oppression in Cleveland, as well as a study of African American triumph against White aggression and racism during the latter 1960s. This thesis offers more insight on the impact of King, however, it does not attempt to perpetuate the nostalgia that already exists in many civil rights histories. Instead, this thesis recounts the way in which Martin Luther King failed in Chicago, but persisted in Cleveland, and ultimately achieved Northern redemption in at least one important northern location.
CHAPTER II

KING, ON THE GROUND

Introduction

On July 18, 1966, the owner of the 79ers Café—Dave Feigenbaum, exchanged obscenities with an African American woman. This incident took place after she “hesitated” to comply with Feigenbaum’s request to vacate his establishment.¹ Eventually, however, she departed, but Hough residents were troubled when they got word of the confrontation. Later on that night, another encounter occurred; this time, Feigenbaum quarreled with a Black man regarding the bar’s policies. The incident took place after the latter rejected the owner’s insistence that take-out customers forfeited the café’s ice-water courtesy.² Coupled with these skirmishes, Feigenbaum perpetuated the situation by mounting a sign that read “no water for Niggers.”³ Details regarding the altercation spread rapidly. Angered by a constant lack of respect and discrimination, Hough residents assembled and demonstrated outside the 79ers.

Alarmed by the growing demonstrations, the owners of the café called the Cleveland Police department. The demonstrators, however, did not disperse when the police arrived. On the contrary, the demonstrations grew stronger and tensions

¹ Marc Lackritz, “Hough Riots” (Master’s Thesis, Princeton University, 1968), 7;
² Ibid., 7-10.
heightened even more—when, a crowd-goer, responding to the presence of law enforcement, launched a Molotov cocktail at a nearby building. The incident escalated when the crowd began vandalizing, looting, and violently showing their deep disapproval with the current status quo. During the chaos, apartment buildings and local storefronts burnt down as the crowd chanted the riots most memorable phrase: “Burn, Baby, Burn!”

After several days of unrest, it became apparent that the Cleveland Police could not quell the violence. The governor of Ohio, James Rhodes, ordered the National Guard into the Hough community, and this ultimately ended the unrest. In the end, the riot did much to demonstrate the reality that social and economic injustices against Blacks were intolerable and warranted reform, revealing deeply rooted discrimination and built-up frustrations existing in African American communities.

On the whole the Hough Riot was a destructive force in the Black community: the neighborhood endured considerable amounts of damage (some sources estimate up to two million dollars), countless African Americans were jailed and imprisoned, hundreds of African Americans and law enforcement personnel were injured, and four African Americans civilians lost their lives. In response, members of the political and business community immediately began to question the source of this social unrest. “For African Americans the answer was clear: the failure of city leaders to address [ominous

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1 Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 8.
2 Moore, Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power, 48.
4 Ibid., 48.
conditions] in the Black community,” created deep frustration that released itself in the form of violent rage.⁵

One year later, in light of the Hough Riot and, in the midst of the SCLC’s campaign against northern oppression, Martin Luther King addressed Cleveland’s Glenville high school. The high school is located in the Glenville neighborhood—a predominantly Black community on the eastside of Cleveland. On April 26, 1967, several months before the start of his Cleveland effort, King challenged the students to encourage their communities to participate in “action programs.” Promoting political volunteerism, King also called on the students to engage in creative protests. “We’ve got to get smart. We’ve got to organize. We’ve got to organize so effectively and so well and engage in such powerful, creative protest that there will not be a power in the world that can stop us and that can afford to ignore us.”⁶

King also urged the students to confront their oppressive conditions and demand change—without, however, violence. “Our power does not lie in Molotov cocktails, our power does not lie in bricks and stones, [and] our power does not lie in bottles.”⁷ Instead, the civil rights leader asserted, “our power lies in our ability to say nonviolently that we aren’t going to take it any longer.” This speech underscored the ideas that inspired Martin Luther King’s Northern Campaign. By the end of this particular visit, King spoke at three high schools to a collective audience of eight thousand youths.⁸ Before departing

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⁵ Ibid., 48.
⁷ Kroll, Cleveland speech, “Martin Luther King Jr. Cleveland Speech.”
⁸ Kroll, Cleveland speech, “Martin Luther King Jr. Cleveland Speech.”
for Minnesota, King announced his intention of conducting a future campaign in Cleveland.⁹

This chapter provides the contextual foundation for the discussion of Martin Luther King’s civil rights work outside of the South. To do so, this chapter describes the conditions that socially and economically oppressed Northern Blacks, chronicling the ills of de facto segregation, racial discrimination, concentrated poverty, and other racially motivated injustices that plagued northern communities. In this same vein, the work will situate King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference amidst a civil rights shift that occurred outside the South, during the 1960s.

Next, this chapter examines Martin Luther King’s first effort in the North. In Chicago, King ultimately failed. His campaign to confront slum housing and de facto discrimination, as well as the civil rights leader’s inability to compel the federal government to enact new civil rights legislation gave merit to those that held reservations regarding the implementation of the Southern strategy outside the South. This chapter explores the civil rights leader’s personal miscalculation and mistakes, as well as the unforeseen events that hindered his civil rights campaign inside the Windy City. The failure of the Chicago Campaign didn’t send Martin Luther King back South. Instead, this chapter will demonstrate that the failure in Chicago facilitated King’s evolving approach. Later, in Cleveland, King would recalculate his strategy and shift his

⁹ David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 559, “That night King left Atlanta for a two-day visit to Cleveland…King spoke at three schools and criticized conservative Cleveland Mayor Ralph S. Locher, who had narrowly beaten black challenger Carl Stokes in 1965 and would face Stokes aging that coming fall…at an evening rally King announced that Cleveland would become a base for SCLC’s future efforts.”
campaign tactics based on the Chicago debacle. Finally, this chapter discusses the African American plight in Cleveland, which ultimately led to the Hough Riot and helped draw King to the city.

Northern Oppression

Martin Luther King’s Cleveland Campaign took place during a larger shift in the civil rights movement. For King, by 1965, it became apparent that Northern poverty and de facto segregation needed addressing. In 1965, violent demonstrations erupted in the Watts section of Los Angeles. The images of violence and local storefronts on fire were broadcast throughout America and, “shocked the nation.”10 Black youth, responding to deep despair and frustrations, angrily battled the Los Angeles Police and tossed bricks and Molotov Cocktails. Within several days, the military pacified the situation. The Watts riot was responsible for two hundred million dollars in property damage, four hundred arrests, and thirty-four deaths.11 Concerned by the turn of events, Martin Luther King visited Los Angeles. He condemned the violence but made it known that those who did not act against the African American plight in the North bared responsibility. While touring the scene, the civil rights leader became “completely undone by the conditions.” After personally evaluating the destruction, King determined that the riot “grew out of the

depths of despair.”

Again, the civil rights leader believed that something had to be done. And, he would later act in light of his conscience.

Racial inequality and discrimination against African Americans differed from North to South. In the South, White segregationists created a series of laws and regulations restricting Blacks from social equality, political fairness, and economic prosperity. Legalized Jim Crow effectively created a second-class African American citizenry, which produced racial hierarchy, as well as voting laws that ensured low African American participation in local and national politics. In the North, however, civil rights abuses appeared in more obscure and ambiguous forms. As such, “Northern blacks lived as second-class citizens unencumbered by the most blatant of southern-style Jim Crow laws but still trapped in an economic, political, and legal regime that seldom recognized them as equals.”

When Martin Luther King arrived in Cleveland to conduct the civil rights campaign, he found an African American community, like Chicago, plagued by social and economic unrest. Poor economic conditions as well as racial segregation and discrimination damaged Cleveland’s African American communities. For decades, African Americans in Cleveland were force to endure racially motivated hardships. The African American plight began to take shape in the early 1900s, when the Southern migration increased the city’s African American population. By the 1930s, “the black population had again more than doubled to over 71,000.”

After World War One, White

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workers began to push back against the Black population increase to protect their job security. Blacks were excluded from joining White labor organizations. And, White employers and employees utilized race and color to exclude blacks from the workplace.\textsuperscript{14}

In the 1960s, workforce discrimination still remained a problem for Cleveland’s African American population. Unemployment reinforced the culture of destitution and hopelessness existing inside African American communities. Blacks, one third of the city’s population, experienced higher unemployment rates. In 1965, approximately twenty four percent of Blacks found themselves out of work, in contrast to nine percent of Whites.\textsuperscript{15} Having the largest concentration of Blacks, the Hough community, in particular, endured rampant joblessness. With a population of nearly sixty thousand, thirteen percent of males and eighteen percent of females were unemployed.\textsuperscript{16}

According to a 1966 report by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, based on public hearings in Cleveland, discrimination against Blacks was widespread throughout the city’s businesses and industries. Local unions, especially, discriminated against African American workers. In 1966, the Commission published ominous employment data regarding this issue: the main builders and carpenter sectors had few, if any, minority workers; the Iron Workers Union, with a workforce of almost two thousand people, included not a single African American worker; the electrical worker union of fifteen hundred, had two African American members; the Plumber and Pipe Fitters Unions, with upwards of sixteen hundred people, had no more than ten African Americans.


\textsuperscript{15} Hearing before the United States commission on civil Rights, Hearing Held in Cleveland, Ohio, April 1-7, 1966, P. 787, Staff Report.

Statistically, the local government did much better than the local unions and private sectors in terms of workforce equality. The City of Cleveland employed ten thousand citizens; out of this workforce, three thousand were Black and minority. It should be noted, however, that half of the Black workforce was relegated to the Division of Streets.\(^{17}\)

In terms of housing, Cleveland’s African American population endured segregation and discrimination. Although laws existed making it illegal to discriminate based on race, landlords, realtors, and financial institutions perpetuated segregation in several ways. For individuals and Black families seeking to escape poor housing and violent neighborhoods, this endeavor was often complicated. Realtors refused to show African Americans houses outside of Black concentrated areas. During the U.S. Civil Rights Commission’ Cleveland hearings, witnesses testified that they were denied housing based on race. According to a male witness, certain realtors “candidly said that they were unwilling to rent to Negroes.\(^ {18}\) In many instances, realtors and landlords refused services once it had been discovered that the potential buyer or renter was African American; suddenly, houses were off the market; housing representatives were out of town; or the representatives became unavailable due to illness.\(^ {19}\)

The City’s public Housing Authority perpetuated segregation in Cleveland. In the Commission’s report, fifty three percent of the African American population and forty

\(^{17}\) Civil Rights Commissions, P. 786-794, Staff Report; also, William E. Nelson, Jr., and Philip J. Meranto, *Electing Black Mayors: Political Action in the Black Community* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 67.

\(^{18}\) Civil Rights Commissions, P. 69, testimony by Leonard Simmons, Cleveland resident.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., P. 42, 69, 199, testimony by Cleveland residents: Hattie Mae, Morris Thorington, and Mr. and Mrs. Crumpler.
three percent of the White population resided in public housing units. According to the report, eighty three percent of African American residents were concentrated in predominately Black estates, located on the eastside of Cleveland; whereas, ninety nine percent of Whites living in Public Housing Units resided in White predominate estates on the eastside of the city.  

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission reprimanded the City of Cleveland for failing to properly address inadequate and dangerous living conditions in Black concentrated neighborhoods. According to the testimonies and Commission reports, thousands of housing units, for example, were rat infested. A sanitary engineer testified that out of the twenty-five thousand units inspected in 1965, seven thousand had rats. Many African Americans living in such housing units endured rat bites. In fact, in 1966, there were as many as seventy cases reported to the Cleveland Health Department and, during the hearing, an official reported that many cases went unreported. Moreover, fourteen thousand of the inspected units had rubbish storage deficiencies. Many Black residents, as a result, stored garbage in the front and back yard of their homes, subjecting themselves to diseases and other harmful toxins. However, these conditions could not be avoided. According to the report, the city lacked proper and adequate trash and pick-up services—that for years, additional manpower and resources was requested but the city never complied.

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20 Ibid., P.156, report presented by Bayla White, Program Analysis for the U.S. commission.
21 Ibid., P. 135, testimony by Clyde Fehan, Sanitary engineer for the City of Cleveland.
22 Ibid., P. 149-150, testimony by William P. Murphy, head of Food AND Drug Administration (Cleveland).
23 Ibid., 147, testimony by Clyde Fehan.
African American residents also experienced inefficient and deteriorating housing conditions. Many who testified, reported that they constantly endured broken pipes, water leakages, and pipe stoppages. Hattie Mae, an African American resident of Cleveland testified that she was forced to shower and cook outside of the house. Even more concerning, residents complained that live electrical wires hung from the ceiling and walls.24 These testimonies were backed up by the Commission’s staff reports—that at least “9000 families lived in substandard swellings” and 13000 homes were overcrowded.25

Even a SCLC internal memo on the situation in Cleveland spelled out awful living conditions in Black communities throughout Cleveland’s eastside, “virtually no inhabited multifamily dwelling in the area [met] the standards of Cleveland’s housing or sanitation codes.”26 Hough residents issued complaints in regards to faulty housing, leaking roofs, inadequate heating, improper door locks, faulty plumbing, inadequate electrical systems, as well as rat-infested units. Yet, Blacks were ignored; their complaints either fell on deaf ears or were resolved in half-measured ways.

Though employment, housing and economic inequality represented a large portion of Black discontent and despair—police brutality, discriminatory treatment, and inadequate police protection—further fueled much of their frustrations. Witnesses testified during the Civil Rights Commission Hearing about the bigoted culture etched into the fabric of the Cleveland Police Department. As reported to the commission,

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24 Ibid., 20-23, 106, testimony by Hattie Mae and Allie Anderson, Cleveland residents.
25 Ibid., 95, report presented by F. Banard Sellers.
African Americans endured a system of police brutality, discourtesy, and were more likely to face false or unnecessary detention.\(^{27}\)

In many instances, Blacks were often detained without real cause or merit. And in order to hide this discriminatory practice, White police officers perpetually abused the “suspicious person” ordinance.\(^{28}\) In addition, the Department employed scare tactics and other mechanism as a way to dissuade African Americans from filing complaints. In fact, Police Chief Richard Wagner admitted to incorporating a “waiver system:” an offensive measure put in place to protect the Police Department from federal scrutiny. Signing the waiver, the person(s) arrested, although under false pretense, was admitting to wrongdoing—with the understanding, however, that they (the arrestee) would not face prosecution. In effect, the people falsely detained and later released, signed a form of culpability, swearing that their detention was “in all respects reasonable and proper.”\(^{29}\)

Furthermore, the Department largely failed to enforce professional standards and conduct; that is, physical and verbal abuse was very much prevalent in terms of the police’s interaction with African Americans. Cleveland Blacks endured unwarranted attacks and racial epithets. Still, Cleveland police officers, at least in the early 1960s, did not face disciplinary actions. In fact, when the Commission inquired if “disciplinary actions [have] been taken against any police officers” during the last three years, Police

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\(^{27}\) Civil Rights Commissions, 512-514; in discussing police relations, former president of the Cleveland chapter of the NAACP—Clarence H. Holmes—one out of three issues dealing with police abuse: “the first would be the issue of police brutality; encompassed within the issue of police brutality, would be the actual physical abuse of accused or apprehended people.”

\(^{28}\) Nelson and Meranto, *Electing Black Mayors*, 82

\(^{29}\) Civil Rights Commissions, 593.
Chief Richard Wagner, responded—“I do not recollect.”

Coupled with the issues of unprofessionalism and racially motivated discrimination, in predominantly Black areas, African American endured insufficient police protection. The Hough community, for instance, was plagued by several deficiencies. For instance, police officers were often tardy or non-responsive; patrolmen ignored emergency gestures when African Americans “hailed police cars on the street.”

So far as dangerous crimes were concerned (housebreaking and burglary), the police response in the Hough community, for example, was twice as slow as in White areas. These inadequacies created dangerous living conditions as Blacks were forced to endure crimes that obstructed safe living conditions. Much of this mistreatment against Blacks was deepened by the lack of African American representation on the force. Since the city lacked an equal amount of Black police officers in proportion to its population, prejudiced police officers mostly patrolled African American communities. In Cleveland, for example, as of 1966—the Police Department totaled two thousand and twelve officers—of this total force, only one hundred and thirty three where African American.

The unsanitary living conditions, discrimination, and de facto segregation that existed in Cleveland did not take place in a bubble. For, Blacks in cities like Detroit, for example, were also confronted with the ills of bigotry and inequality. Poor and working-class blacks resided in cramped tenements and decrepit housing units. The Black

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30 Ibid., 514, 588.
31 Ibid., 578, testimony by Clarence H. Holmes.
32 Ibid., 580.
33 Ibid., 512.
migration prompted many Whites to flee urban neighborhoods. Middle-class and affluent Whites, especially, either moved into suburbs or left the city. When Whites moved out of urban areas, African Americans in large part stayed behind; they lacked the finances and equal opportunity to create new lives outside urban areas. Once Whites exited urban communities, property owners failed to adequately maintain the properties, leaving African Americans to live in unsanitary and defective units.  

Segregation policies and discriminatory tactics largely blocked African Americans from moving into suburban neighborhoods. Prior to the 1948 Supreme Court ruling (Shelley V. Kraemer), racially restrictive covenants maintained White hegemony in suburban areas. Following the ruling, however, de facto discriminatory actions maintained White exclusiveness. In Detroit, for example, between 1945 and 1965, “nearly two hundred White neighborhoods associations formed—mostly with the explicit purpose of keeping blacks away.” In Philadelphia, African Americans who breached suburban lines were often physically attacked, experienced cross burnings, property arson, and property damage. More sophisticated forms of discrimination also existed throughout the North. For instance, many realtors employed a “point system” that ranked perspective homebuyers on the bases of race and nationality, among others. Likewise, many realtors refused to show homes to prospective buyers in predominantly White areas—a technique known as “racial steering.”

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34 Sugrue, Sweat Land of Liberty, 249.
36 Sugrue, Sweat Land of Liberty, 204-205.
37 Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis, 193; also, D’Angelo, ed., The American Civil Rights Movement, 361, section introduction, “they were limited to certain areas by “racial steering,” in which realtors refused to show blacks housing in areas reserved for whites.”
De facto segregation and discrimination in the North created concentrated economic hardship. Even when job growth was robust in “model” cities like Detroit, for example, African Americans were relegated to areas lacking manufacturing and other economic opportunities. For instance, between 1947 and 1963, one hundred and forty thousand manufacturing jobs fled urban Detroit. In 1960, ten percent of Black residents, compared to five percent of Whites endured unemployment. Northern Blacks were also marginalized by disproportionate compensation and de facto hiring discrimination. “Despite the growth in black income, black men in the North earned only three-quarters the income of white men.”

White managers mostly employed discriminatory tactics in order to sustain a White dominated workforce.

Segregated schools and disparity in resources as well as poor police-community relations further perpetuated the Black plight. African American students, “found themselves in deteriorating schools,” which usually lacked the funding found in schools located in predominantly White areas. Most teachers in urban settings had less credentials and education achievements than those in White dominated schools. In terms of police relations in the African American communities, like Cleveland, the dynamic between the police and Black residents were strained for several reasons. For example, White officers dominated Police departments and street patrols in African American communities. Compounding this disparity, a federal study (Kerner

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38 Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 275, “the central-city job lost was only compounded by the fact that blacks remained frozen out of the communities where job growth was most robust (205, liberty). For example, Detroit lost 140,000 manufacturing jobs between 1947 and 1963, most in unskilled and semiskilled positions that had provided an avenue of opportunity for black workers.”
39 Ibid., 256.
40 Ibid., 171.
Commission Report on U.S. Racial Inequality) conducted in the early 1960s found that a significant percentage of White officers serving in predominantly Black areas, were anti-Negro or had prejudices against blacks. As a result, African Americans often endured “stop and frisk” tactics, racial obscenities, extensive scrutiny, and physical abuse.  

The Northern Shift: Chicago and its Failure

For Martin Luther King and his SCLC lieutenants, the North could no longer withstand the status quo; therefore, they intervened. Notwithstanding King’s deep convictions and religious obligation to confront oppression and discrimination wherever it stood, many Southern activists, however, rejected King’s decision to conduct a Northern campaign. For many in the Black Southern coalition, the South “had won its victories because blacks had been able to assemble a coalition.” This faction also argued that the South still warranted its full might and resources. Others, such as White-Liberals, limited their activism to Jim Crowism and violence against Blacks. In effect, they refused to confront issues dealing with housing or economic equality. Many of these same supporters vehemently opposed King’s Chicago Campaign as well as other efforts outside the South.  

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41 Ibid., 331, “in Detroit, where police-community relations were particularly tense, a federal study conducted just before the riot discovered that 45 percent of white police officers who patrolled in the city’s black neighborhoods were “extremely anti-negro” and another 34 percent were “prejudiced (331, liberty). Discrimination. In the [Kerner Commission], Police “stop and frisk” tactics were more common. More than one in five black men reported they had been stopped and searched “without good reason.” And about one in five claimed that police officers had used “insulting language” toward them...Young black men regularly complained that police scrutinized them closely without cause, even if they were not stopped, searched, or beaten.”

42 D’Angelo, The American Civil Rights Movement, 384, quoted from Allen J. Matusow’s work, From Civil Rights to Black Power.

43 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, quoted from Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech in Cleveland Ohio, “People who were with us in Selma, who were
Simultaneously, a more militant response to northern oppression had taken shape in the North. By 1965, Black Nationalist movements began spreading throughout African American communities. Out of deep frustrations and despair, these factions resorted to violent demonstrations and self-defense measures. While King remained opposed to violence as a means of protest, supporters of nonviolent direct-action began to raise doubts about passive resistance. Stokely Carmichael, a SNCC leader turned militant activist, for example, challenged King in Greenwood, Mississippi by refusing King’s request to abandon the phrase “Black Power.” After 1965, dismayed by the lack of Civil Rights reforms, Carmichael began to move away from King and openly dismissed the use of nonviolence as well as the movement’s alliances with White sympathizers.\(^4^4\)

Despite these objections to King’s turn to the North, the SCLC general did not waiver and took the initiative to nonviolently confront civil rights abuses in the North. For King, the existence of poverty and urban slums warranted confrontation. As King later wrote of this decision: “it was neither I, nor the SCLC, that decided to go north; rather, it was “existing deplorable conditions and the conscience of good to the cause that summoned us.”\(^4^5\)

\(^{4^4}\) King, \textit{The Autobiography}, 317-322, Martin Luther King Jr. discusses the content of the discussions between he and Stokely Carmichael during a march in Mississippi in the name of James Meredith; at this juncture, a divide developed between Martin Luther King and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader. A dispute materialized over the term “Black Power” as well as Nationalist ideology. Carmichael did not completely dismiss nonviolence going forward; however, he argued that nonviolence shouldn’t necessary serve as a prerequisite for confronting civil rights. He also argued that the Movement should de-emphasize White participation; also, Peniel E. Joseph, “The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field,” \textit{The Journal of American History} 96 (2009): 751-776.

\(^{4^5}\) Ibid, 299.
In April of 1965 King began to formulate his movement North when he and his lieutenants discussed the topic during a civil rights appearance in Baltimore. During a series of discussions, the SCLC general made it abundantly clear that he was committed to the Northern cause. He announced that the organization would conduct a fact-finding tour to personally evaluate northern conditions, as well as measure local mobilization and readiness.\(^{46}\)

The “People to People” tour, as it became known, kicked off in Chicago on July 23, 1965. King met with local prominent leaders, addressed several civil rights rallies, and delivered sermons at local Chicago churches. On July 26, in Cleveland, King “presided at a breakfast meeting with local clergy.”\(^{47}\) The SCLC leader also discussed civil rights with local civil rights leaders. King also engaged addressed several community rallies; in doing so, he encouraged political activity and voter registration. In the end, after Cleveland, the tour continued into Philadelphia and ultimately concluded in Washington, D.C.

After the “People to People” tour, King decided to launch the Northern Campaign in Chicago. He made the choice for several reasons. First, Chicago was the nation’s second largest city. In addition, throughout the decades, Chicago’s local Black leadership had built substantial mobilization channels and protest mechanisms.\(^{48}\) This


\(^{47}\) Ibid., 35-36, quoted from book; “also, it is important to point out that local leaders in New York eventually canceled King’s visit; therefore, the civil rights leader never visited the city as part of the tour; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 433-435.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 39, “King recognized the potential resources which his new allies commanded, for CCCO represented the strongest indigenous civil rights movement in the North;” Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 434, “Asked by newsmen why Chicago had drawn his interest, King reminded them it was the nation’s second
was important in that King sought to augment existing local mobilization efforts; King decided not to produce the “urban effort from scratch, but would [rather] coordinate with local groups ready to accept [its] assistance.” Our role in the North is not to organize our own unit but to pull together everything else.” King was also partly persuaded by personal relationships and acquaintances in Chicago. James Bevel, a former King lieutenant, had recently formed his own civil rights coalition in Chicago. In Bevel, King had a staunch ally; that is, like King, Bevel had long advocated a civil rights campaign in the North. Bevel also believed the Civil Rights Movement needed to explore ways in which to apply Southern protest tactics in the North. For all of these reasons King was drawn to Chicago. After several rounds of negotiations with individual leaders and civil rights groups, a deal was struck. Thus, on September 1, 1965, Andrew Young (SCLC Executive Director) announced that Martin Luther King and the SCLC would begin its Northern Campaign in Chicago, Illinois.

Martin Luther King launched his Northern initiative on January 19, 1966. Speaking in a Chicago neighborhood, King asserted, “I am here to get things started.” The civil rights leader then spent close to a year attempting to produce fundamental reforms like there movement obtained in the Birmingham and Selma campaigns. Unfortunately, however, the Chicago campaign did not yield the success he initially

largest city. More importantly, he said, was CCCO’s energy;” King quoted, “Since there is a vibrant, active movement alive here, we felt that this was the first community in which we should work and start our visits in the North.”

49 Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 437, first quote from author, second quote from Andrew Young, quoted by author.
50 Ralph, Northern Protest, 40, 42.
51 Ibid., 42.
52 Ibid, 43.
sought. By the summer of 1967, it became apparent that the Chicago Campaign had not lived up to its purpose. SCLC demonstrations and housing protests did little to relieve oppressive conditions. More importantly, the campaign failed to force the United States Congress to pass a “fair housing” Civil Rights law. Unlike the South, the Chicago Campaign lacked enough explosiveness and shock value that would compel the nation and Congress to act accordingly. Too many other factors were at play, at this time.53

Martin Luther King’s failure in Chicago did not reflect the lack of will or resolve. He approached the Chicago campaign with deep ambitions and a commitment to relieve the northern African American plight. Yet, the campaign failed to achieve its intended goals. This debacle demonstrated King’s political and social miscalculations in turning north. It also revealed mistakes made on the behalf of the campaign. With that said, however, the problems that plagued Martin Luther King’s Chicago Campaign is more nuanced and, therefore, deserves examination.

In the first place, King employed direct-confrontation when the method—as the Chicago Campaign ultimately proved—had became less affective as a protest mechanism.54 Simply put, “old formulas applied to new problems did not work.” In the South, direct confrontation proved effective in light of unwarranted and excessive violence against passive demonstrators. Unlike the South (i.e., Bull Conner), however, Chicago’s law enforcement did not partake in violent opposition to street demonstrations.55 Having observed how southern demonstrations (Birmingham and

53 Ibid., 173-176.
54 Ibid., 173, 235.
55 Ibid., 188.
Selma) effectively shut down cities and produced negative publicity, the political leadership in Chicago endeavored to protect marchers—which, in effect, lessened the demonstration’s impact.

The Chicago demonstrations also involved a different cast of participants than southern protests. The marchers included a variety of local factions: nonviolent civil rights leaders and organizations, gang members, as well as militant leaders marched on the streets of Chicago. For this reason, the demonstrations created a level of apprehension for some who previously supported civil rights efforts in the South.56

Along the same lines, Liberal supporters (White sympathizers) were unwilling to support Northern actions against economic oppression. For many northern civil rights activists confronting Northern injustice meant advocating economic equality and housing integration. And at this juncture, White sympathizers were not ready to support such undertaking. In doing so, they would essentially be championing fairness in the employment and housing market place, a reality that would not fare well for White economic dominance and superiority. Simply put, when civil rights leaders began to address fundamental economic equality, White-Liberals balked in light of their own interests.57

In the second place, King could not unite the entire northern civil rights apparatus around a single vision. In Chicago, the civil rights infrastructure consisted of a diverse, complex, and deeply rooted apparatus. In addition, by 1966, active individuals and civil rights groups either did not believe in passive resistance (nonviolence), or they were

56 Ibid., 125.
57 Ibid., 125.
frustrated by the method’s lack of success in Chicago. These individuals and groups sought Black unity and self-determination to achieve social, political, and economic empowerment. Therefore, many found Black Nationalist rhetoric and its confrontational methodology more appealing.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, many Black Chicagoans, including religious leaders supported a political answer to seeking basic civil rights. Simply put, “some local African Americans leaders viewed their own and the Chicago African American populations best interests as being served by working with White politicians rather than with civil rights activists.”\textsuperscript{59} This, in part, negatively affected the Chicago effort because King had not gained the “full backing of the local black church;” that is, “many ministers [were] fearful of reprisals by the [Richard R.] Daley regime.”\textsuperscript{60} Ultimately these political considerations and local complexities made it more difficult for King to mobilize both the local community and the nation.

Lastly, after recognizing that demonstrations failed to create federal actions and national sympathy, King resorted to a negotiated settlement with Chicago’s political and business class.\textsuperscript{61} In this process, King and a mixture of prominent local and national leaders engaged in a series of negotiations. At the Chicago Peace Conference (as it later became known), African American leaders agreed to end demonstrations in White

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 174, taken from Kirk’s introduction, “The urban African American community in Chicago proved a different proposition too. They responded less to King and the SCLC’s distinctly southern and religious sensibilities. Some local African American leaders viewed their own and the Chicago African American populations best interests as being served by working with white politicians rather than with civil rights activists.”
\textsuperscript{60} Ralph, \textit{Northern Protest}, 204.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 208.
neighborhoods. In return, Mayor Richard R. Daley and Chicago business leaders promised to reform oppressive and discriminatory policies. Certain local and national civil rights leaders were skeptical of the agreement. The head of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), for example, made his objections known. He stated that the agreement was “nothing but another promise on a piece of paper.”

Nevertheless, King convinced a majority of Black negotiators to support the agreement. Ultimately, the political establishment did not keep their part of the agreement; they failed to produce the social and economic reforms in the agreement. As Mayor Daley’s “subordinates instinctively understood,” the Mayor viewed the Chicago Peace Conference as a constructive dialogue regarding race relations but never really intended to fundamentally change the culture. The failure of Chicago’s political and business “establishment” to implement the agreed reforms further hindered King’s campaign. Although King was initially encouraged by the deal, the SCLC leader soon understood that he misjudged the political leadership and, “the Summit agreement did not prove to be a spring board for a new Chicago.”

**MLK in Cleveland, Ohio**

In 1967, Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference began to make frequent appearances in Cleveland, Ohio. The visits marked a concerted effort by the United Pastors Association (UPA) to solicit the organization’s assistance. The UPA, a local Baptist organization, formed during the Hough Riot, began to provide

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62 Ibid., 195.
63 Ibid., 209, 211.
64 Ibid, 195.
“much needed positive leadership” in the Black communities. In a recent interview, the Reverend E.T. Caviness, a former UPA pastor discussed the group’s intent: “we began the process to get things done together that individually we probably couldn’t have done.” These religious leaders were afraid that more violence and social unrest would lead to further deterioration in the Black community.

In April of 1967, the Cleveland Plain Dealer published an article with the headline, “King Vows to help Cure Ghetto Ills.” The Plain Dealer went on to report preliminary discussions between the SCLC and the UPA to implement a SCLC-led civil rights campaign in Cleveland. Perhaps, the possibility of King directing a campaign in Cleveland encouraged editors at the local African American newspaper—the Cleveland Call & Post. In 1965, editors at the Call & Post raised doubts regarding the effectiveness of the city’s African American leadership and their efforts. The newspaper questioned whether Black leaders would “meet the critical challenge.” Although the Call & Post also mentioned King’s failure in Chicago, the editors conceded that—in light of a real need for “bold and realistic approaches to housing, urban redevelopment, de facto school

65 Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, pt. 3: Records of the Public Relations Department, Cleveland Public Library, SCLC Memo, the Nature of Housing in Hough, memo quoted: “This group was born in the midst of the Hough riot in the Summer of 1966...the clergymen were literally compelled by the great need and the Holy Spirit, to respond to the apparent need of organization for mobilization.” David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 559, “that night King left Atlanta for a two-day visit to Cleveland, where the city’s black ministers, the United Pastors Association (UPA), wanted help in organizing a civil rights effort that might ensure a more peaceful summer than that of 1966, when the Hough ghetto had been wracked by rioting.”
67 Plain Dealer, “King Vows to Help Cure Ghetto Ills,” April 26, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
segregation, double standard law enforcement, and job opportunity,” it welcomed a potential SCLC campaign.

When Martin Luther King arrived in Cleveland the civil rights leader was fairly well received by civil rights leaders and groups that for decades confronted inequality and injustices against African Americans. By the 1960s, individual activists and organizations established mobilization networks and channels. The NAACP had been active in local civil rights matters since the early 1930s when they filed lawsuits to confront inequality. For the next three decades, however, the NAACP pleaded for patience and the support for “gradual progress.” However, many poor and working-class Blacks were not fond of the “gradual” approach and disgruntled by the lack of NAACP organization efforts, in general. To them, it “tended to keep the visibility of black distress low.” In addition, it “contributed to the conventional assumption among whites that conditions were not exceptionally bad among blacks.”69

By the early 1960s, however, Cleveland’s African American community challenged the gradual progress doctrine. Instead of legal challenges, they aspired to duplicate the struggles taking place in the South. Cleveland’s African American community began to call for direct-action demonstrations and protests.70 This shift to direct-action allowed CORE to take root in Cleveland’s local civil rights movement. By 1962, many Blacks supported CORE’s approach. For many, “unlike the NAACP, CORE defined the problems of the city’s African American community in terms of housing,

jobs, and schools.” In effect, CORE engaged in direct-action protests, favoring the new aspirations of many in the African American community, as well as the more militant faction of the local civil rights movement. For this reason, the NAACP, with their role declining, allied with the leaders of CORE. In 1963, these two major organizations, along with dozens of smaller civil rights outfits (including inner-city ministers, Jewish leaders, and Militant Leaders), formed a new civil rights coalition—the United Freedom Movement (UFM). For several years the UFM engaged in a series of direct-action campaigns, including union protests and school demonstrations. Among the issues, the UFM advocated against de facto school and bus segregation, unsanitary school conditions, and other forms of discriminatory practices. In many instances, the organization, for example, staged public protests at Cleveland elementary schools and Cleveland board facilities.

By the summer of 1967, the NAACP and CORE, nonetheless, remained active in the local civil rights struggle. In large part, these organizations supported Martin Luther King’s Cleveland Campaign. Particularly, the NAACP supported King’s efforts. Before the start of the 1967 SCLC campaign, the local NAACP chapter president, George Livingston, publically commended King for meeting with a “cross-section of the Negro community.” He also added that the African American community was “enthusiastic” about King’s presence in Cleveland. Although they approached social, economic, and

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73 *Cleveland Press*, “Negroes Seek Unity in King’s Campaign,” May 17, 1967, Cleveland Press Archives, microfilm, reporter quote’s former Cleveland NAACP President, George Livingston; also, Garrow, *Bearing*
political empowerment through the prism of Black Power, CORE, too, supported the SCLC effort. During the SCLC’s Cleveland Campaign, CORE’s leaders even “[supported] and [sought] funds for SCLC efforts.”\(^7^4\) They pledged some funds from their one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollar grant from the Ford Foundation; monies it received specifically to register African American Clevelanders.\(^7^5\) At the time, “CORE had transformed itself into a virtually blacks-only organization,” having alternative ideals in terms of obtaining Black empowerment. Nevertheless, CORE’s support for King furthered CORE’s interest in the mobilization of Black political activity and the election of the African American mayoral candidate, Carl B. Stokes.\(^7^6\)

In addition to CORE, local Black Nationalists supported Martin Luther King’s civil rights activities in Cleveland. In fact, Black Nationalist leaders—Lewis Robinson, and Ahmed Evans, met with King at a local conference before the SCLC campaign launched. Afterwards, the two local nationalists discussed their thoughts on King with the media. Lewis Robinson believed that King’s prominence would help advocate much-needed reforms and, moreover, calm tensions between the Black and White communities.

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\(^{74}\) Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*, 56, “The mobilization efforts in the Black community received a tremendous boost when the major civil rights organizations announced that they were “coming to Cleveland that summer to register every black voter.” In fact, Cleveland CORE received a $175,000 grant from the Ford Foundation specially to register black Clevelanders.”

\(^{75}\) Karen Ferguson, “Organizing the Ghetto: The Ford Foundation, CORE, and White Power in the Black Power Era, 1967-1969,” *Journal of Urban History* 37 (2007): 67, “For CORE in particular, [Carl] Stokes’s candidacy provided a concrete beginning to its evolving “community organization” emphasis that sought to harness black urbanites’ collective political, economic, and social power to solve the heretofore intractable problems of the ghetto...by 1966 and the Commissions’ Cleveland visit, CORE had transformed itself into a virtually blacks-only organization dominated by its national body, the National Action Council (NAC), and committed to black power. In its new incarnation, CORE’s leaders no longer sought integration through direct action protest, but rather hoped to organize the ghettos of northern cities to obtain black political and economic power.”
in Cleveland. As Robinson understood it, the “whole Negro community [would] unite behind Dr. King.”

Ahmed Evans also supported King’s efforts. King also received support from White business leaders and politicians, several ethnic leaders and groups, and a number of local politicians who believed King’s prestige would to the African American struggle.

King’s Cleveland Campaign also benefited from his personal friendships and acquaintances in Cleveland. For years, the civil rights leader enjoyed relations with prominent members in the Cleveland community. John Bustamante, a lawyer and local entrepreneur and King, were former classmates at Morehouse College. Bustamante supported King’s efforts throughout the SCLC Cleveland Campaign. In addition, King enjoyed a spiritual and personal relationship with Dr. O.M. Hoover. Reverend Hoover, the spiritual head of the Olivet Institutional Church and leader of the United Pastors Association, played a central role, facilitating community gatherings and serving as the campaign’s nerve center. W.O. Walker—editor of the Call & Post, too, helped facilitate King’s work. Walker, a local politician and editor of the Call & Post, took part in the initial discussions, which lead to King’s decision to implement the Cleveland Campaign. Walker also led and supported fundraising efforts to support the campaign. In the end,

78 David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 561.
79 Reverend E.T. Caviness, interview by reporter Eric Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013, “King had an affinity to here because he had relatives, he had close friends; he had gone to school with John Bustamante; so he had some connections here and more importantly, he saw in Cleveland the opportunity to expand his work for equality and justice.”
80 Al. Sampson, interview by reporter Eric Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013 “Walker and Carole Hoover…helped do fundraising for the campaign…most people don’t know brother named Eddie Osburn who was from Cleveland Ohio, Carole Hoover, and her daddy (O.M. Hoover) from the big Church; Carol was a member of Board of SCLC so they had roots.”
considering the support, logistics, and coalescing of local and national civil rights groups around the SCLC campaign, the stage was set for King’s lieutenants to begin developing their organizational infrastructure on the ground. Therefore, on May 16, 1967, surrounded by local and national civil rights groups, Martin Luther King announced his decision to begin the Cleveland Campaign on June 1.  

Conclusion

Although the SCLC’s Chicago Campaign failed to produce its intended goals, some benefits, nonetheless, came out of that campaign. The failure allowed the SCLC to reexamine and, therefore, refine their approach. Martin Luther King and the SCLC recognized they placed too much emphasis on producing success in Chicago. Even before the Chicago launch, Andrew Young declared publicly that the organization’s future depended on its results in Chicago. Since Chicago was the SCLC’s first large-scale civil rights campaign in the North, premature predictions regarding the outcome of the campaign’s affect and organization’s future seemed to be self-defeating and, put pressure on the organization to produce a large-scale victory. This approach also created high expectations and ultimately invited intense scrutiny regarding the campaign’s effectiveness or lack thereof, in Chicago. King also learned lessons and gained a more informed understanding about the inner workings of Northern racism and discrimination.

81 Cleveland Press, “Negroes See Unity In King’s Campaign,” May 17, 1967, Cleveland Press Archives, reporter’s quote, “King’s announcement regarding his Cleveland efforts brought responses and commentary from other civil rights leaders;” Garrow, “Bearing the Cross,” 561, “...he declared at a New York press briefing, but later that day he flew to Cleveland to announce that SCLC would begin a major summer program there on June 1.”
82 Ralph, Northern Protest, “The Whole future of SCLC depends on whether we are successful here. We’ll just have to fold up if we fail in Chicago.”
He also became more familiar with the opposition to fundamental equality in America.

Despite Martin Luther King’s failure in Chicago, the civil rights leader still commanded a great deal of respect and admiration. Local leaders throughout the North and South remained inspired by his work. Daunted by the deterioration of the Cleveland African American community, the United Pastors Association asked King to conduct civil rights actions in Cleveland and the SCLC leader obliged. As such, “even before disengaging from Chicago, King and the SCLC were already plotting [the] Cleveland campaign.”

By the time King arrived in Cleveland, he had modified his approach and the northern strategy. Instead of trying to bring national attention to local issues, as he did in Birmingham, Selma, and Chicago, the Cleveland Campaign would center on local matters. Moreover, rather than using direct confrontation as a way to seek national consensus and legislation, King—instead, led the community through a series of direct protest actions, which directly challenged local oppression and perpetual civil rights abusers. As such, King led a large voter registration drive and economic boycott (Operation Breadbasket), actions designed to confront local employment discrimination and political inaction. While King implemented these kinds of protests in Chicago, he did so, only after the campaign had largely fallen apart.

Furthermore, the civil rights leader adamantly advocated a unified coalition among the local civil rights apparatus. Prior to the launch, King met with a wide range of

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83 Ralph, Northern Protest, 218.
84 Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 564, after committing to Cleveland as a way forward at the Frogmore retreat, King discussed confrontation with his colleagues, as quoted in the book, “I do plan to stir up trouble in some of the big cities this summer.”
85 Ralph, Northern Protest, 200-202.
civil rights groups and discussed the importance of a unified front. Moreover, King realized that Liberal-Democrats and White civil rights sympathizers were largely opposed to fundamental social and economic equality.  

For this reason, the civil rights leader proceeded cautiously; that is, he continued to ally with White civil rights activists willing to defend Black civil rights. Yet, he understood that the White coalition that existed in Birmingham and Selma, for example, became largely null and void in the North. Lastly, as the Chicago effort came to a close, in “private,” King realized that the campaign had over promised success. Therefore, in Cleveland, though optimistic about its prospect, King determined not to “make the mistakes we made in Chicago by promising to solve all their problems in one summer.” The next chapter examines the SCLC Voter Registration Drive during Cleveland’s 1967 mayoral election. It chronicles the organization’s efforts, which ultimately resulted in the election of the first African American mayor.  

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86 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, quoted from Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech in Cleveland Ohio, They call it a White backlash. It’s a reaction to the demands that are being made by the movement and merely a surfacing of old latten prejudices, hostilities, and fears that were always there and [are] just coming out in the open now…they were with us in Selma because they were against Jim Clark and extremist behavior towards Negroes; they were against Bull Conner in Birmingham; they were not for genuine equality for the Negro.  

87 Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 568, quotes Martin Luther King; also, Ralph, Northern Protest, quotes author, ””As the Chicago project became a memory, King himself privately second-guessed some strategic decisions. He wondered whether the Chicago movement should have selected a more practical goal than ending slums.”  

88 King, The Autobiography, 189, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, directly quoted out of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”
CHAPTER III

VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN

Introduction

In the fall of 1967, the residents of Cleveland, Ohio elected Carl B. Stokes as their first Black mayor. Stokes, a native Clevelander, was born and raised on the city’s eastside. At the age of eighteen, Stokes served in America’s occupation of Germany. In 1946, he returned to Cleveland and after graduating from East Technical High, received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Minnesota. After finishing college, Stokes attended law school, where he later graduated from Cleveland-Marshall School of Law and was admitted to the Ohio Bar Association. Among his careers, Stokes served as a court appointed probation officer, assistant prosecutor, and served three-terms in the Ohio House of Representatives.¹

Martin Luther King helped lead the mobilization efforts that facilitated Stokes’ mayoral victory. For King, the SCLC voter registration effort in Cleveland was part of a larger civil rights effort designed to relieve frustrations in the African American community. Although King enjoyed a great deal of support from the African American community and its leaders, some disapproved of “outside agitators.” In this case, no one

was more vocal in opposition than Carl B. Stokes. Stokes, having plans to announce his candidacy in 1967, had his reservations. He believed, for instance, that the national uproar from King’s prior confrontation with Chicago’s white communities would aggravate and, therefore, dissuade his potential supporters in Cleveland’s White community. Stokes had a point. Many local advocates were rather concerned that outside forces would agitate an already unstable situation.¹

In April of 1966, King and Stokes met to discuss the local leader’s concerns. They held the meeting at the local African American newspaper office (*Call & Post*), facilitated by its editor—W.O. Walker.² Quite plain spoken, Stokes voiced his apprehension: “Martin, if you come in here with these marches and what not, you can just see what the reaction will be.” He continued, “This is our chance to take over a power that is just unprecedented among Black people. But I’m very concerned that if you come here you’re going to upset the balance.” Therefore, “I would rather that you not stay.” Dr. King responded, “Carl, I know just what you mean. We discussed this at SCLC headquarters before I came out here. But I am responding to the invitation of the United Pastors.” Responding to the 1966 Hough Riot, the UPA asked Dr. King to help quell violent sentiment as well as lower tensions between the Black and White communities. Stokes responded, “I understand that, Dr. King, but they’re (UPA) thinking about promoting their own group.”³

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³ Ibid., 101-102.
Dr. King listened. But, the civil rights leader had already made a commitment and intended on keeping this promise. King assured Stokes, however, that he would refrain from taking any unnecessary or inflammatory actions.\textsuperscript{4}

Dr. King’s popularity was another concern for Stokes, though this wasn’t discussed at the meeting. Stokes, however, like many local leaders, did not want King’s celebrity status to overshadow his movement. For this reason, the Ohio State legislator preferred that King remain in the background.\textsuperscript{5} This, of course, was difficult and in terms of mobilization, counter productive. The success of the SCLC largely depended on King’s charisma, popularity, and media attention. Moreover, as Jesse Jackson put it in a 2013 interview with a \textit{Cleveland Magazine} reporter, the Voting Registration Campaign was a civil rights action and, therefore, “not built around Carl’s political ambitions.” In the meeting between King and Stokes, Jackson claimed that Stokes argued that his campaign had to “relieve White fears” in order to build a winning coalition.\textsuperscript{6}

Martin Luther King and Carl B. Stokes had mutual respect and admiration for one another. Both men endeavored to reform a system that perpetuated injustices against African Americans. In hindsight, the meeting between King and Stokes constitutes a

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 101, 102, this meeting between Carl B. Stokes and Martin Luther King Jr. is also referenced in Eric Trickey’s interviews with former SCLC staff members. See interviews with E.T. Caviness and Jesse Jackson.

\textsuperscript{5} Reverend E.T. Caviness, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, \textit{Cleveland Magazine}, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013.

\textsuperscript{6} Jessie Jackson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, \textit{Cleveland Magazine}, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Trickey asked Jackson: “Carl Stokes wrote in his autobiography that he did not want Dr. King to launch the campaign; he thought it would provoke white backlash. He talked about a meeting between himself and Dr. King at the Call & Post offices. Were you there?” Jackson answers: “I remember that meeting. Carl felt he had to have a coalition to win; that meant relieving white fears; between relieving white fears and black legitimate aspirations there’s a tension, but there can be no true freedom until there’s mutual respect.” Moreover, “the voter registration drive was not built around Carl’s political ambitions; Carl benefited from the campaign, he was never part of it.”
great irony; that is, Stokes attempted to dissuade King from conducting a local civil rights initiative in Cleveland; when, in effect, it ultimately brought about an outcome satisfactory to Stoke’s political aspirations.

During the summer of 1967, the SCLC and United Pastors Association embarked on a registration campaign. The measure was an effort to promote political participation, as much as it was an endeavor to defeat the political status quo. This SCLC-led campaign took place throughout the summer of 1967 and led to massive African American voter registrations and helped produce a voting bloc responsible for electing Carl B. Stokes. Stokes already had an efficient, veteran, and influential political machine. In 1965, he ran for mayor and narrowly lost to Mayor Ralph Locher in the general election. However, King’s civil rights campaign galvanized the Black electoral base, which Stokes succeeded in mobilizing for his political advantage. This political marriage ultimately translated into an African American victory. As mayor, Stokes enacted policies as well as reforms that disrupted segregation, discrimination, and poverty. He thus created an apparatus that produced economic, social, and political progress for African Americans in Cleveland. Even more, by virtue of the election, the victory produced a wave of empowerment that inspired the local as well as national African American community.

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7 Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*, 40-44.
8 Ibid., 77, 78.
Aftermath: Public Sentiment Post Violence

After the Hough Riot, the status quo in Cleveland encountered large scrutiny. The African American plight, long ignored by the White “establishment became the topic of local and national discourse. As for Mayor Locher, he blocked numerous attempts by local leaders to resolve issues plaguing the Black community. By no means did Mayor Locher constitute the only problem, but as the highest city executive, he received the most criticism. The outrage levied after the Hough Riot, largely, constituted an all-out assault on Mayor Locher. And, the criticism derived from both White and Black religious as well as secular leaders. Amongst the critics, a White Christian, the Rev. Albert A. Koklowsky, reprimanded the Mayor for failing to enforce housing codes.\(^9\) Ernest C. Cooper, the Cleveland Urban League Executive Director blamed the violence on the city’s failure to provide good-paying jobs, a lack of investment in African American communities, inadequate health care services, and unconstructive leisure. Cooper argued that violence and social conflict would exist until the Locher administration as well as the White “establishment” identified these problems and created reforms to resolve the conditions.\(^10\) The president of the local NAACP chapter, Rev. Donald G. Jacobs, joined the condemnation and repudiated Mayor Locher and his administration. Jacobs further called for the firing of Cleveland Safety Director John N. McCormick for discrimination and “insensibility to Negro grievances.”\(^11\) Like many

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\(^10\) *Plain Dealer*, “Rioting Blamed on Negro Frustration,” July 20, 1966, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

African American leaders, Jacobs believed that poor conditions in African American communities were a direct result of the city’s negligence.

The criticism of conditions in Cleveland that led to the Hough Riot did not stop there. On July 21, 1966, U.S. Congressman Michael A. Feighan of the House Judiciary Committee chimed in. The representative condemned the violence but insisted that the riots “serve as a warning: we must do something and do it fast [in order] to brighten the lives of hundred of thousand of our fellow citizens [living] in the shadow of poverty and discrimination.”12 In this same week, a group of concerned and activist clergymen, the Negro Pastors of Greater Cleveland Association, made an overture to City Hall. In a letter, circulated throughout the Hough area, the organization took the opportunity to condemn the violence. However, they also articulated the concerns of the Black community and sought a resolution going forward. “We the Negro Pastors of Greater Cleveland issue the following communication. The clergy deplores the violence which has erupted and turned a segment of our community to chaos.” The ministers went on to discuss the “unfortunate” reality of federal troops and police action in Hough. They sharply pointed out the underlying conditions that led to the violent uproar and the necessity of speed towards “the elimination of causes and conditions.” In the letter, the leaders were quite adamant that “promises will not suffice [in that] the Negro has been given a steady diet of legislation and political promises over one hundred years, and he finds that he is still frustrated and disappointed.”13

12 Plain Dealer, “House Probe of Riots Slated,” July 22, 1966, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
Like others, the clergymen viewed the letter as an attempt to extract “positive action.”14 Even after the violent demonstrations, Black leaders reached out to the Locher administration with the hopes that the Mayor would ally with the former in order to confront racial injustice, poverty, and Black unemployment. Finally, from Columbus, Ohio, State legislator Carl B. Stokes commented on the volatile situation. He argued that as a result of broken promises made by the city government, Black leaders were decapitated and unable to offer the African American community any “evidence of hope and promise.”15

Mayor Locher and his administration, despite the Hough violence as well as public call for action, did not respond in an adequate manner. He “remained un-empathetic and insensitive to the problems of the Black community.”16 But African American leaders did not waiver. The criticism against Mayor Locher intensified in late 1967. The Call & Post warned of a hostile sentiment and sense of urgency in the African American community. The article went on to condemn the establishment for ignoring the African American plight as well as tolerating Locher’s “inept and dismissive government.”17 Black editors from the Call & Post further reprimanded the city for discrimination against African Americans in Cleveland.18 Dr. King, preparing to launch

14 Ibid.
15 Marc Lackritz, “Hough Riots” (Master’s Thesis, Princeton University, 1968), 21. Note: the quote, “evidence of hope and promise” was quoted from Carl B. Stokes.
16 Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 64.
17 Call & Post, “Cleveland Faces its Hour of Decision,” December 10, 1966, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
his campaign, joined the public condemnation and described the mayor’s policies as divisive for political expedience.\(^{19}\)

As a result of increasing tensions and turmoil, in Cleveland, the White “establishment” began to question Locher’s competence in matters dealing with African Americans.\(^{20}\) Even the Cleveland Bar Association joined in. The association, having power and influence in Cleveland, rejected Locher’s intransigence. Certain members, who were affiliated with the mayor, publicly criticized him for his “continuous and dangerous refusal to talk to responsible Negro leadership.” According to the Bar’s president—James C. Davis, the mayor was “playing a very dangerous game of brinkmanship.” “For the sake of representing what [the mayor] thinks is the majority view of the white people of Cleveland, he is building a stone wall against the Negro population of Cleveland.” Davis sent a telegram to King in Atlanta, stating he “believed that the great majority, both of our Negro and White citizens, desire a common bases of understanding and wish to avoid a collision course.” He further conceded that Black discontent was the “responsibility of white society” and racist attitudes had to be changed.\(^{21}\) Eventually, in a form of protest, the Bar’s members met with Dr. King during his early visits in 1967. In the meeting, Davis discussed his willingness to cooperate to ease tensions as well as resolve issues plaguing the African American community.\(^{22}\)

\(^{19}\) *Cleveland Press,* “King Blasts Locher as Ignoring Negroes,” April 26, 1967, *Cleveland Press* Archives, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio, microfilm.


\(^{21}\) *Cleveland Press,* “Bar Asking Dr. King for Meeting Here,” May 29, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

\(^{22}\) *Cleveland Press,* “Bar Asking Dr. King for Meeting Here,” May 29, 1967, *Cleveland Press* Archives, microfilm.
Even the Community Relations Board, the diversity accountability department of City Hall, entered the public dialogue, despite opposition from Mayor Locher. The African American City Council Majority Leader—Charles Carr, urged and received the unanimous endorsement to hold a public forum. The Board’s members viewed a forum as an important platform, and a way to initiate discussions between Martin Luther King and the Mayor.\(^{23}\) At this juncture, Mayor Locher’s intransigence and lack of governance frustrated leaders on both sides.\(^{24}\) Beyond the social and political outrage, Cleveland’s financial and industrial sectors began to view the violent sentiment as a potential financial and economic hazard.\(^{25}\) This, along with the Mayor’s contempt for the Black community, contributed to a widespread accusation of incompetence.

**The African American Response and the Voter Registration Campaign**

The social and political reactions to the Hough Riot factored into the 1967 mayoral election. Judging from widespread condemnation and deteriorating state of affairs, it appeared that Mayor Locher would have difficulty being reelected.\(^{26}\) Among the challengers, stood the African American Ohio State legislator—Carl B Stokes. Stokes believed Locher was destructive for Blacks who bore the brunt of his executive polices and adherence to the status quo. On June 16, Stokes announced his candidacy. From the start, the campaign rested on Stoke’s aspirations to serve on the behalf of the entire Cleveland community. Stokes assured the city’s voting base that he would govern

\(^{23}\) *Cleveland Press*, “Community Relations Board Asks Mayor to Meet With Dr. King,” June 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

\(^{24}\) Carl B. Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 96.

\(^{25}\) Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 68.

\(^{26}\) Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 95, 96.
regardless of race. Nonetheless, Stokes pledged to enact programs and policies aimed at easing the Black plight. He endeavored to combat frustrations by lifting African Americans from the depths of despair. However, since Blacks represented only one-third of the entire population, to politically compete, he needed a large African American turnout.

In 1965, African Americans made up thirty-four percent of Cleveland’s total population (276,000). The challenge to getting Carl B. Stokes elected became two fold: one, convince discouraged Blacks to participate in the election; two, locate and re-register 40,000 Blacks who were purged from the voting rolls. Politically, Stokes was in an ideal position. Besides having a respected reputation in local and state politics, the Ohio legislator had modest backing from Cleveland’s industrial leaders. More importantly, he had strong support from African American leaders. The UPA was one of the organizations that supported Stokes’ campaign. The group of Baptist ministers seconded his contempt for Mayor Locher’s lack of leadership. Even more, the ministers viewed the mayor’s potential defeat as a civil rights matter and understood its importance. If, Carl B. Stokes were elected mayor—they believed, it would likely lead to tangible reform and empower the Black citizens.

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27 William E. Nelson, Jr. and Phillip J. Meranto, *ELECTING BLACK MAYORS: POLITICAL ACTION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 116, “Fundamentally, Stokes had to reassure white voters, particularly in view of the Hough riot, that he would be a mayor of all the people and that he was not a black power advocate. It was of the utmost importance that he calm the fears of whites who felt that his candidacy represented a black takeover of Cleveland.”

28 Ibid., “The [campaign] argued that the 1967 mayoralty election offered every black a unique opportunity to take part in making black history and to elect a man who would do something about black grievances.”

29 Newspaper Article: *Call & Post*, Carl B. Stokes Election, 1967, Folder 1-10, coll. 4370, Carl B. Stokes Campaign Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Archive Research Center.


31 Ibid., 29.
The Hough Riot ultimately served as a warning that the Black community had made the conscious decision to revolt—albeit violently—against this economic and socially oppressive system. Thus, it became clear that the status quo threatened “peace” in the city of Cleveland. The demonstrations showed that African Americans were willing to take to the streets and violently demonstrate against social, political, and economic discrimination. By the same token, the riots awoke the city to the many problems plaguing the Black community. The violence especially awoke the White “establishment” who had ignored the ominous conditions. As a result of the Hough Riot, they began to understood that their failure to act help create the unrest.³²

Carl B. Stokes’ political aspirations and Martin Luther King’s Northern Campaign were two separate endeavors brought together by the UPA. Immediately after the riot, the UPA began to engage in private discussions with Martin Luther King. The two civil rights groups met throughout 1966. In April of 1967, King agreed to visit Cleveland to discuss future efforts. During his stay, the civil rights leader also addressed students at a predominately Black east side high school (Glenville).³³ King discussed the potential of electing an African American mayor in Cleveland; for this reason, he urged the crowd to engage in constructive matters in order to make the possibility a reality. Politically, the SCLC leader took the opportunity to address the White “establishment”—in particular, the mayor of Cleveland. King criticized, for example, Mayor Ralph Locher for ignoring Black poverty as well as unemployment and acting “insensitive to the needs

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³² Lackritz, “Hough Riots,” 68.
³³ Plain Dealer, “King Coming Here This Week,” April 23, 1966, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
of the Negro community.” On the other hand, King made overtures to discuss the African American plight with Locher. However, City Hall denied King’s request. Not only did Mayor Locher reject the overture, he called King an “extremist.”

Unlike Chicago, King did not take-up residence in Cleveland; however, he maintained a constant presence throughout the campaign. On average, the SCLC leader joined his staff at least twice a month. Notwithstanding his national obligations, King assigned some of his most qualified and dedicated staff to Cleveland. Rev. E. Randel T. Osburn, for example, a five-year veteran of SCLC, led the advanced team. Before the campaign launched, Osburn engaged local clergymen, organized local ministers and congregations, and trained various volunteers for the upcoming efforts. A Boston native and SCLC veteran, Rev. A.R. Sampson, supervised the entire project. Rev. Sampson served as the SCLC Cleveland Campaign manager and liaison between the local apparatus and SCLC headquarters. James Orange, active in Selma, Alabama, served as the Voter Registration Campaign’s Co-director. Also, Mike Bibler and Willie James Tab were civil rights veterans assigned to Cleveland. And, on various occasions, other SCLC members joined the Cleveland staff. Finally, SCLC Executive Director Andrew Young made frequent visits. Young was one of King’s top aides and the

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34 *Cleveland Press*, “Dr. King Expected to Urge Negro Youth to Shun Street Violence,” April 25, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
35 *Cleveland Press*, “King Blasts Locher as Ignoring Negroes,” April 26, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
36 *Cleveland Press*, “Dr. King to confer in June to Plan Summer Drive Here,” May 23, 1967, Cleveland Press Archives, microfilm.
37 Andrew Young, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, *Cleveland Magazine*, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013.
38 *Call & Post*, “King Aids Dig in on Cleveland Front,” June 17, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
39 *Cleveland Press*, “Dr. King Sends Young Men to aid his Rights Drive Here,” June 2, 1967, Cleveland Press Archives, microfilm.
Northern campaign supervisor. By and large, the staff consisted of highly trained and motivated professionals. King’s men were dedicated to the civil rights cause and pledged to combat African American hardship and oppression in Cleveland.  

The Democratic primary campaign began in the summer of 1967. In June, King arrived in Cleveland to consult with both his staff and UPA ministers. The two organizations met and discussed tactics and overall strategy. The aim was to put specific measures in place for the up and coming Voter Registration Campaign. Dr. King often made his visits productive. After meeting with the UPA, he met with a local organization of clergymen that represented a variety of religious affiliations, whereupon he garnered support for the Voter Registration Campaign. This meeting further produced an assembly of local clergymen and civil rights leaders who agreed to implement a Four-Point agenda.

Besides supporting the Voter Registration Campaign, the assembly agreed to advocate for the creation of African American financial institutions, form Tenant Unions, and engage in economic boycotts. During this stay, King also met with leaders from the NAACP, CORE, Cleveland Urban League, and SNCC. Together, they agreed to promote unity as well as conduct joint voting registration exercises. For King, proceeding on a united front was critical for success. If the Black community hoped to defeat a powerful

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40 Andrew Young, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, *Cleveland Magazine*, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013.
41 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Plain Dealer*, “Dr. King Raps Ghetto Wall at Freedom Assembly Here,” June 22, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University.
42 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, “Right Groups Bare Roles in Campaign for Mayor,” June 15, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project. Note: the organization was an assembly of religious ministers (Cleveland Freedom Organization).
mayor, in a political infrastructure hostile to Black empowerment and equality, they had to work in a cohesive manner.

Much of the campaign’s funding derived out of SCLC donations. According to Andrew Young, they spent close to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars on the Voter Registration Campaign. The Stokes’ campaign did not contribute.\(^\text{43}\) To subsidize the cost, King facilitated large fundraising campaigns. On the 21\(^\text{st}\) of October, the SCLC produced a fundraiser in Cleveland Headlined by Harry Belafonte with other celebrity guest such as Sidney Poitier and Aretha Franklin.\(^\text{44}\) This did not represent the only funding mechanism; members of the African American community, local initiatives, and local chapters of national civil rights groups also funded the Voter Registration Campaign. In addition, the UPA and other religious leaders collected special offerings; local businessmen, too, donated to the effort.\(^\text{45}\) Other groups, including the Urban League, CORE, and the NAACP also contributed financially.\(^\text{46}\)

The Voter Registration Drive was accompanied by a nonviolent message. King believed that the effort would only work if nonviolent; therefore, he needed cooperation in the Black community—a task not necessarily simple since Blacks remained hostile

\(^{43}\) Andrew Young, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, *Cleveland Magazine*, Cleveland, Ohio 2013.

\(^{44}\) *Plain Dealer*, “Harry Belafonte Appear Here in Fund-Raising Show for SCLC,” August 29, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database. Note: Martin Luther King Quote. “The tour is to raise funds for the program of the SCLC and to educate the communities in the cities where we work.” The article also includes commentary from the reporter detailing the specifics of the fundraiser.

\(^{45}\) Reverend Al Sampson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, *Cleveland Magazine*, Cleveland, Ohio 2013.

towards the mayor and Cleveland’s White “establishment.” The civil rights leader’s call for nonviolence was especially directed towards a local and growing Black Nationalist segment of the African American population frustrated with the lack of civil rights gains. King contended that violence was self-destructive and counter-productive.\(^{47}\) He argued that despite the will to defeat oppression, Blacks did not have enough weapons, or people for that matter, to defeat law enforcement. Instead, King urged the Black community to engage in nonviolent struggles as a way to defeat segregation, poverty, and Mayor Locher’s unjust policies—that, for the good of the community, it was important to rally around civil rights initiatives taking place in Cleveland. He asserted that if African Americans directed their frustrations towards noble and just efforts, they would be more powerful. In terms of Black Nationalism, Dr. King embraced the historic ideas behind the term “Black Power.” He believed, for instance, that the sentiment was empowering, especially under a “controlled-nonviolent civil disobedience.”\(^{48}\) After 1965, King’s nonviolent tactics became more militant in style. He “concluded that only militant forms of civil disobedience could provide alternatives to the urban rioting that was accelerating racial polarization.” For this reason, King and the SCLC organized a hunger march in Washington. Although the march would be nonviolent, they planned to disrupt “business as usual” inaction in places such as Washington, D.C.\(^{49}\)

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\(^{47}\) Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, “King Calls Slum,” July 29, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.

\(^{48}\) *Plain Dealer*, “King & Black Power & Militants,” August 20, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

\(^{49}\) Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 328, 332-335.)
In the attempt to further achieve unity, King met with local Black Nationalist leader Ahmed Evans at a conference in Cleveland. Evans was a local militant leader admired on the streets. He had a reputation for a no-nonsense approach and courageous stance against injustices; his toughness and “by all means necessary” bravado resonated with his followers included Black Nationalist ideologues as well as frustrated street dwellers. Ultimately, King understood that in order to be successful, the campaign had to engage more than middle-class families and churchgoers. For this purpose, he formed an alliance with Ahmed Evans.50

At the conference, King discussed direct action at length. He further discussed the Voting Registration Campaign and Cleveland’s political potential. The Black Nationalist leader was open-minded and ultimately desired change. As a result, Evans affirmed that as long as gains were made, he would cooperate. He agreed to participate in the Voters Registration Campaign and even urged his followers to register. Dr. King’s alliance with Ahmed Evans, as well as his overall ability to unite different factions, classes, and ideologies was paramount to the movement. Rev. A.R Sampson recently said this about King: “The genius of the movement is when you can tie down the Black church on one side and then get the brothers and sisters in the street on the other side. The reverend further stated, “The genius of Dr. King was that he understood all of those worlds and all of those entities that go to build a movement based on the masses and not just based on the classes.”51

50 Ibid.
The Voters Registration Campaign was a massive and important undertaking. The goal for the SCLC and UPA was to register fifty thousand African Americans. The job for both organizations, then, was to inspire confidence as well as galvanize the African American population. The campaign had to appeal to concern, discontent, anger, frustration, and despair in the African American community. Likewise, the campaign had to engage their aspirations, potential, and urge to overcome oppressive conditions.

The success of the campaign largely depended on mobilization, organization, and unification. In terms of mobilization and organization efforts, those in charge had to devise ways to lure people from inaction. King, in effect, had to convince the Black population that their inaction was part of the problem and not the solution. In doing so, King personally campaigned around eastside wards. The SCLC leader walked around neighborhoods, shook hands, took photos, and engaged in small talk with members of the community. He also discussed the importance of nonviolence, taking action, as well as the state of civil rights and the people’s responsibility to maintain the struggle. Of course, King wasn’t a typical Black leader.

At this time Martin Luther King was nationally renowned and a celebrity. His presence alone, as a result, inspired members of the community. His staff used this to their advantage. Besides engaging the folks on the Cleveland streets, King gave sermons at local churches, as well as spoke to secular audiences at city venues and school

52 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, The Tim Russert Department of Communication & Theatre Arts, John Carroll University.
53 Reverend. A.R Sampson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Note: quote, “When he (King) came in from Atlanta or wherever to Cleveland. I’d meet him at the airport and we’d set things up for him to go to for maximum amount of him touching the people and the people touching him.”
facilities. In addition, the campaign employed a longstanding leaflet mechanism used in Black churches across America. The SCLC created cartoon instructional leaflets to inform the community as well as guide Blacks through the registration and voting process.\footnote{Reverend Al Sampson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, \textit{Cleveland Magazine}, Cleveland, Ohio 2013.} The SCLC also used the local media as a campaign mechanism. In their view, it was a form of free publicity and a way to augment the message. At pivotal moments, King solicited the star power of his celebrity acquaintances—African American musicians, actors, and actresses. Logistically, King made political overtures. In preparation for a potentially large mobilization, the civil rights leader lobbied the Board of Election to consider extending registration hours, activating mobile sites, and other logistical matters aimed at accommodating the registration process.\footnote{Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, \textit{Cleveland Press}, “Dr. King to Propose Mobile Registration,” July 29, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project, reporter quote: “King proposes mobile voter registration areas combined with a request to install night registration hours at the boards downtown location.”}

Martin Luther King’s civil rights campaign and Carl B. Stokes’ political campaign were largely separate entities. As such, the Stokes campaign also worked a registration mobilization effort. In doing so, Stokes aggressively engaged African American communities. The effort was quite thought out and conducted in a systematic manner. They employed as many as three thousand volunteers.\footnote{Nelson, and Meranto, \textit{Electing Black Mayors}, 128.} The Stokes campaign, first, targeted voters removed from the voting list; that is, as a result of an Ohio Law that purged voters for their lack of involvement within a two-year period, thousands of Black voters were unregistered. Second, the campaign offered the necessary “change of address” forms to Blacks who were registered but had relocated since the previous
election. Lastly, they endeavored to entice the individual(s) that had never voted or despaired of the political process. The Stokes team organized a door-to-door registration drive. It empowered a lead campaign captain who then employed small units of volunteers who canvassed the African American communities—block by block. In addition, they used mobilization efforts such as campaign propaganda (posters, stickers, literature), car pools, and personal appearances by Stokes in the respective communities. In the end, the Stokes registration drive was a part of the larger unification and mobilization effort to mobilize the African American community.

For King, simultaneous voter registration efforts conducted by other individuals and organizations enhanced the SCLC goal to mobilize the Black vote. King advocated that the various civil rights groups assemble around a single endeavor. As stated earlier, he regularly met with religious leadership and local civil rights organizations. For King, it was imperative that voter registration initiatives, religious groups, as well as civil rights organizations, proceeded on a united front. No matter the size or influence of the respective group(s), it was important that neither politics nor ego marginalize the effort. Instead of engaging in competitive bickering, to ensure better results, it was imperative that SCLC and other groups involved combine manpower, resources, and expertise, in the hopes that the effort would ultimately lead to a large African American registration turnout.

59 Reverend. A.R Sampson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, *Cleveland Magazine*, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013, Sampson discusses the community mobilizing, volunteerism by men like Hilbit Terry and other Blacks in the community, and “Black business folk contributing to the get out to vote” and financial considerations.
Mass Mobilization and the Cleveland Mayoral Primary

On July 5, 1967, King and his staff embarked on a campaign blitz. The Voters Registration Drive launched with a SCLC campaign rally in the Glenville community. The next evening, King spoke to five hundred parents and students in the Hough area. He spoke eloquently about the African American plight. In doing so, he argued that ever since the Hough Riot, the conditions in African American communities had not changed. In placing blame on the executive leadership, King criticized Mayor Locher for failing to improve conditions for African Americans. For this purpose and others, he urged onlookers to register to vote. As the campaign proceeded to directly engage the African American community, SCLC members held voter registration workshops for campaign volunteers; these workshops, in fact, were co-sponsored by the Cleveland Urban League and the UPA.

The month of July witnessed a large increase in voter registration activities. At the end of July, King made seventeen stops in two days. These engagements were part festive. Before King delivered his speeches, a local band played inspirational tunes while children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens danced and mingled. When King finally addressed the crowd, his audience usually gazed at the civil rights leader with intense

60 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Plain Dealer, “Pastors here to set Registration of Voters Rally,” July 5, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
61 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King Pledges Registration Drive to Defeat Locher,” July 6, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
62 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King Due Tomorrow for Workshops,” July 12, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
63 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King, Gregory to Boosts Negro Vote Drive Here,” July 28, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
stares. King approached the series of speeches with a strong, direct, and part

inspirational message:

We are involved in a nonpolitical voter registration drive to try to get as many
new Negro voters as possible. Now, don’t take this lightly, if we want to
straighten out the conditions of the city, or of the nation for that matter in a
democratic society, you do it through the political process; now there is no point
of us overlooking politics; politics touches every aspect of our lives. You sound
enthusiastic, and I believe you are committed to this movement to make freedom
and justice a reality for every Black man, every Black woman, every black boy
and every Black girl of the city of Cleveland. Say to the nation, we are men, we
are somebody, we want all of our freedom, we want it here and we want it now.64

King also recounted ominous statistics concerning the African American plight. He
warned that fifty eight percent of Black young men in Cleveland were either unemployed
or making wages below the poverty level. And, ninety eight percent of Cleveland Blacks
resided in ghetto conditions. At several rallies, Muhammad Ali and comedian Dick
Gregory joined the civil rights leader.65 In Cleveland, the frustration level in the African
American community was high and thus the circumstances warranted a great deal of
inspiration.

Although many African Americans embraced King and the Cleveland Campaign,
White separatist groups, segregationist, and some status quo “establishment” leaders
opposed the civil rights leader and his efforts. King endured scrutiny, especially, from
local White citizens and media journalists. His motives were questioned and some
scrutinized his national endeavors. Many people out rightly rejected King’s presence.

Besides frequent demonstrations conducted by White citizens protesting King and the

64 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
65 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Plain Dealer, “Ex-Champ Ali to Join Dr. King for Negro
Voter Drive Today,” July 29, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
SCLC, White fringe organizations such as the United Citizens Council of America, a Northern based-White Christian and supremacist organization, challenged and opposed the civil right leader’s Cleveland efforts.\footnote{Plain Dealer, “Critics Line Riots With Communist Plot,” August 21, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database, reporter quote: “William Murphy vice president of United Citizens Council of America blame recent wave of rioting in Negro ghetto areas on a Communist conspiracy; he was followed by Robert W. Annable, president of the organization formed from a merger of North American Alliance of White People, the National Christian Conservative Society, and the White Citizens Council of Ohio.”}

For the most part, the White community questioned the need for a registration drive. In its view, Blacks were not legally prohibited from voting. Instead, many Whites believed that African did not vote on their own accord. This was quite evident when a Channel 5 News journalist inquired about the necessity for a voters’ registration campaign in Cleveland. “Negroes in Cleveland don’t have any problems voting in Cleveland—why is it that they don’t vote?”\footnote{Film Reel, Martin Luther King, Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives. Note: A reporter discussed the state of Black America and voting with King during one of his visits to Cleveland in 1967. Full quote: “this is understandable in the South, we often can’t vote and in the North we often feel as if we have nothing for which to vote.” The premise of the question spoke to the very nature of the Northern Campaign. In large part, northern bigotry did not reflect blatant racist hostility. Instead, Cleveland officials engaged in more subtle abuses such as gerrymandering and purging voting rolls: the type of policies that often minimized the Black vote.\footnote{Jessie Jackson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Quote: “it was part of a voter suppression—same tactics used in Alabama had been used in Ohio just different tricks, combination of Gerrymandering and annexation purging schemes but much more operative in Cleveland and a controlling mechanism.”} King responded: “this is understandable for in the south we often can’t vote, and in the north, we often feel as if we have nothing for which to vote.” The premise of the question spoke to the very nature of the Northern Campaign. In large part, northern bigotry did not reflect blatant racist hostility. Instead, Cleveland officials engaged in more subtle abuses such as gerrymandering and purging voting rolls: the type of policies that often minimized the Black vote.\footnote{These abuses}
reflected the racism engrained in the very fabric of northern society, a system that ultimately led to a Black distrust and a break from the political process.

The campaign intensified in late August. Thus far, the mobilization efforts were effective—the message resonated and people began to register. The campaign garnered general excitement and this was apparent from the large crowds assembling in African American communities. A SCLC spokesperson announced through the media that during the second week of August alone, eight thousand people registered or completed a change of address forms. This, along with a little more than five thousand during the first week, amounted to over thirteen thousand new registries in the first half of August. Still, King and his staff did not slow down. Instead, he increased resources as well as personnel in Cleveland.

During the first week of August, Andrew Young spoke at the Kiwanis Luncheon. The SCLC executive spoke against White leaders who perpetuated poverty and slum conditions: America “cannot have an Island of poverty in a Sea of affluence.” On August 18, the SCLC staff, along with representatives from the UPA, CORE, and the Cleveland Welfare Movement bussed two hundred children to the Board of Election with signs urging adults to register and vote.

Outside the campaign, as a result of the large upsurge in registrations, the Board of Registration increased their staff. At this juncture, they experienced an average
increase of four hundred registrations a day. The Board reported that nine out of ten new registrants were African American. For this reason, the Plain Dealer ran an article praising King and other civil rights organization for the increase in African American participation: “Voter registration drives by SCLC and NAACP are pulling dividends.”

Around this time, SCLC Vice President Ralph Abernathy and Executive Director Andrew Young began to make frequent appearances. Their visits were a part of an effort to increase visibility during this last phase.

On August 23, 1967, the last day to register, the Board of Election placed forty-three mobile stations around Cleveland’s thirty-three wards. They also assigned additional employees to every station; the number increased from four to fourteen representatives depending on the post. These measures taken by the board constituted an effort to assist King and the unprecedented mobilization effort. A Board representative, struck by the outpour and mass mobilization, assigned much of the credit to King. The SCLC and NAACP also provided buses and initiated carpool services. This was helpful in that many African Americans encountered difficulty traveling outside of their neighborhoods. Simultaneously, King visited eastside neighborhoods. In light of the registration deadline, he conducted a final speaking tour.

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72 Plain Dealer, “Locher & Stokes & Registration Drive,” August 5, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
73 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “King’s Men Checking on Voter Registration,” August 11, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
74 Plain Dealer, “King Slates Tour in Bid for Voters,” August 19, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
75 Plain Dealer, “King Visits, Calls Voter Signup ‘a Start,’” [n.d], Cleveland Public Library Digital Database. Note: In an interview with the Plain Dealer, the Board official characterized King’s ability as “magic.”
76 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King Due For Voter Campaign,” August 22, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
On August 23, the civil rights leader made eleven appearances in heavily concentrated African American eastside neighborhoods. Accompanied by several councilpersons and civil rights leaders, King traveled through Miles, Union, Woodland, Buckeye, East 30th, and Sowinski Avenue, just to name a few. At each stop, King encouraged participation and directed people to mobile registration sites. In the attempt to reach out to a larger prospective voter pool, the speaking engagement also visited Puerto Rican as well as poor White communities. It must be noted that this strategy did not begin during the last phase of the campaign. Rather, it had been an ongoing effort to attract non-Blacks similarly ignored by the Locher administration.\(^{77}\) The Voter Registration Campaign ended on the evening of August 23—on the final day to register. On that evening, King, in a speech held at the Olivet Institutional Baptist church, offered his appreciation to his staff “for the tremendous job they [have] done.”\(^{78}\) He also thanked the clergymen and the African American community for their efforts.

On August 24, the Board of Election released its statistical data. According to chairperson A.L DeMaioribus, on the last day, twenty-five thousand citizens registered at neighborhood mobile posts, and another three thousand registered at the Board of Elections. Including the African Americans that registered prior to the deadline, a total of forty thousand new voters were placed on the voting list. The chairperson went on to predict that over one hundred and fifty thousand Clevelanders would participate in the primary. And, he claimed that the increase in voter registrations would likely result in a

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\(^{78}\) Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
two-person race between Mayor Ralph Locher and Carl. B. Stokes. In the end, this kind of mobilization reflected the community as a whole. Of course, for King and other leaders involved, the success of the campaign provided a huge win for the African American community. However, more importantly, the mass registration defied conventional wisdom and signaled a political upheaval.

Dr. King characterized the campaign as a “tremendous success and the most successful registration drive conducted in any major city in our country.” In large part, the Voting Registration Campaign put in place the structure needed to potentially elect an African American mayor. With that said, Black leaders fended off complacency. Efforts were made to inform African American registrants that the success of the voter registration drive only constituted the beginning of the process—that they were steps still needed to be taken to elect Stokes. In fact, the SCLC Vice President—Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, announced that the SCLC’s partners in the Cleveland Welfare Rights Movement agreed to “implement the second phase of the drive;” that is, going forward, the group would provide voter education to African Americans in Cleveland.

At the end of August, King publicly announced that the massive registration was “just the beginning.” He asserted that the African American community had to continue

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79 *Plain Dealer*, “Heavy Mayoral Vote Assured Here,” August 25, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
80 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
81 M Clarence Burns, “Eyes on the Prize—power: 1967-1968,” [n. d], Video Clip, accessed Aug 16, 2013, YouTube, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtEw83us8hk&list=PL6q5Q0YVDI9AfyzTFFuqPgwak95xOsmm](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtEw83us8hk&list=PL6q5Q0YVDI9AfyzTFFuqPgwak95xOsmm)
to mobilize in the primary and general election. The same advice was echoed in a *Call & Post* editorial. While mass registration was a significant first step, “equally as important is the exciting prospect of using this new power to elect…a Negro mayor of Cleveland.” Reporter James M. Naughton of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* commended the turnout for its overall virtue: the “massive one day voter registration drive proved at least one thing—the city’s mayoral primary will be one of the heaviest turnout in history.” The SCLC Voters Registration Campaign had completed its objective. King set out to quell violent sentiment, inspire confidence, as well as activate a powerful voting bloc in the African American community. For this, he made headway. By the same token, the ultimate goal was to rid Cleveland of Mayor Ralph Locher. Therefore, for this reason, even after the end of the registration campaign, King and the SCLC remained active.

The Democratic Primary between Mayor Ralph Locher, Carl B. Stokes, and Lakewood Mayor Frank P. Celeste took place on October 3, 1967. Frank Celeste received only ten thousand of the total two hundred thousand votes. The real contest was between Locher and Stokes. In the end, Stokes defeated Mayor Locher. Carl B. Stokes swept Mayor Locher in fourteen out of thirty-three wards. Stokes’ broad support reflected the massive turnout in predominantly Black wards, where he received ninety-six percent of the ninety-five thousand votes. In addition, Stokes carried seventeen thousand White votes, which amounted to fourteen percent of the entire White turnout. Carl B.

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83 *Plain Dealer*, “Heavy Mayoral Vote Assured Here,” August 25, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
84 *Call & Post*, editorial, 1967, Carl B. Stokes Campaign Papers.
85 *Plain Dealer*, “Heavy Mayoral vote Assured Here,” August 25, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
Stokes defeated Mayor Ralph Locher by a margin of almost nineteen thousand votes, thereupon advancing to the general election against Republican candidate—Seth Taft.86

The demographic and statistical data regarding the primary vote tally reflected positively on Martin Luther King’s Voting Registration Campaign. King had implemented an effective strategy. He made a tactical shift from his Chicago action, deciding not to engage in direct confrontation in predominantly White communities. In doing so, he helped ensure peace to protect the potential effectiveness of the SCLC campaign. In terms of projecting leadership, King presided over a united apparatus. From the outset, he galvanized support, a significant component to mass mobilization efforts. In effect, then, the registration campaign, spearheaded by SCLC but conducted in conjunction with local and national civil rights groups, as well as religious organizations, produced the African American vote that facilitated Stokes’ primary win.

In October, the Cleveland Call & Post published an article that eloquently described the events of the primary months. Stokes victory was in part indicative of “White people who chose ability over mediocrity.” His victory reflected “the Negro people, who at long last have demonstrated their political maturity by making spectacular use of the ballot to attack the major problems of the city in which they live.”87 A few weeks earlier, on October 4, before meeting with a group of ministers in Cleveland, King commented on Stokes’ primary victory. “The response of the citizens of Cleveland in electing Carl B. Stokes, the Democratic nominee for mayor, was a vote for democracy

86 Plain Dealer, “14% White Vote Equals Stokes’ Victory Margin,” October 5, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database; also, Moore, Carl B. Stokes and the rise of Black Political Power, 58.
87 Call & Post, “Magnificent Achievement,” October 14, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
and against racism…Negro voters firmly put an end to the myth that they are politically apathetic.”88 Stokes’ primary victory was a milestone. However, the overall goal had not been reached. That is, the primary victory represented only one step in the ongoing endeavor to elect a Black mayor. So King, true to his commitment, pledged his assistance during the final mobilization efforts in the general election.

Win For Cleveland

On November 6, 1967, King spoke at get-out-the vote rallies on behalf of local civic leaders. Accompanied by Rev. Ralph Abernathy, the SCLC leader urged the Black community to vote on Election Day.89 The civil rights leader also produced radio advertisements. “I strongly urge you to go to the polls tomorrow and make sure your neighbors go with you.” Beneath the surface, King rooted for Stokes but publicly adhered to SCLC’s strict guidelines forbidding political endorsements. Reacting to a reporter’s question, he did, however, hint, “It was only natural” to have “certain private hopes.”90 Looking ahead, he called Stokes’ potential victory a show of “real progress.”91

The citizens of Cleveland headed to the polls the next day. The African American turnout was significant and, though the direction of the White vote was still in the air, Stokes benefited from a daily newspaper’s endorsement. The Cleveland Plain Dealer

88 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King Calls Voters Enlightened Americans,” October 4, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
89 Plain Dealer, “M.L. King in Cleveland Tomorrow,” November 5, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
90 Plain Dealer, “King Warns of Riots if Aid Meets delay,” November 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
91 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives. Note: King speaks to reporters while campaigning on the behalf of Carl B. Stokes during the General Election campaign
praised Stokes for his “determination, imagination, desire, and drive to find solutions to the main problems of the city.”

When the Board of Elections announced the final tally, Stokes defeated Seth Taft by almost three thousand votes, becoming the fifty-first mayor of Cleveland, Ohio. In total, two hundred and fifty-eight thousand Clevelanders voted: Stokes carried the majority of Blacks and fifteen percent of the White vote. The close margin reflected the mobilization efforts produced by civil rights and religious groups. Even Stokes, at a campaign victory rally, hailed his success as the “product of a massive [and] consorted effort [in] the Black community.” Stokes also deemed the win a “wonderful moment.” Surrounded by his wife and campaign advisors, he credited in particular, the citizens who came together to make his public aspirations a reality.

In 1968, a Princeton graduate student argued that Stokes’ election was a result of “the [understanding] of the white Establishment on the need for change, as well as a “unified and organized Black community.” The Reverend Jesse Jackson, King’s former project manager in Chicago, recently discussing the events of 1967, described Cleveland’s African American community and its evolution: “you had all this urban alienation and fears, cynicism, and disappointed people.” Nonetheless, the people “came

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92 *Plain Dealer*, editorial, 1967, Carl B. Stokes Campaign Papers.
93 *Plain Dealer*, Stokes Begins naming his Cabinet, November 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
95 M Clarence Burns, “Eyes on the Prize—power,” YouTube.
out of it, they came alive, they registered, they voted, they came to mass meetings, they elected Carl, they overcame their fears...we broke through and we prevailed.”

Conclusion

So much for Carl B. Stokes’ initial apprehension. His fear, for example, that King would confront the White community and therefore dissuade potential White voters, never materialized. For one, a large segment of the population would resist the election of an African American mayor, no matter how sensitive Black leaders proceeded on the issue of civil rights. In fact, Cleveland was a predominantly leaning Democratic city; that is, eighty percent of registered voters were Democrat. Sill, Stokes who was a lifetime Democrat and the Democratic nominee, only received fifteen percent of the White vote.

Moreover, the SCLC effort was inclusive and aimed at unity. During the campaign, King called for integration, brotherhood, and he addressed barriers that prevented such realities. King publicly reprimanded those who perpetuated oppression and injustices. However, he also displayed willingness to partner with those outside the African American community. From the outset, the SCLC leader associated with average White citizen (s), business leaders, and politicians who were genuine about resolving racial and civil rights issues.

In the end, the efforts by both leaders brought social, economic, and political progress to Cleveland. The election of Carl B. Stokes produced a wave of policies helpful to African Americans as well as an atmosphere that calmed tensions, at least for

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97 Reverend Jessie Jackson, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013.
the moment. First, Stokes confronted poor social conditions and de facto segregation. In doing so, he successfully convinced the United States government to return an upwards of tens of millions of dollars to the Cleveland community. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had withdrawn urban renewal grants under the previous administration, which after extensive negotiations with the HUD director, were returned to the city of Cleveland. Stokes then reactivated the housing development policy and subsequently built housing for the poor. During his tenure as mayor, Stokes built almost six thousand low-and-middle income housing units. Furthermore, many of these facilities were built in middle-class neighborhoods—a settled hit to segregationist citizens.\footnote{Carl B. Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 121, 124.}

As a financial measure, Stokes’ administration forced city banks to provide business loans to Black entrepreneurs. Generally, the largest banks in Cleveland were reluctant to lend money to individuals or companies lacking sufficient credit; therefore, African Americans were largely denied substantive loans. Stokes, nevertheless, insisted that the managers provide these loans. When the bank officials respectfully declined, he used a nineteenth century Jacksonian tactic. At the time, City Hall held fifty million dollars of taxpayer money in the city’s main banks, so Stokes ordered his cabinet to withdraw the funds. The next day, the banks reversed their decision and in the next thirty months issued over six million dollars in loans to Black businesses.\footnote{Ibid., 124.}

Politically, Stokes placed African Americans in positions of power. First, he appointed an African American as the city’s law director—the second most powerful
official in city government. Second, the mayor appointed Blacks to head government departments. For instance, he selected Richard Green to head the Department of Urban Renewal, Dr. E. Frank Ellis at Department of Public Health Services, and Ralph Tyler to head the Street Department. In his 1981 autobiography, Stokes claimed that by the end of his tenure,” he “managed to put Black people in policy—and decision-making positions in all departments of City Government.”

In addition, Stokes enacted policies that created employment in sectors that traditionally discriminated against African Americans. A quota, for example, was mandated for government construction jobs. In an assertive manner, Stokes also forced unions to accept African American membership. At City Hall, he increased middle-management positions in all areas of government. Black lawyers were hired to represent the city, more Black realtors were awarded contracts, and several Black-owned businesses were awarded contracts to supply City Hall with facility supplies.

The election of Carl B. Stokes had larger and national implications. In Washington D.C., Vice President Hubert Humphrey characterized the victory as an example of progress regarding the electability of African Americans in the United States. U.S. Senator, Stephen M. Young of Ohio, also embraced Stokes’ victory; the Senator “rejoiced at the outcome.” Amidst the violent demonstrations taking place throughout the North, the election of Stokes did much to confront racism and discrimination as well

100 Ibid., 114.
101 Ibid., 115-119.
102 Ibid., 118.
103 Ibid., 125.
104 Plain Dealer, “Stokes Begins Naming his Cabinet,” November 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database. Note: the quote regarding the U.S. Senator is a quote given to the Plain Dealer.
as show African American potential. The media—local, national, and international—struck a celebratory tone. The *Call & Post* praised the election for its multiple virtues. First, according to the African American newspaper, the city had elected its first African American mayor, which contributed to the overall Civil Rights movement. Moreover, the peaceful way in which the election took place, it added, occurred during a time of local and national violent upheaval.¹⁰⁵

The recognition of the election stretched beyond the Cleveland media. The election garnered front-page acknowledgment in prominent newspapers outlets. The *Miami Herald*’s front-page read, “Stokes had just been elected mayor of the eighth largest city in the nation.”¹⁰⁶ Finally, *Life Magazine* conducted a full-length story on Stokes and the election. The headline read, “Scores one for Stokes.” It described mayor-elect Stokes as an independent and qualified politician who “represents a new wave of dynamic young Negro candidates.”¹⁰⁷

Though the victory was in part a massive undertaking that entailed the efforts and workings of a variety of groups and interests, the existence of King’s leadership and SCLC resources ultimately galvanized the African American population. This, not to detract from parallel efforts and contributions, but it is only to highlight King’s influence and effectiveness in terms of persuasiveness on the ground. In a recent interview conducted by Eric Trickey of the *Cleveland Magazine*, former U.S. Congressmen and

¹⁰⁵ *Call & Post*, “Stokes Mayor,” November 11, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
¹⁰⁷ *Life Magazine* Vol. 63 no. 15, November 13, 1967, Carl B. Stokes Campaign Papers. Note: the folder contains several newspapers reporting the Cleveland election. Moreover, also included are newspapers clippings of international newspapers reporting on the precedent in Cleveland; this includes the *London Times*, the *London Guardian*, and San Juan, Puerto Rico’s *Elmundo*. 
Cleveland Councilman George Forbes largely credited the Stokes victory to the SCLC campaign. “There are some politicians that would probably disagree with this—Carl would have disagreed with this—but he would not have gotten elected if he had not had that strong registration drive.” Forbes added that King “was the motivating force behind the registration drive.” In another interview conducted by Trickey, local pastor and former UPA member Rev. E.T. Caviness, seconded Forbes’ assertion. “We needed his (King) inspiration, we needed his foot soldiers, and he helped us get there.”

The election of Carl B. Stokes contributed to Martin Luther King’s overall Civil Rights Movement. It also re-affirmed Martin Luther King’s philosophy of nonviolence at a time of widespread upheaval and uncertainty in Northern communities. In terms of the Northern Campaign, the Cleveland Voter Registration Drive and Stoke’s election struck a blow to the racist system that allowed for discrimination against African Americans, poverty, and political marginalization to endure for so long. Above all, the campaign served to correct King’s initial northern strategy: the Voter Registration Drive acknowledged that the SCLC strategy built around the Chicago effort was flawed and counter-productive; and it showed that King was willing to recognize his mistakes and adapt. In Chicago, King conducted efforts such as the voter registration drive only after direct confrontation and negotiations with the White “establishment” failed. In Cleveland, the main focus on the voter registration drive represented a new shift in tactics that entailed direct protest as well as community organizing and mobilization as the main strategy.

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108 George Forbes, interview by Reporter Erick Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio 2013.
The SCLC’s Voter Registration Drive helped change the racial dynamics in Cleveland. The campaign persuaded the African American population to empower themselves by way of the ballot, as King’s powerful rhetoric and engagement with the people resonated with the community. The Cleveland campaign further took the intransigent White “establishment” to task. On behalf of the Black community, King, the SCLC staff, and local leadership placed perpetrators of the African American plight on notice—the status quo would no longer be tolerated. In doing so, the African American community slowly emerged out of the readiness of violence and destruction and instead, opted to challenge the status quo to improve conditions and racial injustice through legal and political means.

Finally, Martin Luther King’s Voter Registration Campaign, and Carl B. Stokes’ election as the first African American mayor of a large industrial city inspired a generation of hope. Now, African Americans could take part in their own destiny, whereas only two years before, the Hough community had erupted in violence. This type of self-empowerment amounted to a show of zeal and resilience. It represented the workings of the natural political potential in the African American community that, for far too long, had been oppressed.

This progress, however, did not translate to fundamental change. For almost seven decades, racism, discrimination, segregation, and poor social conditions—including rampant unemployment and inadequate housing—ruled the day.\footnote{Kimberley L. Phillips, \textit{Alabama North: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland}, 1915-45 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), in chapter three, Phillips discusses the African American plight in Cleveland in the early twentieth century.} It would
take more than one mayoral administration or civil rights campaign to reverse that course. However, for an African American in Cleveland or African Americans in general, it represented progress. Simultaneously, the SCLC and UPA also conducted an economic boycott. This effort, too, confronted blatant economic injustices against Blacks and would work to force discriminatory employers and businessmen “to respect my dollar.” Chapter three chronicles the SCLC’s Operation Breadbasket in Cleveland.
CHAPTER IV

OPERATION BREADBASKET

Introduction

On August 16, 1967, at the Eleventh Annual SCLC convention, Martin Luther King praised Operation Breadbasket. He discussed its theoretical foundation that challenged economic injustice with collective Black Power. “If you respect my dollar, you must respect my person.”

If African American consumers were not granted proper respect, Operation Breadbasket threatened public demonstrations, propaganda campaigns, and economic boycotts of White-owned businesses. King believed that if protest mechanisms were utilized in an effective manner, they offered much in terms of relieving impoverished conditions and correcting civil rights abuses against the African American community. King gathered with his fellow delegates and, among the topics, discussed the ongoing economic protest in Cleveland.

“In Cleveland, Ohio, a group of ministers have formed an Operation breadbasket through our program there and have moved against a major dairy company. Their requests include jobs, advertising in Negro newspapers, and depositing funds in Negro financial institutions.”

In large part the Cleveland Campaign was predicated on bringing about an alternative to violent protests. The prominent civil rights leader endeavored to suppress

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2 Ibid., 178, taken from King’s “Where Do We Go From Here.”
violence and replace it with strategic action. For King, violence was counter-productive and, therefore, Operation Breadbasket provided local African American communities alternate means of confronting their oppressors. Operation Breadbasket harbored a fundamental truth: the disruption of profits effectively extracted cooperation; it also “penetrated a cross-section of American industries and all levels of government.” Prior to the establishment of Operation Breadbasket in Cleveland, the SCLC and other local civil rights organizations produced successful economic struggles in both Southern and Northern regions. For example, in Atlanta, the campaign created upwards of five thousand jobs worth twenty five million dollars annually. In Chicago, in the span of fifteen months, it provided twenty two hundred jobs worth fifteen million dollars annually.¹ This was a testament to the campaign’s fundamental strength and potential for economic justice.

In Cleveland the impoverished conditions in the African American communities created sentiments of despair and frustrations. King understood that the local African American population needed to see tangible economic progress. For the most part, the conditions and events in Cleveland were marked by discrimination, inequality, as well as unjust and disproportionate hiring practices, which largely contributed to economic hardship and perpetual poverty.

Alongside discussions on the implementation of a Voters Registration Drive, the UPA also showed interest in Operation Breadbasket. In April of 1966, Martin Luther

King ordered his top lieutenants to confer with local Baptist ministers on its implementation. Several weeks later, King visited Cleveland and took part in further consultations regarding, in particular, Operation Breadbasket. As such, he engaged in deep discussions with UPA leaders. In the attempt to create unity, the UPA strategically invited concerned groups to meet with the SCLC leader, whereupon King discussed Operation Breadbasket and its intentions. In a series of meetings, King engaged in several discussions involving local conditions and civil rights efforts. Before his departure, King issued statements at the AME and Olivet Baptist Church. He announced the coming of Operation Breadbasket and vowed to personally engage in the campaign. As such, he promised to “consult with community leaders and provide overall directions.” And for the purposes of familiarity and operational strategy, King announced a three-day retreat with members of the civil rights community—on the following month.

On June 6, local and national civil rights groups gathered for a two-day retreat at a resort outside of Cleveland. The retreat included members of the SCLC—including King, representatives of the UPA, and national civil rights activists—such as the NAACP and CORE. The groups engaged in deep discussions and intense planning. In the end, the members ultimately agreed to confront the baking industry. They planned to begin

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3 Plain Dealer, “King to Launch Negro Push Here, June 1’ 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
4 Plain Dealer, “King Marks Bakeries Top Target,” June 6, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
5 Plain Dealer, “King Marks Bakeries Top Target,” June 6, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
the campaign immediately after the retreat. At the retreat’s conclusion, King provided a statement. It read in part, “we feel any major business should have as many Negros employed as there are in the population.” The declaration conceded that Operation Breadbasket did not seek vengeance or attempt to unjustly create economic hardships for White business leaders and companies. Rather, it constituted a genuine attempt to produce equal prosperity for Cleveland’s African American population.

The Interworking of Operation Breadbasket

At the heart of Operation Breadbasket are its intricate components. Therefore, it’s important that we discuss the boycott’s inner workings. In his many speeches Martin Luther King reminded his audiences that there are “powers in numbers.” For King, this theory provided the basis for his economic protest. The concept was fundamental and spoke to the inherent economic power of a collective African American society. As he explained, for example, in his “I’ve Been To The Mountain Top” speech: “Now, we are poor,” but “never stop and forget that collectively…we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine.” King urged African Americans to use their financial leverage as a means against discrimination. As the premise for Operation Breadbasket, the boycott effectively challenged discriminatory business transactions and

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6 Plain Dealer, “King to Attack Bias on Four Fronts,” June 10, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

hiring practices through the power of the purse. It also served as an alterative to violent demonstrations. For King—a civil way of “messing with the captains of industry.”

Operation Breadbasket involved a systematic process. From the beginning of a particular campaign, an economic protest functioned in a chronological and methodological order, which consisted of multiple steps. First, King discussed its possible implementation with respective local groups and civil rights councils. For the most part, these discussions centered on local civil rights abuses and potential gains. Second, after preliminary consultation, King and his local hosts organized support and produced strategies. Third, the campaign orchestrated efforts against potential targets in the government and business community. Finally, the campaign engaged in bargaining negotiations with the targeted entities or individuals, thereupon the latter were allotted a reasonable time limit in which to cooperate, meet demands—if required, or negotiate in good faith. If the targeted were deemed intransigent and ultimately refused cooperation, the economic boycott immediately went into effect.

Operation Breadbasket also entailed a disciplinary mechanism devised to apply economic pressure. Since industries profited from African American patronage, the protest threatened the withdrawal of economic support. If, and when Operation Breadbasket’s leaders sanctioned boycotts against these local industries—in particular—large corporations, campaign representatives purposely targeted its local distributors throughout the respective region. In doing so, the local establishments were required to

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cooperate and remove the targeted products off their inventory. In many cases, local distributors obliged the request, which perpetuated a chain reaction that ultimately resulted in the targeted corporation’s sudden cooperation. On the other hand, when local distributors refused the campaign’s request, they became liable and faced protest actions against their own establishments. Operation Breadbasket was similar to a 1930’s economic protest, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work.” Black leaders such as Mary Bethune protested against employment discrimination in the North. “As a member of the New Negro Alliance in Washington, she boycotted and picketed stores refusing to hire Blacks.”

The church was also important regarding Operation Breadbasket. In large part, Baptist ministers and their congregations served as the campaign’s engine. Specifically, the church functioned as the community organizer and sanction regime. The power invested in the Church derived from its roots and historical role in the community. And, for King, a Baptist Minister, no one understood this better. Generally speaking, the community’s religious institutions harbor widespread influence and the resources needed to produce large activist movements. The Black Church, in particular, functions as a sort of patriarch in the African American community—it’s influence facilitates social and political actions throughout the United States.

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10 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest is the First Target of Dr. King,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
12 Reverend Al Sampson, interview by Reporter Eric Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Note: quote “Black Church represented money, market, and management.”
Specifically, through various means, the Black Church has built in mechanisms and in many instances, influence over local economies and markets. Recently, a former SCLC lieutenant explained this theory like this:

The genius of the Black Church—it represents money, market, and management…Dr. Leon Sutherland from a church in Philadelphia brought Operation Breadbasket to Dr. King…the operating principle, [according to King], was that a preacher go and organize the people; with the preacher, [the people] meets up with the preacher [and] listens; just know, the preacher only has one quart of milk; [however], the genius is, [there is] two hundred members [thus] two hundred quarts of milk; from an organizing point of view, you want to be able to get into the Black church; [the people] respect the Black preacher…he will [also] introduce you to secretary who prepares the bulletin.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition, religious leaders have the ability to mobilize and organize members of the African American community—in the most efficient and effective manner. For this reason, in terms of success, the actions of the religious community largely determined the overall outcome of Operation Breadbasket.

On July 15, 1967, a week after the leadership retreat, King made his third visit to Cleveland. The agenda: consult with members of the SCLC, the UPA, and a variety of other local civil rights activists groups. Operation Breadbasket thrived on widespread support and unity among the communities and its leaders. For this reason, King engaged in constant dialogue with local and national civil rights groups. During this visit, for example, King met with a local clergy organization. The meeting took place at the St. Timothy Baptist Church and included representatives from Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches. Besides requesting financial assistance, King called on these groups to assist in “mobiliz[ing] local support for Operation Breadbasket.” In

\textsuperscript{13} Reverend Al Sampson, interview by Reporter Eric Trickey, \textit{Cleveland Magazine}, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013. Note: quote “Black Church represented money, market, and management.”
terms of logistics—especially research and inquiries, he also asked the members to investigate potential discriminatory practices in local corporations and establishments.¹⁴

Moreover, King met with leaders from CORE, NAACP, and the Urban League. At the time, these organizations were conducting civil rights efforts in response to the city’s racial problems.¹⁵ For King, this was a significant and welcoming development. To his satisfaction, the national organizations pledged their support for Operation Breadbasket. During this visit, the SCLC and UPA discussed funding matters. On behalf of Operation Breadbasket, the SCLC pledged large monetary donations and campaign resources. The UPA similarly contributed funding and resources enlisted from various donation apparatuses. Among their funding mechanism, its leaders required that all UPA pastors designate every fourth Sunday—*Freedom Sunday*. On this designated day, the ministers were required to collect twenty-five cents per person—per congregation—to support Operation Breadbasket.¹⁶ As an added measure, UPA leaders also agreed to solicit donations from outside Baptist institutions in the Cleveland area.

Operation Breadbasket also received added material and moral support from secular as well as religious entities outside the Baptist community. It demonstrated the intentions by many to seek reform efforts in light of civil rights abuses and violent sentiment. For example, Cleveland Catholic Dioceses’ Senate of Religious Women endorsed the “program’s Christian concern.” According to the organization’s spokesperson, the nuns believed that the grassroots attempt to reduce poverty in the

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¹⁴ *Cleveland Press,* “Right Groups,” June 15, 1967, *Cleveland Press* Archives, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio, microfilm.


¹⁶ Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Plain Dealer,* “King Makes Bakeries Top Target,” June 16, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
African American community warranted their support. In addition, the nuns supported King’s nonviolent strategy. In their view, Operation Breadbasket sought to improve the conditions of African Americans with the strategic use of collective bargaining and negotiations. This did not constitute the only outside support and financial assistance. Among others, King accepted the support of the Cleveland Freedom Organization who endorsed Operation Breadbasket. In fact, on June 22, 1967, a large assembly devised of secular as well as religious organizations convened and declared their support for King.

African American businessmen also provided assistance to Operation Breadbasket. Since Operation Breadbasket highlighted discriminatory actions against business owners and entrepreneurs, local African American businessmen supported the campaign in the attempt to benefit from a potential favorable outcome. John Bustamante, for example, a local lawyer and financier, backed King’s economic protest. Besides calming violent tensions in the African American community, Bustamante viewed Operation Breadbasket as an opportunity to augment his financial interests. For this reason, he offered financial contributions and information concerning the discriminatory actions of White corporations and local establishments. In addition, King enjoyed supportive measures from prominent leaders such as Arnold Pinckney—African American insurance broker and firm owner—and W.O. Walker, former Councilmen and editor of the Cleveland Call & Post. The support from the black business community extended the campaign’s influence and resources. In the end, the preparatory phase

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17 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Nuns Support and King,” June 17, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
18 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Plain Dealer, “Dr. King Raps Ghetto Wall at Freedom Assembly Here,” June 22, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
19 Jesse Jackson, interview by Reporter Eric Trickey, Cleveland Magazine, Cleveland, Ohio, 2013.
resulted in successfully obtaining financial and moral support. In the month of June, the SCLC and UPA established the foundation for which the economic protest would stand.

Sealtest Foods

On June 17, 1967, Operation Breadbasket embarked on its first campaign. The leaders targeted the local bread and bakery industry. Initially, SCLC and UPA representatives approached the top management of the targeted industry and acquired statistical data concerning African American employment. They also sought data detailing the type of positions held by African Americans within its local shops. In large part, most Bread and Bakery Industry management cooperated and shared the requested documents. Nevertheless, both privately and publicly, a number of managers rejected accusations that firms failed to sufficiently employ Blacks or, implemented hiring policies on the bases of race, religion, or color. Specifically, the general manager of Fisher Food’s Bakery Division argued that the company employed a large number of African Americans and, in a variety of positions. On the other hand, the official stated that the bakery did not employ African Americans in high-level positions as a result of unqualified applicants.20 Most bread and bakery firms produced similar arguments, asserting their commitment to equality and opportunity based on fairness. In the end, the Bread and Bakery firms were not pursued for further action; King and the UPA ministers

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20 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Plain Dealer, “King Makes Bakeries Top Target,” June 16, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
were satisfied with the industry’s cooperation. Instead, the SCLC leader approached Sealtest Foods, “believed to be the initial objective of the King-directed campaign.”

In July, Operation Breadbasket encountered its first challenge when Martin Luther King and the United Pastors Association confronted Sealtest Foods. The company, a nationally based corporation that distributed its products throughout the state of Ohio, owned a large market share in the dairy industry. On the week of July 7th, representatives from Operation Breadbasket met with the corporation’s local management team. At these meetings, Sealtest refused to share employment data with the campaign’s negotiators. The campaign further stated that Sealtest hindered negotiations by acting in an uncooperative and disrespectful manner. In the media, however, the Sealtest spokesperson rejected the campaign’s assessments. He claimed that Sealtest respectfully engaged Operation Breadbasket leaders. In the corporation’s defense, the spokesperson based its refusal to provide documents on confidentiality policies. Regarding allegations of discriminatory hiring practices, Sealtest argued that the company “employed on the bases of ability and performance, without regards to race, religion, or color.” The corporation further asserted its commitment to equal

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21 Plain Dealer, “Bakeries, Dairies are King Targets,” July 7, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Database.
22 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest is First Target of Operation Breadbasket,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
23 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest is First Target of Operation Breadbasket,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
24 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest Denies Race Barriers in Hiring,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database. Note: Sealtest Personnel Director, C.R Turney, provided the statement.
opportunity, its responsibility to the entire local community, and sought a resolution in
the “spirit of cooperation and accord.”

Rejecting Sealtest’s counter-arguments and statements to the media, SCLC and
UPA leaders reaffirmed their accusation of discrimination against the corporation. To
further prove its claims, Operation Breadbasket published unofficial statistics
demonstrating rampant inequality at Sealtest. According to this data, Sealtest employed
three hundred and fifty-nine Cleveland residents. Out of three hundred and fifty nine
total employees, only twenty-four were African American. The data further revealed
wage disparities and other inconsistencies regarding White and Black employment
practices; it demonstrated that African Americans made less than White colleagues
employed in lower-level positions, and received promotions less rapidly.

Persuaded by the preliminary investigation, King and his local partners threatened
to boycott Sealtest Foods. After the public announcement of a proposed boycott, Sealtest
reversed course and provided Operation Breadbasket requested data. After a thorough
examination, the records determined that Operation Breadbasket’s unofficial data
paralleled Sealtest’s internal report. For example, the official report revealed that forty-six out of its four hundred and eighty-five employees were African American.

Even in light of the public revelation, Sealtest defended its actions. First, Sealtest
argued that employment demographics were consistent with hiring practices in the city of
Cleveland. Second, the corporation denied that as a policy African Americans earned

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26 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest is First Target of King,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
27 Plain Dealer, “Sealtest is First Target of King,” July 8, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
less than White workers and blamed inconsistencies on unforeseen outliers in the data. Finally, Sealtest claimed that they employed African Americans in many positions—including general sales, route services, machine operations, and secretarial services. Sealtest, however, failed to produce all necessary documents. According to Operation Breadbasket negotiators, Sealtest withheld significant financial data—including profits, sales, specific salaries, and other economic statistics significant to the investigation.²⁸

Ultimately, Operation Breadbasket’s attempt to negotiate with Sealtest officials proved unsuccessful. The negotiations with Sealtest leaders failed for several reasons. First, the corporation refused to fully cooperate. Indeed, Sealtest’s failure to recognize its unjust hiring and employment practices—in the first place, spoke to the management’s refusal to address inequality. Consequently, Operation Breadbasket attempted negotiations with perpetuators of a discriminatory status quo. For these reasons, on July 10, the campaign sanctioned its first boycott against Sealtest Foods.²⁹

UPA ministers subsequently contacted local Sealtest distributors and, demanded that these establishments remove the corporation’s products from their shelves or face the possibility of protest actions against them.³⁰ In doing so, the campaign encountered both support and cooperation from local establishments—especially in the African American

³⁰ Carson and Shepard, ed., The Landmark Speeches, 179, taken from “Where Do WE Go From Here” Speech. King discusses negotiations with Sealtest in Cleveland.
community. However, although sympathetic, many local managers lacked the proper authority to fully comply with the campaign’s wishes.

Nevertheless, leaders of Operation Breadbasket did not waiver. Undeterred by the minor stumbles, Operation Breadbasket officials delivered their demands to a higher level of management at Sealtest. Ultimately, the threat of a boycott against local Sealtest distributors forced the corporation to act. Reacting to growing pressure, Sealtest initiated a meeting. At this gathering, the corporation turned over the remaining data. At the same meeting, Operation Breadbasket negotiators further discussed broad reforms at the company. They sought fair employment, fair hiring practices, fair wages, and equal opportunities on the behalf of African American employees.

On July 13, King arrived in Cleveland. He was scheduled to meet with ministers regarding Operation Breadbasket and specifically, the negotiations with Sealtest Foods. As usual, members from the local press bombarded the civil rights leader—among all else—with questions regarding Operation Breadbasket. By the same token, as usual, King engaged the media with his thoughts on the conditions of African Americans, as well as the local civil rights movement. In King’s view, the economic boycott sparked a much-needed dialogue between African Americans and the business community. The protest highlighted the extent of discriminatory practices and helped force some White employers to act against their own prejudices. In addition, the campaign allowed African

31 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Chain Stores Asked to Support Boycott,” July 11, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
32 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Plain Dealer, “King Very Pleased by Boycott Progress,” July 14, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
33 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, The Tim Russert Department of Communication & Theatre Arts, John Carroll University.
Americans to channel their negative energy in a nonviolent way. Especially since, it was clear, as it related to obtaining civil rights in Cleveland, that African Americans could not depend on, or count on the government to act on the behalf of African American grievances. Therefore, the SCLC and the UPA acted on the behalf of the people. Both organizations believed that discriminatory acts against African Americans could not withstand public scrutiny and direct-action protests. For this reason, Operation Breadbasket, in response to unsuccessful negotiations with Sealtest, targeted the corporation’s most profitable distributors.

Operation Breadbasket aimed its protest against a profitable distributor of Sealtest Foods—A&P Supermarket. During this time, A&P franchised supermarket establishments throughout Greater Cleveland and Ohio. In the latter part of July, UPA ministers contacted A&P about the Sealtest boycott. They explained that if the franchises’ management failed to remove Sealtest products within a certain time frame, it risked the likelihood of having protest measures taken against local A&P establishments. Incidentally, this threat did not, at first, seem to convince A&P representatives. As a result, King and the UPA sanctioned limited demonstrations against select A&P supermarkets.

The demonstrations against A&P took place at supermarkets in select stores located in Black neighborhoods. Consequently, the targeted locations could not withstand the boycott and temporarily shutdown. The lost profits and negative scrutiny

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34 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
35 King, The Landmark Speeches, ed. Carson and Shepard, 179. Note: Source taken from “Where Do WE Go From Here Speech.”
subsequently forced A&P franchisees to demand a resolution from Sealtest, which ultimately led to friction between the two companies.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition, an A&P representative made an overture to a King lieutenant. The former sought advice on a way forward. King’s lieutenant, who advised the A&P representative, recommended that the supermarket proceed in a manner beneficial to the franchise. A few days later, A&P removed Sealtest products from its Cleveland locations. They also threatened to do the same in supermarkets outside of Cleveland—if Sealtest did not reach an agreement with King and the local ministers in a timely manner.\textsuperscript{37}

Simultaneously, King applied added pressure by engaging in an informational campaign against Sealtest. During a series of speaking engagements, the civil rights leader publicly criticized Sealtest. He also sought the community’s support, urging the crowds to refrain from purchasing Sealtest products, until its leaders complied with the campaign’s demands.\textsuperscript{38} All together, Sealtest endured negative publicity, public reprimand, and a lost of profits. Collectively, these actions forced Sealtest to recognize the seriousness of Operation Breadbasket and the community it served. As a result, the campaign against Sealtest Foods successfully pressured the company’s leaders to negotiate in good faith.

In the end, Sealtest agreed to implement most Operation Breadbasket recommendations. On August 8, King flew to Cleveland. He and the UPA ministers met

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 179-181.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 179. Note: Source taken from “Where Do WE Go From Here Speech.”
\textsuperscript{38} Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
with Sealtest officials. This time, the meeting was more productive. As part of the terms, Operation Breadbasket officials agreed to lift the economic protest as well as halt public demonstrations against Sealtest Foods and its associates. In addition, UPA ministers agreed to “inform their congregations and the overall African American community that Sealtest has adopted a substantial and far reaching program aimed at saving the problems of economic deprivation and unequal employment.”\(^{39}\) In return, Sealtest made a legal commitment to prosperity and equality in the African American community.

First, Sealtest agreed to hire fifty African Americans as well as promote minorities within its current ranks (this concession was projected to channel upwards of three hundred thousand dollars, annually, into the African American community). Second, the company promised to list job openings within employment agencies in African American communities and with guidance counselors at predominantly Black high schools. Third, Sealtest agreed to train the company’s African American employees to facilitate the promotion process. Fourth, in regards to the African American business community, Sealtest agreed to increase financial transactions and partnerships with Black-owned entities and entrepreneurs. Lastly, as a measure of good faith and commitment to secondary education, Sealtest pledged to support academic endeavors by providing large donations to African American scholarship funds.\(^{40}\) While, these concessions may not appear extravagant in hindsight, nonetheless, in a time of despair and growing frustration, the agreement produced some progress in the struggle for civil

\(^{39}\) Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, “Sealtest Agreement May Lead to Others,” August 9, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project. Note: the quote derives from the official agreement reprinted in the newspaper.

\(^{40}\) *Plain Dealer*, “Sealtest Boycott Lifted; 50 New Jobs Promised,” August 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
rights. The Sealtest effort marked the first victory for Operation Breadbasket in Cleveland. It resonated throughout the community and received recognition for the achievements. In fact, a newspaper editorial described the agreement as a “demonstration of Black Power.” The same editorial praised King and the UPA for its implementation of Operation Breadbasket. For King, the victory against Sealtest demonstrated the collective economic power and will of the African American community.

In the midst of Operation Breadbasket, the campaign’s leadership endured criticism and scrutiny; outside the African American community, King—especially, faced serious opposition for his civil rights actions in Cleveland. In terms of the opposition, White civil rights activists—the United Citizens Council of America condemned King, ridiculed his national efforts, and demonstrated against his local civil rights actions. Amongst the various claims, they alleged that King took part in a Communist conspiracy. These groups also claimed that outsiders such as King agitated local violent sentiment and actions, despite the civil right’s leaders condemnation of violence as well as his call for unity and brotherhood amongst the racial groups in Cleveland. Nonetheless, ridiculous as this type of opposition seemed, it was aggressive and quite passionate.

Furthermore, this opposition did not remain in the realm of demonstrations and public commendation. As a matter of fact, King’s detractors augmented their techniques

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42 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, “Sealtest Agreement May Lead to Others,” August 9, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project. Note: the quote derives from the official agreement reprinted in the newspaper.
43 *Plain Dealer*, “Critics Link Riots With Communist Plot,” August 21, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
in order to rid themselves of the civil rights leaders—though it would never have worked—considering King’s civil right’s success and support throughout the local African American community. Nevertheless, the president of the North America Alliances of White People, for instance, challenged King’s right to conduct Operation Breadbasket in the state of Ohio. In particular, the organization accused King of committing civil rights abuses against Sealtest Foods. The complaint alleged that Operation Breadbasket campaign mechanisms were improper. Namely, protest demonstrations against local establishments in order to force a hiring quota—based on race and color, defied Ohio Civil Rights statues. As such, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission investigated accusations against King and Operation Breadbasket. Ultimately, the board did not take further actions. Chiefly, the legal actions against King were baseless. The accusations were not based on merit—rather, they were trumped up charges to get rid of the civil rights leader and protest actions.

At a time of obvious civil rights abuses as well as widespread condemnation against local politicians and the White establishment, the opposition against King demonstrated an overwhelming irony. This is to say, in essence, the president of a White civil rights organization vowed to protect the White population from a prominent civil rights leader and proven human activist. In addition, the same organization opposed African American demonstrations and economic protests against White civil rights abusers. Operation Breadbasket did not aim to create arbitrary hiring quotas, as argued by King’s White supremacist detractors. Instead, the program endeavored to force White

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44 Plain Dealer, “Rights Unit Shift King’s Tactic Here,” August 12, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
employers and corporations to instill justice, fairness, and equality into hiring and employment practices. Operation Breadbasket merely challenged discrimination and only threatened economic withdrawal, if and when civil rights abusers refused to implement fair measures and practices.

**Pick-N-Pay**

King’s fringe opposition and general detractors did not dissuade or distract Operation Breadbasket and the overall civil rights agenda. After the Sealtest campaign, King and the UPA continued to confront economic abuses against African Americans. In doing so, Operation Breadbasket confronted a local supermarket chain, Pick-N-Pay—with stores in Black neighborhoods. In September of 1967, the campaign targeted Pick-N-Pay. SCLC and UPA leaders met with the supermarket’s management and attempted negotiations. During this gathering, the Black leaders reprimanded the supermarket’s management for their deficiencies and inconsistencies in employment matters. The campaign mainly addressed these issues in that Pick-N-Pay profited heavily from its African American constituency. Namely, the ministers asked Pick-N-Pay’s management to increase it’s hiring of African Americans and to establish recruitment and training programs. In the end, Pick-N-Pay resisted the proposals. Operation Breadbasket negotiators, therefore, publically announced that talks with Pick-N-Pay failed to produce a satisfying outcome. Nonetheless, Operation Breadbasket sought a resolution and, therefore, decided to continue its discussions with Pick-N-Pay.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press* “Negroes Talk to Pick-N-Pay on Job Increase,” September 18, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project, quote from SCLC staff Statement.
Publically, the campaign, however, applauded Pick-N-Pay for its engagement and willingness to discuss issues plaguing the African American community. Pick-N-Pay negotiators conceded that the company was aware of the frustrations and poor conditions existing in African American neighborhoods; during the initial talks, the company agreed that more jobs would help alleviate these issues. Although the rhetoric coming out of the pick-N-Pay camp seemed promising, their employment statistics proved disturbing. Pick-N-Pay employed a little over three thousand local Clevelanders. And, out of the total employed, only one hundred and sixty seven were African American and other minority. Even more, in predominantly Black neighborhoods, Pick-N-Pay accumulated eighteen million dollars in annual sales—for which, only three hundred thousand of that yearly figure compensated African American employees.46

By the middle of September, King arrived in Cleveland to deliver a celebratory speech on the behalf of a prominent Baptist minister. During this visit, the civil rights leader used the occasion to survey the situation on the ground as well as meet with his staff and UPA ministers.47 Talking to reporters, King claimed that negotiations with Pick-N-Pay appeared productive. He also announced that in preliminary discussions, Pick-N-Pay agreed to hire three hundred African Americans.48 With that said, another

46 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King Sets Limits on Pick-N-Pay,” September 27, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
47 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King to Preach Here Sunday,” September 18, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
48 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, Cleveland Press, “Dr. King and Pick-N-Pay Reach negro Job Pact,” September 26, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
issue arose, however. The campaign insisted that at least half of the hiring consist of elevated positions. Among these positions, the campaign proposed ten store managers, fifteen assistant store managers, and fourteen meat department managers. In addition, they demanded that the franchise increase its economic transactions with Black-owned businesses. Specifically, the proposal included an increase in marketing with the Call & Post and placement of monetary deposits in Black-owned financial institutions. At times, the negotiations struggled. Pick-N-Pay, during the talks, objected to certain demands and offered demands of their own. For example, regarding the proposed hiring increase, Pick-N-Pay insisted on a longer time frame; they viewed the one-year proposal impossible to implement and instead, sought a five-year window. Moreover, Pick-N-Pay disagreed with the proposed “elevated” positions; they sought half of what the campaign proposed. Despite disagreement, negotiations preceded. After some time, however, discussions halted and remained in a theoretical standstill. In the spirit of finding an agreement for the sake of progress, again, campaign leaders decided not to rush protest actions.

Later in November, King, again, met with Pick-N-Pay leaders. At this gathering, the civil rights leader reinforced the campaign’s position. While in town, as most times, King engaged the media regarding civil rights struggles, the poor conditions in the African American communities, as well as discrimination and oppression. King often addressed these topics with the local Cleveland media—a strategy to mobilize more
support for Cleveland’s civil rights struggle. His engagement with the local Cleveland media, too, represented King’s constant public dialogue regarding civil rights. King discussed the civil rights movement and the potential for further social unrest. Although he hoped to quell violence, the civil rights leader also warned the White “establishment” that a continuation of the status quo would ultimately lead to more violence.\textsuperscript{51} Conversely, King made it known that he continued to believe that violence was disconcerting and, therefore, the underlying conditions warranted serious consideration and change in a timely manner. He, nonetheless, reaffirmed his position regarding violent protests; that is, he did not favor this form of opposition and hoped to avert further violent demonstrations.\textsuperscript{52}

By the end of November, a final agreement between Operation Breadbasket and Pick-N-Pay still was not reached.\textsuperscript{53} As a result of sustained differences regarding key issues, Operation Breadbasket conducted limited street demonstrations at select Pick-N-Pay locations. This action proved quite effective. The protest disrupted profits and subsequently forced Pick-N-Pay to demonstrate a greater willingness to consider the campaign’s initial proposals. The two sides met again and resumed negotiations. On November 28, 1967, Martin Luther King announced in the media, “Negotiations with Pick-N-Pay Supermarket have resulted in an agreement.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{46} Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
\textsuperscript{47} Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Plain Dealer}, “King Warns of Riots If Aid Meets Delay, November 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
\textsuperscript{53} Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, \textit{Cleveland Press}, “Pick-N-Pay Forcing Boycott,” November 22, 1967, Cleveland Memory Project.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Call & Post}, “Pick-n-Pay Pledges 300 Job,” December 2, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.
The signing ceremony took place at a Baptist Church and the local press covered the occasion. In the final settlement, Pick-N-Pay agreed to a significant portion of Operation Breadbasket initial proposals. First, Pick-N-Pay promised to employ three hundred African Americans and, within a one-year time span. In terms of “elevated” positions, Pick-N-Pay agreed to hire six store-managers, six meat-managers, and a number of produce-managers. The new employees also included meat-cutters, meat-wrappers, clerks, truck drivers, bakers, diary positions, maintenance positions, and salary level positions. Second, Pick-N-Pay agreed to advertise job openings with various employment agencies and training programs that catered to African Americans. Third, Pick-N-Pay agreed to augment their investments with African American businesses. In doing so, the company pledged to increase their advertisements in the Call & Post, increase financial transactions with African Americans business leaders, and deposit larger funds into Black-owned Savings and Loans institutions. In addition, Pick-N-Pay agreed to distribute Black-owned products and brands. Finally, Pick-N-Pay committed itself to African American social causes. Among all, they promised to support the United Negro College Fund as well as scholarship programs beneficial to its Black employees. Incidentally, the final agreement fell short of the campaign’s initial demands, but it well exceeded Pick-N-Pay’s initial counter proposals. In the end, the concessions made on both sides embody the very nature of negotiations. With that said, by accepting a settlement closest to its position, King and the UPA ultimately pursued a course most beneficial to African Americans.

55 Ibid.
56 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
Addressing the media, Martin Luther King and the president of Pick-N-Pay Supermarket read their final statements. In King’s view, the agreement brought much needed progress to the African American community. His statement read in part: “the lack of income and jobs in our slums breed riots through which many American cities has suffered.” And, as long as the “people are devoid of jobs, they find themselves in moments of despair that can lead to a continuation of social disorders.” King further vowed that “Operation Breadbasket intend[ed] to play a vital role in overcoming the deep social tensions that keep[ed] the fabric of [American] society fade.”57 Similarly, the Pick-N-Pay president conveyed an amicable statement. He vowed that the agreement was consisted with the company’s values and leadership. The company also promised added resources in the African American community. Lastly, the Pick-N-Pay president reaffirmed, as a way to further the cause of civil rights, the company’s commitment to increase training and employment of African Americans residents.58

Conclusion

The SCLC’s Cleveland-based Operation Breadbasket produced much needed progress in terms of widespread poverty and perpetual discrimination. In its actions against inequality, the campaign provided tangible outcomes and, moreover, diverted violent sentiment. In the end, the success of Operation Breadbasket brought jobs and financial investments into the local community. It effectively forced White business leaders and industries to hire a large number of African Americans, providing economic

57 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
58 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives.
opportunities to a well-deserved constituency. Of course, the sort of modest improvement didn’t change the entire complexity and level of despair. Nevertheless, it constituted progress in the local Cleveland struggle for civil rights. In doing so, collectively, the campaign helped produce three hundred and fifty jobs. It also provided opportunities for advancement in areas that never before existed. In total, these measures amounted to an annual income of two million dollars a year. It also established investments and produced a wide range of business opportunities for African American business leaders and entrepreneurs.59

In addition, Operation Breadbasket put in place an alternate protest mechanism. Martin Luther King, the SCLC, and the UPA provided a nonviolent yet effective method to protest against unjust civil rights abuses. For this reason, it hoped to calm tensions, unite local and national factions, and encouraged the African American community to engage in the nonviolent struggle. Similarly, the campaign, in it of itself, uplifted and boosted morale.

Operation Breadbasket, a part of Martin Luther King’s 1967 Cleveland Campaign, diminished after the Pick-N-Pay protest. Nonetheless, King’s effort—by virtue of its implementation—put mechanisms in place that encouraged local civil rights groups to continue economic protests going forward.60 In fact, in 1968, local leaders encountered discriminatory practices. For instance, the campaign rehashed its grievances against Fisher Foods, a part of the local Bread and Bakery industry. Although Fisher

60 Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, January 15, 1968, Cleveland Memory Project.
Foods honored its 1967 agreement, local ministers accused the company of later falling short.\(^{61}\) Moreover, the campaign conducted a boycott against paint manufacturer Sherwin-Williams in February of 1968.\(^{62}\)

In 1968, other alternative grass-root efforts also took root. Local leaders and activists produced several employment mechanisms aimed at reversing the African American unemployment rate, as well as unjust employment policies and hiring practices. Such leaders, for example, Clarence H. Holmes of AIM-JOBS (an African American employment agency) and L. Edward Dickerson of the Youth Opportunity Center (youth division of Ohio Bureau of Employment Services), however, chose to approach civil rights struggles in a different manner. They conducted workshops and outreach seminars with the help of local employers and top executives—as the former believed that mutual cooperation, as supposed to threats and cohesive methods, provided the best opportunity for increased employment.\(^{63}\) Perhaps, the circumstances of 1968 called for a different approach, less cohesive protest mechanisms, and better cooperation between White business leaders and African American activists. This had not been the case in 1967. Instead, the White business community failed to change their discriminatory policies without actions taken against them. As a result, it took leaders

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\(^{61}\) Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, February 16, 1968, Cleveland Memory Project.

\(^{62}\) Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Cleveland Press*, November 25, 1968, Cleveland Memory Project.

\(^{63}\) Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, *Plain Dealer*, January 26, 1968, Cleveland Memory Project.
such as Martin Luther King, the UPA, and other involved civil rights organizations to galvanize the community to force cooperation.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{64}Martin Luther King Jr. newspaper clippings, \textit{Cleveland Press}, November 25, 1968, Cleveland Memory Project.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On December 16, 1967, Martin Luther King and James C. Davis of the Cleveland Bar Association spoke to a diverse audience at the Human Rights Institute Luncheon, one of King’s last appearances in Cleveland. The event, sponsored by the Council on Human Relations, was held at the Hotel Sheraton-Cleveland. The two leaders addressed subjects dealing with both human rights and civil rights in America. Both King and Davis discussed equal employment, equal opportunity, “Black Power,” the Vietnam War, and housing in the inner-city, just to name a few. The content mostly reflected King’s shift in advocacy post-1967.

The luncheon took place a few weeks after the SCLC and UPA concluded its successful negotiations with Pick-N-Pay Supermarket, an event that marked the end of the Cleveland Campaign—although, however, the SCLC remained engaged in Cleveland’s local civil rights activities. Going forward, King pledged that the economic

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2 David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 581, 582, “…and to make plans for the upcoming staff retreat to be held at Frogmore from November 27 through December 1…’nonviolence must be adapted to urban conditions and urban moods. Nonviolent protest must now mature to a new level…mass civil disobedience…There must be more than a statement to the larger society…” “The following day King and his aides discussed their plans further…Finally, the movement would call for a second “March on Washington” very different from the first. This time the purpose would not be “to have a beautiful day,” King said, but laterally to occupy the city until the Johnson administration altered it foreign policies.”
protest (Operation Breadbasket), “intend[ed] to play a vital role in overcoming the deep social tensions that now keep the fabric of our society fixed.”¹ Over the next year, at least, the SCLC maintained their commitment to Cleveland and assisted local leaders to confront discriminatory business and hiring practices committed against African Americans.² Out of the original SCLC staff members, the Reverend E. Randel T. Osburn and Mike Bibler remained behind to manage Operation Breadbasket as well as other SCLC affairs.

On February 15, 1968, Operation Breadbasket confronted Fisher Foods. The SCLC staff and local Baptist ministers announced their intentions to picket Fisher Food stores in African American neighborhoods. The company, while it employed two hundred and forty two African Americans out of one thousand seven hundred and fifty-five employees, was pressed to hire an additional one hundred Black employees.³

Two weeks later, on the twenty-eight of February, Operation Breadbasket leaders and the Concerned Clergy and Citizens Committee pledged their support for St. Luke’s Strikers. The strikers, demanding that hospital trustees negotiate with nonprofessional employees, boycotted Uncle Bill’s discount store located in North Randall. In particular, they aimed the boycott at Sherwin-Williams, a paint manufacturing company, whose president served as the chairman of St. Luke’s Hospital Trustee.⁴ St. Luke’s African American employees and the civil rights community protested against the hospital’s

² *Cleveland Press*, “Dr. King’s Staff Reduced to 2 in Cleveland,” January 15, 1963, “Dr. Martin Luther King’s staff here has been reduced fro five to two persons to help conduct the programs intended to benefit the Negro community.”

In the end, the SCLC’s continued engagement in Cleveland’s local civil rights matters reflected a real commitment on the part of King and the organization. Like Chicago, the organization remained embroiled in Cleveland’s actions against inequality and discrimination. As such, Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference continued their northern activities, even after 1967.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King met his untimely death. Ironically, Carl B. Stokes, the man he helped propel to the mayoralty, was credited for keeping the peace in Cleveland after the civil rights leader’s assassination, which was significant taking to account the violent demonstrations that took place throughout the country. Perhaps, the anger that the African American community felt immediately after King’s death and mayor Stokes’ ability to keep the peace reflected the civil rights leader’s involvement in Cleveland’s local civil rights struggle.

King’s contribution to the history of the civil rights movement in Cleveland and the legacy of the Cleveland Campaign is two fold: it produced both primary and secondary achievements. As to the primary gains, this refers to the campaign’s immediate contribution—the election of Carl B. Stokes and successful economic boycotts

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6 Leonard N. Moore, Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 71, “The Mayor’s ability to keep Cleveland calm after Martin Luther King’s assassination was cheered throughout the metropolitan areas. The Plain Dealer led off by labeling the effort “Good Work By City Leaders.” The paper attributed Stokes’s success to his ability to communicate with the people, which enabled Cleveland to escape the immediate “madness” that had erupted throughout the country.”
against discriminatory businesses. The SCLC and UPA voter registration effort largely mobilized the Black voting bloc. Prior to the Democratic Primary, forty two thousand African Americans registered to vote, an outcome King referred to as “the most successful registration drive conducted in any major city in our country.”

In the primary, Stokes defeated Mayor Ralph Locher by a margin of nineteen thousand votes; in the general election, Stokes won the election by a margin of three thousand votes, both victories rendering the registration effort and mass mobilization, significant. Operation Breadbasket, the SCLC and UPA protest against employment and other economic discriminatory actions, created three hundred and fifty jobs, including a series of promotions and compensation raises; local businesses too, as a result, pledged to augment financial transactions with black owned businesses, including the distribution of African American-owned products; and more importantly, collectively, the effort placed White businessmen and establishments on notice that local black leaders and the African American community no longer tolerated blatant discriminatory practices.

In terms of the campaign’s secondary contributions, this mostly includes Stokes’ mayoral actions and his policies to relieve the socioeconomic plight of the local African American population. Stokes’ actions as mayor created tremendous social as well as

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7 Film Reel, Martin Luther King Jr. in Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, Northeast Ohio Broadcast Archives, The Tim Russert Department of Communication & Theatre Arts, John Carroll University, note: at the conclusion of the SCLC led Voters Registration Campaign, King characterizes the campaign’s success; and Plain Dealer, “Today Ends Wave of Registrations,” Aug 23, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

8 Plain Dealer, “14% White Vote Equals Stokes’ Victory Margin,” October 5, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database; also, Plain Dealer, Stokes Begins naming his Cabinet, November 9, 1967, Cleveland Public Library Digital Database.

economic measures beneficial to the Black community. He also empowered Black city employees and confronted discriminatory and de facto segregated measures.\textsuperscript{10}

Stokes championed an Equal Opportunity Law to require anyone contracting with the city to “hire workers without regard to race, color, religion, or gender,” and he banned discriminatory practices concerning promotions and training opportunities.\textsuperscript{11} More importantly, the law carried enforcement measures; that is, compliance officers were given the authority to audit personnel as well as financial records and transgressors risked financial penalties and other disciplinary actions.\textsuperscript{12}

Second, Stokes and his administration advocated on the behalf of African American entrepreneurs and business interests. As a supporter of black capitalism, the mayor “did not hesitate to funnel a large percentage of city contracts into the hands of black businesses.” In a politically risky move, Stokes joined a civil rights protest against McDonald’s franchises. By the end of his first term, as mayor, Stokes supported a local boycott against McDonald’s franchises located in Eastside neighborhoods to demand African Americans franchise opportunities.

Third, in one of his most significant achievements and the centerpiece of the Stokes administration, Stokes launched \textit{Cleveland: Now!}, “a 1.5 billion dollar (public and private funding) plan to improve housing, employment, and urban renewal during a ten-year period.” During the summer of 1968, alone, Stokes provided millions of dollars in the areas of employment, youth programs and resources, health and welfare,

\textsuperscript{10} Moore, \textit{Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Political Power}, 194-198.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 156, for discussion of Stokes’ appointments see Chapter 2 of this thesis.
neighborhood rehabilitation, economic revitalization, and city planning. As such, the mayor allotted seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the Summer Youth program; he awarded almost seventeen thousand dollars to a youth program in partnership with Case Western Reserve University; and the mayor allotted tens of thousands of dollars towards cultural base programs, day-care centers, and multiservice health and welfare centers across the city.¹³

Finally, Stokes formed the all-black Twenty-first District Caucus, “which rivaled the Cuyahoga County Democratic party and quickly emerged as one of the most powerful urban political machines in the country.”¹⁴ For Stokes, it was important to establish an all-black organization that would help facilitate the political aspirations of local African Americans. Chiefly, Stokes endeavored to elect another African American mayor in Cleveland. Ultimately, however, the latter did not transpire. Still the Caucus served as a political powerhouse in Cleveland for several years.

Unfortunately, neither Martin Luther King’s direct-protest actions nor the election of Carl Stokes fundamentally altered race relations and the extent of poverty and discrimination against African Americans in Cleveland. As Mayor of Cleveland, Stokes presided over a racially divided city. Martin Luther King’s Cleveland Campaign and Carl B. Stokes’ election as mayor was not enough to prevent violent confrontations between Black Nationalist Ahmed Evans’s New Libya organization and the Cleveland police in the summer of 1968, an incident known as the Glenville Shooting, following several skirmishes between White police officers and Ahmed Evans. On July 23, 1967,

¹³ Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and Rise of Black Political Power*, 73-93.
¹⁴ Ibid., 194.
Evan’s and his lieutenants engaged Cleveland Police officers in a gunfight. The battle had lethal consequences: within the first few hours, “three white police officers and two New Libya members were dead.”\(^{15}\) Subsequently, Black youth got involved, throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at White motorists and looting neighborhood establishments. In the end, seven people died during the confrontation—including three police officers, three Black Nationalists, and an innocent bystander. In addition, fifteen people endured injuries, forty people were arrested, and the neighborhood endured tens of thousands of dollars in property damage. Eventually, in 1969, the State of Ohio convicted Ahmed Evans of murder and sentenced the Black Nationalist to death.\(^{16}\)

Yet the violent clash between Black Nationalist leaders and the Cleveland Police in 1968 does not render King’s protest actions nor Stoke’ civil rights contribution as Mayor, any less important. Generally speaking, both leaders confronted status quo social and economic injustices against Blacks and worked to reduce poverty and blatant racial inequality. By the same token, both leaders could not fundamentally alter the extent of poverty or divisive race relations in the city. As mentioned earlier, Black poverty and societal marginalization culminated from decades of socioeconomic discrimination and inequality. As such, the opposite is also the case: it would take decades to begin the reversal of such oppression. In terms of racial prejudices, not withstanding the election of an African American mayor, the culture had not fundamentally changed; that is, racial tension and White prejudice remained prevalent in Cleveland’s society.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 84-87.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 95.
After Cleveland, Martin Luther King did not implement another Northern campaign. Instead, the civil rights leader mostly engaged in human rights issues. As far as the legacy of the Northern Movement is concerned, the failure in Chicago overshadows King’s successful direct-action protests in the Windy City, as well as the success of the Cleveland Campaign. Of course the momentum of the Northern Campaign endured a huge blow in King’s failure to compel Congress to enact housing civil rights legislation. By the same token, his strategic shift and ultimate success in Cleveland deserves historical acknowledgment and warrants scholarly examination. After the Chicago Campaign, the Northern Campaign no longer sought to get Congress to enact civil rights legislation. Instead, King and the campaign endeavored to empower local struggles and civil rights leaders to confront discriminatory practices and injustices. The Northern Campaign focused on mobilizing the vote and electing Black political leadership. The campaign also placed emphasis on the use of nonviolent direct-action protests as a way to confront economic oppression. In Cleveland, King’s shift to these strategies proved successful. The Voter Registration Drive and Operation Breadbasket produced a wave of policies, reforms, and actions that helped relieve some of the oppressive economic conditions in the African American community; equally important, the election of the first African American mayor instilled a sense of hope in the Black community. In that way, the success of the Cleveland Campaign created a blueprint for achieving progress in northern cities growing forward: focus on politically empowering African Americans and augmenting local civil rights struggles.
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