

You Can't Have Black Power without Green Power:
The Black Economic Union

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Robert Anthony Bennett III

Graduate Program in History

The Ohio State University

2013

Dissertation Committee:

Leslie Marie Alexander, Advisor

Hasan Kwame Jeffries

Samuel Russell Hodge

Copyright by
Robert Anthony Bennett III
2013

Abstract

Alongside the call for “Black Power,” which became prominent in the late 1960s, numerous African American scholars and activists also promoted “Green Power,” the belief that Blacks needed to become involved in the economic infrastructure of America in order to improve their lives and their communities. This dissertation will add to the historical discourse on the Civil Rights/Black Power era, by exploring a lesser-known Black political strategy; namely, the endorsement of capitalism as a means of Black liberation. This study focuses on the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU), later renamed the Black Economic Union (BEU), which was founded in the 1966. The BEU was a body of African American professional athletes who had three objectives: to use the finances of African Americans collectively for the benefit of all, to assemble loans with special attention to the interest rates for Blacks in business and industry, and to establish clinics and workshops that would provide guidance and education centers for African American youth. Although economic empowerment did not initially appear as threatening as other forms of Black Nationalism that were circulating during this era, the BEU ultimately found itself at the center of a political and media firestorm. The organization was especially contentious because it was composed of high-profile athletes who supported controversial people such as Muhammad Ali, and advocated for an economic strategy for racial advancement. Through the use of periodicals, organizational documents, and oral interviews, the project provides an account of the BEU, examining

how African American athletes organized to improve Black communities throughout the United States during a period of great political and economic strife; actions which brought criticism from the Black community and scrutiny from the United States federal government.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the members of the Black Economic Union who worked for the betterment of themselves and their communities when the validation from others was never the objective.

To my cousin Harry Weaver III who demonstrated one must be “harder” than a hard situation.

For Alice Bennett and Rosetta and Walter Brame Sr. I wish you all could be here to witness me walk across the stage.

Acknowledgments

When I entered The Ohio State University in 2004, I had two research foci at the time: the fancy girl trade in 19th century New Orleans, and an autobiography on African American civil rights leader Hosea Williams. I chose the former as the basis of my research the first four years of my graduate experience. However, as I completed my master's thesis and finished my PhD candidacy exams, my interest in the topic waned. Through a chance conversation with OSU alum Leonard N. Moore, I was convinced I needed to explore my passion of activism and Black male professional athletes.

Yet convincing my advisor, Leslie Marie Alexander of my interest to change not only my topic but also time period was not easy. Nevertheless, you did not try to deter me from my leanings. During that period of my life, support and patience was important and she provided it unwaveringly. Overall, I owe a huge debt. You served as a leader and friend through the muddy waters of academia. When I wanted to give up and walk away from graduate school, you listened and encouraged me to fight through the doubt. While I wanted to rush this process she also helped me understand through numerous ways that I could not treat this topic in that manner. While the topic may not have been in the realm of 19th century history, I am truly grateful for your willingness to continue to serve as my advisor and read through numerous drafts of the dissertation. For that I will always be

appreciative. The type of commitment you have shown to me as a graduate student is one I hope to replicate as an academic.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries, my Morehouse brethren, who while I have known over a decade, never took it light on me. I am truly indebted to his influence and guidance provided as I matriculated through The Ohio State University. You helped me keep a great perspective on the usefulness of the academy. While it has been a true pleasure to know you as an academic, observing you as a father has been a true joy. The balance of family life, academics, and activism is truly admirable. I have learned a great deal from you over the years and will always cherish the plentiful academic and life lessons you have taught me.

Samuel Russell Hodge helped solidify my focus on athletics and its place within African American communities, as well as the numerous links between Black people and sports. I am also truly thankful for the publication opportunities. For you to give me the opportunity to undergo the rigors of conducting meaningful research was an enriching experience. The dissertation process has not been easy, but you helped me see it was possible if I put the necessary effort into my work. Most of all, thank you for promoting a healthy lifestyle as an academic. I still marvel at what a fifty-year old could do on the basketball court. Although you made it known my repayment will suffice by my walking at graduation, I recognize my debt is much greater. Thank you for the assistance over the years.

James Luther Moore III provided me the opportunity to work at the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male (BNRC). During

my time here, we have had hundreds of conversations, both academic and personal, which helped shape my outlook on life. Most significantly, thank you for your patience and for being a friend with whom I could discuss my many frustrations and joys. I will always be open for advice, a great discussion, or just a good laugh.

Gratitude must be given to the BNRC staff. Edie Waugh and Tai Cornute served as readers of early drafts. For those efforts I am truly grateful. Many thanks also to Todd Suddeth. David Graham with the Student Athlete Support Services Office (SASSO) provided me the chance to work with student-athletes. For that opportunity and experience I am thankful.

There are numerous professors and scholars who have contributed to my growth in some fashion. They are: Marcellus Barksdale, Yosef ben-Jochanan, Kevin Boyle, John Henrik Clarke, N. Jeremi Duru, Lamont Flowers, Asa Hilliard, Alton Hornsby, Leonard Jeffries, Valerie B. Lee, Leonard N. Moore, Margaret Newell, Charles K. Ross, Randolph Roth, Akinyele Umoja, Anne Watts, James Young, Kurt Young, and Judy Wu.

A chance phone call to the Fritz Pollard Alliance in 2010 set this study in motion. John Wooten's willingness to talk to me about my project led to one of the most eventful times in my life as a scholar. It led to a conversation with Jim Brown, which resulted in numerous conversations over two years with him and other members of the Black Economic Union who provided insight about their involvement with the organization. They are: Walter Beach III, Jim Brown, A. Deane Buchanan, Brady Keys, Curtis McClinton, Bobby Mitchell, Brigman Owens, Spencer Jourdain, Sidney Williams, and John Wooten. It is my hope that I have done justice to capturing aspects of your lives and

many contributions. This study would not have been possible without your honesty and ability to dig deep into your historical memory. Thank you all for the countless telephone conversations. Many thanks must also be given to Monique Brown, Davonne McClinton, and Terri Mitchell for their assistance with this project. Special gratitude must also be given to Sababa Akili who was able to provide perspective to the Union's early years. His personal history is worth historical study. It is my hope we can get your story documented.

Much of the primary source material for this work was due to the contributions of several people. They include: the staff at the Case Western Reserve Historical Society, the Cleveland Public Library, the Kansas City Public Library, Phyllis Andrews at the University of Rochester Libraries, Rare Books & Special Collections in Rush Rhees Library, Branson Wright with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Kevin Carroll with ProQuest, and David Lincove at The Ohio State University.

There have also been many others who have provided support throughout my academic career: the Association for African American Life and History (ASALH), the Black Graduate and Professional Student Caucus (BGPSC), the Department of History at OSU, the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH), and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), and the Student Athlete Support Services Office (SASSO).

There are a wealth of people who provided encouragement throughout this process: Shakeer Abdullah, Mike Alarid, Greg Alfred, Joseph Amos, Adowa Asante, Curtis Austin, Jim Bach, Ennise and Carlton Bell, Ghanasyam Bey, Dexter Blackman,

Desmond Bourgeois, Vincent Briley, Ka'Nea Brooks, Chris Burton, Tamara Butler, Whitney and Kwame Christian, Tayo Clyburn, Frankie G. Collins, Martinique Cornute (children Amaia and Machai), Morris Council III, Dan, Cheryl and David Cramer, Nyron Crawford, Melissa Crum, Patricia Cunningham II, Adrienne Dixson, Chigo Ekeke, Britney and Phil Farmer, Dr. Jennifer Faison-Hodge (and daughter Samantha Mahogany), Jelani Favors, Delia Fernandez, Liselli Fitzpatrick, V. P. Franklin, Cyndi Freeman, Norris Freeman (for sharing your insight on Cleveland in the 1960s), Tony Gass, Javaunne Adams and Dmitri Gaston, Alisha and Ashli Gordon, Claiborne Green, Kenneth Guiton, Toycee Hague-Palmer, Frank W. Hale, Jr., Audra and Jonathan Hall, Tiffany Halsell, Rashea Hamilton and Charles Patton, Shantelle and Andre Hill, Nancy Hill-McClary, Daniel Herron, Tamara Afia Thompson and Demetrius Kweku Hobson, Nadine Holmes, Samuel Hopkins, Nicole Jackson, Keisha Hunley-Jenkins, Rashida Jeffries (and daughters Asha and Aliyana), Grace Johnson, Kelechi Kalu, Abby Walters and Najib Kamagate, Habiba Kamagate, Theresa Kline, Tina Ligon, Kimberly Lowe, Brandon Manning, Justin McGee, Craig McMullen, Dawn Miles, Travian Mitchell and family, Renae Mayes, Daniel Newhart, Michael Norris, Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, Danielle Olden, Luther Palmer, Kelsey Paras, Ronald L. Parker, Jason Perkins, Ernest Perry, Jessica Pliley, Christa and Franklin Porter, Allison Prasad, Martha Rachedi and the Barton family, Jamal Ratchford, Stephanie Shaw, Michelle Rivera-Clonch and Maurice Stevens (as well as the black rat snake who crossed my path), Elaine "Dr. E" Richardson, Willie "Mukasa" Ricks and family, Walter Rucker, Theresa Runstedtler, Charles Scott III and family, Lee Smith, Tyran Steward, Justin Stewart, Mac Arthur Stewart, Tera James

Stewart, Gail Summerhill, Chila and Dan Thomas, Shabaka Ture, Desiree Vega, Shafa and Alex Vigo, Noel Voltz, Roderick Watson, Eric White, Deanna Wilkinson, Joel P. Williams, Lawrence K. Williamson, Carla and Vincent Willis, Rose Wilson-Hill, Kimberly and William Wolfe, and Matthew Wynter.

Many thanks must also be given to my aunts, uncles, and cousins: Alonza Bennett, Samuel W. Bennett, Delores Marion, Karen and Leroy Bennett, Alfred Bennett, George L. Marion, Sharon Marion, Gloria and Clyde Bennett (and daughters Allison and Courtney), Pernelope Whitby (and daughter Britney), Kaisha and Antron Birch, Walter Brame, Lucky and Horace McKennie, Joyce, Preston and Lee Moreaux, Pearl Brame, Shirley Banks, Joe Brame, Libra and Walter McKennie, Shimika and Abayomi Brame (and son Ayo), Tracey and Kenyatta (and children Kamau and Kimani) Veronica Watford, Tamika Brame (and children Coreyan, Ahanu, Awan, Anyeh) Dawn and Harry Weaver III (and children Cuatro and Somi) Dorothy and Harry Weaver II, “Momma” Sims, Ana and Douglas Jeter, Nicole and Rodney West (and children Xavier, Tyler and Sydney), Jasmine Jeter, Al, Pat and Mone Doucet, along with the extended family within the Bennett and Brame families.

To my mother and father, Marjorie and Robert A. Bennett, Jr., you have been a great support system for me since “day one.” If it were not for your many sacrifices, I would not have the many opportunities afforded to me. Your encouragement kept me focused on finishing. This project also would not have been possible if you two did not introduce me to the role of Black athletes like Jim Brown, Muhammad Ali, and Bill Russell as a child. For the early lessons, I am truly grateful. This has been an arduous

task, and while I am glad to finally see this finished, I think your joy is greater than mine. The infinite sacrifices you have made over my life have served as a true example of love.

There was a great deal of self-doubt I experienced while working on this dissertation. However, Gisell Jeter, my best friend, was always a great supporter and kept me encouraged to stay focused on completing this project. She kept me positive during troubling times, especially those that had nothing to do with the dissertation. I could not have asked for a better woman to share my life with so intimately, and I am glad I told you to take those shades off your face that fateful day in September 2007. You have been patient as I have gone through this dissertation process, assisting me by reading through numerous drafts providing excellent feedback. The support you gave me during this time must be reciprocated. I love you!

And to Bubba Alowishus, thank you “big fella.”

Vita

June 2000.....Southwest DeKalb High School
2004.....B.A. History, honors, Morehouse College
2007.....M.A. History, The Ohio State University

Publications

Samuel R. Hodge, Robert A. Bennett III, and Frankie G. Collins. (2013) “Historical Overview of the Evaluation of HBCUs and Their Athletic Conference Affiliation” in *Racism in College Athletics* (3rd Edition). Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology.

Samuel R. Hodge, Frankie G. Collins, and Robert A. Bennett III. (2013) “The Journey of the African American Athlete on the HBCU Playing Field” in *Racism in College Athletics* (3rd Edition). Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology.

Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (University Press, 2000) reviewed in *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 96, No.4, (Fall 2011), 545-548.

David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen, eds., *Reconstructing Fame: Sport, Race, and Evolving Reputations* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008) reviewed in *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 95, Nos.3-4, (Summer-Fall 2010), 469-471.

Samuel R. Hodge, Joe W. Burden, Jr., Leah E. Robinson, and Robert A. Bennett III. (2008). “Commentary on the Stereotyping of Black Male Student-Athletes: Issues and Implications.” *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*. Volume 2, Number 2.

Fields of Study

Major Field: History

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Vita	xii
Chapter 1: The Historical Foundations for the Black Economic Union	1
Chapter 2: “We were standing on our image, our education, and our future:” The African American Presence on the Cleveland Browns	199
Chapter 3: “You can’t have Black power without green power:” The Birth of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, 1964-1967	76
Chapter 4: “I’d be less of a man now if I tried to run away from him now: Muhammad Ali, the NIEU, and the Vietnam Draft	1918
Chapter 5: “A man can’t tell another man what to read:” The NIEU and the Challenge of Economic Empowerment in the National Football League, 1965-1972	1974
Chapter 6: “Men who were just crap-shooters on the city streets are now proud members of the community:” Social Programs and Business Development, 1967-1972	214
Chapter 7: “They wanted to control you... They only wanted you to play football:” Brady Keys and the Quest for Green Power	268
Chapter 8: Epilogue	304
Bibliography	318

Chapter 1

The Historical Foundations for the Black Economic Union

On June 4, 1967, a group of African American male professional athletes convened a “hush-hush meeting” with heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali in Cleveland, Ohio. The assembly of men was widely recognized as the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU), assembled on this fateful day to provide support for Ali who refused induction into the United States Armed Forces two months earlier on April 1, 1967. Despite the irony of the date on which Ali elected to announce his decision, his refusal to join the U.S. military was clearly no “April Fools” joke. Nor did the U.S. government treat it as such. Ali cited opposition towards his enlistment on religious grounds, and since the boxer’s actions was a federal offense, he was eventually stripped of his heavyweight title, and denied access to fight, thus limiting his ability to earn a living in his profession. Convinced Ali was sincere in his stance against the draft based on religious conscientious objection, the NIEU agreed to “offer [Ali] whatever help [they] could with his problems,” and some members even assisted Ali financially.¹

While the meeting only lasted two and a half hours, it gained national attention and the NIEU found itself at the center of a political firestorm. The Union encountered a

¹ Bill Russell with Tex Maule, “I am Not Worried about Ali,” *Sports Illustrated*, 19 June 1967,

backlash from the media for their endorsement of the former boxing champion as many reporters questioned the athletes' loyalty to their fan base and, most importantly, their loyalty to the United States. The NIEU's support of Ali was especially controversial since he was a member of the Nation of Islam (NOI); a religious organization that was widely perceived by White Americans as Black supremacist hate mongers. Of course the NOI was much more complex. Jim Brown of the Cleveland Browns, and Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics were hit hardest by these allegations since they were among the top athletes in their profession, and constantly in the public eye. During interviews, reporters bombarded them with questions about when they joined the Nation of Islam and why they hated Whites.

Likewise, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) increased its surveillance of Union members, because the government viewed the NIEU's demonstration of solidarity with Ali as dangerous. Prior to the Ali incident, Black male professional athletes such as Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, and Joe Louis had always adhered to patriotic ideals and remained steadfastly loyal to the United States during wartime. Then suddenly, an influential and popular African American man, Muhammad Ali, had supposedly become unpatriotic towards the nation by refusing to serve in the military. Worse, he was publicly supported by the NIEU, a group of prominent African American men who seemingly endorsed his actions. From the FBI's perspective, Ali and the NIEU posed a serious threat to the status quo and represented potential for a terrifying trend among African American males.

Among scholars, the June 1967 meeting with Muhammad Ali has come to

epitomize the NIEU's activities, which overshadows the organization's broader importance to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Little attention has been given to why the group was created, what it accomplished during its tenure as an organization, and its impact on American society. The purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is to chronicle the history of Negro Industrial and Economic Union, which later became known as the Black Economic Union, and to explore the economic and political ramifications of this collective. Oral history, newspaper articles, autobiographies, and federal records, as well as an array of secondary sources are used to demonstrate the Union was more than an organization that made a lone statement of solidarity with Ali, but was instead an organization centered on providing aid, financial assistance, and economic and entrepreneurial education to African Americans in cities across the United States.

Alongside the cry for "Black Power," which became prominent in the 1960s, many scholars and activists also promoted "Green Power," the notion that Blacks had to become involved in the economic infrastructure of America.² The NIEU sought to combine notions of both "Black" and "Green" power for the betterment of African American communities nationwide. Founded in 1966, the NIEU served as a self-help entrepreneurial organization, formed primarily by Black athletes in the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA), which operated during

² Julian Bond et al, "A Symposium: Black Power—It's Meaning and Measure," *Negro Digest*, November 1966.

the 1960s and 1970s.³ Jim Brown, a member of the Cleveland Browns, a professional football team in the NFL, has been credited as the founder of the Union and was certainly one of the NIEU's most famous members. As such, previous scholarship on the Union has tended to focus on him and fails to recognize the contributions of other members such as John Wooten, who served as the organization's Executive Vice President, along with Browns teammates Bobby Mitchell, Sidney Williams, and Walter Beach III, as well as dCurtis McClinton, Jr. of the Kansas City Chiefs, Jim Shorter of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and an array of others from across the professional sports ranks. The Union also had a broad base of support. Drawing on their fame and notoriety, Union members used their influence to garner the support of Black athletes in professional football, basketball, and baseball, along with Black politicians, community organizers, and businessmen.

In a 1968 interview with *Ebony* magazine, Jim Brown explained why the NIEU was necessary:

Dealing with the white man economically is one of the things we're teaching brothers. We believe that the closest you can get to independence in a capitalist country is financial independence...we've got to find a way to stop begging, just like we've got to stop wasting all our energy and money marching and picketing and doing things like campaigning down in Washington on a Poor People's Campaign. They didn't accomplish a single thing down there. They got a little attention and lots of condescending pats on the back from white liberals who wanted them to keep as quiet as possible and hurry up and get out of town...We've got to get off the emotional stuff and do something that will bring about real change. We've got to have industries and commercial enterprises and

³ "Leaflets Denounce Jim Brown at D.C. Premiere" in *Jet*, 10 August 1969, 59. Numerous sources on the NIEU give different dates of the organizations founding. In *Economic Disparity: Problems and Strategies for Black America*, William L. Henderson and Larry C. Ledebur cite 1965 as the year the organization was founded. However, the majority gives 1966 as the year the organization was founded, while others cite 1957.

build our own sustaining economic base. Then we can face white folks man-to-man.⁴

As Brown explained, the Union firmly believed that African American economic self-sufficiency was essential to racial advancement. In contrast to the strategies that dominated the Civil Rights Movement, such as marching and picketing, Union members endorsed the use of alternative approaches to achieve their goals. Brown's reference to the Poor People's Campaign (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's economic initiative), illustrated the NIEU's emphasis on economic opportunities for African American communities. Specifically, his identification of the Poor People's Campaign as "begging" and a "waste of energy" reflected a belief that Blacks should not depend solely on those outside of their communities to bring about the necessary changes they seek within. The NIEU identified the need for African Americans to do business among themselves, and not depend on the goodwill of Whites for economic strength. Moreover, the Union called for African Americans to understand how they could benefit from capitalism, and developed training programs for Black workers and provided loans to Black businesses to help them become economically self-sufficient.

There has been minimal discussion about the NIEU's influence on the political, social, and economic climate of the United States. Oral histories conducted with the rank-and-file of the organization serve as the foundation for this narrative. Conducting interviews with former members provided a historical overview of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union that furthers the discourse of the Civil Rights and Black Power era.

⁴ Charles L. Sanders, "Film Star Jim Brown Talks about His Marriage, His Women, His Career," *Ebony*, December 1968, 202.

It also adds to the discussion regarding African American male professional athletes' social and political activism. Over the course of the twentieth century, Black athletes created a space to address social and bureaucratic issues at local and national levels. Despite their activism, the field of African American history has not given sufficient historiographical attention to the role of political, social, and economic matters in the realm of professional athletics, a particularly egregious oversight given the consistent efforts of many Black male professional athletes to advance the Black freedom struggle.⁵

As such, my research is guided by numerous questions: Why was the NIEU formed? As professional athletes, what did they gain and lose within their professions? What were some of the successes and failures of the organization? How did the leagues and the media respond to Black athletes' activism during this period? What were the economic, social, and political factors that were instrumental in shaping their activism, and in what ways did these factors impact the manner in which they addressed their concerns? This dissertation chronicles the organization's formation and examines how it became a vehicle for "Black Power" and "Green Power" during the 1960s and 1970s.

The earliest studies of African American involvement in athletics followed the "contributionist" model; a common research methodology utilized by early African American historians. In an effort to highlight Black achievement, and refute notions of inherent Black inferiority, contributionist scholars primarily illustrated the contributions and achievements of Black athletes rather than explore the complexity of social, political and cultural history. In fact, the first of these was an autobiography written by an athlete

⁵ In my study, I define activism as the involvement in activities or actions that are done to achieve certain political, social, or economic goals.

who wished to express the unique challenges that Black athletes faced. Marshall “Major” Taylor, one of the world’s greatest professional bicyclists, earned a great fortune racing in America, Australia, and across Europe from 1896 to 1903, and 1907-1910. As an African American he was able to challenge the notions of segregation; a topic he explored in his autobiography, *Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World*, in 1928. Taylor’s work can be considered one of the premier texts that illustrate the trials and tribulations Black athletes endured in individual sports.

Even so, *The Negro in Sports*, written by Edwin Bancroft Henderson in 1939, was the first scholarly study on African American athletes that exemplified the “contributionist” approach to history.⁶ Henderson’s text provided insight into the early history of Blacks in American sports focusing, in particular, on boxing, track and field, baseball, football, tennis, and golf. While he successfully explored the ways in which Black athletes challenged the myth of white dominance in athletics through integration, he failed to discuss any facet of African American athletes’ political activity, which was largely due to the fact African Americans were barred from many leagues, and thus, their focus was more on gaining access than challenging the status quo. In the 1950s, Denzil Batchelor wrote *Jack Johnson and His Times*, and Nat Fleischer published *Fifty Years at Ringside*. Batchelor discusses the life and impact of Jack Johnson in professional boxing during the early part of the 20th century, while Fleischer, who set the precedence for boxing history, provided a firsthand account of the growth of professional boxing in his

⁶ The contributionist approach resembled many writings during this period, which was greatly influenced by the Harlem Renaissance. During this era, African American writers and scholars made efforts to demonstrate the central role that Black people had played in American society.

work. These texts continued to examine the individual success of Black athletes, and examined the role of African American men in segregated sports, team or individual.⁷

In the 1960s there was an increase in the number of writings on the African American athlete, an outcome of the growing social movements around the United States, which also influenced professional and collegiate sports. These publications, which included Arna Bontemps's *Famous Negro Athletes*, Harry Edwards's *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, and Jack Olsen's *The Black Athlete* and *A Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport*, offered important historiographical contributions because they represented a crucial shift in the way Black athletes' roles in sports were discussed. Autobiographies also began to grow in number as authors broke from the contributionist model and offered firsthand accounts of the numerous challenges African Americans faced during the desegregation period. Yet as with previous studies, publications in the 1960s, including autobiographies, failed to fully examine athletes' political involvement. Olsen's scholarship only provided scant overviews, and gave little detail about the philosophies that served as a foundation for their actions.⁸

In *Economic Disparity: Problems and Strategies for Black America*, William L. Henderson and Larry C. Ledebur identified the NIEU as an organization that existed

⁷ Marshall Taylor, *Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World: The Story of a Colored Boy's Indomitable Courage and Success Against Great Odds* (Manchester: Ayer Company Publishers, 1928); Edwin B. Henderson, ed, *The Negro in Sports* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1939); Denzil Batchelor, *Jack Johnson and His Times* (London: Phoenix Sports Books, 1956); Nat Fleischer, *Fifty Years at Ringside* (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1958).

⁸ Arna Bontemps, *Famous Negro Athletes* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1964); Bill Russell and William McSweeney, *Go Up for Glory* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966); Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete, A Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968); Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); Jack Orr, *The Black Athlete: His Story in American History* (New York: The Lion Press, Inc., 1969).

“within the existing institutional framework” with the motto ‘Green Power.’ Henderson and Ledebur, who published their monograph in 1970, highlighted the organization’s sponsorship of graduate education for Blacks in the areas of business and economics for the purpose of leadership and staffing the organization. They also identified the organization’s grants from the Ford Foundation and the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, which combined totaled half a million dollars. From the author’s overview, there were also hair and cosmetic lines the Union supported, along with service industry jobs that focused on shelter, food, and clothing. However, the detail given the overall structure of the Union is missing. As Robert S. Browne identified, the analysis about the organization was “toward the superficial and provide[d] little insight into the extent to which the several programs [made] a meaningful impact on the economic status of Blacks.”⁹

In the 1970s and 1980s, biographies on African American professional athletes were published in greater quantity. During this time, Olympic track and field star Jesse Owens published five autobiographies in the span of eight years, 1970-1978, the first two, *Blackthink: My Life as Black Man and White Man*, and *I Have Changed* were published in 1970 and 1972 respectively; basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar released *Giant Steps* in 1983; and football great Jim Brown who published a second memoir *Out of Bounds* in 1989. Their accounts provide insight into their lives, inviting readers into their experiences as professional athletes, and also informing them of their personal views and philosophies. Owens provided accounts of his life growing up in

⁹ William L. Henderson and Larry C. Ledebur, *Economic Disparity: Problems and Strategies for Black America* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 133.

Alabama during a period in which opportunities for Blacks were not only limited in sports, but also within the larger American society. He also discussed his rise to fame in the 1936 Olympics, when gold medal feats in Nazi Germany defied misconceptions about the humanity of African Americans. Similarly, Brown and Abdul-Jabbar discussed the various obstacles they endured as Black men in racist environments. Scholars such as Richard Lapchick, author of *Broken Promises*, published in 1984, critiqued the racism that permeated American professional sports. The great number of monographs on Black athletes represented the influence of the social and political changes of prior decades, and by synthesizing the events discussed in these and other works, I will create a larger narrative which details professional athletes' political and social activism.¹⁰

Scholars have also expanded the discourse on African American males and sports by examining the social, economic, and political impact of sports on American life from the 1990s forward. In 1994, George Eisen and David K. Wiggins edited *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture*, which explores how various ethnic groups have contributed to the growth of sports in American society. Wiggins, along with Patrick B. Miller published an anthology in 2003 titled *The Unleveled Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, which provides a synopsis of the challenges African Americans faced in sports, from the antebellum period

¹⁰ Jesse Owens with Paul G. Neimark, *Blackthink: My Life as a Black Man and White Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970); Jesse Owens with Paul Neimark, *I Have Changed* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1972); Jackie Robinson with Alfred Duckett, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: Putnam, 1972); Muhammad Ali with Richard Durham, *The Greatest: My Own Story* (New York: Random House, 1975); Kareem Abdul-Jabbar with Peter Knobler, *Giant Steps* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983); Richard Lapchick, *Broken Promises: Racism in American Sports* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984); Jim Brown with Steve Delsohn, *Out of Bounds* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 1989).

through the 1990s. While most of the selections for this volume are social commentaries and personal accounts from those who lived during the periods discussed, it speaks to the historical legacy of Blacks in athletics.¹¹

Similarly, within the past two decades, scholars have begun to explore Black athletes' political activism in studies such as Michael G. Long's *First Class Citizenship: The Civil Rights Letters of Jackie Robinson* and Dave Zirin's *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People, and Play*. Michael Long uses Jackie Robinson's life as a case study, exploring his career beyond baseball from 1946 to 1972. For example, Long shows after Robinson gained fame and status as "the first to integrate to Major League Baseball," he became a consultant to numerous politicians on racial matters, supporting Republican candidates for office even after many African Americans had crossed over to the Democratic Party in the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, *A People's History* demonstrates how politics and sports mutually shaped each other. Since Zirin covers two hundred fifty years, he does not go into great detail about the Black athletes' political activism in any given era. However, one of the benefits of Zirin's book is it addresses not only the long struggle for African Americans to integrate American professional sports, but also the role of women and gays in sports and the rise of college athletics.

While Long and Zirin's works add to the discourse on social and political activism, their work, like most studies of African American athletics, only provides an

¹¹ George Eisen and David K. Wiggins, eds., *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994); David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

assessment of athletes' individual actions.¹² The primary exception to this historiographical trend is, of course, the pivotal moment during the 1968 Olympics when sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised the "Black Power" salute on the medal stand while the United States national anthem played in the background. Smith's and Carlos act, which has been revered as one of the most significant political demonstrations by professional athletes in history, has been given significant scholarly attention and discussion.¹³ While the 1968 Olympics represented a powerful moment in the African American freedom struggle, these demonstrations were not the only examples of Black professional athletes engaging in political actions.

To date, the most extensive look at the NIEU has come from Mike Freeman's biographical account of Jim Brown, *Jim Brown: The Fierce Life of an American Hero*.¹⁴ Although it is an assessment of Brown's life, Freeman gives scant insight into how some African American male professional athletes became affiliated with the Union. Even so,

¹² Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight for Free Agency in Professional Sports* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006); David Maraniss, *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Michael G. Long, ed., *First Class Citizenship: The Civil Rights Letters of Jackie Robinson* (New York: Times Books, 2007); Dave Zirin, *A People's History of Sports in the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2008).

¹³ As historians have revealed, Smith and Carlos consciously decided to demonstrate their support for the burgeoning Black Power movement in an effort to bring attention to the social and economic issues that African Americans faced in a country that sought to spread "democracy" and "equality" overseas, while simultaneously oppressing its Black citizens. Works that focus on this topic are: Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: the 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Frank Murphy, *The Last Protest: Lee Evans in Mexico City* (Kansas City: Windsprint Press, 2006); Tommie Smith with David Steele, *Silent Gesture: The Autobiography of Tommie Smith* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Matthew C. Whitaker, ed., *African American Icons of Sport: Triumph, Courage, and Excellence* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Freeman, *Jim Brown: The Fierce Life of an American Hero*

he does not discuss the breadth of players who were involved, which unfortunately leads readers to the inaccurate conclusion the NIEU existed solely as a result of Brown's actions when, in reality, other athletes played an integral role in the group's formation, as well as its successes and failures. Moreover, the choice to primarily focus on Brown's involvement in the NIEU causes the study to fall into the trap of hagiography rather than historical analysis. My exploration of the NIEU seeks to avoid this intellectual trap by giving full attention to all members of this influential organization.

Under the guidance of Director J. Edgar Hoover in March of 1968, the FBI/COINTELPRO enacted a program designed to "neutralize" Black Nationalist organizations, including those the bureau recognized as "hate groups." The Union was not identified as one of the four primary groups on which the FBI wanted to conduct surveillance, nonetheless the federal agency did watch the Union and many of its members.¹⁵ In essence the FBI sought to prevent the establishment of a coalition of Black organizations, prevent the rise of a 'messiah' "who could unify, and electrify," thwart notions of respectability amongst Black leaders within the Black community by damaging their reputations, and impede the growth of Black organizations.¹⁶ With these aims my work seeks to illustrate the complexities surrounding Union members' activism as they sought to assist others in their quest for economic empowerment.

¹⁵ The Nation of Islam (NOI), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) were the four groups identified, but these programs called for other organizations to be watched.

¹⁶ Brian Glick, *The War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do About It* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

Through the use of primary sources, and oral history, I seek to provide a documented account of the NIEU. My work seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship by examining African American athletes' political activism since the 1960s, focusing in particular on how the Negro Industrial and Economic Union/Black Economic Union advanced the African American freedom struggle through collective and individual means. *You Can't Have Black Power without Green Power* will also discuss interracial sexual relationships, as well as notions of citizenship and activism among African American male professional athletes. Emphasis will be placed on why the NIEU was formed and give attention to the group's platform that went national in 1967. This work will also demonstrate how Union members' status as professional athletes influenced their respective roles in the Black freedom struggle.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One is composed of three chapters, and uses a chronological approach to explore the origins of the Union and its early development. Chapter two introduces the reader to several men such as Jim Brown and John Wooten, who were members of the Cleveland Browns during the 1950s and 1960s. Together they played a critical role in the formation and expansion of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union. This chapter will provide individual accounts of the players to illustrate how their experiences influenced their desire to challenge the world in which they lived. Furthermore, it examines how they used their own brand of social and political activism to become involved in the fight for economic empowerment and equality for African Americans. A look into their early lives and their dealings with racism will allow readers to understand their challenge of second-class citizenship on and

off the field. An analysis of these men's lives will also demonstrate that their involvement with the Union was not spontaneous, but rather a part of a longer battle connected to the Black freedom struggle.

Chapter three discusses the origins of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union in 1965 and its official incorporation in 1966. This was a period in which the Civil Rights and Black Power movements became part of the national conversation on how the United States responded to years of discrimination backed by White supremacy. Jim Brown, with the help of businessman John Daniels and activist Maggie Hathaway, articulated a use for "green power" as a means of obtaining freedom, justice, and equality. It places the organization within the context of the 1960s specifically around two particular events: Jim Brown's retirement from professional football and the upheaval in Cleveland as a result of the Hough riots. It will also explore the early tenets of the group and chronicle the events that shaped the NIEU's early formation in Los Angeles, California and Cleveland, Ohio. The Union's involvement was geared largely around a political activism and philosophy developed by Black professional athletes. This chapter will also explore how the tenets of the organization influenced the communities in which they worked.

The fourth chapter explores the intersection of race, religion, and sport in the case of Muhammad Ali from 1964 to 1967. His affiliation with the Nation of Islam brought negative attention to his boxing career, which greatly impacted the formation of Main Bout, a management group initiated because of the boxer's relationship with Jim Brown. Combined with Ali's political views on the Vietnam War and subsequent conviction for draft evasion, his professional boxing career was in limbo. However, members of the

NIEU convened a secret meeting to discuss with “the champ.” They were confronted with a dilemma about Ali’s destiny. Should they unite as a show of solidarity and support his right to not enlist and face their own economic downfall as a result, or should they object to his political and religious stance on the grounds of saving face? This chapter examines the numerous events surrounding this particular event and what it meant in the context of the Black freedom struggle.

Part Two takes a thematic approach and looks at the maturation and expansion of the Union during a narrower time period. Chapter five examines how several members of the Union, like Walter Beach III, John Wooten, and Sidney Williams, embraced “green power” on the playing field as they contested their compensation as professional athletes from 1967 to 1972. Regardless of the sport they played, African Americans were restricted in their movement and their ability to profit from their own labor. With the rise of professional football in popularity and financial standing by the late 1960s, players were aware they should give great attention to economic initiatives that benefitted them as players and once they retired. As a result they challenged NFL ownership over the compensation they received and the lack of financial security experienced by retired players. As a result, the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) was formed. Two Union members, John Mackey and Brigman Owens, served an integral role in the formation of the players’ union. These stories illustrate the challenges Black men within the professional ranks of the NFL faced in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The sixth chapter covers the NIEU when the organization had the goal of becoming a national body, which included opening offices in Washington, D.C. and

Kansas City, Missouri. This was also coupled with two foci: first, the organization created social programs that addressed poverty on local and national levels and also gave Black youth work opportunities and the wherewithal on developing their own businesses. This objective was demonstrated through Project J.I.M. and “Food First,” two of the Union’s seminal programs. Second, the group helped Black businessmen by providing them with technical aid and support to improve their companies. As with any organization, financial support was also a significant challenge for the BEU. This chapter will also assess the arduous task by which money was raised to provide loans to Black businesses as well as way to support the Union’s social programs.

Chapter seven looks at “green power” through providing an examination of the work of Brady Keys, a defensive back in the NFL from 1967 to 1974. An assessment of his entrepreneurial capabilities illustrates how he upheld the Union’s objective of bringing Blacks into the mainstream of the American economy through business development. He achieved this goal through the development of All-Pro Fried Chicken, an enterprise that helped him garner millions in revenue. However, it was not without incident. An examination of his commercial interests conveys the obstacles he and many other African American men faced as they made attempts to achieve success as businessmen.

Today, BEU chapters in Kansas City and Cleveland still remain in operation, and they focus on housing development. Many of the professional athletes who were members of the Union in the 1960s are also still active in their communities. The epilogue serves as the conclusion to the dissertation, and provides an analysis of the

activities in which some of the key members of the organization have been involved since they left the group. For them, the commitment of bettering their lives and those of other African Americans did not rest with their involvement with the Union. An assessment of former Union members demonstrates their ongoing commitment to racial and economic advancement as a means to illustrate that in order to have political and social power, one must embrace financial empowerment.

Chapter 2

“We were standing on our image, our education, and on our future.”

The African American Presence on the Cleveland Browns

During the 1950s and 1960s, the racial climate in the National Football League (NFL), mirrored that of American society. As African Americans fought for social, political, and economic parity, so too did professional athletes. In 1966, a group of African American Cleveland Browns football players established the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU). Led by Jim Brown, the NIEU sought to address the economic disparities that plagued Black Americans. Members of the organization included offensive lineman John Wooten, defensive back Walter Beach III, linebacker Sidney Williams, and running back Bobby Mitchell of the Washington Redskins. The NIEU grew out of the unmet promises and hardships endured not only by this group of men, but also by African Americans as a whole. As such, the members were determined to address both racial and economic oppression.

This chapter explores the lives of the aforementioned men who played for the Cleveland Browns from 1957 through 1966, and who served a critical role in the formation and expansion of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union. This chapter gives special attention to their personal histories because it is important to gain insight into their trajectories as individuals, as well as some of the trials and tribulations Black

professional athletes endured during this period. In the first half of the 20th century, racism infringed upon Black people's freedoms and numerous institutions limited their upward mobility. This was also the case for Jim Brown, John Wooten, Bobby Mitchell, Walter Beach III, and Sidney Williams. However, it did not force them to accept the status quo that was predicated upon White supremacy. Their experiences influenced their desire to change the world in which they lived and inspired them to become involved in the fight for economic empowerment and equality for African Americans using their own brand of social and political activism. An examination of these men's upbringing and undertakings with race and racism is important because insight into their lives will help us understand how they acquired the wherewithal to challenge second-class citizenship on and off the field. An analysis of these men's lives demonstrates that their involvement with the Union did not manifest overnight; there were certain lived experiences each man had that brought them to that moment in 1966. Therefore, when they gained the financial means and wherewithal to combat Jim Crow, they did so as a collective force.

James Nathaniel Brown was born on February 17, 1936 in St. Simons Island, Georgia, to Theresa and Swinton Brown. He was their only child. Brown's father was a professional boxer, porter, waiter, caddy, and a gambler. The latter issue was an important factor as to why the union between his parents did not last. In all, Brown did not have much of a relationship with his father as he only saw him "four or five times" in his life. He remembered his mother as a "tall lady, hard working person...took care of me the best way she could as a single mother." In Georgia, the love he received from Myrtle

Powell, and Norah Peterson, his grandmother and great-grandmother respectively, along with his aunt, Bertha Powell, allowed him to enjoy life as a young boy. Peterson, who Brown called “Mama,” was “the most important person” in his life. She raised him from the age of two, a time when his mother went to New York to find work, a move many Southern Blacks made to better their economic plight.¹⁷

In St. Simons, the racial segregation of the town was evident to Brown, as racial separation was a fact of life. He noted, “You start out living it because you lived in a separate part of town, so right away, there are some things that separate these two people, because you got separate beaches, separate schools, separate everything. So your whole existence is based on segregation. Total lifestyle.” African Americans in St. Simons were “one big happy family” despite the common mishaps that may happen in a community. As in many African American communities, church attendance was very critical as “Mama made it the law.”¹⁸

When Brown was eight years old, he left St. Simons to join his mother in Great Neck, New York. As “Mama” put him aboard a train for New York to meet his mom, he was not bitter about leaving behind St. Simons Island. Peterson prepped him for the day he would be reunited with his mother. As his great-grandmother told him growing up, ““Someday she’ll send for you.””¹⁹ In New York, Theresa Brown worked for the Brockman family, and lived in the maid quarters, a room over the garage of the family’s

¹⁷ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, November 10, 2010, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Jimmy Brown with Myron Cope, *Off My Chest* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 104

¹⁸ Ibid.; Jim Brown with Steve Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1989) 26-28. In *Out of Bounds*, Myrtle Powell is Myrtle Johnson. However, in an interview with Brown on November 10, 2010, he called his grandmother Myrtle Bell.

¹⁹ *Out of Bounds*, 50.

home. Brown had positive memories of his time up north, arriving to his elementary school in nearby Manhasset by taxi dressed in a shirt and tie, all paid by his mother. The Great Neck area was different than St. Simons, but people in the New York community replicated the support of the elder matriarchs in Brown's family, whom he visited for summer vacations.²⁰

After a couple of years, Brown had become too old to live with his mother in a one-bedroom apartment. Thus, during the week, he stayed with a Black family in Manhasset, New York, with whom he "felt like an intruder."²¹ However, when the Brockman family moved to California, Brown's mother found an apartment in Manhasset. This allowed him to live with his mother on a regular basis, rather than just on the weekends. Brown was happy to be with his mother, despite the fact that her absence in his early years of childhood prevented him from demonstrating overt affection to her. He was well aware of the financial hardships she experienced working numerous jobs. In his autobiography *Off My Chest*, he noted his mother's "expenses were higher and she had trouble finding enough work, but with a lot of scraping she managed to keep me neatly dressed."²² His mother's sacrifices were not taken for granted, nor was the work of other people in the town.²³

As a teenager he attended Manhasset High School, where White men like Ed Walsh, Brown's football coach, provided him positive support and guidance. At the school, he excelled academically and athletically, lettering in football, track and field,

²⁰ Ibid.; *Off My Chest*, 97-102.

²¹ *Off My Chest*, 106

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 104-107

basketball, and lacrosse. Walsh served as a guide for Brown during his high school years at Manhasset. His skills provided him numerous scholarship offers from football powerhouses as well as Ivy League schools. The Ohio State University was the leading candidate in Brown's mind, since the school played in the Big Ten, one of the nation's premier conferences. However, in 1953, he was encouraged to attend Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York where he believed he had earned a lucrative football scholarship. Unbeknownst to Brown, he did not receive any aid from the school. Rather community members in Manhasset pooled their monies to send "Jimmy" to school.²⁴

The transition from Manhasset to Syracuse was different for Brown because, as he explained, "when I was in my teens, I met all those loving White people at Manhasset. Then I went to Syracuse, ran chin first into overt racism. Someone had changed all the rules, forgotten to tell me."²⁵ Coaches and other players on the team continuously compared him to the last Black player on the team, Marion Farris. Brown remembered that the freshman quarterback told him at all cost to avoid being like him. Farris was a pretty good quarterback at the school. However, while at the university, he committed a social taboo of having relationships with the White co-eds on campus. White females were noted to sing songs to him at practice, while others washed his clothes. Brown gathered from the comparison to Farris that the mistreatment he received was because of his race, which led him to conclude Syracuse "did not want black athletes."²⁶ For Brown, he had to demonstrate to his coaches that he "was interested in touchdowns, not white

²⁴ *Out of Bounds*, 37-38, 47

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37

girls.”²⁷ At historically White institutions of higher learning, interracial relationships were always a subject matter especially when Black males were in attendance. In Brown’s case, the coaches at Syracuse experience with Marion Farris affected how they treated him.²⁸

During his freshman year, Brown had to live in a dorm separate from his freshman teammates and he was not given the same number of meal tickets for the athletic dining hall. Thus, to maximize his number of meal tickets, he was forced to eat at a dining hall different from his White teammates. All of this was due largely to Brown not being on athletic scholarship, something he did not know at the time. Brown later learned that he was able to attend Syracuse because of the financial help given by people like Ed Walsh, and Kenneth Malloy, a Manhasset judge and Syracuse alum. These two men pooled their monies with others from their community to cover Brown’s expenses. They had taken an interest in him during his early childhood and adolescent years. Despite the offers from other colleges, they wanted to send Brown to Syracuse. His relationship with these men was instrumental because they played a key role in his collegiate experience, especially when the dismissive behaviors of his coaches forced him to contemplate whether to stay at the school.²⁹

His freshman year was rough psychologically as he failed to play, largely because there were upper classmen ahead of him on the depth chart. Members of the coaching

²⁷ Ibid., 39

²⁸ Ibid.; *Off My Chest*, 19.

²⁹ *Off My Chest*, 113-127. Brown and another student at Syracuse printed phony tickets to get more meals. Fortunately for the two, they were never caught and did not have to suffer any dire consequences from the school’s administrators.

staff also frowned upon Brown, for what they perceived were sexual interactions with White co-eds. Yet, Brown made a concerted effort to avoid White females at the school to demonstrate that he was not like Marion Farris. One practice during the fall, he stretched out on his back to see if anyone noticed him, and not one coach made any remarks. Brown lay on the practice field to get someone's attention, but to no avail; he was an "invisible man."³⁰ The fact that no one addressed his actions disturbed the Syracuse freshman, and the disregard he experienced made him question whether he should be at Syracuse. The thought of transferring to Ohio State came to Brown's mind, but Kenneth Malloy, helped him get through the difficult time. The following season Brown became the starting halfback after Sam Alexander, the team's leading runner, suffered an injury. Since his athletic capabilities were too much to ignore, from that point Brown did not endure the discrimination he experienced his first year. He went on to achieve All-American honors in football and lacrosse, playing both sports for four years, and lettered in basketball and track and field, participating his sophomore and junior years.³¹

The Cleveland Browns selected him as the sixth overall pick of the 1957 NFL draft. The Green Bay Packers had two of the first five picks, and the Los Angeles Rams, San Francisco 49ers, and Pittsburgh Steelers each had the opportunity to draft him but decided on other players. Browns' head coach Paul Brown was grateful for the other

³⁰ *Invisible Man* is the title of a novel by African American writer Ralph Ellison. The main character of the novel, a Black man is socially invisible to Whites, thus the title of the work.

³¹ Ibid.; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; "Development of Line Is Regarded as Key To Syracuse's Gridiron Fortunes: Backfield Riches Hearten Orange," *New York Times*, 24 September 1954, 31; "Jim Brown Now A Brown," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 22 June 1957, 3C.

teams' decisions. He and his coaching staff had their sights on Len Dawson, a quarterback from Purdue University, but the Steelers selected him. So the Browns coaching staff took the strategy of drafting the best player available, Jim Brown. Paul Brown recognized him as "a once-in-a-lifetime player" despite not getting the signal-caller the team coveted.³²

Paul Brown was also one of the first coaches to sign players on their ability to play the game of football, and not so much their race as other teams had done historically. His ability to coach was illustrated the first four years the team was part of the All-American Football Conference beginning in 1946. With a record of 47 wins, 4 losses, and 3 ties, the Browns won four straight titles until they were invited to join the National Football League (NFL) in 1950. During their first six seasons in the league, they played in the championship game every year winning half of those contests. The Cleveland Browns and Paul Brown were part of the upper echelon of professional football as they had successes that many other teams were unable to duplicate. The presence of African American players Marion Motley, a running back, and Bill Willis, a lineman for the team, impacted the team's overall success. Motley, who played at South Carolina State University and the University of Nevada, Reno, and Willis who attended The Ohio State University, were two of the more prominent Black players with the team and the league

³² Paul Brown with Jack Clary, *PB: The Paul Brown Story*. (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 241. Unlike the NFL Draft of the common era, teams selected players when the college football season was over usually in November.

during the 1940s and early 1950s. They contributed immensely to the team's championship runs, but they both stopped playing for the team in 1953.³³

The Browns continued their winning ways as the league champions the following two seasons, but in 1956 they had a 5-7 record, the worst in franchise history. Due to their lackluster season, they garnered a top pick in the 1957 NFL draft. They chose Jim Brown to help rekindle some of the successes of earlier Cleveland Browns teams. In the spring of 1957, Brown graduated from Syracuse with a liberal arts degree, and served as class marshal. Later that summer, he signed his contract with the Browns. In his first season with the team, the Browns went 9-2-1, a record that afforded them the chance to play in the NFL championship game against the Detroit Lions. The Browns were favored to win the game, but lost 59-14. Despite the loss, that year was a great season for Jim Brown; he was named Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player as he led the league in rushing. The success he had was a precursor to the significant role he played in the

³³ Ibid.; Cleveland Jackson, "Marion Motley Joins Bill Willis At Brown's Pro-Football Camp," 17 August 1946, 10B; Terry Pluto, *When All the World Was Browns Town: Cleveland's Browns and the Championship Season of '64*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 19-23; Frank Litsky, "Marion Motley, Bruising Back For Storied Browns, Dies at 79," *New York Times*, 28 June 1999, B7; Richard Goldstein, "Bill Willis, 86, Racial Pioneer in Pro Football, Dies," *New York Times*, 29 November 2007, B7; The Cleveland Browns team was Paul Brown's "baby," metaphorically. He had been with the Browns since 1945. His impression was seen throughout the organization, from its name, the Browns, to the team dress code, player contracts, and to the team rules of no smoking, drinking, or swearing. The ban against narcotics was so strict that in 1959 he traded Bill Quinlan, a defensive end for the team, to the Green Bay Packers after confronting him about smoking. Quinlan responded to Paul Brown's questions in a manner that did not exhibit the attitude of deference expected from players, therefore the coach traded him to show other players they should respect his authority. Coach Brown also implemented "The Tuesday Rule," which prohibited all sexual activity following the Tuesday before the Sunday game. However, that measure was not actively put into effect, and was based on the honor system. He was also an innovator in professional football. He created the facemask for helmets, which for more than forty years simply covered everything except the face. There were other firsts by the Ohio native: the playbook, studying game film, the use of practice squads, known as the "taxi squad," the use of assistant coaches, and the first to constantly call the plays for the offense instead of the quarterback.

team's future achievements. Even so, Jim Brown's personal experience on the team was much more complex. Although he had a great responsibility on the team, Brown remembered in a later memoir that he took the advice of a teammate to "keep your mouth shut," and he embraced "the part of the big dumb fullback...which is to say with a maximum of physical effort and minimum of dialogue." Whenever he did speak to reporters or in front of audiences, he "came up with some kind of scintillating statement that endorsed God, country, and teamwork." His silence led many to think of him as a big brute, a sort of enigma. Unfortunately for Jim Brown, Paul Brown also saw him in that light.³⁴

The coach's thinking was made evident in 1959, in a game against the New York Giants, when the Syracuse grad experienced concussion like symptoms. It was the first time that he had to miss game time in his three years with the team. The coach approached him and said, "Well, Triplett got hurt and he's back in there." The coach's reference was to Mel Triplett, another full back for the team who was injured earlier that half and continued to play. Paul Brown's words irked Jim Brown so greatly that the experience changed the way he viewed him. He did not understand why his coach questioned his toughness after he played hurt for many games throughout his career. Jim Brown was already considered "Paul Brown's big brute," so for the ball coach to compare him to another player was a sign of disrespect, especially when he never complained to his coaches. Their relationship was never the same, and from that time on Paul Brown had a difficult time with one of his team's leaders. Following Jim Brown's

³⁴ Gloria Steinem, "The Black John Wayne," *New York Magazine*, 11 November 1968, 39.

rookie year, the Cleveland Browns selected Bobby Mitchell with the eighty-fourth pick in the seventh round of the 1958 NFL draft. Coupled with Jim Brown in the backfield, the two complemented each other as offensive weapons for the team. And eventually, the two forged a relationship off the field, as they worked with other Black male athletes to build the NIEU.³⁵

Similar to his teammate Jim Brown, Bobby Mitchell's journey to the Cleveland Browns was fraught with racial conflict. Robert Cornelius Mitchell was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on June 6, 1935 a resort town located near the Ouachita Mountains, a location many Americans visited to experience the therapeutic springs. One of eight children, he was reared in a home led by his minister father who taught his children how to be frugal, shunned the consumption of alcohol, and frowned upon cursing and smoking. This upbringing prepared Mitchell for life outside of Arkansas. Considered a "speedy, multisport, high school athlete," he had aspirations of attending Grambling College, a historically Black college football powerhouse. However, the coaches at the University of Illinois persuaded his mother to see their school as the better opportunity. In 1954, he entered the school on a football scholarship. In his first year he remembered "I was a young, immature country boy...I was ready to go back home every day."³⁶

There he became a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) champion on the

³⁵ Associated Press, "Browns Favored Over Lions Today," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 1957, B1, B4; Louis Effrat, "Browns Favored to Beat Lions in Title Game Today," *The New York Times*, 29 December 1957, 103; Associated Press, "Triumph Over Browns Brings Lions 4th Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 December 1957, C4; *Off My Chest*, 5-10.

³⁶ Thomas G. Smith, *Showdown: JFK and the Integration of the Washington Redskins* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 142.

track and field team as a long jumper and hurdler. He also excelled on the football team, and after a successful sophomore year, he was selected to the All-Big Ten Team.³⁷

There was a future NFL Hall of Famer who accompanied Mitchell on the football squad at Illinois, Ray Nitschke, a linebacker who would go on to have a stellar career with the Green Bay Packers. He helped Mitchell understand a little known financial aspect of the collegiate game, improper benefits. Since the early 1900s, college athletes had secretly received financial compensation from supporters and boosters, but under NCAA guidelines, student athletes were not supposed to receive extra benefits since it conflicted with their status as amateurs. Nitschke, a White male from Elmwood Park, Illinois, once told Mitchell, ‘Bobby you’re not getting what I’m getting,’ referring to the payments he was receiving from White alumni. While both players arguably made equal contributions to their team’s success, Mitchell received fewer financial perks in comparison to his White teammates. The money they were given at the time was enough for them to have “a good dinner date in Urbana on a Saturday night or maybe a good sweater. But the black players [did not] get the same and although Ray Eliot, the coach, sweetened the pot for Bobby and Abe, it never did catch up with what the whites got.” Eliot allegedly had no power over what alumni chose to give to certain players. In its proper perspective he did have control, but chose not to change a system that had been in

³⁷ Ibid., 143; “NFL Draft Selections,” *The Washington Post*, 29 January 1958, A25; Cal Whorton, “All-Star Terrors Start for Browns,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1958, C1;; Hot Springs, Arkansas identifies itself as “America’s First Resort.” Located in the city is the nation’s first area protected with federal funds.

place for years. Even with illegal fringe benefits African Americans were given unequal compensation.³⁸

Despite the inequities even with illegal payments, Bobby Mitchell made the most of his experience at Illinois by being involved in campus life. He even found time to pledge Alpha Phi Alpha, a Black Greek letter fraternity. Mitchell was also given the opportunity to make the 1960 Olympic team for track and field, but if he wanted to participate, he had to give up his aspirations of professional football for two years. Eventually he was convinced that he should commit to playing in the NFL. Paul Brown told Mitchell that he wanted him to replace Ray Renfro, another running back for the team who he claimed was “over the hill,” and accompany Jim Brown in the Browns backfield. He went on to win the Rookie of the Year award for that season helping the team to a 9-3 record. However, the Browns lost in the divisional playoffs to the New York Giants 10-0.³⁹

While all was well on the playing field for Mitchell, there were some concerns away from the gridiron. Living comfortably in Cleveland was no easy feat. Finding housing without redlining, the practice where financial lenders refuse to lend money to potential borrowers based on geographic location was an issue many Black players had to navigate. This was largely because many White neighborhoods imposed racial

³⁸ John Carmody, “The Pro,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 12 October 1969, 270-271.

³⁹ Jack Walsh, “Giants Take East Title, 10-0,” *The Washington Post*, 22 December 1958, A15; Louis Effrat, “Giants Defeat Browns, 10 to 0, in eastern Football Play-Off,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1958, K1; United Press International, “Howell Praises Aide Landry for Defense,” *The Washington Post*, 22 December 1958, A16; “Browns’ Blue-Chip Mitchell Top Rookie,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, 3 January 1959, 6C; “Mitchell Gets Four Votes for Rookie Honors,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 15 January 1959, B10; John Carmody, “The Pro,” *The Washington Post*, 12 October 1969, 19, 20, 23.

segregation throughout Cleveland. Bobby Mitchell and his wife Gwendolyn encountered some resistance when they wanted to buy a home in an all-White suburb. There were homes in all-White communities where brokers would not sell homes to the Mitchells by raising the selling price for homes they viewed, and in other cases banks denied them access to loans. Like many African Americans across the nation, redlining was also a tactic the Mitchell family encountered. Eventually they were able to get a home they wanted, but it was not an easy task. Many White Cleveland residents were not receptive to Blacks as neighbors, especially since there was a long held belief among Whites that the presence of “Negroes” depreciated the value of their homes. These kinds of incidents influenced Mitchell’s later activism with the NIEU, particularly in Washington, D.C. Despite the happenings in his life away from the athletic field, Mitchell was very productive with the Browns. The experiences he and Brown had on and off the gridiron set a particular culture of racial consciousness amongst Black players on the team. This contingent of men grew with the valued addition of John Wooten, an All-American two-way lineman from the University of Colorado.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Carmody, “The Pro,” 23-26; Martie Zad, “Player Goes to Fort Meade: Marshal Tries to Get Mitchell But Paul Brown Turns Him Down,” *The Washington Post*, 19 October 1961, B14; Associated Press, “Redskins Confirm Deal For Mitchell of Browns,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1961, 33; After four seasons with the team, he was selected to the Pro Bowl and chosen as an All-Pro twice. The latter an annual honor given to players recognized as the best at their positions. Mitchell was traded to the Washington Redskins in 1961. This was a significant move on the part of both teams as he was traded for Syracuse University running back Ernie Davis. This move to the nation’s capital was also historical, since it marked the first time that a Black man would play for the Washington Redskins. The move there nearly doubled Mitchell’s rookie contract of \$9,000 as he agreed to a yearly pay of \$17,000. While he was traded to the Redskins, the bonds formed with his former teammates on the Cleveland Browns would provide him an opportunity to join with their efforts to promote economic development in Black communities.

On January 21, 1959, John Wooten was selected by the Cleveland Browns after he was selected fifty-third overall in the fifth round of the NFL Draft. Wooten was born in Riverview, Texas on December 5, 1936, the youngest of six children. He remembers living in poverty as a child. In the late 1930s, while he was still a baby, the Wooten family moved from East Texas to Carlsbad, New Mexico for better economic possibilities. While growing up in the community there, he became aware of the role that education and sports provided him. As a young kid, he remembered that he “wanted a better life with what I saw around me in terms of education, and fortunately I was able to play sports and get that done.” His mother worked as a domestic, cooking and cleaning for Whites throughout the city, and every weekend she cleaned three churches in the Carlsbad community for extra money. His father, a laborer, left the family in 1944, and so, like Jim Brown, Wooten grew up largely without a father in his home. Four years passed before Wooten saw his father again in 1948 in Phoenix, Arizona. Wooten remembered that his dad gave “personal gifts from time to time, but nothing was ever held against him.” His father’s absence caused the family financial grief, but his mother, his siblings, and he found ways to meet their financial needs.⁴¹

To help bring extra income to the household, the Wooten children shined shoes in their spare time, picked cotton in September and October, and helped their mother clean churches. John remembered as a child that the only options for many Blacks were to

⁴¹ John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; N. Jeremi Duru, *Advancing The Ball: Race, Reformation, and the Quest for Equal Coaching Opportunity in the NFL*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52; The issue for the team was whether he would play for them, because there were rumors circulating that he would be going to Canada for professional football. Brown guaranteed to pick him if he was willing to complete a deal.

work as a garbage collector or in the potash mines excavating potassium sulfide. The prospects for him did not seem great. He remembered that they lived in a “horrible economic situation...we probably should have been on public assistance but my mom didn’t want that.” In all, the Carlsbad community provided the Wooten family with “help and love” that positively shaped his outlook on life. John was cognizant of what serving others meant. When he had the chance to support others, he did because he got “great satisfaction out of helping someone, because I have gotten to where I am because somebody somewhere helped me.” Fortunately the help given to him did not stop at financial assistance. Wooten was given the opportunity to obtain a better education within the city.⁴²

There was only one school designated for African Americans in Carlsbad, Carver School, and it housed students from the first through twelfth grades. In comparison to the city’s White schools, Carver lacked the financial resources to provide its students an adequate education, but the teachers at the all-Black institution did their best. Yet, in 1952, going into his tenth grade year, and prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, an opportunity was given to John Wooten and other Black adolescents to attend the much better school in Carlsbad. The community held an assembly to vote on whether the “colored” students would be provided entry into Carlsbad High School, an all-White educational institution. With overwhelming support, African American students were given the choice to attend, and only the high school level, the tenth through twelfth grades, were integrated. Wooten left Carver for Carlsbad. There he took advantage of the

⁴² John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

opportunities present and excelled in the classroom and in football, a sport that was not available to him at the city's all-Black school. The break he was given at the school influenced Wooten's consciousness and his great desire to help others. In reflection, he added, "What drives me is all of my life, someone, somebody, a lot of bodies, have helped me, sometimes beyond my knowledge of it, people knew me or liked me for whatever reason, they told other people about it...and because of that, help came." The chance to go to Carlsbad demonstrated to him what equal opportunity did for a person.⁴³

In all, Wooten garnered All-State honors his junior and senior years at Carlsbad, and was offered several scholarships to play at the collegiate level. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Dartmouth College, an Ivy League institution in New Hampshire, were a couple of schools interested in Wooten. Too far from home, his mother nixed any ideas of him going to Dartmouth because "it was on the other side of the country." After counsel with her, the University of Colorado, not far from New Mexico, was his choice. He and another teammate, Frank Clarke, were the first two African Americans to play football for the school.⁴⁴

At Colorado, Wooten majored in history and lettered in football. The school, located in Boulder, Colorado was a "very open place," and it is where he met Box Arano,

⁴³ John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; N. Jeremi Duru, *Advancing The Ball: Race, Reformation, and the Quest for Equal Coaching Opportunity in the NFL*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52-55.

⁴⁴ John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; N. Jeremi Duru, *Advancing The Ball: Race, Reformation, and the Quest for Equal Coaching Opportunity in the NFL*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52-54; Wooten and his siblings were born two to three years apart. He had four sisters and one brother. He learned how to read from his oldest sisters. The specific date of the Wooten family moving to New Mexico was not remembered since the family moved while Wooten was a toddler; According to Wooten, Riverview, Texas is not far from Clarksville, Texas.

an Italian American from Trinidad, Colorado, with whom he became very good friends. While there were “not many incidents” on campus that involved racial conflict, away from the university, especially on road games, John encountered racism that limited his movement and ability to live and eat as he saw fit. The school had a policy that allowed players and students to “room with whomever they chose.” Yet, in other places established rules meant nothing.⁴⁵

Ironically, one particular incident of racial segregation Wooten encountered was when he and Jim Brown first crossed paths playing in the same city on New Year’s Day in 1957 in Miami, Florida. The University of Colorado played Clemson University in the Orange Bowl, and Syracuse University played Texas Christian University. Interestingly, the racial segregation in Miami affected the University of Colorado’s stay in the city. The Bell Harper Hotel initially did not want Wooten and Frank Clarke to stay in the same hotel as their White teammates, but then agreed to have them both stay together, after the school’s Athletic Director and head coach Dale Ward contended they were not going to change their philosophy on not separating their players.⁴⁶

The arms of Jim Crow stretched beyond the south. As an example, during a road game to Manhattan, Kansas Colorado prepared for a matchup against Kansas State University. Wooten and eight other teammates visited a drugstore to get a soda. Wooten was denied service. One of his teammates stated, “You can’t sit in here, we are not going

⁴⁵ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author. Arano became the godfather of Wooten’s oldest daughter.

⁴⁶ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author. Howard Barry, “Tight Orange Bowl Battle Seen,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 January 1957, C1.

to sit in here either,” and the group of players left the store. Salt Lake City, Utah was not open to the rooming of players of different races, as players from Colorado found out in a visit to The University of Utah in November 1956. Colorado practiced assigning football players by position and not their racial makeup. As had been common practice at other schools, Black players stayed with each other and the same for White players. Wooten remembered, “Our athletic director and coach took the same stance. Our guys are going to play and be in the city and room. We don’t room our black guys with black guys. We room our guys according to position. If you guys don’t want us there, we will get back on the plane to Boulder.” Needless to say, the contest took place with Colorado winning 21-7.⁴⁷ In all, John Wooten had a very successful time at the University of Colorado. He finished as an All-American, and member of the Big Seven Conference first-team his senior year. In 1959, he graduated from the University of Colorado with a degree in History.

When the Browns drafted Wooten in 1959, he was unable to escape the racism widely associated with the South. The opposition to integrated grade schools, and the drive to keep segregated neighborhoods illustrated issues of racism crossed the lines of the playing fields, and into their communities away from the stadium. Yet, after Wooten joined the NFL, he was pleased that Browns’ head coach, Paul Brown, did not easily bow to racial segregation. As Wooten attests, “We were fortunate from the fact that Paul Brown said to the NFL, I’m not going to cities where my players are going to be separated or segregated, can’t stay in a hotel. We are going to either travel as a team, or

⁴⁷ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

we are not going to travel at all.” The Cleveland Browns belief in equality was challenged when the team made a trip to Dallas, Texas for a game against the Dallas Cowboys in 1961.

The attitude of team unity across racial lines had been influenced by Jim Brown’s discussion with the Browns brass about internal separation amongst the team, and the issues it caused. Wooten recalled, “When we came into Dallas, our ritual was always to have a Saturday evening dinner, then go to a movie as a team. We didn’t do that in Dallas. Back in the sixties the movie house was segregated. Therefore the whole team decided not to go.” The team eventually retreated to the hotel. Wooten also noted, “Back in those days you could put money in your television to sit and watch the movies that would come on. We would get a handful, or bag of quarters to watch them in our room. We had pay-per view TV.” Despite the living restrictions, Wooten, Brown and Mitchell played at a high level. From 1959, when Wooten joined the team, to 1962, Jim Brown was selected All-Pro three times, and Bobby Mitchell had been chosen twice. Their success as running backs can be attributed to Wooten’s skill, as their later work in the NIEU attested, their on-field success made their friendships off it much easier.⁴⁸

In Cleveland, the Black players on the Browns were organized as a family unit as they not only interacted with each other during practice and team gatherings, but spent a great deal of time with each other off the field. The fraternizing extended into training

⁴⁸ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Past Buffalo Greats,” 2010 Colorado Football Information Guide & Record Books, (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2010) 399; *Off My Chest*, 160-162.

camp as well. Coach Paul Brown remembered one offseason most of the African American players were eating on one side of the dining hall. Despite efforts to keep a cohesive group of players, these kinds of separate associations continued during the season as many of them continued to eat lunch together. The bonds Black players exhibited was an example of how those with similar interests and shared histories associated with each other on the Browns. As John Wooten noted, “We always got together on Friday nights and sat and talk about the game.” There was a solidarity and fellowship among these men that also existed in their work with Black folks in Cleveland.⁴⁹

John Wooten, John Brown and Jim Shorter created a relationship with many of the Black people in the city. For Wooten, it was fostered as a member of the Cleveland Community Action for Youth Project (CAYP), and as a substitute teacher at Addison Junior High School. John Brown, was an offensive lineman for the Cleveland Browns, an affiliate of the NIEU, and was intimately involved in the Hough area as he worked at Addison Junior High School and was also a home visitor within the area. In Brown’s first visit to a home in Hough, he said, “I got sick. I saw five people in one room, in filth. I had to go back to my supervisor for a reorientation lecture.” Jim Shorter was also a substitute teacher at Addison during the offseason teaching social studies and health classes. As members of the Cleveland Browns, these men were given a certain respect amongst many residents and inspired a willingness amongst community members to be

⁴⁹ *PB: The Paul Brown Story*, 244; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; The Browns were 7-5, 8-3-1, and 8-5-1. The latter record was the first season the NFL changed from a 12-game season to a 14-game season.

open to the Union's agenda. One person, who served as an example of this outreach during the Union's genesis was Sababa Akili, a student at Addison Junior High School in 1960⁵⁰

Addison Junior High School was located at 1725 East 79th Street in the Hough area. Akili remembered the school was "rowdy" and "buck wild". If any of the youth were to misbehave, a "group of brutes...terrorize[d]" the students. Also, if students were late to class, these men round up all the students and take them into the auditorium and paddle them as a means of discipline. Corporal punishment was legal at the time and was used to encourage them to be punctual. Akili remembered that many of his friends went "to jail for either car theft, robbery...some of them would get killed. It was that kind of atmosphere in the community." Another teenage friend, James Ford, not in high school, was shot in the head and killed in the parking lot of an "after hours spot." The violence on the streets also found its way into the school. There were many fights amongst students, and in other cases school administrators were attacked. One of the principals of Addison was "knocked out" by a student.⁵¹

Sababa Akili considered the Hough area a "northern cesspool of misery." It was a poor community that had been overrun by White merchants who charged exorbitant prices in grocery stores, and high rent for tenements that were infested with roaches and

⁵⁰ "Wooten Joins Staff of Hough Area CAY Project," *Call and Post*, 25 January 1964, 5A; Dave Brady, "Jim Brown Maps Plan For Economic Revolution," *The Washington Post*, 6 March 1966, C4; Interview with Sababa Akili, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 20, 2012, Atlanta, Georgia. Recording in possession of author.

⁵¹ Interview with Sababa Akili, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 20, 2012, Atlanta, Georgia. Recording in possession of author; Sababa Akili was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi on November 30, 1947. His family moved to Cleveland, Ohio in 1956 to escape the racism of the south, only to face many of the same issues they sought to avoid prior to their move.

rats. There was a high crime rate, and many single parent homes. Also, many of the youth by the eighth grade, had given up on school and furthering their education. Akili mentioned they saw going as a “trick,” because the things they were taught in school did not match their reality. For young Hough residents, they did not know of the opportunities that existed beyond their community, thus, had no desire to aspire to better lives. What changed the focus for many of the adolescents at Addison, and Akili in particular was the arrival of John Wooten and Jim Shorter in the spring of 1960.⁵²

On Wooten and Shorter’s first day, one of Akili’s classmates said, “Hey man they got some Cleveland Browns players teaching in the school.” Akili asked, “Well do they have any paddles?” They did not. What Wooten and Shorter brought was a desire to understand what was going on in the school, as “they talked to everyone” and dealt with the students “like they were human beings.” Wooten served as the health teacher for Akili, who had gained the reputation of a lollygagger when it came to his schoolwork. When the Browns offensive lineman scheduled a paper on mental illness, he had very low expectations for the Mississippi native. Wooten assumed Akili turned in an essay that covered the basics such as the different levels that affect humans. What he received was a paper that examined imbeciles and IQ level. Shocked, Wooten, with Shorter, met with Akili and told him he did not expect to see the material he covered. Wooten told him, “I looked at your grades you should be an A-B student, what’s with all these D’s and F’s

⁵² Ibid.

you getting?” Akili responded “Man, this stuff is boring! Stuff in this school, and the life that we live don’t match up.” Wooten told him “You can do better.”⁵³

What Wooten provided Akili from that meeting onward was exposure to different life experiences outside of Hough as many of the Browns players lived in Black middle class communities like Kinsman and Shaker Heights. He provided him a job cutting his lawn, along those of other Browns teammates Jim Brown and Bobby Mitchell, as well as his brother in-law Arnold Pinkney. Akili’s relationship with Wooten set him on the “right track.” As he admitted, “With the mind that I had, I would have been one of the sickest criminals in America or locked up forever.” In all, Wooten’s time at Addison led to a lifelong friendship between the two even as Sababa Akili went on to East High School and helped form Afro Set, a Black nationalist organization in Cleveland. His interactions with Akili were also a precursor to the work the Union did addressing the issues of poverty with young adolescents with their jobs programs.⁵⁴

Yet, during the offseason of 1962, an event occurred that permanently altered the Cleveland Browns team and the future of the NIEU. Bobby Mitchell was traded to the Washington Redskins for Ernie Davis, the first overall selection in the NFL draft, and also the Heisman Trophy winner, the first African American to receive the award. This particular transaction greatly impacted the team dynamics, in part because although Davis was a welcome addition to the team, his battle with leukemia prevented him from ever playing a single down for the Cleveland Browns. Ironically, however, Mitchell’s

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; “Afro Art Shop Hints Sabotage,” *Call and Post*, 22 June 1968, 3A; Alvin Ward, “Akil Claims He’s Political Prisoner,” 24 May 1969, 16A.

departure to the Washington Redskins ultimately had a positive impact on the later expansion of the NIEU, because the friendships that Mitchell formed on the Cleveland Browns team eventually inspired him to expand the NIEU's activities in Washington, D.C., a topic that will be explored in the next chapter.⁵⁵

The Mitchell/Davis trade was not the only significant development that occurred for the Cleveland Browns during the 1962 offseason. Jim Shorter, a defensive back from Detroit Mercy, also joined the team. Shorter was born in Montgomery, Alabama on June 8, 1939, one of fourteen children. His family moved to Pontiac, Michigan while he was a youth, and he later attended Detroit Mercy, a private Roman Catholic coed university in Detroit, Michigan. Shorter played running back and majored in education while at the school. On the football field he was considered an offensive threat, and his speed is what the Browns sought to utilize on the defensive side of the ball. As a rookie with the Browns, Shorter spent some time on the injured reserve list due to a "deep wart" he had to get removed from the bottom of his foot, which led the Browns to place him on waivers, as they had to reach their limit on thirty-six players. He was placed on injured reserve to help him recover from foot surgery, and also free a spot on the active roster.

Despite the early problems, Shorter was the type of player the Browns coaching staff believed would help the team win a championship. Notwithstanding high expectations, the Browns went 7-6-1 missing the playoffs again for the fourth consecutive year. After the season Jim Shorter called a former high school teammate from Pontiac, Walter Beach III. Shorter informed him of the team's need for defensive

⁵⁵ "Ernie Davis Deal Preceded Draft," *New York Times*, 16 December 1961, 30; Ernie Davis died on May 18, 1963.

backs and encouraged Beach to reach out to Browns' management. So Beach wrote Paul Brown about the chance to workout with the team during its training camp to vie for a position with the ball club. This notice from the head coach served as the opportunity Beach awaited to rejuvenate his professional football career. He made the squad, but even that accomplishment did not come without its own racial obstacles.⁵⁶

Walter Beach III was born January 31, 1933 in Pontiac, Michigan to Walter Beach, Jr. and Tranquilla K. Beach, a birth he considers "highborn and well bred," a family motto that encouraged high self-esteem. He had a great sense of pride enhanced by his relationship with his great grandparents and grandparents. In all, Pontiac embodied segregation with a small Black population living on the southwest side of the city. Many of the "colored" citizens were attracted to the city to obtain one of the automobile jobs with General Motors, Fisher Body Auto Plant and the Wilson Foundry. Economic opportunities were limited to the auto industry or domestic jobs. The racial divide in the city was demarcated by Orchard Lake Road. However, in order for Beach and other Black children to attend Washington Junior High School, they had to cross this road. This is where he learned about racism first-hand, as he and many of his Black friends "had to endure less than peaceful daily journeys." Yet, the Beach family provided an

⁵⁶ United Press International, "Detroit U. 34-8 Victor: Titans Rout Xavier of Ohio—Gross and Shorter Star," *New York Times*, 30 September 1961, 19; William Jackson, "Cleveland Browns 1962 Edition," *Call and Post*, 4 August 1962, 6C; "Cleveland 'Still in Running': Brown Has Faith in Team," *The Washington Post*, 17 October 1962, B11; "Six Tan Stars Seen Surviving The Browns Final Squad Cut," *Call and Post*, 8 September 1962, 7C; Aside from Brown and Wooten, there were four other African Americans on the team: Ernie Green, John Brown, Tom Wilson, and Charley Scales. These members of the Browns were not intimately involved with the work of the Union. While Jim Shorter was a charter member of the Union, he died in 2001, and was unable to be interviewed for this project. However, everyone I spoke to relayed the message that Shorter was one of the Union's hardest workers in Cleveland and Washington, D.C.

environment that encouraged young Walter and his siblings to think critically and have discipline, lessons that were not easy for him to grasp, but served a strong foundation for him later in life.⁵⁷

One particular incident in Mounds, Illinois impacted his life immensely. During the mid-1940s, Beach's mother had taken him and his sister there for a summer vacation to visit family. While playing outside, one of his cousins challenged a group of White boys to race Beach, ensuring that he "could run faster than all of them." The race took place and Beach won. One of the White kids responded, "Niggers should not be able to run faster than White people." This enraged Beach, who approached the youth and punched him in the face, giving him a bloody nose, after which a "youthful scuffle" ensued. After the skirmish was quashed, the children continued to play for a little while then Beach returned to his aunt's home.⁵⁸

While eating dinner later that evening, his cousin's friend came to the house to alert the family that there was a mob of Whites gathering to reprimand Beach for accosting the White boy earlier in the day. His older cousins, Bessie, Doris, and Ethel put his sister's dress on him and took him past the mob and out of Mounds to escape the mob as they prepared to lynch Beach. It was the last time they visited Mounds, Illinois. This particular incident had a lasting effect on Beach. He challenged the racist barbs of his opponent with anger, and it nearly cost him his life. What is most interesting is the only

⁵⁷ Walter Beach, "Beginnings" in *Hebkhu*, unpublished document, 2012; Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

way Beach escaped death was to wear his sister's clothes. The family unit, which had been such a strong force in his development, served to be his saving grace. This confrontation with racism served as a reminder of how society expected Black males to act. If one did not prescribe to subservience, he was punished. Understanding the role Beach, Jr. played in his life, Beach III did not easily bow to racial injustice. The incident in Mounds served as a precursor to how race and athletic competition played an integral part in Beach's life.⁵⁹

While a youth, Beach was very much involved in athletics. He had "known nothing but Caucasian coaches," at Pontiac Central High School where he received numerous accolades as a standout in football and track, at one point holding the state record in the 100-yard dash. While he was given "star" treatment, a hall pass to do as he wished during classes, and extended deadlines on assignments, he was excluded from many of the school's functions because of his race. Yet, Beach "never made the mistake of seeking a rational explanation about being excluded." As Beach later explained, "racism is irrational, and part of living with a double consciousness is realizing incompatible realities of black folks and white folks living in racially divided America."⁶⁰

Upon graduating from Pontiac Central in 1952, Beach postponed going to college and volunteered for the United States Air Force where he served four years. Upon receiving an honorable discharge, there was an article in the Pontiac local newspaper that raised a question about where Beach would play college football. Both the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and Michigan State tried to recruit him to attend their schools.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

However Bill Kelly, the head coach at Central Michigan University (CMU) was successful after he personally visited the Beach's home and met with his parents. In a discussion with them, "You can be a big fish in a little pond, or a little fish in a big pond." Walter Beach, Jr. jokingly responded, "June," the nickname for Beach III, "will be a big fish wherever he go." They exchanged further pleasantries and talked about what Central Michigan offered the younger Beach. The meeting pleased Beach's mother who viewed him as "a good man" and as a family they decided he would attend the school in Mount Pleasant, declining visits to other schools. For him, he saw the small school as a place he could get an education, by utilizing the GI Bill and grant-in-aid. Yet Beach's time at CMU was not without incident.⁶¹

In his first introduction to the school, prior to the start of camp, Coach Kelly asked him "Walt, you don't date White girls do you?" A bit amazed by the audacity of the question, Beach answered honestly and told him "No...but I am a man." The coach wanted to know if Beach was interested in relationships with White coeds. As Beach denied any inclinations for interracial relationships, Kelly hinted it was in his best interest to only seek Black women. With his tutorial into the Central Michigan race relations, Beach was given an on-field lesson of the racial hierarchy on the playing field.

⁶¹ Barry Howard, "Collegians Add Power and Speed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 July 1960, C1; Associated Press, "Beach Joins All-Stat Squad," *New York Times*, 6 August 1960, 16; Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, October 24, 2012, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author. Kelly coached against Beach in high school and kept up with him after his high school playing days.

In his first training camp in the summer of 1956, Beach was slated as the fourth string running back. As the first string started practicing, Kelly asked, “Where is Beach?” To which Beach replied, “Here I am.” The head coach then instructed him to practice with the first team. However, the following three days, Beach was assigned back to the fourth string by his position coach, who operated under the belief no Black player could start over White players, especially as a freshman. When Kelly became aware of this, he called them together, and on a bullhorn pronounced “This is Walter Beach in case you all did not know. He is the starting left half back. Every time I come out here, I want him to be on the first unit.” This was Kelly’s way of preventing any direct conflict with his assistant coaches. From that day, Beach was one of the starting wingbacks for the Central Michigan Chippewas.⁶²

When it came to his education at Central Michigan, Beach was caught off guard when team officials scheduled him for twelve credit hours, fewer than he expected. When he asked his coaches about the setup, he was told “We try to keep all the athletes with low registration [hours] so they don’t have any academic problems.” With 124 hours needed to graduate, Beach assessed it would take him six years to graduate. He refused to take 12 hours during his time at the school, and signed up for 24 credits the following semester. He did so for the next three years and he graduated on time.⁶³

On road games, Walter Beach faced segregation, as there was restrictions on where he ate and slept, which in effect impacted his teammates. On a road game to

⁶² Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, October 24, 2012, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

⁶³ Ibid.

Southern Illinois University, Beach entered a restaurant, and to the dismay of the owners they told his coach, that he could not eat there. Coach Kelly did not want to ostracize one of his players because of the discrimination promoted by White businessmen so they left and sought food elsewhere. After eating, the team went to the hotel they were slated to stay. In preparing to check the team in to their rooms, Coach Kelly was told by the owner of the hotel, they did not allow African Americans either. He returned to the bus and told his players, “We are going over here to the practice field, practice, then we will shower at the high school and eat. Then we are going to sleep on the bus.” Beach responded angrily, “Sleep on the bus?” Kelly countered, “Yeah, they don’t allow Blacks in the hotel.” The racial conflicts did not stop there for Beach, as many opponents called him “nigger”, but many of his teammates backed him and supported him. The Pontiac native grew to understand that not all White people suffered from the “sickness” of racism. Despite the limitations, Beach had a successful career at Central Michigan graduating in 1960 with a degree in secondary education with a focus in sociology and history.⁶⁴

In all, because of his stellar play at CMU, Walter Beach was selected to play for the College All-Star team that played the NFL champion Baltimore Colts in the summer of 1960. That year he was also selected in a few drafts: the New York Giants of the NFL, the Oakland Raiders of the AFL, and the Hamilton Tigers of the Canadian Football League (CFL). That summer, Beach chose to go to training camp in Connecticut with the

⁶⁴ Ibid.; Beach noted despite the limitations on hours he coaches wanted him to take, it should not suggest the academic success of CMU student-athletes was not taken seriously, but with the time commitment for practice and games, football coaches did not want their players swamped with academic work during the season as players had a Wednesday deadline for all homework assignments.

Giants. While in Los Angeles, California for an exhibition game against the Los Angeles Rams, he received a phone call from Lou Saban, the head coach of the Boston Patriots of the American Football League. Unbeknownst to Beach the Giants had placed him on waivers, and any team was free to claim him. Coach Saban told him the Giants would give an official notice the following day. The purpose of his call was to let Beach know the Patriots wanted to sign him to a contract to play for them in their inaugural season. Beach agreed to terms and caught a plane from Los Angeles to Fairfield, Connecticut. What influenced this interesting twist of events was Saban remembered Beach's play at Central Michigan University while he was a coach at Southern Illinois where the two played against each other for four years, the same school where he experienced racial discrimination. During Beach's second year with the Patriots, Saban was fired during the season and Mike Holovak took leadership of the team. The man who was instrumental in bringing the CMU alum to the team was gone.⁶⁵

During the 1962 training camp, the Patriots were scheduled for an exhibition game in New Orleans, Louisiana, a city plagued by racial segregation in public and private facilities. According to Beach, the team was given an itinerary for the weekend where the African American players on the team were lodging at one place, and the White players were at another. Beach protested this act and called all the Black players together stating they not play under such conditions. He went to Holovak to call a team meeting to address their displeasure with the prescribed schedule that embraced the "Jim

⁶⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 1 October 1960, 23; Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

Crow” laws of the city. During this meeting, Beach recounted he did all the talking on behalf of the Black players, one of the main reasons he earned the reputation as the clubhouse lawyer. The following morning, “they gave me a ticket back to Pontiac, Michigan. They sent my butt home.” Beach sat out the year in Michigan. He wrote Paul Brown about playing for Cleveland, and in April of 1963, Beach signed with the Browns.⁶⁶ While he was given an opportunity to continue his career in professional football, there was a belief amongst Browns management he was a troublemaker, which garnered him the reputation of one “walking to a different drummer.”⁶⁷

His on-field presence with the Browns caught the attention of Jim Brown, who came to Beach’s defense when he needed it the most. “Forgetting race or personal friendship,” Brown noted “the greater your value to the franchise, the more preferential the treatment.” The wisdom of this statement was made evident through the relationship between Jim Brown and Walter Beach III. Brown’s star power and significance to the team was an important reason Beach was part of the team’s championship run. They were linked because of their ties to the Cleveland Browns, but their outlook on the world and racial matters led to a friendship that allowed them to work together in addressing issues of economic and social equality on and off the field. Interestingly both men did not accept Jim Crow measures and were well aware of the Black freedom struggle in existence. The summer prior to Beach coming to the Browns, Jim Brown told a group of Baltimore, Maryland residents that when the team visited Dallas for the upcoming

⁶⁶ Associated Press, “Browns Sign Four,” *The Washington Post*, 16 April 1963, A20.

⁶⁷ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Associated Press, “Browns Sign Four,” *The Washington Post*, 16 April 1963, A20.

season, they would not accept the accommodations provided because of Jim Crow laws. Brown commented, “It is unfortunate that the people in Texas have taken such a position in regard to our accommodations...but you can be sure we have no intention of accepting it.” He added, “It just wouldn’t be right for us to do so in the face of the daily sacrifice being made by college students all over the South in their sit-in demonstrations.” Other Black members of the team, like Prentice Gautt, Jamei Caleb, and A.D. Williams supported their teammates comments. It demonstrated the unity players had regarding issues pertaining to civil rights and the Black freedom struggle. Thus, space on the Cleveland Browns was prime for Walter Beach, as he found greater acceptance amongst these men, since they were not threatened by his political positions and worldview.⁶⁸

In his first year, Beach served on the “taxi squad” for the Browns most of the 1963 season. While with the team, he affectionately earned the name “Doc.” The origin of his nickname was two-fold. First, he was the oldest rookie to ever play in the NFL at thirty years old. Thus, when he came to the Browns, he was older than many of the players on the team. Also, when there were issues about race, his teammates went to him “because I was always reading, and always making philosophical statements. So they began to start calling me ‘Doc Beach’. So if you ever wanted to know something they

⁶⁸ *Out of Bounds*, 77; “We’ll Accept No Jim Crow Housing,” Says Jim Brown,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, 3 June 1961, 4B; Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

would go ‘Ask Doc Beach,’” a moniker which influenced his reputation as an intellectual.⁶⁹

Despite his forthrightness to speak on racial matters, which was evident when he was with the Patriots, Walter Beach was also well received by many of his White teammates on the Browns. Bernie Parrish, a defensive back with the team, had a positive recollection of Beach. “I liked Walter...this was when the black consciousness movement was beginning. Walter was reading the Koran and things like that. He was very smart, smart guy. But he never tried to rub your nose in his politics.” Parrish continued, “Some of the other teams he was with maybe were uncomfortable with him because of his interest in black politics, but he was great with us.”⁷⁰ Team chemistry was an important element to the success of any NFL team. The adage “one spoiled apple can spoil the whole bunch” was very true. Yet, for a player to address unfair treatment on a team could start a racial war many coaches and owners did not want to face.

With the civil rights movement blossoming during the 1960s, any attention brought to a team for strife between White and Black players, or unfair treatment of Black players was not good for business. Thus, players, regardless of their race, were encouraged by management to be cognizant of their actions, on and off the field. Jim Kanicki, a defensive lineman with the Browns, already had a relationship with Beach, as both of their families knew each other from living in the Pontiac, Michigan area. “He could be outspoken about civil rights, and maybe that was why sometimes we heard he

⁶⁹ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

⁷⁰ Terry Pluto, *When All the World was Browns Town*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 103

was a rebel who created problems with black players when he was with other teams.”

Yet, in reflecting on how Beach meshed with the Browns, Kanicki had a different perspective. “Walter was a good man, a heady individual who thought about things. We had a lot of black leaders on our team, such as Jim Brown and John Wooten. The Browns were always ahead of most teams when it came to race relations, so Walter probably felt comfortable with us.” Bill Glass, a defensive lineman with the Browns, added “Walter came to us with a bad reputation, but I respected him. He was a nice guy, and frankly, there were a number of players on our team who were more radical than Walter Beach.” Despite the talk that circulated about Beach prior to his arrival, the players on the Browns welcomed him.⁷¹

While Jim Shorter suffered from an injury, Beach played in the last three games of the season. Due to the team’s success and his play on the field, Beach believed he was the heir to the position. Shorter was placed on waivers by the Browns due to a leg injury he suffered, and later signed with the Washington Redskins. However, his decision to sign in D.C. did not prevent him from working with the Union in Cleveland, he also helped form the Union chapter in the city. During the training camp of 1964, Beach prepared to be one of the team’s starting defensive backs and he became the first African American to start at that position for the team.⁷²

⁷¹ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Terry Pluto, *When all the World was Browns Town: Cleveland’s Browns and the Championship Season of ’64*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 103; For more on Bernie Parrish see Bernie Parrish, *They Call It A Game*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1971).

⁷² Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; United Press International,

However, this accomplishment was threatened prior to the beginning of the season. Before a training camp practice held at Berea College that summer, the Browns told “Doc Beach” he had been put on waivers. He recalled, “I went upstairs and packed my bag and was getting ready to leave.” While in his room gathering his belongings, Jim Brown came by and told him, “Let’s go to practice Doc!” He was unaware Beach was dismissed from the team. He replied, “They just put me on waivers man.” Brown refusing to believe what Beach told him, responded, “Come on let’s go to practice.” Beach growing agitated retorted, “Man I’m telling you they just put me on waivers. They’ve fired me. I just had the meeting with Modell, the owners, the coaches.” In disbelief, Brown countered, “Come on man, quit bullshitting.” Beach responded, “Jim, What am I doing? You see I’m packing my shit. Got my suitcase, and I’m putting my stuff in my suitcase. They got a bus that is going to take me into town, so I can go home.” With a sense of urgency, Brown told him to stay put and walked out of the locker room. He came back in forty-five minutes and said to Beach, “Let’s go to practice.” Bewildered, Beach asked, “What are you talking about. I told you they have put me on waivers.” “Let’s go to practice,” Brown demanded. Beach quickly replied, “I ain’t going. They’ve told me I’ve been fired.” Brown grabbed him by the arm and told him once more to get ready for practice. Beach left his room, walked out of the Berea College dormitory, and headed across campus to the locker room. When he arrived at his locker, he noticed his

“Browns Enroll 3 Backs,” *The New York Times*, 13 June 1964, 17; George J. Dunmore, “Negro Rookies May Make Browns Roll,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 September 1964, 15.

things were put back. Beach remembered “my shoulder pads and name were back over the locker, so I dressed.”⁷³

Being released from the team after putting in a great amount of physical and mental work created a brief period of difficulty for “Doc Beach.” He was uncertain of his future as a professional athlete. Reflecting on the back and forth with Brown, Beach stated “I got on a uniform and the owner had told me I had been fired, and Jim telling me to ‘come on man, let’s go to practice.’ So I have on my uniform and I don’t know what to do.” Yet Beach followed Brown’s advice and proceeded outside and no one from the coaching staff, or owner Art Modell said anything to him as he participated in team drills. When they got together into groups, they called the depth chart, “Bernie Parrish, Ross Fichtner, Larry Benz, and Walter Beach.” Those four were named the starters in the defensive backfield. A man who was once cut from the squad became a starter in the matter of an hour.⁷⁴

Many years later at an alumni meeting for the Browns, Beach asked Jim Brown about the incident, “What did you tell them? I appreciated it.” Brown replied, “Every year you all want me to do the best I can. Put all my energy in so we can have a championship football team. However, when it comes time for you to make that kind of commitment, you don’t do it. Walt Beach is the best cornerback we got. Why would you send him home? If you are going send the best guy home, you telling me you don’t want

⁷³ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

⁷⁴ United Press International, “Browns Activate Beach,” *New York Times*, 1 December 1963, 256; Associated Press, “Browns Activate Walter Beach, Sideline Shorter,” *The Washington Post*, 1 December 1963, C6; United Press International, “Browns Cut Shorter,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 August 1964, C2; Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

a championship. You don't want the best." With the Browns' best player vouching for Beach's abilities and illustrating the error of their decision, Beach's tenure with the team was saved. Brown told Beach, "I didn't do it because you were my friend. I got a lot of friends. I did it because you can play and help the team. That's why I spoke up. If you couldn't play I would have just given you some money and let you go home." Beach believed "stacking," a discriminatory practice of having a certain number of players based on their race at a particular position was the reason behind his initial release. In Beach's view, in order for a Black man to make a team, he did not have to be the second best; he needed to "be *the* best." Positions such as quarterback, center, middle linebacker, and safety were pinned as positions for intellectually capable players. Many coaches, owners, and fans believed for many years only White players had the capacity to fill those spots.⁷⁵

Beach remembered Calvin Lang, a cornerback from Florida A&M University (FAMU), as one player who sought to make the team in 1965, and who was greatly impacted by the practice of stacking. From what Beach remembered, the FAMU graduate was more in competition with him, than the other guys at camp, specifically the White defensive backs on the team. With Lang in camp, Beach concluded, "All of them are challenging me for my job, they are not challenging him." He held the belief the Browns

⁷⁵ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; For more on stacking see: Michael E. Lomax, "The African American Experience in Professional Football" in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1999), 163-178; Richard Lewis, Jr., "Racial Position Segregation: A Case Study of Southwest Conference Football, 1978 and 1989" in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (March 1995), 431-446; Lawrence M. Kahn, "Discrimination in Professional Sports: A Survey of the Literature," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April 1991), 395-418.

were not going to sign two African Americans to the defensive backfield. Beach remembered, “When they placed him on waivers, they told him he was not fast enough.” Beach and Lang ran the forty-yard dash in 4.3 seconds and 4.5 seconds respectively. However, none of the White players in camp ran it in five seconds. Beach noticed Lang was distraught over the news. He told him, “They not telling you that you not fast enough, they telling you that you not faster than me.” It was a bitter reality for Lang and a host of Black athletes, but as Beach said, “That’s how the system was run.” Black players were not provided equitable opportunities to make professional football teams. In the history of professional sports, owners and coaches had the prerogative to decide whom they wanted on their teams. Due to a quota system, the notion professional sports were based on a meritocracy was untrue. In Lang’s case, he had to outshine Beach or not make the team.⁷⁶

While Beach was able to outlast any of Lang’s efforts to surpass him on the depth chart, the Pontiac, Michigan native still encountered problems, some with Browns fans and some with Browns management. Once after a game, a White male and his son, around “five or six years old,” were waiting to get players autographs. When Beach appeared, the father asked his son if he knew who he was. The son replied, “yeah, he’s a nigger.” As a personal obligation to sign autographs, he signed the young boy’s item. Others asked him why he chose to oblige, he responded, “My job ain’t to raise his son, he got to raise his son, and that’s the way he is raising his son.” This incident illustrates

⁷⁶ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; The forty-yard dash was a measure of a player’s speed.

some of the absurdities African American athletes faced. Thus, keeping perspective of his position in society was key for the Central Michigan graduate. “The stands would be packed, they cheer for you...they not cheering for Walter Beach, they cheering for the Cleveland Browns.” It was clear that socially accepted positions mattered to him as historically, Whites often prescribed non-threatening roles of African American males. Throughout the history of the United States, often times when in the company of Whites, Blacks were a perceived threat toward Whites. It was presumed African American males in particular would commit heinous crimes that involved bodily harm or sexual violence. Unfortunately, these beliefs followed Black male professional athletes once they left the confines of the playing field.⁷⁷

Thus, as a way to combat the racist ideologies that permeated America, and Cleveland in particular, Beach and other Browns players paid great attention to their presentation on and off the field and embodied what John Wooten called “a seriousness” in their public demeanor since “most of us had a college education, and were graduates. I felt that in itself pushed us to a different level on how we carried ourselves. If you saw pictures of us back then at a home game or on the road, we were always coat and tie, attaché cases.” He added, “That was the way we went about business. We did that for a reason because we wanted to show to the public that we weren’t just a bunch of football players, scalawag type of guys. That we were college educated men.” These men were cognizant of their appearance and often projected a serious demeanor when in public. They recognized the image politics of Black men. The laughing buffoon or “happy-go-

⁷⁷ Interview with Walter Beach III, in-person interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

lucky-negro,” they were not. As Black males who graduated from their respective institutions of higher learning, placed them in a small group many Americans regardless of racial makeup did not claim membership. When it came to their “blackness,” they were in a category of their own, especially since the majority of African Americans in the 1960s had not attended college. Thus, in a “talented tenth” fashion, they saw themselves as representatives of African Americans, and rightfully so. While many Whites were unwilling to give the same encouragement and support to African American players on and off the field, there was a different sentiment among Blacks. As Beach remembered, “the Black community loved us!” This was largely because of the connection they had with Browns players who lived in the same neighborhoods. In all, there was a connection to other African Americans for professional athletes.⁷⁸

Despite their appeals to image politics, many in the media, and fans alike, labeled some of the Black players “militant,” a stigma particularly reserved for Jim Brown for the attitude and demeanor he exhibited. Interestingly, this description of him was not a widely held belief until the publishing of his memoir, *Off My Chest* before the 1964 season. Doubleday, the publishers of the work described the book as:

All his life, Jim Brown has been running hard and saying little. He breaks his reserve in OFF MY CHEST, telling what it is like to come up against giant linemen who, game after game, are out to destroy him. He speaks out—bluntly—about his relations with former Cleveland coach Paul Brown and with the men he plays with and against. He attacks the advertising business for its treatment of Negro athletes...forcefully expresses his positive views about race relations in general...and tells how

⁷⁸ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author. The “talented tenth” is a concept developed by sociologist W.E.B. DuBois discussed in his article “The Negro Problem” published in 1903.

it feels to sign autographs in a hotel lobby and then be turned out of its dining room.⁷⁹

Prior to its publication, many fans of the Browns, especially Whites, had feelings of ambivalence towards Jim Brown. They knew without him, their team would not have much success. However, his outspokenness on racial matters, his support of the Black nationalist organization the Nation of Islam (NOI), and his relationship with vocal proponents of the NOI Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, did not sit well with many.⁸⁰

Brown provided an assessment of the Muslim organization in the first chapter of Part III, titled “The free, white, and twenty-one Negro.” In it he mentioned when Whites assessed the religious group, they defined them as “extremists” and the “counterpart” to the White terrorist organization, the Ku Klux Klan. Brown countered this view. For him they were not as radical as many believed, and were not in the same category as the Klan. He argued, “They don’t stalk into the night and burn crosses and terrorize people and flog them...they preach against drinking, against smoking, against adultery...The Muslims preach neatness, cleanliness, and courtesy. Where is the parallel between them and the Ku Klux Klan?” He added the beliefs of the NOI were “not one iota different” from those Blacks at “the lowest economic class to the business and professional

⁷⁹ Display Ad 103, *Chicago Tribune*, 22 November 1964, M11; Display Ad 387, *New York Times*, 22 November 1964, BR52.

⁸⁰ Associated Press, “Bomb Threat Made Against Jim Brown,” *The Washington Post*, 23 September 1964, C4; Sid Ziff, “Jim Brown Reveals Cribbing Scandal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1964, B1.

level.”⁸¹ These particular comments received a great deal of attention, despite the majority of the autobiography was about his life in New York as an adolescent and student athlete, as well as his time with the Browns. Brown’s refusal to articulate disdain for the Black Muslims was not received well by some of the Browns’ fans. In all, the ballyhoo created over one chapter speaks volumes to the expectation Black athletes were to be meek or not have any opinions of their own creation. There were challenges to Brown’s ideas about the Nation of Islam, especially physical threats.⁸²

In September 1964, Brown appeared on the Mike Douglas Show on KYW-TV to promote *Off My Chest* and discuss some of the racial matters in his book. Before he arrived, the station received a bomb threat from a White woman who called Forest Fraser, the producer of the show. She told him if Brown discussed any of “the things that have been in the papers...we are going to bomb his home.” Police were dispatched to the station and surveyed Brown’s home on the east side of Cleveland. Despite the intimidation, he appeared on the show and there was no damage to the television studio or his home. Brown was asked about his interactions with the Nation of Islam and replied, “I am not one of the Muslims, yet I’m all for them because we Negroes need every possible element going for us. The more commotion, the better.” The promotion of disorder was something many civil rights strategists utilized to get their demands heard, often times played off more radical groups. In this particular case, the NOI represented

⁸¹ *Off My Chest*, 167.

⁸² *Off My Chest*, 167

the radical element in comparison to other organizations dedicated to the Black freedom struggle.⁸³

Off My Chest served as a precursor of Jim Brown's forthrightness when it came to the conditions that afflicted African Americans. Stan Isaacs, a *Newsday* columnist, noted in his book *Jim Brown: The Golden Year 1964*, Jim Brown was perceived by those outside of the Browns, as "indifferent about social injustices to less fortunate; that he was content with the world because he himself had made it big." The argument was "he had been like most successful black pro athletes, so silent publicly on the matter of race that he was almost regarded as an 'Uncle Thomas'—a successful Negro who was happy to get along with the white establishment." By 1964, there was no debate about where he stood.⁸⁴

As evidenced by Jim Brown's book, many of the Black Cleveland Browns players did not embrace attitudes of subservience to Whites. By 1964, with the civil rights movement in full swing, a fair number of Black male professional athletes refused to cower to Whites. They were unafraid to question beliefs about what Black men were allowed and not allowed to do; these gentlemen simply did as they chose. In Brown's opinion the NFL wanted "nice guy blacks, humble blacks, just-glad-to-be-there blacks, lower-pay, work-hard, say-the-sky-was-blue, the-sun-was-shining blacks. Blacks who wouldn't rock the status quo."⁸⁵ The assumption was African American players were to

⁸³ Stan Isaacs, *Jim Brown: The Golden Year 1964*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 58; Associated Press, "Bomb Threat Made Against Jim Brown," *The Washington Post*, 23 September 1964, C4.

⁸⁴ *Jim Brown: The Golden Year 1964*, 50

⁸⁵ Jim Brown with Steve Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, 55-56

be grateful they were given the opportunity to play in the National Football League.

Interestingly enough the Browns did not have such “Blacks.” As the Syracuse grad recalled,

My leadership with the Cleveland Browns, was based on me being an African American man that believed in freedom, equality, and justice, and that I was an adamant fighter against discrimination and racism. If you were an African American player coming to the Cleveland Browns, for the most part, you were going to be a part of that. We controlled our own territory, we wore suits and ties, we carried our business papers with us; we presented ourselves a certain way. We had a very classier approach of representing ourselves. That was very important to us. If you came in as a rookie, you didn’t come in and try to change the culture, in most cases you would join the culture.⁸⁶

Brown described the culture of respectability the players expected and the organization promoted. His relationship with Sidney Williams demonstrates the depth of how important personal and group representation was for African Americans on the team.⁸⁷

During the spring of 1964, the Green Bay Packers contacted Williams, an All-American linebacker from the historically Black institution Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. “Vince Lombardi called and asked me if I wanted to play, and I said ‘of course.’ I was excited and happy.” However, he never got the opportunity to play for them, as the Cleveland Browns selected him in the sixteenth round with the two-hundred twenty second pick in the 1964 NFL draft. Ironically, Cleveland was Williams’ favorite team as a child, since he was able to watch them on television on Sundays. For him it was

⁸⁶ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

“like dying and going to heaven. Here is a day I’ve been dreaming about all my life. I have an opportunity now. I have something I enjoy and I’m going to get paid for it.”⁸⁸

While a childhood dream was fulfilled, Williams had to prove himself on the squad, as the stacking problems that once hampered Walter Beach also affected him. Instead of the usual meritocracy he experienced at Southern University, one’s skill level was not often a predictor of playing time. As he remembered, “Most of the coaches in the NFL were from the South. That was a tough situation. It was not too bad on the Browns because of Jim Brown. Jim kept a whole lot of that stuff down because they needed him and he was an asset to the whole league.” Alluding to Brown’s ability to vouch for others like he did Beach, Williams recognized his own ability to play and the support of Jim Brown was critical to his opportunity to be with the team. It was hard for someone like Williams, a product of a historically Black college/university (HBCU), not to see his race as a reason for the lack of playing time.

From what Williams remembered, in 1964, there were only three Black linebackers in the NFL, one in Detroit, one in Green Bay and himself, as teams in the NFL were “not drafting Black linebackers to play...those were sacred positions. Quarterback, linebacker, free safety, and center. Those four positions were sacred for White boys.”⁸⁹ Williams noted, “You see these guys coming from all white schools, LSU, Ole Miss, Penn State, Notre Dame, and you look at yourself in comparison to them and you just shake your head. There were so many athletes of color who did not have a

⁸⁸ Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 24, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

chance to make the team because most of the Caucasian guys had no-cut contracts.”⁹⁰

According to the Shreveport, Louisiana native, teams had agreements with certain players, particularly Whites, a guaranteed number of years with this team. Often times, it included players who changed positions to ensure a roster spot. These types of maneuvers infuriated Williams. He added, “You cannot be converted from offense to defense to play that position. They did back in the twenties and thirties but at this time you were specializing in a position.”⁹¹ While early American football players played on offense and defense, by the 1960s, most people who played the game were only utilized at one position. Thus, in Williams’ viewpoint, another player who had not played the same position should not have affected his playing time. Despite the roadblocks in his way to make the team, Williams made a presence on the special teams units.⁹²

The culmination of the team’s efforts led them to a 10-3-1 record and after they won the Eastern Conference championship against New York Giants, 52-20, the Browns earned the chance to play in the 1964 NFL championship game against the Baltimore Colts. The game was played before 79,544 people, the second largest crowd for this sporting event. At this moment, the Cleveland Browns had not won a championship in ten years, and players and fans alike, wanted a victory. Now more than ever, Jim Brown deemed it necessary to remind his teammates not to get caught up in the hype of the game. As he mentioned, “We were very serious about our profession, and there was no fooling around...no dancing in the end zone.” He continued, “We were standing on our

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

image, our education, and on our future." During the nationally televised game, Sidney Williams made "silly faces" towards a camera that panned on him. This was an action that caught the ire of the Browns' captain, Jim Brown. He severely chastised Williams for the act, which he deemed highly unacceptable by the standards the players established for themselves. Brown told Williams, "We're on a mission here, we're being scrutinized, and we carry ourselves in a certain way. We're not clowns, shuffling, or uneducated. We're together, we play hard, and we want to be treated like professionals. So don't make faces on national TV!" In Brown's view Williams' antics put the spotlight on him and took attention away from the team. It reinforced the buffoon stereotype held by many White Americans. Despite the showboating, no love was lost between Brown and Williams as the underdog Browns defeated the Baltimore Colts 24-0. For the game, Jim Brown rushed for one hundred fourteen yards.⁹³

⁹³ While winning the championship with the Browns as a rookie, the Packers won the next three NFL championships. The last two were Super Bowl I and II, which marked the beginning of the Super Bowl era and the merger of the American Football League and National Football League. The record for the largest crowd for a NFL championship game was 85,693 in 1955 when the Cleveland Browns defeated the Los Angeles Rams 38-14. This game was Cleveland's last championship prior to 1964. For his efforts that year, Brown was awarded the Hickok Belt, a \$10,000 diamond-studded award that honored that year's professional athlete of the year. For more on the Browns championship win see: United Press International, "Browns Blank Colts: Collins Scores 3 TDs," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 28 December 1964, 25; "Browns Win Title; Whip Colts, 27 to 0," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1964, 1; George Strickler, "Browns Upset Colts for N.F.L. Title, 27-0," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1964, E1; "Browns Expect to Get About \$8,000 Apiece," *New York Times*, 28 December 1964, 41; "Brown Goes Over 100 Yards for 2nd Time," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 December 1964, 25; "Cleveland Blitz Leaves Colts in Ruins," *New York Times*, 28 December 1964, 41; "Colts Conquered, Browns Eager for All-Stars Next," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1964, E4; Jim Murray, "Colts Get a Horse!" *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 1964, B1; For coverage of Brown winning the Hickok Award see: United Press International, "Browns' Brown Wins S. Rae Hickok Award," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 January 1965, 21; United Press International, "Earns \$10,000 Belt: Jim Brown Edges Foyt to Win Athlete of Year Belt; Chance 3rd," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 January 1965, B6; United Press International, "Jim Brown Named Top Pro Athlete," *The Washington Post*, 25 January 1965, C2; United Press International, "Jim Brown Wins \$10,000 Belt," *Call and Post*, 6 February 1965,

While they won the “World” championship and received numerous accolades and fringe benefits for their accomplishments, some of the African American players on the Browns were aware their achievements did not end the trials and tribulations associated with racism. They recognized Black folks in the city grappled with inequities in housing and education, while police brutality was constant, and they simply did not have enough money to live as comfortable as they were allowed. When Jim Brown first arrived to Cleveland he was met with discrimination. He was denied an apartment in an all-White community. Brown did not look to be a civil rights pioneer by integrating a neighborhood. He simply had no desire to live amongst Whites especially if he was not received openly. All he wanted was a place near the Cleveland Browns practice facilities.⁹⁴

Williams settled on a home at 3277 East 147th Street in the Kinsman area, a predominantly Black community in the city with working and middle class families. One place he knew to avoid was “Little Italy,” a hub of many Italian Americans on the east side of the city where there had been many reports of assault on African Americans. Brown was well aware of what life meant once he stopped scoring touchdowns and was no longer within the confines of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. He was cognizant of race relations off the football field. “I could have scored twenty touchdowns Sunday afternoon; if I walked through Little Italy that evening I’d have been jumped. I’d have no 32 on my back, all they’d see was black.” Professional athlete or not, a Black man in

11B; *Third and Long*, directed by Theresa Moore (Chicago: Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011) DVD.

⁹⁴ Jim Brown, interview by Alex Haley, *Playboy*, February 1968, 60.

Cleveland was still considered a “nigger.” Walter Beach’s interaction with the young autograph seeker made that point evident. A Black man in Little Italy, or many predominantly White sections of Cleveland after working hours, was considered a prime target for a racial assault. At the advice of their other teammates, Sidney Williams and Jim Shorter became knowledgeable about residential issues when they joined the team, which was a major reason they both lived in the Kinsman area as well.⁹⁵

When it came to winning football games, there were not many racial incidents that caused disharmony amongst teams. However, there was one particular issue that caused some friction: Black players and their sexual relationships with White women. It was a critical factor in why there were not many interracial interactions for Browns players off the field. Brown noted in his autobiography *Out of Bounds*, if a Black man were with a White female it led him to “run into all kinds of trouble. If he gets anywhere around white men with her, fellow athletes or not, pretty soon that black man is going to get reminded that he is not free, that he’s still black in white men’s eyes, star on the field or not.” There were always constant reminders of the color of one’s skin.⁹⁶

The Black players on the team were well aware of the contradictions within team dynamics. Many White Americans, regardless of their national origins, frowned upon interracial dating and sexual relationships. Brown once told his teammates, “They don’t invite us to the parties and events with the pretty white girls, then we won’t go to those

⁹⁵ *Out of Bounds*, 66; A view of the Little Italy website at <http://www.littleitalycleveland.com/>, one section reads, “The hill to the East, which eventually led to development in the heights, was a natural boundary. The boundaries created a chicken leg shape for our community; it both isolated and protected us from the rest of Cleveland.” Little Italy is currently in the area known as University Circle.

⁹⁶ Jim Brown, interview by Alex Haley, *Playboy*, February 1968, 58.

community functions, that boring, political shit, where they want to make us look like one big happy family.” He continued, “If we can’t go to all the stuff, the fun stuff, then we won’t do the fake stuff. They room us together; we’ll stay together. We’ll play hard, dress right, carry ourselves with class, and be team people. But we don’t have to kiss any ass, or take any attitude, to pacify some redneck from Mississippi.” As Walter Beach acknowledged, “we were free and sovereign individuals.” Therefore, as American citizens they wanted to embrace self-determination.⁹⁷

While many African Americans sought racial integration, some of the Black players on the Browns were not concerned about the acceptance of their White teammates outside of the locker room. They were cordial, but were cognizant of their primary objective, winning football games. Thus, a player’s race was of no concern come game time. The primary goal for each member of the team was to fulfill their duty at their position, and ensure the success of the team. Yet all African American players’ accomplishments on the field did not always translate to equal treatment off it. As Jim Brown noted, “America loved my performance, yet I couldn’t check into certain hotels, drink from any water fountain when I was thirsty.” He added, “I didn’t want to give up football, did not want to close my eyes. I tried to find a way I could live with the contradiction, still feel decently about myself. I accepted trophies, never displayed them in my home.” Brown continued, “I liked the cheers, didn’t allow them to fool me. I never forgot who I was, and from where I came. Throughout my career I’d drive to the bleakest

⁹⁷ *Out of Bounds*, 57; Interview with Walter Beach III, in-person interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

neighborhoods in Cleveland, spend time with the lowliest brothers.”⁹⁸ It was this time spent in Black communities like the Hough and Glenville, where he, Mitchell, Wooten, Beach, Shorter, and Williams wanted to make contributions to the movement that swept the nation. Brown remembered, “On the football field they wanted me to be brave. Wanted me to take the ball when we were all backed up, our own one-yard-line, carry us out of there, where we could be safe. Away from football, they wanted me to be another guy. They wanted me to be docile.” While he noticed the inherent contradiction, he asked, “How could I have the courage to run that hard, then be so weak off the field that I’d succumb to inequity?” For Jim Brown and other Black athletes, the intersection of race, politics, and athletics became apparent, and thus, they decided to join in the struggle for “freedom, justice and equality.”⁹⁹

The Black freedom struggle impacted all facets of life for African Americans: the political, economic, religious, social, and even the athletic realm. In 1966, John Wooten had a conversation with SCLC leader Martin Luther King, Jr. He told King, “What you are doing, we are in full support. But I cannot let people spit on me, and drag me, and not fight. Therefore, I do not want to hurt the movement, so we are going to go this way.”

The “way” Wooten knew was economic development:

We were not going to protest and march and all those things because at that time the protest was suppose to be non-violent and don’t hit back and people could spit on you and pour water on you, and you were suppose to just keep going. Well we knew that wasn’t in our nature to let that happen to us. So we didn’t get involved in any of the marches. But we did feel we

⁹⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁹ Jim Brown with Steve Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1989), 47, 67.

needed to be men fighting for civil rights. As athletes we needed to be involved in the civil rights movement.¹⁰⁰

Brown, Wooten, Shorter, Beach, Williams and a host of others collectively concluded they “needed to be involved in the economic part of the community.” Brown believed financial development and self-sufficiency was a tenet African Americans needed to embrace to receive true equality. The group agreed they would not advocate non-violence, nor advocate Black Nationalist tenets. However, they did believe in self-defense. There was a consensus amongst Brown and others that this was their way of becoming involved in the Black freedom struggle. As Walter Beach noted, they felt they had an “obligation and duty to respond to the particular conditions of racism, segregation, and Jim Crow [as it] weighed heavily on us. For Brown he believed “every Black person in the country had to make a choice on how they were going to fight.”¹⁰¹

Activist and CORE member James Farmer characterized Brown’s refusal to embrace non-violence best in his autobiography *Lay Bare the Heart*. He recollected the Freedom Rides, when interracial demonstrators rode buses throughout the south as a way to protest the Jim Crow laws innate in public transportation. Farmer relayed a story about Brown who had taken “a private Freedom Ride, flying to Alabama, boarding a bus, and sitting on a front seat.” The driver of the bus reportedly addressed Brown as “boy” in a condescending manner to get him out of the seat. Brown ignored the request. The driver

¹⁰⁰ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.; *Third and Long*, directed by Theresa Moore (Chicago: Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011) DVD.

responded, “‘Boy didn't you hear me...I said get up out of that seat and get in the back of this bus.’” Brown continued to ignore him. The bus driver addressed him for a final time, “‘Boy, I ain't gon' to tell you no mo'. If you don' get up out of that seat, I'm gon' come over there and throw you into the back of this bus.’” According to Farmer, Brown stood up and walked to the driver and grabbed him by his shirt and pulled him out of his seat. He responded, “‘Look man, you made two mistakes. First, I ain't no boy. Second, I ain't one of Dr. King's nonviolent niggers. Now move this damn bus!’” The driver complied.¹⁰²

While the Jim Crow laws of the South were evident on public transportation, they were also evident in the promotional materials of companies who advertised across the country. In the March 8, 1965 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, Pepsi ran a full-page color ad of Jim Brown. Harvey C. Russell, an African American male who served as vice-president of Pepsi-Cola Company Inc., had chosen him for this particular promotional material because of the relationship the two formed in their work with the soft drink company. Russell believed the time was ripe for African Americans to be a key element of advertisements put out by the company. The caption under the picture read, “10,882 yards for Cleveland...168,427 miles for Pepsi.” While most ads were used repetitively over a period of time, Brown's piece was only published once because bottlers were furious that a Black man was used for “the white media.” Prior to this particular magazine spread, there was no outcry from the publics over Brown's role as spokesperson for the soft drink company. Brown had served as an assistant to Russell,

¹⁰² James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement*. (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1998). 210.

promoted the Pepsi brand in numerous meeting. His position with Pepsi allowed him to learn about corporate America, as he rode the trucks that delivered the bottled soft drink, was amongst the workers in the bottling plants, and in nine years with the company in the offseason studied with their advertising agency. It was there he learned about “special markets” which Russell explained to him meant the Black community. For Pepsi, and many major corporations, “these markets had the needs as every other market, but there was no full department.” So in Russell’s view, Brown was prime to sell to that particular area. Yet, Whites markets were not ready to see a Black man sell them products.¹⁰³

By 1965, many of the Black men on the Cleveland Browns began to have conversations amongst themselves, community leaders, and family and friends, about the formation of a group that addressed social inequities in America. What formed from extensive dialogue was the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU). The NIEU made it clear to define themselves before others had the ability to lump them with nationalist beliefs. They did not “seek a separate economy for Negroes or any other minority group, only full participation in the productive phases of the existing American economy.”¹⁰⁴

The individual experiences of Jim Brown, Bobby Mitchell, John Wooten, Walter Beach III, and Sidney Williams were unique in many ways. Nevertheless, the manifestation of their political consciousness allowed for them to be unified in an effort

¹⁰³ Stephanie Capparell, *The Real Pepsi Challenge: The Inspirational Story of Breaking the Color Barrier in American Business*. (New York: Wall Street Journal Books, 2007), 268-269.

¹⁰⁴ John Wooten, “History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union,” Appendix II, 2; *Out of Bounds*, 58-59; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

to form an organization that challenged notions of Black inferiority at the economic and social levels. They developed a purpose of uplifting African Americans with the intent of promoting business development and the eradication of social problems in the United States. These men recognized this was not an easy feat, but understood racial discrimination did not cease because they won an NFL Championship, or received numerous awards, or because of their status as professional athletes. For them, creating the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, and joining in the Black freedom struggle was a means to overcome racial oppression. Thus, there was no need to choose between “the movement” and athletics; they were able to do both. The next chapter examines how the NIEU was formed and how members from the Cleveland Browns played a role in its formation.

Chapter 3

“You Can’t Have Black Power without Green Power:”

The Birth of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, 1964-1967

In the winter of 1964, while visiting Los Angeles, California for the NFL’s Pro Bowl, Jim Brown met with John Daniels, a local African American businessman, to discuss his financial support of *Elegant*, a magazine that focused on fashion. Brown was intrigued by the concept and provided the seed money to begin the publication. Unfortunately, the magazine folded after several issues due to the lack of financial support but this incident demonstrated to Brown that Black businesses could have greater longevity if they had the economic backing necessary to survive. Brown noted, ““If we could provide dollars to allow Negroes to become proprietors, we would not need a poverty program. Instead of an occasional Negro owning a small store, he could expand to a big one or maybe several.””¹⁰⁵ What ensued from this business failure was the idea for the formation of a new organization that would combat the inequities that African Americans across the nation had experienced, and to do so they wanted to address the void of Black businesses in Black communities. For them, the solution to inequality was for African Americans to “produce, achieve, [and] prosper” by bringing “the Negro into

¹⁰⁵ Dave Brady, “Jim Brown Maps Plan For Economic Revolution,” *The Washington Post*,” 6 March 1966, C4

the economic mainstream of American society.”¹⁰⁶ What culminated from their talks was the formation of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU).

At this time, Jim Brown was well known as an established member of the Cleveland Browns, and was beginning to form a national reputation as an actor. John Daniels was an up and coming entrepreneur. When he met Brown that winter, he had plans to fashion Crenshaw Boulevard in Los Angeles into Las Vegas’ “Sunset Strip” an effort to create an array of Black enterprises that catered specifically to Black people. Together, these men, one a professional athlete, and the other an entrepreneur recruited other high profile African Americans for membership into the organization and financial support of Black communities. Brown and Daniels utilized the NIEU in effort to support the Black freedom struggle.¹⁰⁷

Jim Brown’s reason for involving John Daniels in the workings of the NIEU was quite simple. Brown sought to utilize Daniels’ business acumen and networks for the better good of the organization. In turn, men like John Wooten, Walter Beach III, Sidney Williams and a host of others drew upon their stardom, financial assets, and professional connections to increase organization membership and address the dismal political and economic conditions that existed in Black communities across the United States. In summation, the efforts of Brown, and other Black members of the Browns, allowed the NIEU to garner the attention of supporters and members who helped them fulfill their mission. This chapter investigates how the Negro Industrial and Economic Union came

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

into being placing it within the context of the Black freedom struggle of the 1960s. In particular, it examines the social conditions in Cleveland that allowed the organization to exist, explores the early philosophy of the group, and illustrates how two events, the Hough riots and Jim Brown's retirement from professional football, marked the birth of the organization.

The NIEU was founded during a time of intense political agitation, and its formation and philosophy reflected the profound social conflict and transformation that occurred during the modern Civil Rights era. During the first half of the 1960s, the struggle for Black "freedom, justice and equality," centered largely on the desegregation of public facilities and accommodations. These issues were nationalized through the burgeoning civil rights movement that used direct action and mass mobilization as strategies to address the morally corrupt practice of segregation. One such example was the movement for economic equality and "the right to work," which culminated in one of the most notable demonstrations of the period, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963.

On that sunny Wednesday, more than 200,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. This event was organized by a coalition of interracial and religiously diverse groups with numerous speakers who addressed the economic, social, and political disparities that existed the country. The highlight of this occasion was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech, "Normalcy Never Again," which included his soliloquy "I Have a Dream." During this monologue he declared,

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of ‘interposition’ and ‘nullification’ -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.¹⁰⁸

The speech at the Lincoln Memorial served as the zenith of the march. King’s call for racial integration and the end of discrimination in the workplace became the focal point of the Black freedom struggle. Yet, he sought to “dramatize” the great need for jobs and the eradication of poverty. During his speech he said, “the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.” It was this reality for African Americans who lacked sufficient financial means to enjoy the American dream, which the Baptist minister and so many others fought to get rid.¹⁰⁹

The March on Washington marked a critical moment in the Civil Rights era, and that was followed by a series of events that garnered national attention. The next month, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a Black congregation in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed. As a result, four girls were killed, an act of terrorism that garnered national attention. In November, United States President John F. Kennedy was killed in Dallas, Texas. As Lyndon B. Johnson took the helm of the U.S. presidency, he followed through on Kennedy’s plans for new civil rights legislation. After much deliberation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was developed and enacted the following July. The law ended poll taxes for the right

¹⁰⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Normalcy Never Again,” March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Lincoln Memorial: Washington, D.C., 28 August 1963. Address. Emphasis is in the original.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

to vote, abolished segregation in public facilities and within federally funded programs, and also began the integration of public schools. While the letter of the law promoted equality, there was resistance from Whites, diminishing the act's impact.¹¹⁰

By 1964, the civil rights movement achieved several successes on paper but it did not end the economic inequalities African Americans faced. The franchise was accessible to more people of color. Yet thousands of Black folks were threatened and imprisoned for their defiance of Jim Crow, countless others were murdered for being involved in the movement, and many more were harmed simply because they were Black. African American communities, homes, and businesses were routinely attacked as a means of intimidation to thwart the drive to end segregation, and to ensure that Whites maintained political power.¹¹¹

Throughout the 1960s and beforehand, numerous civil rights organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) utilized the strategy of non-violent protest. Nonviolence was a hallmark technique of the

¹¹⁰ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, Seventh edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 506-509; The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was organized by a coalition of interracial organizations: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress of Racial Equality, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Negro American Labor Council, the National Urban League, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, American Jewish Congress, National Council of Churches, United Auto Workers, and AFL-CIO.

¹¹¹ "Constantly yours," *Call and Post*, 12 March 1966, 1B; Walter Burrell, "The Soul Side," *Call and Post*, 4 November 1967, 3B; "New Role Shows Jim Brown Is Star Rookie in Films," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12 October 1968, 20; Lin Hilburn, "Black History is a Continuing Process," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 February 1972, A7; Jevallier Jefferson, "Maverick's Flat is Historical Landmark," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 5 July 2000, A1; Yussuf J. Simmonds, "John Daniels/Maverick Flats," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 14 October 2010, A14.

movement, used primarily to appeal to Whites' sensibilities. This strategy was intended to assist African Americans in gaining full access to American society particularly in the areas of the franchise, public facilities, and educational institutions. To some degree, nonviolence had been successful in reaching certain goals, such as the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights acts. However not all members of the Black community agreed with nonviolent protest as the best method for manifesting social change.

Jim Brown, for example, stated that he "loved Dr. King," but he did not agree with his endorsement of nonviolence. He believed King "never told us how to utilize our earnings. He told us to integrate. He even went into Cicero, Illinois to integrate there. Encouraged black folks to do the same." King's ideology did not make sense to Brown because "economically, that type of thinking wasn't sound. Why should a Black family pay five times what a house would normally cost just so they can live next to white people? Black people don't have that type of money to throw around." Brown did not believe in social integration; but rather the unification of Black dollars within Black communities, which brought about the notion of "freedom, justice, and equality." These were ideals not predicated upon Blacks and Whites interacting in all facets of life, but rather guaranteeing that African Americans were given the same opportunities to succeed in the business world as Whites. Thus, achieving the "American dream" was paramount,

but for “White people [to] think that you just want to join their country club or you want to be with them...was a total misunderstanding.”¹¹²

What Brown wanted, as was the case with many African Americans around the United States, was equal protection under the law and the ability to make a living without intimidation from Whites, or any force that wanted to impede on the American citizens’ freedom. As Brown mentioned in an interview, his particular philosophy was based on “the concept of self-determination.” As he noted, “I’m a citizen. I pay my taxes. I want my rights.”¹¹³ For Brown, the best way to obtain these privileges was to confront the inequities in American society and force the federal government to protect civilians from White terror imposed physically and mentally. Thus, while Black people across the nation resisted tactics of racial oppression and continued their efforts to change the political and economic structure of America throughout the 1960s by utilizing organizations to address their concerns, Jim Brown chose to do the same.

Brown’s opportunity to implement his political philosophy came in January of 1964, when he visited Los Angeles, California for the Pro Bowl. A few days before the game, Brown was introduced to John Daniels, a Los Angeles businessman, to discuss the formation of an organization that “help[ed] Negroes help themselves.” Brown remembers from that initial meeting that Daniels was “entrepreneurial, a go get ‘em kind of guy” whose energy he liked. Daniels, who was born and raised in Gary, Indiana, had attended Butler University. After college, he was hired as a songwriter for artists on Capitol

¹¹² Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, February 25, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Records. His experiences with the record label served as his introduction to how businesses operated in the entertainment industry. His history in the entertainment field intrigued Brown immensely and they started to discuss different concepts for businesses, along with an organization that addressed Black economics on a national level, “an idea that was in the minds of a lot of bright people.” For Daniels, Brown had the financial capital to help him see his ideas come to fruition. As such, the meeting between Brown and Daniels was fortuitous for both men, and led to the creation of the NIEU. Intrigued by their discussions, the two men continued to stay in contact with each other over the course of the year. Busy schedules with football and filming limited their interactions, however by early 1965, the two men began identifying people they believed would help them see their idea come to fruition. In doing so, they decided to go into business together.¹¹⁴

In January 1966, Daniels and Brown formed Maverick’s Flat, a nightclub and restaurant in the Crenshaw area of Los Angeles. After a few months of business, it “was the hottest club in Los Angeles...[and] attracted people from all over.” With numerous musical acts coming through the establishment, it was called “the West Coast version of New York’s famed Apollo Theater.” Devoid of a security staff and a two-drink minimum, and absent of alcohol entirely for that matter, this establishment was different from other late-night spots in Los Angeles. There was an element of “good, clean fun”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, November 10, 2010, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Jevallier Jefferson, “Maverick’s Flat is Historical Landmark,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 5 July 2000, A1; Yussuf J. Simmonds, “John Daniels/Maverick Flats,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 14 October 2010, A14

that enticed many people to visit.¹¹⁵ One of their early draws was the singing group, The Temptations, whom they brought out to the west coast. As Brown remembered, the members were “in school during the day, and performing in the club at night.” The success of this business venture was a significant development because it proved to Daniels and Brown that with the necessary planning, capital, and support, they could form an organization that supported and addressed the economic, social, and business needs of African Americans. Even so, they were still in need of someone else who articulated their vision for Black economic development. Maggie Hathaway was that person.

Maggie Hathaway was born July 1, 1911 in Campti, Louisiana, and raised in nearby Shreveport as a youth. As a young adult she moved to California where she made her mark in acting and providing Black people the opportunity to work in film in Hollywood. The *Chicago Defender* described her as a “glamorous actress of stage and screen” who was “attractive and very exotic.” She had several roles in films from 1939 to 1945, the most notable of which was *One Dark Night* (1939), which starred Mantan Moreland, one of the most popular Black actors during the 1940s, and was the first comedy to feature an all-Black cast.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “Mantan Moreland Is Star of Coast Film,” *Chicago Defender*, 2 September 1939, 20; “Maggie Hathaway Gets Break With Warner Brothers,” *Chicago Defender*, 27 May 1944, 8; Jim Brown with Steve Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1989), 46; A.S. Doc Young, “The Unforgettable Maggie Hathaway,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 November 1993, 7; “Actress Victor in Civil Rights Suit,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 February 1943, 20; “Maggie Hathaway Gets Break With Warner Brothers,” *Chicago Defender*, 27 May 1944, 8; NPB, “Maggie Hathaway Of Movies Moves To Stage Berth,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 May 1944, 8.

Hathaway made a name for herself as a fighter for equality in the realm of acting, golf, and civil rights.¹¹⁷ Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, she battled Hollywood over the lack of opportunities afforded to Black actors and actresses. Outside of the theatrical arena, Hathaway was also engaged in the fight for “freedom, justice and equality” in sports, particularly golf. In 1952, the Professional Golfers’ Association continued a longstanding practice of not admitting African Americans to play in their larger tournaments, and she supported the efforts of players such as Teddy Rhodes and Charlie Sifford to gain equal access. In the summer of 1962, Maggie Hathaway founded the Beverly Hills-Hollywood Branch of the NAACP. The aim of the chapter was “the elimination of racial discrimination in all departments of the motion picture, television and recording industries, as well as in housing facilities and all other areas where segregation is still practiced.” Within months of being chartered, they were able to garner over three hundred members. Charlton Heston, Sammy Davis Jr. along with his father Sammy Davis, Sr., actor Peter Brown, and Mai Britt Davis were some of the early members. She continued her efforts with the branch into the mid-1960s.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ In 1943 she won a racial discrimination lawsuit against the Royal Coffee Shop after a waitress at the restaurant told her ‘I am not going to serve you.’ Hathaway’s lawsuit represented her refusal to accept second-class treatment from anyone. Despite her challenges of racial discrimination, in 1944 Hathaway starred as a woman from Algiers in Warner Bros. film *To Have and Not to Have*, a role that allowed her to demonstrate her thespian and musical capabilities. Her ability to play “the piano and sing as well as she emotes” garnered her the role. Critics identified her “as the most outstanding ‘type’ in Hollywood.” This year she also was a stand-in for Lena Horne, considered one of the premier African American actresses of the period, in *Stormy Weather*.

¹¹⁸ John Wooten, Appendix II, “History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union,” 3; Brown, *Out of Bounds*, (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1989), 46; “Golfers Back Publinx Prejudice,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 July 1957, B4; Lawrence F. LaMar, “Maggie Hathaway End Fight for Extras,” *Daily Defender*, 4 May 1961, 16; ANP, “Portray Negroes Accurately Screen Guild Tells Members,” *Call and Post*, 30 December 1961, 6C; “The Same Old Policy: PGA

By the early part of 1965, Hathaway and Jim Brown had met and joined forces. In particular, they provided financial support to Ray Botts and Pete Brown, two African American men who were members of the Professional Golfers' Association of America (PGA). Their efforts were especially noteworthy because most golfers had corporate sponsorships, but since Ray Botts and Pete Brown were Black, they lacked the support of big corporations.¹¹⁹ The bond that Hathaway and Brown formed during this time was significant because it ultimately helped to launch the NIEU.

Keeps Ban On Negro Pros," *Chicago Defender*, 19 January 1952, 17; "NAACP Charters Hollywood Unit," *Call and Post*, 21 April 1962, 1C; "Howard University President Installs Hollywood NAACP Officers," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 14 June 1962, A10; "Johnny Mathis Becomes NAACP Life Member," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 24 July 1962, 17; "New NAACP Branch Formed," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 August 1962, B2; A.S. Doc Young, "The Unforgettable Maggie Hathaway," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 November 1993, 7; In 1961, with the NAACP and a group she formed called International Artist, Hathaway protested the actions of the Central Casting Bureau of the Motion Pictures Producers Association, the Screen Extras Guild, and the Negro Motion Picture Extras of America Guild regarding "an integration policy in the handling of extra players and the lack of dignity accorded the Negro representative." They were concerned with the small office space given to Black extras and the lack of provisions given that were afforded to White thespians. Later that year, Hathaway helped lead a move for African Americans to be portrayed correctly and in all fashions of life, to be provided equal opportunities in the motion picture industry. In the 1950s, she led fights to desegregate public golf courses and organizations throughout Los Angeles. In 1957, as president of the Western Avenue Women's golf club, Hathaway led an effort to ensure "Negroes" were admitted to the Southern California Public Links. The association was integrated after the county subpoenaed it. In April 1964, Maggie Hathaway was denied membership in the Women's Golf Club because she "was not well liked, considered a troublemaker, not wanted, had made threats against the club and were told they're discriminating." She gained a reputation of one who never minced words. Several months later in August, in association with the Militant Affiliated Golfers, the Board of Supervisors mandated all "tax paying Americans" be permitted into the club. However, she was still denied membership after some finagling by the Whites-only club.

¹¹⁹ Clayton Moore, "Another Golf Hassle: Western Ave. Rejects Hathaway Again!" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 April 1964, B4; Maggie Hathaway, "Golf Club Rejects Maggie Again!" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 13 August 1964, B4; William Jackson, "Negro Golfers Need Money Sponsors," *Call and Post*, 4 July 1964, 6A; "Botts Retains Lead; Brown Trails By Stroke," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 December 1964, A1, A2; William Jackson, "Botts, Lone Tan Golfer To Reach Open Finals," *Call and Post*, 19 June 1965, 10B; Maggie Hathaway also worked as a columnist with the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a Black owned newspaper for the city. In this position she helped promote many of the NIEU's and NAACP's events and frequently discussed issues like Blacks in golf and the inequities in African Americans acquiring acting jobs

While Brown and Hathaway focused on promoting Black golfers, they also began to meet with John Daniels and the three activists formed a friendly bond, which served as the basis for their decision to create an organization that spoke to the economic issues of African Americans on a national level. That organization eventually became known as the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU). As a result, they developed literature, promotional materials, and a five-year plan that included fund raising efforts that would be used to prevent the group from depending on other financial institutions for economic support. They also created a constitution, which established rules and regulations to govern the organization and to articulate a plan for sustainability. The constitution included a statement of a purpose, a motto, a vision for how the organization was to utilize money raised, a description of its' non-profit status, and an explanation of the educational and social programs that the group promoted, along with the cost of membership and requirements. Their purpose was to provide financial support to sustain Black businesses in an effort "to promote, encourage, motivate and develop" African American success in the economic, social, and political fabric of American life.

Brown also wanted the group to have a social mission. He believed that his goal would be accomplished by providing educational programs and scholarships for "deserving persons" at numerous levels of education. To support this vision, the group developed a motto: "produce, achieve, and prosper." According to Brown, it was their objective to have economics as the center of the group's mission because they believed,

“if you are educated, you are able to determine your own economics in your community, in terms of your buying, selling, [and] development.”¹²⁰

While Brown was making headway in Los Angeles with John Daniels and Maggie Hathaway, his Black teammates on the Cleveland Browns were considering their contributions to the national movement that inspired many African Americans across the nation. They recognized if they wanted to obtain full citizenship, a plan had to be devised that challenged White supremacy. They agreed with Brown that economic development was the best strategy. Jim Brown noted, “I was making choices on how I wanted to contribute to a movement and economic development was a major part of it. We were talking about ‘Green power’ and not ‘Black power.’ Business was totally necessary to get any kind of freedom, equality and justice.” The reference to “green power” was not a new concept. Many African Americans before Brown, like Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B. DuBois espoused the philosophy. In the context of the 1960s, Brown developed the ideology as a means to encourage Blacks to embrace self-help, pride, respect coupled with the desire to use capitalism, the American economic system, to better one’s lot in life.¹²¹

Beyond economic empowerment, Jim Brown and his Cleveland Browns teammates were beginning to develop a broader political belief. They did not, for example, endorse pacifism and non-violence as a strategy because they played a sport

¹²⁰ Ibid.; John Wooten, Appendix II, “History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union,” 4, Articles of Incorporation of The National Negro Industrial and Economic Union; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

¹²¹ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

predicated on violence and the utility of physical force. Non-violent organizations embraced tenets of nonaggression as a means of moral persuasion and putting pressure on politicians and segregationists to uphold the law and make them react in the best interests of not only Black folks, but also all Americans. While Brown, Wooten and many others recognized the usefulness of non-violence, they agreed they would get away from the tactic, an element foreign to the game of football, and would defend themselves if attacked by Whites. As John Wooten later recalled, “We knew that was not in our nature to let that happen to us so we didn’t get involved in any of the marches. But we did feel we needed to be men fighting for...civil rights.” Many of Wooten’s Black teammates actively discussed their position on the Black freedom struggle and after some reflection they recognized non-violence was a tenet they were not supporting. What they wanted to do was promote economic prosperity in Black communities, endorsed by a wealth of African American athletes and business professionals in numerous cities across the United States. From these discussions the men moved forward with launching their group.¹²²

In February 1966, the Los Angeles offices of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union opened. During this time, there were also preparations to establish the group’s headquarters in Cleveland the following month. As Jim Brown had expressed to John Daniels and Maggie Hathaway, he wanted Black professional athletes to be the face and voice of the NIEU. As such, his Browns teammates, John Wooten and Jim Shorter, began to build relationships with some of the businessmen in Cleveland to gain their financial

¹²² Ibid.; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

acumen, to bolster the NIEU's presence, and to strengthen their knowledge base on how to promote the organization to potential members and supporters. Wooten and Shorter also participated in the U.S. Department of Commerce's first "Domestic Commerce In-Office Seminar," which allowed executives and researchers to discuss the best practices to secure funding for their businesses. Wooten and Shorter attended numerous meetings to develop strategies for the Union and to keep Brown informed while he was away filming in Los Angeles and overseas.¹²³

On Monday, March 7, 1966, the Cleveland offices of the NIEU officially opened, and a celebration was held with over 8,000 people in attendance. Dick Gregory, comedian and civil rights activist, flew in from New York to attend the event. John Daniels told those in attendance, "The name of the game is green. We recognize that in order for the Negro to really become a potent economic force, we must endeavor to use our monies collectively to promote business and industry." Brown added that the organization was "rallying the 'new-breed' which we believe represents the beginning of the Negro's ascension to true economic respect as a group." Daniels and Brown used the opening to promote the notion of capitalism and how African Americans, old and young, could utilize it to better their lot in life. Even religious institutions invited the NIEU to speak to their parishioners. Rev. C. T. Nelson of Greater Friendship Baptist Church. The minister in a move to encourage his members to join the Union accepted his membership card as part of the Sunday service. This gathering served as one of many

¹²³ "Touchdown Scored for Business," Call and Post, 12 March 1966, 3C.

ways Union members made their presence known in Black communities throughout Cleveland.¹²⁴

On March 16, John Wooten met with the Lee-Harvard Community Association, a Black civic organization that was formed in 1961, to discuss their partnership with the NIEU. The group, composed of residents from the Lee and Harvard neighborhoods in east Cleveland, was formed to ensure the quality of life their community members received, like education, business dealings, and municipal services were adequate. This meeting was significant because it allowed Union leadership to find out from Black Clevelanders, especially those in areas the NIEU sought to focus their efforts, how the organization could develop a relationship with them, and best serve their social, political, and economic interests. The Lee-Harvard Community Association also wanted all of their members to buy individual memberships with the Union. While they reached out to religious and community groups, the NIEU also sought the help of political figures. In

¹²⁴ “Jim Brown and Pro Mates: Back Negro Industrial And Economic Union,” *Call and Post*, 5 February 1966, 1A; Lumpkin Photo, “NIEU Leaders,” *Call and Post*, 19 February 1966, 3A; Bill Lane, “The Inside Story,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 November 1966, A12; Gerturde Gipson, “Gertrude Gipson... Candid Comments,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 3 March 1966, B9; “Overflowing Crowds Pack NIEU At Official Opening,” *Call and Post*, 12 March 1966, 1A, 2A; “Photo Standalone 29,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 7 April 1966, C4; “Zooming Movie Star Jim Brown Claims He’s A Rookie in Another League Now,” *Call and Post*, 5 October 1968, 11A; Jessie Mae Brown, “Your Social Chronicler,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 February 1972; “NIEU Sponsors Show,” *Call and Post*, 2 April 1966, 16A; During this time, John Daniels and Jim Brown, along with the investment of others, began investing in musical talent. One of their initial acts was The Seven Souls who performed at the duos’ club Maverick’s Flat. The Seven Souls had relative success with two songs, “I Still Love You” and “I’m No Stranger” in 1967. Aside from investing in Elegant, Jim Brown also was part owner with John Daniels of Maverick Flats, an after-hours private nightclub located in the Watts section of Los Angeles. The discotheque gained a huge following amongst many patrons in the city. The last day of Black History Month, February 28th, served as the opening night to which the club opened, and was filled to capacity. While serving as a spot for many to enjoy the nightlife, Maverick Flats served as a sponsor of community events as well. The South Los Angeles, Inglewood, and Pasadena chapters of Jack and Jill, a social club established for more affluent African Americans, held annual black history celebrations, Easter events such as the Gala Affair for Sophisticates.

April, the Union extended an olive branch to Granville Bradley, an African American man who was Cleveland's 20th district Democratic candidate for Congress. Bradley promised to provide assistance to the NIEU as he was identified as "'being the best qualified candidate, and offering the greatest new hope for Cleveland to send a Negro to Congress.'" With this endorsement, the Union began its involvement in the political life of the city.¹²⁵

Back in Los Angeles, Richard Lee "Dick" Bass, a running back for the Los Angeles Rams, was appointed as the West Coast executive director in May 1966. Bass was a former All-American at the College of Pacific, and in 1958 was heralded as "just about the greatest runner in collegiate football." In the 1959 NFL Draft, he was the second player chosen overall by the Rams. However, since he was considered a "future," a player with a year of eligibility, he did not report to the team until 1960. By 1966, Bass was one of the league's top rushers and had been selected to the Pro Bowl three times. Bass was such a talented athlete that he was routinely compared to Jim Brown. Since the two men shared many athletic accolades, it was beneficial for the Union that they were both committed to the organization because their involvement brought much needed attention to the group's ideals and efforts.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ "John Mapp, Heads Lee-Harvard Group," *Call and Post*, 25 May 1963, 6A; "Lee-Harvard's Femme "ford Frick" Cited at Association's Banquet," *Call and Post*, 25 January 1964, 4A; "John Wooten To Address Lee-Harvard Association," *Call and Post*, 12 March 1966, 1C ; Bob Williams, "At NIEU Breakfast: Bradley Gets Praise," *Call and Post*, 9 April 1966; The Lee-Harvard Community Association met at the Lee Road Baptist Church located at 3970 Lee Road. An "open house" and "Breakfast Show" were also held at Leo's Casino in an effort to get supporters for the group.

¹²⁶ Cal Whorton, "Rams Draft Bass as First Selection," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 1958, C1.

When Bass' position with the NIEU was announced, he echoed many of the same sentiments that Brown, Wooten, and others espoused from the Cleveland office. Bass told reporters the Union's purpose was to further Blacks in the areas of business, to secure financial assistance, and to educate them in the areas of commerce and industry, so African Americans knew how to "compete and be more productive" rather than creating a separate economy as some Black Nationalist organizations wanted. Pervis R. Atkins, Jr., a former member of the Los Angeles Rams, Washington Redskins, and Oakland Raiders, served as Bass' assistant, and Bill Stennis, a Union board member, was the director of financial management. Booker Griffin, an Ohio native, served as the guiding force of the Los Angeles Chapter with Bass¹²⁷

Griffin was a native of Gary, Indiana, and attended Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. He moved to Los Angeles in 1962 after John Daniels, a "long-time friend," encouraged him to join in the staff of *Elegant* magazine. He also helped Daniels and Brown with the establishment of the late-night club Mavericks Flat. Because of his work with Daniels, Griffin joined Dick Bass, Maggie Hathaway, and a host of others in Los Angeles, and worked for the Union's chapter in the city. He helped the west coast offices make strides in its efforts to solicit funds to help Black businesses in the city, as he was primarily responsible for promoting initiatives throughout the city of L.A. As was the case in Cleveland, they also focused attention on activities that educated youth about creating businesses and summer job initiatives. Stephani Swanigan served as the administrative assistant to Griffin, and for the early years of the chapter, these two with

¹²⁷ "NIEU Picks Dick Bass," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 5 May 1966, B1, B4.

Bass, served as the “total staff of the NIEU.” While they were under-staffed in relation to the headquarters in Cleveland, Griffin’s contribution and efforts were “regarded as the major factor behind the rise of NIEU as a major community program” in the Los Angeles area. John Wooten, who worked closely with Griffin, knew him as “an Ohio guy, writer, smart as all get out, [and] very political astute.” Sidney Williams also noted the Gary native was “political...and knew everybody.” Griffin’s ability to connect with so many people in the Los Angeles area, served to be beneficial to the chapter as they began larger efforts of recruiting and programming in the following years.¹²⁸

On May 31, 1966, the Negro Industrial and Economic Union was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization. It was registered in the states of Ohio and California, and in Washington, D.C., despite the Union not officially opening an office there until 1968. The national headquarters were established in Cleveland, Ohio, a strategic move since the majority of the members of the executive board resided in the city. Jim Brown served as President of the organization. Bobby Mitchell served as a board member, and a liaison in D.C. for a future chapter in that area. Dick Bass of the Los Angeles Rams was chosen to lead the Los Angeles office. William Stennis, owner of the prosperous Golden Bird Chicken restaurants in Los Angeles, was financial advisor and consultant for the group because he had the business acumen to help the athletes

¹²⁸ Ibid.; Jim Cleaver, “Booker Griffin Rites Set for Sat. At FAME,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 8 July 1993, A1; John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 30, 2010, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Booker Griffin Quits NIEU Post,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 29 August 1968, A4.

navigate the world of commercial enterprise. Stennis saw the importance of the NIEU in its relation to other organizations. There were four points he outlined:

The professional Negro athletes are one of the few collective groups who, being well paid, don't need pay for their race-improvement work...Athletes are engaged with their sports seasonally and, hence, can afford to spend considerable time with NIEU...Athletes can establish easy rapport with young people; and...Athletes can open doors which many others cannot.¹²⁹

Stennis saw what Jim Brown and others recognized; professional athletes had a certain cache in American society. They were deemed “gladiators” and admired by men and women from all walks of life. Thus, the NIEU sought to utilize this to their advantage. The fact they were paid handsomely for several months out of the year, coupled with an extensive offseason, they had the ability to work in communities using their popularity to help Black businessmen and provide help to the youth. There were several men dedicated to achieving the NIEU’s goals and took on leadership positions to ensure the organization was successful.¹³⁰

Jim Brown chose John Wooten as Executive Director and Vice President because Brown knew that “Woots” was committed to helping other Black folks and he possessed the “ability to get along with people.” Wooten also “had the ability to call people that we didn’t know, [and] setup meetings,” a skill that stemmed from his earlier meetings with businessmen and politicians around the city. Walter Beach was a member of the board of

¹²⁹ A.S. “Doc” Young, “Jim Brown Says: ‘Green Power’ Is Key To Equality,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 February 1967, A3

¹³⁰ Ibid.; Ted W. Brown, The group’s articles of incorporation were filed on May 31, 1966 recorded under roll B459, frame 283, and the amendment was filed on November 7, 1966 recorded under roll B480 and frame 13. It was not until June 6, 1968 that it was filed in the office of Ted W. Brown, the Secretary of State for Ohio recorded under roll B561, frame 366. The cost of the filing was \$18.

trustees and helped orchestrate many of the social programs, which was a particular strength of his. In all, there was a connection with members of the Cleveland Browns and African Americans from the city who had a role with the Union. Sidney Williams and Jim Shorter were put in charge of the youth development programs. While Shorter left the Browns in 1963 and played with the Washington Redskins since he left, he was still integral in the Union's operations. He sought to "channel the interest of youngsters into business." He sought to create a project for Cleveland youth modeled after a program at Howard University. Shorter told Dave Brady of the *Washington Post* in March 1966, "We hope to set up scholarships for students who do not have the means to continue their education. We would put them in business courses at regular colleges or in business schools because not every candidate would be qualified for college." Shorter's initiatives was one of the leading programs of the Union that year. He was just one of several men to play an important part in the organization.¹³¹

Arnold Pinkney was chosen as treasurer of the NIEU because he had a long history of economic success in Cleveland. He served as a financial advisor to many of the Black men on the Cleveland Browns, was president of Pinkney-Perry Insurance Agency, a trustee for the Urban League and the Phyllis Wheatley Association, and the first vice president of the Cleveland chapter of the NAACP. Pinkney, a Case Western Law graduate, also ensured the Negro Industrial and Economic Union was connected with the

¹³¹ John Wooten, Appendix II, "History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union," 4, Articles of Incorporation of The National Negro Industrial and Economic Union; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Dave Brady, "Jim Brown Maps Plan For Economic Revolution," *The Washington Post*, 6 March 1966, C4

right people for organizing programming efforts and funding. He understood the internal workings of the various political machines of the city and the Union's navigation of such hierarchies was vital to the organization's success.¹³²

To strengthen the core group, which included the likes of Wooten, Brown, Shorter, and Sidney Williams, Carl Stokes was chosen to serve as secretary and legal advisor. Much like Arnold Pinkney, Stokes was a welcome addition because he understood the political and social workings of Cleveland, Ohio across racial lines. As such, he served as an important part of the Union's leadership and an introductory figure to their activism within the city. Shortly after Stokes entered a bid for mayor of Cleveland, he resigned from the NIEU, but he continued a close relationship with the organization.¹³³

As the Union made efforts to get the headquarters in Cleveland solidified, Jim Brown contemplated the question of whether to continue his professional football career. Several months prior, in February 1966, several news media outlets had begun to circulate stories that the upcoming NFL season was Jim Brown's last. What gave these rumors credence was that it was the last year of his contract with the team, and the

¹³² Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Articles of Incorporation of The National Negro Industrial and Economic Union, roll B459, frame 283; The first meeting of the members of the Board of Trustees was held on May 28, 1968 at 6:30 pm; "Cooper Resignation Due Tuesday: Hewitt is School Board Hopeful," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 26 March 1967, 18A; "James Young Joins Insurance Company," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 5 September 1959, 2A; "Arnold Pinkney Named Campaign Director for Judge Charles White," *Call and Post*, 17 September 1966, 4A; "Negro Syndicate Plans \$2 1/2 -Million Project," *Call and Post*, 14 July 1962, 4A. As an insurance salesman, Pinkney provided many of the African American players on the Cleveland Browns with coverage.

¹³³ Arnold Pinkney was a member of the United Community Development Program, a group of African American lawyers and businessmen in Cleveland who developed a housing project and shopping center in Cleveland. Carl Stokes also served on the board of trustees for the Union.

Browns fullback was getting heavily involved in his acting career.¹³⁴ In May 1966, he began filming *The Dirty Dozen* in London, England. This was his second film towards fulfilling a three-movie contract he signed with Paramount Pictures earlier that year.¹³⁵

Problems arose when it became clear that Jim Brown's filming schedule conflicted with the Cleveland Browns' training camp. There were three months left of recording and with that timetable, Brown would have come into the football season a month after it started. Art Modell, owner of the Browns, gave him an ultimatum to report by July 17. Brown wanted to return to play the final year of his contract, but since he was unaware of when filming would be completed, and because he was not thrilled by Modell's demand, he decided to announce his retirement from the NFL while still on the movie set. On July 9, Brown read from a letter, "I am leaving the Browns with an attitude of friendliness and cooperation. Once I return to Cleveland I'll do everything I can do to help the Browns—other than playing." He continued:¹³⁶

After much deliberation I have come to the conclusion I will retire from professional football this season. My original intention was to try and participate in the 1966 National Football League season, but due to circumstances this is impossible. My ambition right now is to devote as much time as possible to the national Negro industrial and economic union project which stresses full participation of Negroes in the main stream [sic] of the American economy.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Associated Press, "Wide Business Interests May Lead Brown to Quit," *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1966, C3.

¹³⁵ Brown, *Out of Bounds*, 109.

¹³⁶ William N. Wallace, "Jim Brown Uncertain About Pro Football Career," *New York Times*, 29 May 1966, S1; "'Happy To Be Home': It's Movies and NIEU For Retired Jim Brown," *Call and Post*, 1 October 1966, 2A; Brown, *Out of Bounds*, 148-149; Gloria Steinem, "The Black John Wayne," *New York*, 11 November 1968, 35-39; Hal Lebowitz of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* was able to get the first-hand account from Brown about why he was retiring.

¹³⁷ Brown's first film was *Rio Conchos*, which debuted in 1964. In *The Dirty Dozen*, Brown played an American World War II soldier, who was imprisoned for killing a "white racist who attempted to castrate him." For the movie, he was a finalist for Best Supporting Actor in a film,

Brown departed as the NFL's Most Valuable Player (MVP) and the league's all-time leader in career rushing yards.

Friend, teammate, and Union executive, John Wooten was surprised by Brown's retirement. A day before the announcement Brown called him from England. He wanted to let "Woots" know he was not playing the upcoming year, so members of the Browns would not receive the news from the media, but rather from him first. Wooten noted, "Jim's departure shocked me. I knew that Jim was not intending to retire, but he got into a thing with Art Modell. And Art will be the first to tell you that he made a horrible mistake. He put an article in the paper that if Jim did not report on time, he would fine him." Wooten also noticed that Modell's strategy "really, really irritated Jim. He felt that he had stood up for Modell when they fired Paul Brown, and in helping Art overcome that, and now Art was treating him as a commoner." Numerous media reports questioned Brown's decision and hinted that Brown would come back and play that year. However, Wooten knew otherwise because, "When he made up his mind, I knew him well enough not to waste time trying to talk him out of it."¹³⁸

but the award was given to Walter Matthau. The nomination was an honor for Brown, as there were many doubts about Brown's thespian skills. However, Gloria Steinem, an activist and journalist, labeled him the "Black John Wayne," an expression that was more an exercise of appreciation than a slight towards Brown since several critics argued he was not an actor, but just a "black body." As filming took Brown away from many of the Union's day-to-day activities, Wooten provided updates when he returned to Cleveland.

¹³⁸ "Brown Quits Football, May Manage Clay," *The Miami News*, 14 July 1966, 19A, 21A; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Associated Press, "Jimmy Brown to Announce Retirement," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 July 1966, B5; United Press International, "Jim Brown Quits Game, May Manage Clay," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 July 1966, B7; Associated Press, "Collier Plots Attack: With No Jim Brown, Browns Will Throw," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 July

The announcement of Jim Brown's retirement came as a surprise to many others as well. Reporters across the nation fixated on whether he would come back and play out the year. Others addressed the fact Brown was stepping away from a game that made him the highest paid player. But Brown saw the situation differently. As he put it, "I wanted to depart in style, on my own set of terms. I wanted a career so consistent, production so constant, no one could fuck with me, the way they always do with an athlete who has lingered too long." Assessing his nine years, he added, "My first year in the NFL I led the league in rushing. My last year I was MVP. Bench that motherfucker." Brown left the NFL as the "greatest runner in pro football's annals." He was well aware of what happened to players who played well after their prime. Thus, the reality that he came into the NFL as leader of one of the most herald statistical categories, and to leave as the best, assured that he left the game with what he deemed dignity and grace that no one overshadowed. He had also amassed the highest salary in the league, and since many professional football players' careers do not last longer than five years, Brown had a longer than average career and he elected to leave on his own terms.¹³⁹

Throughout his professional football career, Brown prepared for life away from the game and made certain moves to secure his financial security. As a member of the

1966, B7; Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: Irrevocable Decision," *New York Times*, 18 July 1966, 32.

¹³⁹ Brown, *Out of Bounds*, 112; On October 18, 1966 Hubert Horatio Humphrey, Vice President of the United States sent him a congratulatory telegram that read: "I am delighted to join with thousands of others in saluting an outstanding American athlete who achieved unprecedented excellence in his field. For the past nine years, the name Jimmy Brown has been synonymous with professional football at its best. Jimmy Brown has contributed immeasurably to the increased respect, status and popularity of football. Few Americans have given more gridiron thrill to million of admiring people, young and old, negro and white, rich and poor, than the Cleveland Browns' incomparable number 32. I commend Jimmy Brown for his outstanding achievements in professional football and wish him success in his future endeavor."

Browns, he was made aware of the realities of his occupation and he knew his career was not forever. Brown noted, “I had a consulting contract, an addendum to my playing contract, which ran for three more years. I had deferred payments coming for five more years. Straight out of football, I earned more than I did in it. And no one tried to bust my head.” As his comment suggested, Brown was clearly aware of the physical toll and the impact that football had on one’s quality of life. Brown believed, “A man might love the game, but the game loves no one. The game will use what he has, discard him. The shit isn’t personal. Game needs new blood. A ninety-year-old woman can’t be on the cover of *Playboy*. A washed-up athlete can’t play football.” Thus, he retired knowing he had to secure his own financial future.¹⁴⁰

While the NIEU grappled with their organizing efforts in the midst of Jim Brown’s retirement from professional football, four days after his announcement the Cleveland chapter had to reassess their focus as major unrest ensued in the Hough area, a predominantly Black community in Cleveland. What ensued for the next six days was a series of events that became known as the Hough Riots. NIEU members were on notice about the civil disturbance as this was one of several locations they worked and had a particular history. They also worked in the area during the offseason, and served as teachers at Addison Junior High School, and partnered with the local Young Men Christian Associations for summer recreation programs for the youth. The Hough neighborhood was a populous with whom Union members had an investment. From what

¹⁴⁰ Brown, *Out of Bounds*, 109-111

transpired, their reaction to the disturbance resonated with other African Americans and provided them relevance within Black communities in Cleveland.¹⁴¹

During the 1960s relations between Blacks and Whites in Cleveland were deeply troubled. They worsened one summer night in 1966 at the Seventy-Niners Café in the heart of the Hough area on East 79th Street and Hough Avenue. Dave Feigenbaum and his brother Abe were co-owners of the establishment, and on Monday, July 18, Dave exchanged some obscenities with a female prostitute. He asked her to leave the business when she allegedly entered the bar seeking to get donations to aid the children of another prostitute, who recently died. Feigenbaum “muttered something about serving Negroes” to one of his workers, and some of the Black patrons of Seventy-Niners overheard him. Later that night, an African American man visited the establishment and bought a pint of wine, and asked for a pitcher of water with a glass. Feigenbaum denied his request since the customer had a take-out order, and then again informed his workers to not serve “no niggers no water.” The man who bought the wine, angered by the comments he overheard then made a sign out of a brown paper bag and posted it on the bar’s front door and it read, “No water for Niggers.”¹⁴²

As African American residents walked past Seventy-Niners Café, they noticed the sign on the edifice of the business. Angered by what they saw they drew other Black

¹⁴¹ Associated Press, “Brown Will Star In World War II Movie in Spring,” *The Washington Post*, 28 January 1966, D2; William N. Wallace, “Jim Brown Uncertain About Pro Football Career,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1966, S1; William N. Wallace, “Jim Brown Uncertain About Pro Football Career,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1966, S1; “Fitness For Fun...Project Champ,” *Call and Post*, 16 July 1966, 7A; Several Union members who also played for the Browns and Washington Redskins participated in the summer recreation programs: Paul Warfield, Jim Shorter, Walt Roberts, John Wooten, and Walter Johnson.

¹⁴² Marc E. Lackritz, *The Hough Riots of 1966*, (Cleveland: Regional Church Planning Office, 1968), 7-9; Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*, 48.

folks attention to the makeshift sign, and led some of the Hough residents to deface and break windows of the Feigenbaum café. As a result the police were called to calm the violence. When local forces arrived, they were greeted by rioting where businesses were set afire, others vandalized, and numerous people harmed. To quell the rioters, police used their guns on community residents. Unfortunately, a Black mother of three children, who reportedly had no part in the disturbance, was killed in the crossfire. The mayor of Cleveland, Ralph Locher, hesitated to call on the National Guard. He hoped the city's law enforcement would be able to quell the violence. The next day, July 19, Ohio Governor James Rhodes sent the National Guard to relieve some of the tension Cleveland police encountered. They were not as successful as government officials wanted as the rioting continued several more days. By the following Monday, July 25, the rioting had finally ended. At the end of nearly a week of rioting, four African Americans were killed, hundreds were injured, numerous arrests were made, and nearly \$2 million amassed in damages. While many White businesses were targeted, community institutions caught the brunt of the rioters. A vocational planning center that provided Hough residents employment training was firebombed. Thus, animosities that were originally centered on the Seventy-Niners Café spread to places that promoted the greater good of Hough like schools and churches.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Ibid., 7-9; Hilbert Black, "Police Fill Hough Riot Area," *Cleveland Press*, 19 July 1966; United Press International, "White-Hater Sees More Riots Ahead," *The Washington Post*, 29 July 1966, A4; Alvin War, "A Look at Hough July 1967," *Call and Post*, 22 July 1967, 9B; *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*, 48; United Press International, "Cleveland Aid Center Firebombed," *The Washington Post*, 25 August 1966, A4; The act of violence on the vocational planning center accrued \$750 in damage.

After the riots subsided, numerous investigations began that questioned the nature of the violence. Black nationalist organizations were the early targets. Harlrel Jones, a comrade of Sababa Akili and member of Afro Set, and also the supervisor of the Jomo Freedom Kenyatta (JFK) Youth Center, was summoned and testified before a grand jury. After the hearing Jones was met by reporters as he left the courtroom. To their surprise, he told them the violence would continue. Jones said, ““There will be riots here next week, next month, next year...Conditions which caused the riots haven’t been eliminated.”” As a result of the grand jury investigation, Cleveland law enforcement closed the JFK Youth Center for fear the location was a place where firebombs were being made for use by rioters. When questioned about that claim, Jones added, ““I have a gun. I don’t trust any white man. Police shot all the people who were shot in the Hough riots. Check the bullets.””¹⁴⁴ While the JFK was targeted, so were other Black groups. The activities of a “local gang” called the “Black Panthers” was accused by law officials of being responsible for some of the looting as well. When asked if he knew of the group, Jones mentioned he heard of the group ““in the South...they tried to start a black nationalist party there.”” His comment, of course, was a reference to the political group formed in Lowndes County, Alabama, known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), an organization comprised of Student Nonviolent Coordinating

¹⁴⁴ United Press International, “White-Hater Sees More Riots Ahead,” *The Washington Post*, 29 July 1966, A4; United Press International, “Testimony in Cleveland,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1966, 19; William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12-13; For more information on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, see Hasan K. Jeffries’ work *Bloody Lowndes*, Clayborne Carson’s *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. The Black Panther Party in Alabama had no affiliation with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California although the former inspired the latter.

Committee members who chose a black panther as their symbol. However, he was not aware of the group's presence in the city. Organizations like Afro Set had caught the attention of government officials. Their promotion of armed self-defense countered the non-violence rhetoric that permeated much of the Black freedom struggle. By 1966, the Black power ideology had grown, and entered the national dialogue as groups like the SNCC and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense promoted the notion Black people should control their political, economic, and social destinies.¹⁴⁵

While numerous elected officials tried to place the blame for the upheaval on Black Nationalists, many African Americans contended it was the failure of legislators to address the numerous concerns of their constituency who lived in overcrowded urban areas. Government officials were capable of making effective change, but their failure to address the racial discrimination in the city and the concerns of African Americans in the city was a major factor in the rioting. While Cleveland was considered "The Best Location in the Nation," as an urban center it ranked last in "education, housing, employment, health, welfare, law enforcement, and municipal services." A study conducted by the Cleveland Subcommittee of the Ohio State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights illustrated this point. Ironically, the Hough riots brought these issues to the forefront and got the attention of city officials. In the wake of the violence, they had every reason to want to understand Black Clevelanders' frustrations. Before a Senate subcommittee, Mayor Locher argued federal stipulations on city spending were to blame. Locher stressed the "red tape" associated with federal aid

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

needed to be rid, and city officials be given the authority to do with the money as they choose. The mayor's denial of responsibility signaled the failure of Cleveland administrators to recognize the frustrations and realities of Black life in the city.¹⁴⁶

The lack of jobs amongst African Americans under the age of thirty years was one issue that United States Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach identified as a reason for the rise in violence in many of American's major urban cities. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Cleveland served as a major industrial hub. However, by the mid-1950s, the industrial jobs began to decline. By the summer of 1963, African Americans made up 18% of the labor force, while 45% of Black youth under the age of twenty-one were unemployed. Thus, there were great economic disparities between Whites and Blacks in the city. On average, White families brought in \$2,500 more than Black households. Such a disproportion in wealth was due to 66% of the people in predominantly Black communities like Central, Hough, and Glenville received welfare, coupled with more than 75% of dependent children accounting for federal aid. There were other factors at play for the inequalities amongst wealth and job opportunities. One businessman from the Cleveland area argued "whites don't want to work next to" people of color. As employees complained about having to work with Blacks, many companies refused to hire African Americans. These particular issues caught the attention of NIEU members.¹⁴⁷

Since the offices of the Union in Cleveland had only been open for about four months, the violence that ensued in July could have slowed their efforts. Rather the NIEU

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.; Daisy Craggett, "City Limits: What Price Glory?" *Call and Post*, 16 July 1966, 3A

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

used the Hough riots to address the political and economic inequalities throughout the city, particularly in Black neighborhoods. It proved a strategic move on their part as they used their social clout as professional athletes to call on city politicians and businessmen to begin the work of solving the problems from which the earlier violence stemmed. Hal Lebovitz, a writer for the *Plain Dealer* interviewed Walter Beach, John Brown, and John Wooten where the three players voiced their concerns about the riots. The three men concluded: (a) if the amount of money spent to stop the riots had been used to alleviate the conditions which caused them, the violence that ensued would not have been; (b) housing and jobs, or the lack thereof, were a major reason for the violence; (c) while they were against the rioting and law-breaking that ensued, they understood the “discontent” of the people; and (d) Walter Beach identified the weakness of the Black community in the lack of “any grass-roots leader,” a notion he believed to be great concern in many predominantly African American neighborhoods.¹⁴⁸

John Wooten argued Black folks in Cleveland needed people who were willing to associate ““with them and [talk] their language, a leader who they will listen to. Somebody who will go in the barbershops, get haircuts with them; go into the pool rooms, onto the playgrounds; somebody they can come to with their problems.”” He continued, ““I know this won’t make me popular with some of our elected officials, but it’s the truth. The masses don’t have leaders to identify with and communicate with.”” Wooten was able to gather from African Americans he communicated with throughout Cleveland, that the people wanted leaders and representatives with whom they had a

¹⁴⁸Hal Lebovitz, “3 Browns in the Know Reflect on Situation in Hough,” *Plain Dealer*, 24 July 1966, 1C.

relationship. Interestingly, the Negro Industrial and Economic Union had men who were willing to serve in such roles. Wooten also told Lebovitz “‘Cleveland was lulled into a feeling [the riots] couldn’t happen here because we had so many Negro officials. Cleveland is a good city. With the right kind of leadership it wouldn’t have happened here. Maybe now it will wake up and be a better one.’”¹⁴⁹ The way in which these three members of the Cleveland Browns responded in the aftermath of the Hough riots made them important to the political conversation pertaining to the Black community at the time. The political philosophy they expressed resonated with Hough residents and many Cleveland residents, who viewed them as concerned members of their community who addressed their interests. As Executive Director, John Wooten became a spokesman for the group articulating the Union’s position in different public venues on issues along with Jim Brown. For the University of Colorado graduate, it was about the formation of alliances that helped “‘bring about unity through racial pride, a unity that [was] created by a coming together and doing things for ourselves...[and] to give money to help build up Negro communities. The Jews, Italians and Irish have done this. Negroes have to do it, too.’”¹⁵⁰

While strengthening the chapters in Los Angeles and Cleveland were the focus during the summer months of 1966, by the winter the focus shifted to fundraising for the organization. That December, Jim Brown expressed before reporters the Negro Industrial

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Francis Ward, “Jim Brown Tackles Film and ‘Black Power’,” *Jet*, 11 August 1966, 22; Brad Pye, Jr., “Bass Is A Big Fish For Rams,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1 September 1966, B2; John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

and Economic Union had a target of raising \$10 million. The group wanted to raise this particular amount so they did not “have to go to the SBA for help” because it was their belief that “we can help people on our own.” It was the objective of the NIEU to become a national organization and reach Black folks in communities all over the country. Thus, Union leadership operated under the belief that if enough people donated to the Union, their financial goal would be easily reached. The Union was not in competition with other Black organizations, and was not in opposition to the goals set forth by other groups, as being the vanguard was not important to them. As Jim Brown noted, the intention was to consolidate businesses and start new businesses and improve existing ones. He argued

We’re not in competition with anyone; we’re not worried about who’s in the forefront. We just want Negroes to participate in the economy of the country so they can stand on their own feet and won’t have to beg anybody to give them a little of this and a little of that. What could be more dignified than that?¹⁵¹

Brown made those statements to put to rest any claims he wanted to create a separate economy. It was a strategic way for Brown to distance himself from the Nation of Islam, an organization many media outlets linked him to as a member, despite his constant denials.¹⁵²

The desire for African Americans to promote “green power” was similar to the demands made regarding school desegregation, voting rights, and protection from White vigilantism. Yet, the promotion of economic development was an essential critical

¹⁵¹ Bill Lane, “The Inside Story: Business Help,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 29 December 1966, A3

¹⁵² Ibid.; While the event was scheduled to commemorate Brown’s football career for October 16, scheduling conflicts forced the event to be held January 29, 1967.

addition to the fight for freedom, justice, and equality. Jim Brown wanted to promote these tenets and get rid of the option for African Americans to play victim. The perfect time to do so was at the farewell tribute sponsored by the NIEU and Art Modell and the Cleveland Browns scheduled for January 29, 1967. On that particular day, Jim Brown received a Western Union telegram from Martin Luther King, Jr. It read:

My heart warmed with [the] example you are setting for our nation stop to express athletic powers is noble but to show example of superior manhood is devine [sic]. For too long our great heroes have settled for glory of crowd applause without looking into pressing needs of our disinherited brothers. Negro Industrial and Economic Union speaks to our most pressing needs. Southern Christian Leadership Conference has open new department special project and economic development. At your earliest convenience I would like to send head of department Reverend Jesse L. Jackson Chicago to meet you for council and share our findings growing out of Chicago projects which are economic explorations with a few more pages to on my book I could not have surprised you in Cleveland but our entire organization sends highest respects.¹⁵³

Jim Brown's athletic prowess on the football field garnered the attention of many and King recognized that fact. King's memo was an expression of gratitude in reference to Brown's creation of the NIEU. The SCLC leader wanted to extend an "olive branch" to him and the Union on behalf of his group, as he recognized the utility of such a relationship between both organizations.

As Martin Luther King, Jr.'s letter also demonstrated the reach Jim Brown had because of his time with the Cleveland Browns. Many African Americans during this time were fans of the team not only because of the great number of Black players on the team in respect to other NFL teams, but also because of Jim Brown. By the early 1960s, he was bestowed the "race man" label, and interestingly was not shy about embracing the

¹⁵³ Jim Brown and Jeff Baxter, *Jim Brown Tells It Like Is*. Cleveland: Main Line, 1968.

responsibilities it entailed. Yet, when the time came to recognize Jim Brown's career, there was no surprise thousands came out to recognize him as Cleveland Browns football embodied the social fabric of the city.¹⁵⁴

As the "Farewell Day" festivities approached, Brown had to fly to Cleveland from Jamaica as he was filming *Dark of the Sun*. Many Browns fans hoped Jim Brown would end his retirement and return to the team, but no such announcement was given. The retirement celebration had two purposes: to recognize the prolific football career of Brown, and also raise money for the NIEU. There was a \$50 a plate dinner at the Sahara Hotel in downtown Cleveland, followed by a program to honor Brown at the Cleveland Arena. For the latter program there were nearly 5,000 people in attendance, with several professional athletes, businessmen, and community leaders in attendance like Tim Brown of the Philadelphia Eagles, Bernie Casey of the San Francisco 49ers, Sam Huff of the Washington Redskins, Minnesota Twins pitcher Jim "Mudcat" Grant, Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics, and heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Ali spoke for a few minutes to honor his friend. He opened, "You know there was some talk a while back about Jim Brown becoming a fighter." Looking at Brown with a wide smile, he continued, "He's even worked out some with me...He's strong but he's not about to get in the ring with the champ. Jim doesn't even want to dream about being a fighter. That would be a nightmare." Ali concluded telling the guests in attendance that his "great respect" for Brown brought him to Cleveland as he prepared for an upcoming fight. From

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

that moment, Ali gave center stage to Brown who approached the podium without any papers or notes.¹⁵⁵

In his opening comments he thanked those in attendance, and immediately moved his focus to the NIEU, discussing his political philosophy and how it related to the organization. He acknowledged that everyone was there to celebrate his football career, and stated, “I think of it more as something else. I think of it as a point wherein the Negro Industrial and Economic Union can be brought forth, and then move on to greater things.” Brown began to talk about the “struggle” and the various means used by African Americans to obtain social equality. He also exposed an oft-recognized contradiction of American society that lay within the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights. For him these were to be the measurements of freedom not only for African Americans but all citizens of the country, as they did not “say that one portion of our society should have more freedom than another.” Brown exposed an oft-recognized contradiction of American society at the time: the denial of civil rights, despite believing “We live in the number one country in the world. We all have an opportunity to better ourselves.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Associated Press, “4580 Pay Tribute: Jim Brown Given Film, Jersey No.32,” *The Washington Post*, 31 January 1967, D1; Francis Ward, “Grid Pros Bid Jim Brown Farewell in \$20,000 Benefit,” *Jet*, 16 February 1967, 50; A.S. “Doc” Young, “Jim Brown Says: ‘Green Power’ is Key to Equality,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 February 1967, A3; Chuck Heaton, “Plain Talk: ‘Nice Guy’ Clay Wins New Friends,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 31 January 1967, 29; United Press International, “Browns Retire Jimmy’s No. 32,” *Chicago Defender*, 4 February 1967, 13; A.S. “Doc” Young, “Jim Brown Says: ‘Green Power’ is Key to Equality,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 February 1967, A3; Brown was given a film by Art Modell was titled “The Best of Jim Brown.” Carla Thomas, a songstress with Stax Records serenaded him with “The Ballad of Jim Brown.” Other musical guests included Martha and the Vandellas, The Kin Folk and the Jive Five.

¹⁵⁶ United Press International, “Plan Jim Brown Farewell: Top Figures Sent Oct. 16 Invitation,” *Chicago Defender*, 24 September 1966, 17; Thomas Vail, “Excerpt of Jim brown’s Farewell Night Speech,” *Plain Dealer*, 5 February 1967, C8; Jim Brown and Jeff Baxter, *Jim Brown Tells It Like Is*. Cleveland: Main Line, 1968; Interestingly, the speech Brown gave at his “Farewell

In the speech, Brown continued to identify the obvious inequalities many Blacks recognized in their fight for social, political, and economic equality. He discussed the use of non-violence as a strategy used by African Americans to address the biases that prevented them from full citizenship. In his view, the approach “failed,” and the notions of Black Power that called for the use of “technical equipment” had “caused trouble in the streets.” Some Blacks espoused an idea to form their own economy and physically separate from America through the use of violent means if needed. They held a great disregard towards “Whitey” and felt there was nothing to be gained from co-existing with those of the lighter hue. While these beliefs were just a fraction of what the concept of “Black Power” meant, many Whites associated the term with “violence and destruction, racism, and black domination.” Brown also noted that racial separation was not feasible, a tenet promoted by the Nation of Islam and “Farewell Day” attendee Muhammad Ali. For the Syracuse graduate, he supported many of the NOI’s beliefs like not drinking alcohol, eating a healthy diet, and treating women with respect. Yet, he disagreed with

Day” was the focus of correspondence between FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and a Cleveland provocateur agent. FBI documents focus on Brown filming *Dark of the Sun* in Jamaica, the farewell celebration, and charges brought against him by an 18-year old, Brenda Ayres who filed suit against Brown in 1965 for assault and battery and paternity of a child born to him. He was eventually acquitted of those charges. Speculation about their observations and the objectives of COINTELPRO could lead to the conclusion FBI officials tried to determine ways they could sully Brown’s name and the NIEU. Aside from the government surveillance, the event included fifty elementary school essay contest winners, selected by the NIEU, who had to write about why they wanted to attend the event. Along with tickets to the event, they were also able to meet many of the athletes in attendance for the farewell celebration.¹⁵⁶

the call for African Americans to form a separate nation in the United States as bad thinking.¹⁵⁷

Brown noted the purpose of the NIEU was “very simple but not new” and had “been applied throughout the history of this country.” It was the idea of self-help he wanted Black people to reconnect to embracing a do-it-yourself attitude. Most importantly, African Americans had utilized the principle to better the lives throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One only need to think of the teachings of Booker Taliaferro Washington and his industrial education ideology at Tuskegee Institute, or Marcus Garvey and his program of economic development instituted through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The NIEU did not take elements from these gentlemen, but a comparison of their philosophies to those of the Union illustrates the long history of African Americans supporting themselves through the creation of their own businesses.¹⁵⁸

By 1967, thousands of African American citizens had died in the fight for civil rights. In that vein, Jim Brown made an appeal to all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or religious belief, and argued for the use of free enterprise as something all people, “black, white, bigot, liberal” were unable to disagree with because the United

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.; William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 18; Francis Ward, “Grid Pros Bid Jim Brown Farewell in \$20,000 Benefit,” *Jet*, 16 February 1967, 50-53; Hal Lebovitz, “Notes-Off the Cuff,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 March 1967, 33. The affair raised over \$20,000, with \$10,000 donated by Muhammad Ali to the organization as well. Sport Magazine presented The Top Athlete in Two Decades trophy to Brown.

¹⁵⁸ For more on Booker T. Washington see his autobiography *Up From Slavery* and Louis R. Harlan’s two volumes, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* and *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*. Please see *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, and Ula Yvette Taylor’s work *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* for details concerning the UNIA and the life of Marcus Garvey.

States' economy was based on that principle. While "Black Power" was considered "a good rallying cry," Brown felt it had failed to be defined by the people who were to use it. From his point of view, African Americans had "taken it and twisted it into something that is very sensational, but nothing else. It has been a crutch for a lot of people who did not have a program." Essentially, he believed numerous groups embraced the slogan, but there was no real definition of "Black Power." The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) used the slogan for political power through the electorate. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and Determination saw it as a means to end police brutality. SCLC, particularly with Martin Luther King, Jr., saw the utilization phrase as the death of any future gains within the movement.¹⁵⁹

Yet, the members of the Union believed if the United States was a society of independent people govern by free-enterprise principles, then the truths it found to be "self-evident," should not have been predicated on whether a group of people endorsed an ideology another sector of society disliked. In all, no philosophy should prevent freedom, justice, and equality. Brown stated more than forty years after the speech was made,

I bought into the concept that I pay my taxes, I would have representation. I'm an American citizen. I deserve the rights of every other American citizen. I don't have to discuss someone liking me or not liking me. All I want is my rights. That keeps out all the weak arguments and discussions. I'm of African descent. I don't believe in integration. It is important to be very definitive in your position and your position should be one that is correct. And the correct position is discrimination is wrong, and those who

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Vail, "Excerpt of Jim brown's Farewell Night Speech," *Plain Dealer*, 5 February 1967, C8; Jim Brown and Jeff Baxter, *Jim Brown Tells It Like Is*. Cleveland: Main Line, 1968.

practice it are wrong. What you got to do is wrench your freedom out of the hands of these sick people.”¹⁶⁰

What Brown and others knew in the 1960s and in retrospect, was moral suasion was not conducive to a group of people who wanted nothing to do with African Americans simply because of their complexion, and prevented them from enjoying liberties granted American citizens at all costs. Thus, the greatest need was for the federal government to protect the rights of its tax-paying citizenry. The Negro Industrial and Economic Union wanted to uphold the principles of liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the “god-given right” to express their opinions without reservation since they considered themselves “free and sovereign individuals.”¹⁶¹

By the summer of 1967 the NIEU had enjoyed its first year of existence. It was a small victory as the group garnered national attention, but was far from fulfilling its mission of supporting Black businesses on a grand scale. As the Union continued its efforts to grow its membership and form chapters in cities across the U.S., some of its core members became involved in one of the most paramount demonstrations of solidarity with Muhammad Ali. Known in other circles as Cassius Clay, he was the “heavyweight champion of the world,” a recognition given to him by the World Boxing Association (WBA) and World Boxing Council (WBC). However, his refusal to enlist with the U.S. Selective Services caused him to face jail time, jeopardize his professional

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.; Interview with Sababa Akili, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 20, 2012, Atlanta, Georgia. Recording in possession of author; Recording in possession of author; Interview with Walter Beach III, interview with the author, digital recording, April 12, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author.

boxing career, and put Main Bout Inc., a management group he helped form, in limbo. As a result, John Wooten, at the encouragement of Jim Brown, contacted several high profile members of the NIEU to convene for a meeting with Ali. Chapter four examines Muhammad Ali's refusal to enlist for the Vietnam War and the national debate that ensued, and will focus on the intersections of race, religion, civil rights, and sports.

Chapter 4

“I’d be less of a man now if I tried to run away from him now.”

Muhammad Ali, the NIEU, and the Vietnam Draft

On the Sunday afternoon of June 4, 1967, a group of African American male professional athletes representing the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU) met at the organization’s headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. Hailed as the “Ali Draft Summit,” this gathering was held in the wake of heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali’s public announcement he would not submit to be drafted and sent to fight in the Vietnam War. Facing jail time, the devout member of the Nation of Islam and supporter of the NIEU reached a crossroad. The conflict over Ali’s political beliefs was at its peak and the future of his boxing career was in jeopardy. As Ali’s declaration sent shockwaves throughout the United States and abroad, NIEU members sought a meeting with the “champ” to discuss his recent position on the Vietnam War and the US military draft.

One of the most important elements of this meeting was the presence of three men-Bill Russell, Jim Brown, and Muhammad Ali- who can be considered the “Holy Athletic Trinity” of the Black freedom struggle. These three, all friends, were also the most vocal athletes against white supremacy and racial injustice in America.

Accompanying the “Holy Athletic Trinity,” were seven other athletes, and a mayoral candidate also in attendance. Curtis McClinton (Kansas City Chiefs), Willie Davis

(Green Bay Packers), Walter Beach III, Sidney Williams and John Wooten (Cleveland Browns), Jim Shorter and Bobby Mitchell (Washington Redskins), and Carl B. Stokes, a state representative at the time, who was in the midst of preparations for his bid as mayor of the city of Cleveland. Together, they composed part of the NIEU's nucleus of professional athletes and members who provided financial aid and additional support to Black businesses across the nation, along with community service programs for the youth. That afternoon, these men faced a difficult decision, whether to support or denounce Ali at a pinnacle moment in his career.¹⁶²

In order to fully understand the significance of the "Ali Draft Summit," one must examine a series of personal and professional exchanges that when brought together, unveil the complexities surrounding one man's political viewpoint. This chapter explores the development of Muhammad Ali's racial and political consciousness in relation to his religious beliefs and friendship with Malcolm X. The chapter also focuses on Ali and Jim Brown's comradeship and business ventures. The intent here is to discuss the formation of Main Bout, Inc., a successful management and promotions company created by Jim Brown and operated by NIEU members, and its ties to Ali and the boxing federation. Prior to the Draft Summit, Main Bout was the first Black company successfully involved in the promotion and televising of professional boxing matches. Largely dependent on the athleticism and economic support of Ali, his refusal to enter the military caused concern over the stability of Brown's brainchild. Those associated with the Union and Main Bout

¹⁶² Bill Russell was player/coach with the Boston Celtics, Jim Brown, formerly of the Cleveland Browns, and Muhammad Ali, the World Boxing Association (WBA) and World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight champion.

were confronted with a dilemma of brotherhood versus business. Contemplating the issue at hand, NIEU members gathered before the Draft Summit to decide whether they would support “the champ.” This chapter attempts to answer questions about the role of Black professional athletes in the fight for human rights.¹⁶³

Muhammad Ali was born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. on Saturday, January 17, 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky to Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr. and Odessa O’Grady Clay. He and his younger brother Rudolph were reared in Baptist teachings; tenets the elder Clays were steadfast on their children embracing in their adulthood. As a youth he began his pugilist training after his bicycle was stolen. As he recounted, ““I reported [the stolen bicycle] to the neighborhood branch of a police youth program. I saw a lot of boys boxing in the gym there and I’ve been at it ever since. Never did get my bike back, though.”” Ali joined the young boxers and soon developed a fondness for the sport participating in the Louisville Police Athletic League. He became so great he won numerous Golden Gloves titles at the state and national levels, and carried a record of 121 wins. These feats afforded him the opportunity to represent the United States in the 17th Summer Olympiad in Rome, Italy in 1960. A successful showing meant a lucrative career boxing professionally.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Main Bout consisted of Herbert Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam’s leader, John Ali, the National Secretary for the religious group. These two served as “leading management.” Michael Malitz and Robert Arum, who was Malitz’s attorney.

¹⁶⁴ Robert L. Teague, “Via Stolen Bike: The Road to Rome,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1960, S3; Shirley Povich, “This Morning...” *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1960, A15; United Press International, “Clay To Make Jump: Olympic Winner Eyes Pro Ring,” *Daily Defender*, 7 September 1960, 23; William Reynolds, an affluent metal manufacturer of Reynolds Aluminum Company served as Clay’s sponsor prior to the Summer Olympics.

Prior to leaving for the Olympic games, Clay visited New York City for a meeting with Dick Schaap, a reporter for *Newsweek*. Schaap wanted to do an interview with him and another USA Olympic boxer, Wilbert “Skeeter” McClure, for a feature story. The trio took a visit to Harlem, New York, where Schaap introduced the novices to friend and boxing great Sugar Ray Robinson. En route to the meeting they came upon a “soap box preacher” who iterated African Americans needed to adopt a “do-for-self” ideology, and support themselves by creating Black businesses. Amazed by what he heard and the way other Blacks endorsed the speaker’s rhetoric, Clay asked Schaap, “Ain’t he gonna get in trouble?” Schaap told him no. Unlike Ali’s hometown of Louisville, verbal demonstrations were customary in the Harlem community. This moment between the pugilists and the reporter amidst the streets of Harlem served as a genesis for the political awakening of Clay that came full circle by 1964.¹⁶⁵

In Rome, Clay had much success. One U.S. Olympic committee member commented, ““That boy’s putting on an amazing performance in Rome.”” Winner of the Light Heavyweight gold medal, Ali’s showmanship in Italy earned comparisons to some of boxing’s best. One particular person was African American boxer Floyd Patterson, who turned pro after winning gold in the Summer Olympics in 1952. The expectation was the Louisville native would follow the same path. In all, numerous agents and managers “drooled” over the possibility of landing a top prizefighter. Due to Olympic rules, he was an amateur boxer and not allowed to speak publicly about his future

¹⁶⁵David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*. (New York: Random House, 1998), 101; Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 142; On April 18, 1960, prior to leaving for Rome, Clay registered with the Selective Service Local Board 47 in Louisville, Kentucky.

aspirations. Clay's abilities brought him great attention from the media, who were infatuated with his braggadocio, and intense love for himself. In the Olympic Village it earned him the name "Cassius Conceit."¹⁶⁶

At a press conference following his gold medal victory, a Russian reporter asked him about his feelings on bringing notoriety to the United States with his gold medal performance, despite the fact he was unable to be served at a Woolworth's in Louisville, or most cities across the United States. He replied, "Tell your readers we've got qualified people working on that problem, and I'm not worried about the outcome...to me, the U.S.A. is the best country in the world, counting yours." Clay added, "It may be hard to get something to eat sometimes, but anyhow I ain't fighting alligators and living in a mud hut."¹⁶⁷ Speaking as an eighteen year-old, Clay's statements demonstrated the light heartedness of an eighteen year-old in regards to a very serious social crisis. Such expressions from Clay would be quite different in the years that followed, especially after he proved himself to be a fighter who could "float like a butterfly, and sting like a bee." Upon returning home, Clay visited a Louisville restaurant, gold medal around his neck

¹⁶⁶ United Press International, "Three Americans in Boxing Finals: Crook Scores a Knockout—Clay and McClure Win—Czech Beats Daniels," *New York Times*, 4 September 1960, 131; Shirley Povich, "This Morning..." *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1960, A15; Associated Press, "Champ Boxer Proves a Champ Ambassador," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 August 1960, C3; United Press International, "Clay To Make Jump: Olympic Winner Eyes Pro Ring," *Daily Defender*, 7 September 1960, 23; Lee D. Jenkins, "Cassius Clay Prepares For Pro Ring Jump," *The Chicago Defender*, 24 September 1960, 23; Jim Murray, "Cassius on Clay," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April 1962, B1.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Lipsyte, "'I don't have to be what you want me to be,' says Muhammad Ali... 'I'm Free to Be Who I Want,'" *New York Times*, 28 May 1967, 29,42-45,57,60; Remnick, *King of the World*, 103-104.

and was denied service. The racial politics he tried to avoid in his interview with the Russian reporter became more evident despite his win in Rome.¹⁶⁸

As Clay grappled with the realities of Jim Crow coupled with athletic stardom, he decided to turn professional on October 26, 1960. He entrusted in a group of White men from his hometown to serve as his financial backers. They called themselves the Louisville Sponsoring Group (LSG) and served as his managing group. They consisted of eleven men between the ages of twenty-five and seventy, ten of who were millionaires. Ali signed with them for \$10,000 with his parents serving as cosigners. A year and a half later, the young fighter moved to Miami, Florida where he lived and trained. This period in his career was highlighted with Clay winning his first ten fights, seven of which were by knockout or technical knockout. During this time, he also became involved with the Nation of Islam (NOI). This was a move LSG encouraged him to remain silent about his involvement with the group, as any connections to the organization would hurt him financially. Despite his management group's warning, Clay was intrigued by their rhetoric that addressed racism, and attended numerous meetings at the NOI mosque in Miami, and enjoyed several conversations with Ishmael Sabakhan, his first teacher of the NOI philosophy. From there meetings, a NOI minister in Atlanta gave word to headquarter of the young pugilist's interest. Elijah Muhammad reminded the Atlanta representative his purpose was "to make converts, not to fool around with fighters," as a

¹⁶⁸ Robert Lipsyte, The Beatles and Clay Spar a Fast Roundelay: Visitors Square Off Against Fighter at Training Camp," *New York Times*, 19 February 1964, 46; Robert Lipsyte, "Clay Fought Way Up Thru Golden Gloves," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1964, B2; There is historical debate of whether Clay threw the medal into the Ohio River after the restaurant incident.

Muslim should not concern himself with frivolous activities, especially sports.¹⁶⁹ Despite, failing to receive Muhammad's endorsement, the ideals of the organization resonated with Clay. Witnessing a group of African Americans who openly challenged second-class citizenship and White supremacy in America was appealing. The discipline that was exhibited through their demeanor, dress, and diet; not to mention the call for the unification of Blacks in America through their own brand of Islam, excited the young man from Louisville.¹⁷⁰

The Nation of Islam became particularly influential in life of Clay after he discovered minister Malcolm X (formerly Malcolm Little). His powerful oratory and charismatic sermons delivered from soapboxes along the streets of Harlem, New York brought new young members and supporters to the NOI. Public orations were a tradition of this community, a custom made popular since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Malcolm X verbally challenged White supremacy and its proponents, whom he referred to as "blue eyed devils." The attention he received also created animosities amongst other ministers of the NOI, including leader Elijah Muhammad. Yet, Minister Malcolm's fiery, dynamic oratory inspired Cassius Clay to join the Nation of Islam at the age of eighteen. Over the next several years, the two young men developed a strong bond. Together they

¹⁶⁹ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 469-501; Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 91; Michael Ezra, "Main Bout, Inc., Black Economic Power, and Professional Boxing: The Cancelled Muhammad Ali/Ernie Terrell Fight," *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 29, Number 3, Fall 2002, 417; Clay would later sign with trainer Angelo Dundee, who contributed to his early success.

¹⁷⁰ United Press International, "Clay to Turn Pro," *New York Times*, 7 September 1960, 50; United Press International, "'Brainwashing': Father Says Clay Joined Muslims at 18," *The Washington Post*, 7 February 1964, B1; While a high school student, Clay wanted to write a paper for his English class that focused on the Nation of Islam, but his teacher disapproved of the topic.

discussed religion, politics, and the role of the Black man in American society. Clay had such admiration for the minister that he often referred to him as his “big brother.”¹⁷¹

When Clay was not studying the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, he was focused on his boxing career. From 1962 to 1963, Clay remained undefeated as a professional boxer. Outside the boxing ring, the champion received word that he was classified as 1-A by the Selective Service System, thereby making him eligible to serve in the military. The Louisville native’s military classification is important because it would serve as the basis for his refusal to serve in Southeast Asia. While his career was burgeoning, the United States intensified its efforts in Vietnam in an effort to strengthen the country’s influence in the region, as there was an abundance of commodities like oil and rubber for the taking. Also, in the area, religious friction was amplified between South Vietnam leader Ngo Dinh Diem and Buddhist monks who protested his favoritism towards Catholics and pro-Christian policies in a country where the citizens overwhelmingly practiced Buddhism. One of the most monumental forms of dissent occurred on Tuesday, June 11, 1963. In an act to bring attention to the lack of justice and religious freedom afforded, Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, set himself afire and died as thousands watched. More monks protested in the same fashion, which garnered international attention, and eventually Diem’s rule began to hinder the U.S.’s efforts in the region. Backed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a coup was planned for Friday, November 1, 1963 where Diem was killed and marked the end of his regime. In the wake of this changing of the guard, the United States heightened its efforts in thwarting the Vietcong. Yet exactly

¹⁷¹ The surname “X” was given to converts to replace their last names. According to NOI doctrine, the letter took the place of what they called “the name of the slave master.”

three weeks after Ngo Dinh Diem's death, on Friday, November 22, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.¹⁷²

The president's death was shocking and many Americans, not Blacks, were heart broken. In a strategic move, Elijah Muhammad instructed all NOI ministers to refrain from making any comments on the death of the president as he feared political backlash. Prior to Kennedy's assassination, Muhammad had been outspoken about the President's "New Frontier" plans and any slight of Kennedy's death brought unwanted attention to the organization. However, on December 1, Malcolm X gave a speech called "God's Judgment on White America," where he failed to refrain from commenting on the president's death. Speaking before a crowd of about seven hundred people at a NOI rally at the Manhattan Center in New York City, during the question and answer portion of his talk, he proclaimed, "[I] never foresaw that the chickens would come home to roost so soon...Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad." Attendees laughed and applauded these sentiments. Malcolm X also referenced the killings of Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, Mississippi NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers, and the bombing of Sixteenth Street

¹⁷² Ibid.; Malcolm W. Browne, "Diem Appeals for Calm Over Buddhist Crisis," *The Washington Post*, 8 June 1963, A10; Associated Press, "Monk Suicide by Fire in Anti-Diem Protest," *New York Times*, 11 June 1963, 6; Reuters, "Buddhists Gathering Today in Saigon to Plan Protests," *New York Times*, 28 July 1963, 4; David Halberstam, "60,000 Buddhists March in Vietnam: Mourn Monk in 4 Cities—Regime Rebuffed Again," *New York Times*, 31 July 1963, 3; Associated Press, "5000 Viet Buddhists Protest Against Diem," *The Washington Post*, 12 August 1963, A12; In 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy had been selected as the 35th president of the United States and he continued to support the policies Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower had implemented in relations to Vietnam.

Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed four young African American girls as evidence enough for the “roost.”¹⁷³

Malcolm X's comments over Kennedy's death caused a public frenzy as the media used his speech as a way to malign the NOI. From the vantage of reporters, the group's rhetoric of separatism and intolerance of Whites had reached an all-time high in the wake of the president's assassination. The publicity the Nation of Islam received over this event was not good for the organization's reputation. Since he went against the request of Elijah Muhammad, which in result put the NOI under fire with national media, Malcolm X was suspended from the organization for ninety days. He did not speak or make any public appearances on behalf of the group. Muhammad told reporters “Minister Malcolm did not speak on behalf of the honorable Elijah Muhammad, the nation [sic] of Islam or any of Mr. Muhammad's followers.” One member in the Nation of Islam expressed Malcolm X had “emerged as a ‘personality’ rather than as a spokesman for the movement.” This suggested there were long held tension within the NOI to suppress X's popularity. It was reported that Elijah Muhammad's “immediate family resented the status of Malcolm as the most quoted in the newspapers and on TV of the Muslims.” It was a case of the follower outshining the leader. In January 1964, through the

¹⁷³ “Malcolm X Scores U.S. and Kennedy,” *The New York Times*, 2 December 1963, 21; With the untimely death of Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson took control of the oval office and inherited the task of executing the military agenda of the United States' in Vietnam. In reference to his talk at the Manhattan Center, Malcolm X alluded to the United States government were heavily involved in the assassination of Lumumba in 1961. Evers was shot and killed by Byron De La Beckwith in the driveway of his Jackson, Mississippi home. Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson (all fourteen years old) and Denise McNair (age 11), were the four young girls killed in the church bombing.

encouragement of other ministers, Malcolm X was relieved of his duties as head of Harlem Mosque No. 7 and national minister.¹⁷⁴

In lieu of this change within the Nation, Cassius Clay invited Malcolm X to Florida while he trained for his match against Sonny Liston scheduled for February 25, 1964. While X dealt with internal matters with “the messenger of Allah,” his friend Clay dealt with his own conundrum. In January, a month prior to the match, Ali took a pre-introduction military qualifying exam. The physical portion of the test was completed with no difficulty and he passed. The mental fitness section posed a predicament for him. He scored in the sixteenth percentile, which was considerably below the minimum qualification for military service. This resulted in his reclassification from 1-A to 1-Y, a distinction given to those who were “available for military service, but qualified only in case of war or national emergency.” For the next two years, he did not have to deal with any issues regarding military service.¹⁷⁵

As the match with Liston drew closer, the Black Muslims continued to distance themselves from Clay. The reasoning for the disassociation is not clear, but it can be attributed to the rumors that Clay would lose to Liston who was heavily favored. Behind closed doors, the relationship between the boxer and his management group, LSG, became strained. Bill MacDonald, the promoter for the fight wanted Clay to publicly

¹⁷⁴ “Malcolm X Suspended!: Muslim Head Drops Malcolm X in Rift,” Chicago Daily Defender, 5 December 1963, 1, 3; R.W. Apple, Jr., “Malcolm X Silenced for Remarks On Assassination of Kennedy,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1963, 22; “Malcolm Expected To Be Replaced,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1963, 27; Major Robinson, “Cassius Clay May Back Malcolm If Black Muslim Group Divides,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 February 1964, 1; Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 200-202.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 63-67; Manning Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011), 280-281.

reject his connection to the Black Muslims and Malcolm X, in particular. This came as a result of Clay's growing friendship with the once close confidant of Elijah Muhammad. While under suspension for his remarks regarding the assassination of Kennedy, Malcolm X's presence at the boxer's training facilities created pandemonium amongst sponsors and members of the media. MacDonald threatened Clay that if he did not adhere to his request that LSG would find another boxer to replace him on the card. It was not long before Malcolm X was aware of McDonald's ultimatum and when asked his opinion, he encouraged Clay to refuse his proposition. While, a search for another fighter was not made, a compromise was reached between the two parties. Minister Malcolm agreed with Harold Conrad, one of the other fight promoters and left town to ease the tensions over the boxer's connection to the NOI, but returned in time to attend the fight.¹⁷⁶

Before Malcolm X retreated, he and Clay received a warm visit from Jim Brown. It was the first time Brown was able to sit down with both men extensively. Brown admitted his time with the two greatly influenced his activism and outlook on American society. He stated, "I was increasingly perceived as a militant. [In spending] time with Malcolm X, [I] made no attempt to hide that fact, and Malcolm made many people nervous." When the former minister of the NOI spoke publicly he addressed the inequalities he saw in America with a particular fervor that was popular. He did not go out of his way to make harsh realities for many seem pleasant. His frank honesty is what many adored about him. "Malcolm and I spoke a lot that week. I found him brilliant and

¹⁷⁶ Robert Lipsyte, "'I don't have to be what you want me to be,' says Muhammad Ali... 'I'm Free to Be Who I Want,'" *New York Times*, 28 May 1967, 29,42-45,57,60; Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 66-67.

reasonable and I would leave our talks exhilarated.” For Brown, Malcolm X was the closest individual he identified as a hero. The rhetoric he espoused fit his own ideology and beliefs he fostered over the years. He found Malcolm X appealing because he was a charismatic leader. According to Brown, the militant activist “represented the kind of manhood I wanted to represent...you come here and slap me, you gone get slapped back twice as hard.” The Cleveland Brown captain was also intrigued by his social consciousness remembering that Malcolm X “spoke of economics and voting rights and political power, [and] questioned the goals of the integration movement.” From his conversations with the suspended NOI leader, they asked themselves, “Did black folks really want to sit down next to white people on the toilet? Was that a goal for black people?” These conversations sparked an interest in Brown and the role he played in the Black freedom struggle. He had long challenged the status quo in the National Football League, but believed it was necessary to find a feasible way to impact the greater society. Brown left their talk asking, “How I’m gone be a warrior on the football field, and not stand up?” “By any means necessary” was his answer.¹⁷⁷

While the long night gatherings did a great deal for the development of Brown’s ideology, he was not sold on whether Clay could defeat Liston. He was not alone in his beliefs. Former heavyweight champion Joe Louis proclaimed “The Louisville Lip” would be able to last ten rounds. Yet, he believed “Clay can’t beat Liston. I don’t see how he could win.” Jack Nilon, Sonny Liston’s manager, was very confident before the bout. He

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 153, 187; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, November 10, 2010, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, February 25, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author;

argued “‘If I was Liston, I wouldn’t even bother to train for Cassius Clay...Why waste money training, with expenses and all for this kind of a fight? I wouldn’t even go to the trouble.’” Liston’s entourage was bold in their pre-match assessments. Interestingly, Clay saw his opportunity differently, predicting a victory in eight rounds. On the night of the fight, a record of three hundred fifty-five locations in Canada and the U.S. aired the bout, and in the 7th round, Clay won by technical knockout (TKO). The Louisville native’s victory brought him quick acclaim, and made it easy for Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam to embrace him, since he was now the world’s heavyweight champion.¹⁷⁸

After the Liston upset, Clay and Brown were scheduled to attend a post-fight party at the Fontainebleau Hotel, celebrating amongst hundreds of people. However, the new heavyweight champion wanted to retreat to the Hampton House, a Black-owned motel, for a gathering hosted by Malcolm X. While there, Clay wanted to be away from the festivities so he and Brown could talk. The Browns running back remembered, “For

¹⁷⁸ Dave Brady, “Joe Louis Claims Clay May Last 9 or 10 Rounds,” *The Washington Post*, 15 January 1964, C2; Associated Press, “Liston Still 5-1 Favorite Despite Clay’s Ballyhoo,” *The Washington Post*, 16 February 1964, C2; “Waste of Time To Train for Clay, Nilon Says,” *The Washington Post*, 19 February 1964, B1; Frank Mastro, “Clay Finishes Drills; Sees Victory in 8,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1964, A1; Leonard Koppett, “The Plot,” *The New York Times*, 23 February 1964, S1; “Record Crowds Expected to See Liston-Clay Title Fight Tuesday,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1964, S3; United Press International, “Liston Takes on Clay Tonight: Champ 7-1 Pick to Retain Title,” *The Washington Post*, 25 February 1964, D1; Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 210; Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 88-89; There was also a civil rights component to the Liston-Clay fight. While Clay was preparing for the backlash of his affiliation with the Nation of Islam, Sonny Liston had a vested interest aside from winning his match that garnered little attention. While Liston has not been depicted as an active participant in the Black freedom struggle, he did challenge segregation, specifically in how his matches were shown. According to historian Michael Ezra, the locales that had shown the closed circuit telecasts of his fights could not be segregated. Due to Louisiana state law, two theaters were unable to show the fight in New Orleans. While public perception has linked Liston to organized crime, he did have a racial consciousness and connection to the Black freedom struggle.

the next two hours, he told me about Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. He told me about the Mother Ship, how it came out of the sky, gave birth to all the little ships.” Brown pondered why the new heavyweight champion chose that moment to disclose all the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, while a celebration was taking place in his honor at the Fontainebleau, a gathering Brown preferred rather than to listen about NOI ideology. While they conversed, Clay also told Brown a big surprise: his friendship with Malcolm X had to end. The rift between Elijah Muhammad and X had reached its peak and Clay chose “the messenger.”¹⁷⁹

Muhammad and Malcolm X’s leadership and influence were essential to the personal growth of the Louisville native. Their guidance also helped shape the sports world, impacting not only Ali, but professional athletes like Jim Brown and Bill Russell, and even college athletes like Lew Alcindor, later known as Kareem Abdul Jabbar, of the University of California-Los Angeles. Interestingly, after the Liston fight both Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X lobbied for the boxer to join them. Malcolm X told “Clay to ‘find out for yourself’” in regards to whom he should follow. Since there was tension between the two and if Clay wanted a smooth transition into the Nation of Islam, it was best he side with the group’s founder. He solidified his departure from Christianity publicly on February 26, the day following his victory over Liston. During a press conference Clay announced he was a member of the Nation of Islam and took the name Cassius X. A week later on March 6, Muhammad Ali became his official name, given to him by Elijah Muhammad. Even though Ali requested he be called by his new name, few

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 187-188; Manning Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011), 287; Hauser, 105-107.

reporters and writers complied while many others simply refused to acknowledge the champ's request. In the days following Ali's naming, Malcolm X left the NOI and formed Muslim Mosque Inc., and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). This resulted in Muhammad Ali becoming the new symbol of the Nation of Islam.¹⁸⁰

Ali's announcement angered some of his hometown supporters. They were infuriated over his decision to align himself with the Nation of Islam. Reverend D. E. King, pastor of Zion Baptist Church, the state's largest Black church at the time, believed Ali was 'not helping the soul of America' by joining the NOI. The president of the Louisville chapter of the NAACP, Lyman T. Johnson wanted Ali to "shake himself out of this delusion" because he believed it would ruin Ali's opportunity to be a champion. Johnson also believed Black leaders in Louisville agonized over their fellow native's decision to join the Black Muslims. For these particular religious leaders, Ali's aberrant decision did not make sense. The NOI preached separatism with a militant Islamic tone that encouraged Blacks to hate and despise their enemy and embrace self-defense. In

¹⁸⁰ "Clay Talks With Malcolm X Here," *New York Times*, 2 March 1964, 36; United Press International, "It's Cassius X Now as Clay Changes Name," *The Washington Post*, 8 March 1964, C3; Robert Lipsyte, "Malcolm X Led Clay to Muslims," *New York Times*, 23 February 1965, 21; Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 86-88; Jack Olsen, "A Case of Conscience," *Sports Illustrated*, 11 April 1966, 92; Clegg, *An Original Man*, 212-213; Cassius Clay, Sr. asserted his son had been a member of the Nation of Islam since he was eighteen. However, there was never a public acknowledgement on the part of Ali or the NOI to verify this claim. His brother Rudolph Arnett Clay also joined the Nation of Islam, and later took the name Rahman Ali. Also during March, Malcolm X left the Black Muslims and formed his own organizations Muslim Mosque, Incorporated, and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Prior to Malcolm's exodus, he and Elijah Muhammad were at odds. While Clay told Jim Brown he would have to part ways from Malcolm X, the two were seen in public together in New York on March 2 watching a review of his fight with Liston at a local theater.

essence, any belief other than Christianity was deemed negative and a falsehood to their beliefs.

Harry McAlpin, a lawyer in Louisville and member of the State Board of Education, was very vocal about Ali's decision to join the Nation of Islam. He told a *New York Times* reporter, "In a hero-worshipping society, it is regrettable that Cassius Clay, against a limited background of education and experience, and riding high on a reputation gained by his fists and comic rantings [sic], should suddenly turn philosopher." Ali's affiliation with the NOI demonstrates the complexities of the Black freedom struggle. It is safe to say McAlpin would not have made these comments if Ali stayed as Cassius Clay and continued to align himself with the church and not the mosque. The lawyer's comments also demonstrate that Blacks, like Whites, embraced the notion athletes should not have a say on matters outside of the realm of athletics. He added the boxer had the "right in our democratic society to be a Black Muslim or a blue goose. He has a right to speak and say whatever he may choose. It is regrettable, however, that he has chosen to speak as a wise man on a subject in which he shows a great naïveté." The issue of Islam, coupled with a Black supremacist ideology adopted by the world's most renowned fighter in boxing concerned the media, promoters, and even the federal government. However, what Ali did not realize was the impact his allegiance with the Nation of Islam had on others.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Associated Press, "Negro Leaders Criticize Clay For Supporting Black Muslims," *New York Times*, 29 February 1964, 15; Associated Press, "13 Whites Join Negro Church at Louisville: Family of Ex-Pastor Among Group," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 December 1956, 16.

In May 1964 Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali both visited Ghana separately. However, they crossed paths in the West African country's capital Accra. There, the former minister left him a telegram that read, "Because a billion of our people in Africa, Arabia and Asia love you blindly, you must now be forever aware of your tremendous responsibilities to them. You must never say or do anything that will permit your enemies to distort the beautiful image you have here among our people." Ironically, they crossed paths as Malcolm X was leaving the Hotel Ambassador, their lodging location, for Morocco. They exchanged a few words. When Ali was asked what he thought about his friend, he said, "'Man, did you get a look at him? Dressed in that funny white robe and wearing a beard and walking with that cane that looked like a prophet's stick? Man, he gone. He's gone so far out he's out completely.'" Ali's comedic remarks toward Malcolm X demonstrated the lengths he was willing to go to distance himself from the former NOI leader. Ali gave further praise to Elijah Muhammad when he retorted, "'Doesn't that just go to show, Herbert, that Elijia[sic] is the most powerful? Nobody listens to that Malcolm any more.'" These words were a gesture that had greater impact than the Louisville native recognized at the time.¹⁸²

In the early winter of 1965, Betty Shabazz, the wife of Malcolm X, saw Ali in Harlem at the Theresa Hotel. Referring to her husband's disassociation with the Nation of Islam, she asked him "You see what you're doing to my husband, don't you?" Ali replied, "I haven't done anything. I'm not doing anything to him." Shabazz felt Ali's position in the Nation of Islam, coupled with the distance he put between himself and X,

¹⁸² Lloyd Garrison, "Clay Makes Malcolm Ex-Friend," *New York Times*, 18 May 1964, 40

put her family in the crosshairs of the NOI's wrath. Unfortunately, six months later on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom at the Theresa Hotel. When reporters for the *Chicago Defender* sought to get Ali's feelings about Malcolm X's death, he was initially "apparently too shaken to comment."¹⁸³ When asked if he felt his life was in danger, the boxer told them he did not. For his safety, Ali was provided security by the Chicago Police Department as there were presumptions made within the Nation of Islam that retaliation be made against Ali and the organization. Despite it all, there were none, and he was able to convene his career without incident.¹⁸⁴

While his contract with LSG was to expire at the end of October, Ali was set to sign with new management. There were reports that Ali was joining Main Bout, Inc., a company initiated by Jim Brown, manned by NIEU members, and governed by the NOI. This management company was historically significant because for the first time African Americans were a part of the decision making with promotion and telecasts, two forms of profitability in professional boxing. The company epitomized the Union's concept of "green power," in that economic strength met Black power. Unfortunately, not everyone was supportive of Jim Brown's business venture. Main Bout was mistakenly seen as a "Muslim takeover" with the Nation of Islam ushering their influence. However, it was

¹⁸³ Sun B. Lee and Skip Bossette, "Malcolm's Death Received With Mixed Emotions," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 23 February 1965, 5; Austin C. Wehrweins, "Muhammad Says Muslims Played No Part in Slaying," *New York Times*, 23 February 1965, 1, 20;

¹⁸⁴ Walter Blitz, "Gunmen Kill Malcolm X: Black Nationalist Is Shot At Rally In NY," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1965, 1; "Malcolm X Gunned Down: Slain From Ambush at New York Rally; Suspects Arrested," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1965, 1; "Malcolm X—Man of Violence," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1965, 2; Sun B. Lee and Skip Bossette, "Malcolm's Death Received With Mixed Emotions," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 23 February 1965, 5; United Press International, "Clay-Liston Heavyweight Title Rematch Is Set for May 25 at Boston Garden," *New York Times*, 23 February 1965, 44.

really an undertaking Brown initiated to serve as the basis for the establishment and provision of financial support for the investment in Black owned-businesses through the Union. Yet, numerous writers and columnists continued to argue the Black Muslims controlled Ali. Ironically, when he was under the guidance of White managers there was no discussion about the White millionaires “exploiting” Ali at all. The Louisville Sponsoring Group managed his career for nearly five years, and there was never an objection to the way they managed him. Yet, all of that changed when word about Main Bout began to spread. As members of the Nation of Islam were appointed to positions in management, numerous media outlets printed negative analysis of the business decision.¹⁸⁵

Much of the pessimism harped the Black Muslim associations would tarnish Ali’s image. There was a desire to paint him as an American hero, but his association with the Black Muslims prevented that from happening. To set the record straight, Jim Brown argued, “This is not a religious thing, it is a business project. I have no objection at all with working with Muslims. No more objection than I did to playing football in Texas for the first time, where I had no idea how I would be treated. I deal with all people—even if I don’t agree with them.” For Brown, it was about “green power,” and the ability for African Americans to get into the business realm of professional sports. This posed a threat to the White power structure that had a stronghold on athletics. The presence of Black athletes in ownership roles posed a serious threat. Professional sports mirrored American life, and if African Americans were going to be in positions of leadership in

one of the most lucrative arenas, then in the minds of many Whites, it meant a restructuring of American society as a whole. By the 1960s, African American ownership in the professional sports leagues like the NFL, MLB, and NBA was non-existent. Main Bout Inc. was “an unlikely consortium,” but a representation of the possibilities for African Americans as sports agents and representatives of Black athletes. Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* saw what others feared when he wrote, “boxing may soon have a wholly new hierarchy. Only the fighters will be the same.” Main Bout Inc., with Ali, represented the new leaders.¹⁸⁶

Main Bout consisted of five men. Herbert Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad, and John Ali, the National Secretary for the religious group, served as leading management. Muhammad’s and Ali’s roles were an obvious business move on the part of the NOI to be involved in the leadership of the promotional team, an arrangement that allowed the religious group to achieve financial gains from boxing matches and also have a say in Muhammad Ali’s legal matters. The other two members, who had no affiliation with the Nation of Islam, were two White men, Michael Malitz and Robert Arum, a television producer and lawyer respectively. Prior to joining Main Bout, they were also members of Lester M. Malitz, Inc., a closed-circuit television group. Brown brought members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union into the operations of the company to handle some of the advertising aspects. John Wooten served on the

¹⁸⁶ Associated Press, “Wide Business Interests May lead Brown to Quit,” *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1966, C3; Robert Lipsyte, “Clay’s Main Bout, Inc. Seen Final Step In a Project to Bolster Negro Business,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1966, 4; It was noted that Brown was given a salary of \$25,000 as Vice President, along with his ten percent interest.

promotional staff, and several other men like Jim Shorter, Sidney Williams, and Brady Keys of the Pittsburgh Steelers, developed relationships with theatres throughout the nation to show fights.¹⁸⁷

Initially Herbert Muhammad was not accepting of Jim Brown's role, as he did not want Brown involved in any financial dealings, despite the fact that the concept of the group was his idea. Muhammad was hesitant due to Brown's strong relationship with Malcolm X. Arum and Malitz came to Brown's defense stating, "Herbert, look! This guy has value. He knows all the athletes. He knows the people that can promote these fights, televise them. And he's the guy who put us together in the first place!" At this point, it was agreed that Brown, the individual who served as the impetus for Main Bout, be given his due, with a ten percent interest. It was hard to convince Muhammad Ali to come to terms with the organization. Brown mentioned, "It took great pains to convince him this association would be in his best interest and the best interests of the Negro people." Despite Herbert Muhammad's early reservations regarding Brown's role eventually conceded to the Cleveland Brown's star role, but his father instructed him to safeguard Ali from "a crooked business."¹⁸⁸

While there was uneasiness over the NOI's involvement in Muhammad Ali's affairs, the looming threat of military service was ever-present. This was clear on February 17, 1966, when Ali was informed of his reclassification and told by the

¹⁸⁷ Brown with Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, 190; Robert Lipsyte, "The Last Preliminary: Clay's Main Bout, Inc., Seen Final Step In a Project to Bolster Negro Business," *New York Times*, 9 January 1966, 157; Associated Press, "Wide Business Interests May lead Brown to Quit," *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1966, C3; Clegg, *An Original Man*, 247; Robert Arum also served as Malitz's attorney;

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Louisville draft board he would be drafted in the United States military. During this time Ali's legal team began to prepare his appeals to the draft board. By March, Ali applied for conscientious objector status, a position taken when a person refuses to perform military duties. In the case of Ali, he did so on religious grounds. While the boxer's rejection of service drew the ire of people in his hometown, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), an organization founded on protecting the civil rights of American citizens, provided public support to Ali. Members of the ADA argued the Vietnam War had initiated a "number of governmental actions which have attempted to stifle dissent, give preferential treatment to supporters of the war and, in some cases, violated the rights of dissenters." The ADA maintained Ali was treated unfairly because of his alignment with the Nation of Islam, and refusal to enlist.¹⁸⁹ In an interview with sportscaster Bob Halloran, Ali addressed his reclassification:

These fellows got together and made the statement that I'm 1-A without knowing if I'm as good as I was the last time or better. Now they had 30 men to pick from in Louisville, and I'm also sure that there are at least 30 young men that they could have picked from. Instead they picked out the heavyweight champion of the whole world. There's just one in my class. You have a lot of men in baseball they could have called. You have a lot of men in football they coulda [sic] called. You have a lotta [sic] men that they coulda [sic] called that are of school age and have taken the test that are 1-A. Now, I was not 1-A the last time I was tested. All of a sudden they seem to be anxious to push me in the Army...And another thing I don't understand: Why me? A man who pays the salary of at least 50,000 men in Vietnam, a man who the government gets \$6 million from a year from two fights, a man who can pay in two fights for three bumma [sic] planes.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ United Press International, "ADA Comes To Defense of Clay," *Daily Defender*, 25 April 1966, 3.

¹⁹⁰ "Ain't Nobody Gonna Take This," *Jet*, 19 November 1964, 36; Jack Olsen, "A Case of Conscience," *Sports Illustrated*, 11 April 1966, 95.

Ali understood the change to his status as a personal attack by the federal government on his livelihood. Interestingly, an NOI member who was involved in Ali's personal affairs told Jim Brown "that they wouldn't mind him going into the service, but they couldn't tell [Ali] that." While Ali believed that his fate was "in the hands of Allah," NOI brass was seeking an alternative for the boxing champion.¹⁹¹

The appeal that Ali's lawyers put forth was rejected by the draft board in Louisville. They appealed on several grounds: hardship due to alimony payments to his former wife Sonji Clay, his role as a religious leader in the Muslim community and a conscientious objector. They even appealed on the absence of Blacks on the local draft board. However, none of those reasons prevented him from facing trial. One of his lawyers, Hayden Covington said to him, "It looks like trouble, Champ. This isn't like any case I've had before. Joe Namath can get off to play football and George Hamilton gets out because he's going with the president's daughter, but you're different. They want to make an example out of you." Covington's comments suggest they did not expect the process with the draft to last this long as there were other cases where athletes were excused from military service.¹⁹²

Ali did mention he would serve in the military if it ensured the protection of the civil rights of African Americans. He told reporters, "If I thought going to war would bring freedom and equality to twenty-two million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me. I'd join tomorrow. But I either have to obey the laws of the land or the law of

¹⁹¹ Steve Rushin, *The Caddie was a Reindeer and Other Tales of Extreme Recreation*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004), 188.

¹⁹² David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*. (New York: Random House, 1998), 289-290.

Allah. I have nothing to lose by standing up and following my beliefs. We've been in jail for four hundred years." Ali's remarks demonstrated how his political and social consciousness was connected to the struggles of other African Americans. Many people of color did not make the same decision to refuse service in the military, simply for fear of going to jail. Ultimately, it was Ali's belief that his actions were for the greater good of Black folks, and those acts, refusing to serve, were the best way to obtain freedom and equality. In an interview with reporters on February 20, one writer asked Muhammad Ali why he did not feel obligated to enlist in the military. He responded, "“You want me to give up all this love, America? You want me to do what the white man say and go fight a war against some people I don't know nothing about—get some freedom for some other people when my own people can't get theirs here?””¹⁹³ Interestingly, Ali's anti-war sentiments gained ground across the nation as the anti-war movement began to grow.¹⁹⁴

Growing numbers of Americans began to question the U.S.'s role in Vietnam with mass protest. Some people argued the United States needed to address domestic affairs like poverty and race relations in the nation and not focus on war. Others centered on the country's foreign policy, and did not want the U.S. imposing its will and might on others. On February 24, 1966, approximately four thousand people gathered at the Waldorf-Astoria, a luxurious hotel in New York City. United States President Lyndon Johnson was there to give a speech on Vietnam. He was greeted by protestors chanting “War on poverty, not people,” and “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” African

¹⁹³ “Athletes Face Call in Draft Step-Up: U.S. Sports Stars Facing the Draft,” *New York Times*, 20 February 1966, S1.

¹⁹⁴ Remnick, *King of the World*, 289-290

American protestors were also cognizant of the racial elements in the Vietnam effort as ten percent of the infantry were Black. They had signs that read “Bring Our Black G.I.s Home” and “The Viet Cong Never Called Me Nigger.” The latter message paid homage to Ali’s statement made to a reporter, when he thought about why he did not want to fight in the war. While the attention to Vietnam continued across the nation, Jim Brown prepared to get the promotional undertakings for Main Bout’s first fight under Ali in motion. Yet, it did not go without negative attention.¹⁹⁵

By February 1966, Muhammad Ali and Jim Brown had formed a strong relationship in the wake of the official announcement of the formation of Main Bout. Their racial consciousness and exceptional athleticism is what allowed for such a relationship to flourish. In his autobiography *Out of Bounds*, Brown discussed the numerous trips the two took to Black communities in New York and Philadelphia during the 1960s. Brown stated, “We would go to barber shops, shoe stores, barbeque places, Ali would shadow box and tell jokes, put me in a headlock, brag how he could whip my ass. We’d sit around, just talk to people.” They recognized the clout they had as professional athletes and wanted to stay connected to other Black folks. The camaraderie provided both men with a beneficial relationship that prepared them to support each other through good and bad times.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Martin Arnold, “4,000 Picket Johnson in Antiwar Protest at Hotel: They Chant Peace Slogans as President Speaks at Waldorf-Astoria,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1966, 16; Douglas Robinson, 100,000 Rally at U.N. Against Vietnam War: many Draft Cards Burned—Eggs Tossed at Parade,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1967, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Brown with Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, 186.

With the negative press regarding Ali's relationship with the Nation of Islam and his views on war in Southeast Asia, Brown used his public persona to help deter some of that attention. He urged people in the United States to have a greater concern over issues that affected everyday people, and not a sporting event. He argued, there needed to be some concern given to "juries in the South that make a mockery out of our court system or a murderer acquitted in the South and writing a magazine article about how he did it. Such injustices are more important to the future of our country than the draft status of Muhammad Ali—or, if you prefer, Cassius Clay." Brown, as did Ali, sought to help others understand the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which allowed American citizens the right to "exercise" any religious faith they choose without discrimination. Despite the federal government's view the Nation of Islam espoused hate and animosities towards "blonde hair, blue-eyed devils," African Americans had the right to be members and practice its tenets. Brown concluded, "He's extremely religious and with people like that religion comes first. What do you do with a man's belief? You leave it alone." Brown's point illustrates Americans were not always safeguarded despite the existence of legislation that existed to protect U.S. citizens. This was especially true when it came to religious beliefs that were not Christian and espoused an anti-White philosophy.¹⁹⁷

Overall, the involvement of the NOI, led to the cancellation of many of Ali's bouts, including the group's first fight planned against Ernie Terrell that was scheduled for March 29. Brad Pye, Jr., a writer for the *Los Angeles Sentinel* provided an assessment

¹⁹⁷Ibid.; Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: Visit with Jimmy Brown," *New York Times*, 13 June 1967, 78.

of the cancellations. He remarked, “Unsavory characters of all kinds, except ones of color, have been permitted to stage all sorts of title fights. Yet, when Negroes stand to share a big swag of the loot, virtually every politician and alleged do-gooder puts the knock on the Clay-Terrell match.” This was similar to the backlash that Ali experienced when word began to spread in February 1964 about his involvement with the Nation of Islam. Whether Black Muslims, or Black athletes, many Whites did not want to see people of color have input over a major sport that had been dominated by them for many years.

In essence, the friendship between Muhammad Ali and Jim Brown was also unsettling for some people. There was the expectation that Brown, a former servicemen himself, would encourage Ali to enlist in the army. In March 1966, Brown told reporters at a press conference held at NIEU headquarters:

Cassius and I are friends but he never has tried to influence me toward the Muslim religion. I’d be less of a man if I tried to run away from him now. Clay’s initial comments about the draft were just about what any fellow might think if he’s pulled away from a job. He simply said them publicly. The things he’s saying do not appeal to me but my association with the champion has nothing to do with the NIEU. In business you must deal with many kinds of people...The NIEU is a beautiful thing. I’d hate to see anyone trying to destroy it. I believe in this with all my heart. It can open up many doors for the Negro people. All I’m asking is that the truth about it be told. There are no secrets.¹⁹⁸

What ensued for Main Bout over the next month was the postponement of the fight numerous times, and several changes in venue. During that time, Ali’s legal team presented him with a proposal to enlist in the army, but he refused. However, all of this

¹⁹⁸ Brad Pye, Jr. “Jim Brown Says Bigots Delay Clay-Terrell Bout,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 March 1966, B1, B4. Ernie Terrell dropped out of the fight because he believed he would not be paid enough money for the matchup.

did not deter Main Bout in its effort to orchestrate its first fight and the closed circuit, theatre-TV production of the fight with George Chuvalo in Toronto. They were cognizant of what the opportunity presented. Brown noted, “[Blacks] have always been the gladiators in the ring, the men who were throwing the punches and getting a pretty good share of the money, but not the share of the money we would get with closed-circuit TV or network TV.” His comments alluded to the fact that historically, African Americans in professional boxing were only recognized as boxers, but never in the production and overseeing of fights shown. Unfortunately, the fight with Chuvalo was cancelled as well.¹⁹⁹

To address the issue of cancellations, Jim Brown scheduled a meeting with U.S. House of Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (D-NY). Brown was joined by NIEU members Cookie Gilchrist of the Denver Broncos, Willie Wood of the Green Bay Packers, Walter Beach III and John Wooten of the Browns, as well as Bobby Mitchell, Jim Snowden, and Lonnie Sanders of the Washington Redskins. Representative Powell, was also a pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, served as the chairman of the House Labor and Education Committee, and developed a reputation for challenging racial injustices. Thus, Brown wanted Powell to examine if “organized forces” treated the Ali-Terrell fight unfairly. The Harlem representative vowed to meet with President

¹⁹⁹ Associated Press, “Clay-Terrell License Ruled Illegal: Champion Refuses to Apologize,” *The Washington Post*, 26 February 1966, D1; A.S. “Doc” Young, “Fight Telecast Here,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 26 March 1966, 33; United Press International, “Sorel, Quebec Gives Ok to Clay=Terrell,” *Daily Defender*, 7 March 1966, 26; , “Chuvalo Eyes Title Winner,” *Daily Defender*, 10 March 1966, 40; “Toronto Athletic Commission Withholds Title Go Sanction,” *Daily Defender*, 14 March 1966, 26; , “Clay’s Bout May Be ‘Financial Flop’,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 March 1966, B1; Francis Ward, “Jim Brown Tackles Film and ‘Black Power’,” *Jet*, 11 August, 1966, 20-25; George Strickley, “Clay-Chuvalo Fight Drowning in Apathy,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 March 1966, D1.

Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House to address the matter, since he had an upcoming meeting with him.

When their meeting ended, Powell concluded there was a violation of the Civil Rights Act. The group held a press conference at the Rayburn Building. Powell opened, “This is a violation of Federal employment practices regulations. My lawyers tell me it may be a violation of the anti-trust law...the anti-black trust law.” Brown and Powell were cognizant of the mingling of politics and sports, as it impacted the economic viability of Ali’s matches. Overall, the Union refused to accept the argument Ali’s “unpatriotic” remarks were the reason for the push to stop the fight. They believed race and the money they longed to gain from Main Bout as the motivating factors. Jim Brown argued, “The bout [had] been booted around because Main Bout Inc. has the TV rights. For the first time Negroes own stock in closed circuit TV and will be in on some of the big money.” Unapologetic at this point in the process, Brown recognized the racism of “organized forces” that sought to end their operation. “This new TV corporation wasn’t Clay’s idea,” Brown added, “He had to be sold on it. This is Negro participation, not Muslim.” Six months after the formation of the company, Brown continued to make arguments Main Bout was not a company under the auspices of the Nation of Islam.²⁰⁰

Representative Powell agreed that the disarray Main Bout experienced was not only due to the fact that there were a great number of African American men working

²⁰⁰ Dave Brady, “Jim Brown Claims Racial Bias Haunts Fight,” *The Washington Post*, 11 March 1966, D1; For more information on the life of Adam Clayton Powell read: Wil Haygood, *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993); Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma*. (New York: Atheneum, 1991); John Wooten, John Brown, Sidney Williams, Ernie Green, Walt Johnson, Bobby Mitchell, Lonnie Sanders, and Executive Director John Daniels were the Union brass involved in Main Bout.

with the group, but was largely due to Muhammad Ali's affiliation with the NOI. The Harlem representative made a great point when he countered there was not "the slightest scintilla of criticism against Gene Fullmer when he was fighting. He is a Mormon and no Negro can hold office in their religion." When asked if Ali was anti-American, Powell replied, "No, he is a pacifist and so am I. I don't think there is any thing glorious about the war in Vietnam, or any other war." Powell was willing to put his political career on the line to support Ali's and the Union's efforts. During the press conference, he also used the moment to address the racial inequities present in the National Football League. He asked, "When are the Redskins—and all the other professional football, baseball, and basketball team who have been making all that money off the black backs of our athletes—going to integrate off the field? Edward Bennet [sic] Williams (Redskins president) is my good friend, but when are the Redskins going to have their band, the Redskinettes, and the front office integrated." The points were poignant with three members from the team in attendance.²⁰¹

While numerous athletes in different sports at the collegiate and professional ranks had military obligations, Ali believed that he was being singled out. Ali argued, "I can't understand out of all the baseball players, all of the football players, all of the basketball players—why seek out me, the world's only heavyweight champion?"²⁰² During 1966, there were other prominent athletes who were called by their local draft

²⁰¹ Dave Brady, "Jim Brown Claims Racial Bias Haunts Fight," *The Washington Post*, 11 March 1966, D4; Fullmer became a prominent boxer after defeating "Sugar" Ray Robinson for the middleweight championship in 1957.

²⁰² "Athletes Face Call in Draft Step-Up: U.S. Sports Stars Facing the Draft," *New York Times*, 20 February 1966, S1.

boards, and contacted about their status. Two Florida congressmen discussed Joe Namath, the quarterback for the New York Jets of the American Football League (AFL), about his standing. He was classified as 4-F, a designation that meant he was “not qualified for military service.” The bad knee Namath sustained playing football was attributed to this designation. Arthur Ashe, an African American professional tennis player, was 1-D, a distinction given to a person who was a member of a reserve unit, or a student taking military training. Ashe was a student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and member of the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). He committed to two years of service upon graduation and received a lieutenant’s commission. After the 1965 season ended, the Marines contacted Bob Shann, a defensive back for the Philadelphia Eagles. Mike Garrett, a running back for the University of Southern California (USC) who received All-American honors and won the Heisman Trophy in 1966 was also contacted about fulfilling his military commitment. Like Ashe, he also had a student deferment.²⁰³

On November 14, 1966, Main Bout promoted its first match, more than a year after Ali signed with the company. It pitted Cleveland “Big Cat” Williams against Ali in the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. The winner of the fight was to face Ernie Terrell, the following January. With over 100 theatres showing the event, Main Bout was also able to show the match at a few historically Black colleges and universities like Southern University, Grambling State University, and Tennessee State University. It was determined the fight would not be easy for Ali, as Sonny Liston called “Big Cat” the

²⁰³ Ibid.

“toughest puncher he ever faced.” Despite all the legal woes regarding his military service, and the numerous cancellations and postponements, Ali defeated Williams in the third round, winning his fifth title defense.²⁰⁴

Less than one month later in December, plans were scheduled for Ali’s bout with Ernie Terrell on February 6, once again at the Houston Astrodome; nearly a year after the initial bout was cancelled. Main Bout partnered with the Astrodome Championship Enterprises, Inc., an organization created by the Houston Sports Association, to handle the closed-circuit distribution and satellite orders. Six days prior to the bout Ali went before the draft board. His lawyers had 3,810 people sign a petition, and 42 affidavits that supported his claim he was a Black Muslim minister. However, the appeal was denied. While Ali’s opposition to the war was not unique, the magnitude of his decision to consistently refuse entry in the military was extremely significant. After all, he was one of the world’s most notable athletes and had risked his livelihood to demonstrate his discontent with American foreign policy. Despite the legal matters, Ali won by a unanimous decision over Ernie Terrell in fifteen rounds.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ , “100 Theatres To Show Clay Bout On Giant Screen,” *Daily Defender*, 18 October 1966, 26; Brad Pye, Jr., “Next Monday Night: Does Clay Fear the ‘Big Cat?’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 November 1966, B2; Brad Pye, Jr., “In Astrodome: Angelenos Back Clay,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 November 1966, B2.

²⁰⁵ “Will Ali-Terrell Settle It All?”, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 15 December 1966, C4; , “Cassius To Defend Title In Honolulu,” *Daily Defender*, 19 December 1966, 26; Ali’s last fight took place on March 22, 1967 against Zora Folley at Madison Square Garden in New York City, New York. Ali knocked him out in the seventh round successfully defending his heavyweight boxing title. It was his ninth defense of the championship and twenty-ninth straight victory. Five days later, Ali’s April 11 induction was postponed after one of his attorneys, Hayden Covington, had his records transferred from his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky to Houston, Texas, which they deemed the champion’s legal residence, a move for them to buy more time for the appeal.

The issue of Vietnam continued to loom not only for Ali, but members of the NIEU as well. In March 1967, West Coast executive director of the Union, Richard “Dick” Bass embarked on a seventeen-day “handshaking trip” of Vietnam. His trip resonated with some of the sentiments Ali and other Union members expressed. Upon returning Bass assessed, “I don’t know why we’re fighting over there and most of the Negroes don’t want to be over there. They count the days until their time is up and they can leave Vietnam alive.” While the views of many soldiers were muted, Bass was able to voice some of the concerns of African American soldiers. His time in Vietnam allowed him to better understand the plight of Black combatants on the frontlines. For those who criticized his comments, Bass added, ““Being in the spotlight is like walking a tightrope. You also lose your identity. People don’t think of me as Dick Bass: they think of me as Dick Bass, the football player.”” Writer Thomas Hauser acknowledged during this period, athletes “were supposed to be one-dimensional quasi-cartoon characters.” Due to their careers as professional athletes, their humanity was in many ways dismissed. Outside of athletic competition they were not allowed to voice their concerns about social, political, or economic issues even when those matters involved the sports they played professionally. Bass demonstrated that many other athletes aside from Muhammad Ali and Jim Brown were conscious of the pro-American propaganda in regards to Vietnam War, but were never lost on the tenets of the Black freedom struggle.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ “NIEU Picks Dick Bass,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 5 May 1966, B1; Willie Hamilton, “After 17-Day Tour: Bass Reports From Vietnam,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 30 March 1967, B2; Hauser, 103; Bass called the visit a “handshaking trip” in was joined by two other professional footballers. Don Meredith, quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys and the league’s Player of the Year for 1966, and Larry Wilson, a defensive back with the St. Louis Cardinals.

Despite the anti-war sentiments that Bass and others expressed, Muhammad Ali continued to hold steadfast to his beliefs. This especially true on April 28, 1967 when another appeal was denied and he was ordered to report to the Houston Induction Center for military induction. By this time, his lawyers changed their approach and presented him with an offer to join the National Guard, which would have been an “easy way out,” but Ali stood on the principle that engaging in any military effort, whether it involved picking up a gun or fighting exhibition matches, was not going to happen. The proposal stated if Ali were to enlist with the National Guard, he would not have to fight in combat, but serve as a good will ambassador. Joe Louis, a former African American heavyweight-boxing champion of the 1940s, received the same deal during World War II. Interestingly Louis adorned military flyers in full army gear holding a Springfield M1903, a gun, with the phrase, “We’re going to do our part...and we’ll win because we’re on God’s side.” Joe Louis exhibited the mold of what American athletes were to exhibit: to be Christian, and willing to support the war effort because it was the duty of all Americans.

Muhammad Ali served as the antithesis in his unwillingness to serve on any level.²⁰⁷

Despite months of appeals, on April 28, 1967, Muhammad Ali reported to the Houston Induction Center. Rumors circulated that he would give up his citizenship to become a religious expatriate and take up residence in Egypt. Ali arrived at the U.S.

²⁰⁷ “Clay Stops Folley In Seventh Round,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1967, 1; “Clay Keeps Title: KO’s Folley in 7th,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 March 1967, G1; Associated Press, “Clay Denies Carrying Folley,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 March 1967, G1; Dave Anderson, “Victor Consoles His Aging Rival,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1967, 40; , “Ali (Clay) Wins Induction Delay,” *Daily Defender*, 28 March 1967, 26; Elliott J. Gorn, ed., *Muhammad Ali: The People’s Champ*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 136; “Pvt. Joe Louis says___,” Poster, University of North Texas Libraries Government Documents Department, World War Poster Collection, World War Two Collection, 1942.

Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station on San Jacinto Street where he underwent physical and mental aptitude examinations. He also told officials to call him by Muslim name “Muhammad Ali” and see that it was on his paperwork. When the time came for Ali’s oath of induction, he refused to step forward, thereby refuting the symbolic gesture needed to certify his enlistment. His actions led to the formation of a new trial date set by the military. As a result, the World Boxing Association (WBA) and the New York State Athletic Commission stripped Ali of his heavyweight title in late April, along with his boxing license. Ali responded to the press with a statement:

I strongly object to the fact that so many newspapers have given to the American public and the world the impression that I have only two alternatives in taking this stand: Either I go to jail or go to the Army. There is another alternative, and that alternative is justice. If justice prevails, if my constitutional rights are upheld, I will be forced to go neither to the Army nor to jail. In the end I am confident that justice will come my way for the truth must eventually prevail.²⁰⁸

During the trial, the presiding judge asked Ali, ““regarding the conflict between Christianity and Communism, which side would you take?”” He responded, ““neither. We are neither Christians nor Communists.”” The judge’s question was one example of how the 1940s threat from the “Reds,” was still prominent in the 1960s.²⁰⁹ Americans were

²⁰⁸ Ed Meagher, “Cassius Refuses to Enter Army; Faces Prison Term, Fine,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 1967, 1,8.

²⁰⁹ , “ABC, 8 Heavies Air Title Elimination,” *Daily Defender*, 8 May 1967, 26; “Victory in Sight?” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 February 1966, 16; A. Robert Smith, “Senator Morse’s Advice and Dissent,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1966, 249; “Morse Attacks U.S. On Role in Vietnam,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1966, 64; William R. MacKaye, “Senators Assail War in Vietnam; Clerics Plan Fast,” *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1967; Associated Press, “District Court Denies Clay’s Final Appeal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 1967, C1; Robert Lipsyte, “‘I don’t have to be what you want me to be,’ says Muhammad Ali... ‘I’m Free to Be Who I Want,’” *New York Times*, 28 May 1967; The New York State Athletic Commission proposed a tournament to decide the new champion. Thus, a meeting was held in Houston, Texas for the development of the contest that would involve eight heavyweights who would fight for the title. The American

deemed either patriots or communists, pro-Vietnam or anti-American. Ali's lawyers H. C. Covington and Quinnan Hodges filed a suit against the Selective Service System, and argued racial and religious discrimination, along with public pressure as the basis for Ali's reclassification making him eligible for enlistment. The legal team continued to argue Ali was a religious minister with the hopes he be given exemption from military service. All hope was not yet lost as Ali had the right to file a claim for an exemption, deferment, and postponement from military service. He was also free to appeal the change in how he was classified. Unfortunately, public sentiment found him guilty of failing to honor his country. Ali, a Muslim minister in his own right, was "ready to die" for his religion.²¹⁰

Fortunately there were people who understood the boxer's position and were willing to support him publicly. High profile civil rights activists Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bayard Rustin were two examples. On Sunday, April 30, 1967, King spoke about Muhammad Ali's courage from the pulpit of Ebenezer Baptist Church: "Every young man in this country who believes that this war is abominable and unjust should file as a conscientious objector. He is giving up even fame. He is giving up millions of dollars in order to stand up for what his conscience tells him is right."²¹¹ King's comments served

Broadcasting Company (ABC) and the Houston Astrodome, along with representatives for the boxers discussed the possibilities of the matchups.

²¹⁰ Betty Washington, "Supreme Court Turns Him Down," *Daily Defender*, 18 April 1967, 1,3; Associated Press, "No Army, No Title For Clay, Say Ring Officials," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1967, A1; Associated Press, "District Court Denies Clay's Final Appeal," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 1967, C1, C5; Ed Meagher, "Cassius Refuses to Enter Army; Faces Prison Term, Fine," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 1967, 1,8; "Clay's Lawyers Begin New Court Maneuvers," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 1967, 11; "Champ Ali Will Risk Jail Term," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1967, 25; William Jackson, "Heavyweight Ill-Advised," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 6 May 1967, 9B.

²¹¹ , "Dr. King Accuses Johnson on War: Asserts Westmoreland Was Returned to Quiet Dissent—Praises Clay on Draft," *New York Times*, 1 May 1967, 1, 10.

as a microcosm of a position he vocalized in greater depth. King, who can be considered the poster child of the movement, was also beginning to shape his view on the Vietnam War. Bayard Rustin, a civil rights activist who played a pivotal role in the Black freedom struggle as the key organizer of the March on Washington in 1963, was one of Ali's staunchest supporters. Viewed as a key figure in the movement, Rustin defended Ali in an article for the *New York Amsterdam News*, titled "Reverberations: In Defense of Muhammad Ali." He encouraged people to not focus on the teachings of the Nation of Islam when thinking about the political implications of the boxer's decision. Rather, they should consider Ali's right as an American citizen to seek deferment from the draft. Rustin argued,

In the case of Ali and the Muslims, the authorities seem to be insisting on the right to make their own determinations. The constitution clearly warns against any official establishment of religion, but it would seem that by now insisting on the right to determine what is or isn't a legitimate minister, or what is or isn't a legitimate religion, the authorities are taking a clear position concerning the establishment of religion.²¹²

Throughout the history of the United States, Christianity has been treated as the unofficial religion of the country, even though the Constitution does not permit the creation of an official faith. However actions taken by the general public, and federal officials argue otherwise. Thus, the oft-presented notion "America is a Christian nation," exists de facto but not de jure. Rustin contended while the teachings of the Nation of Islam were not

²¹² Bayard Rustin, "Reverberations: In Defense Of Muhammad Ali," *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 June 1967, 14.

popular, Black Muslims deserved the religious liberty to practice their beliefs, a virtue espoused in America.²¹³

Jill Nelson, a Harlem native and well-known African American writer, also loved Ali for his stance on the draft. She mentioned, “It was the defiance against having to be the good Negro, the good Christian waiting to be rewarded by the righteous white provider...But he also epitomized a lot of black people’s emotions at the time, our anger, our sense of entitlement, the need to be better just to get to the median, these sense of standing up against the furies.” Nelson’s views illustrated the love and admiration of many African Americans had for Muhammad Ali. It also demonstrated that the mold of being a “good Negro” and “good Christian” were the expectations of Black people. Ali’s acceptance of NOI philosophy strayed from the prescription of Black masculinity, and made it difficult for people to understand his willingness to give up the fame and fortunes on religious principle.²¹⁴

At no other time did Muhammad Ali demonstrate his steadfast commitment to his faith in such a public manner than on Sunday, June 4, 1967, which became associated with the famous “Ali Draft Summit.” With his original court date moved from June 5 moved to June 19, the timing of this meeting was critical. There were several options presented to him that prevented jail time. According to Herbert Muhammad, the federal government was willing to let Ali serve in the Special Services. This allowed him to keep his championship titles and his livelihood as a boxer. Muhammad, recognizing the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Howard L. Bingham and Max Wallace, *Muhammad Ali’s Greatest Fight: Cassius Clay vs. The United States of America*. (New York: Robson Books, 2004), 212.

opportunity to keep Ali out of jail and making money fighting, wanted Jim Brown to persuade Ali to the new proposal. Brown was shocked by the proposition presented by the NOI leader since the organization was once ardent opponents of military service. Nevertheless, Brown met with Ali the night before the meeting in his Cleveland home to discuss his views on enlisting. As they discussed the federal government's motion, the NIEU leader recognized that "the champ" wanted no involvement in promoting the Vietnam War. In essence, Muhammad Ali did not accept any arrangements that contradicted his religious beliefs. He told Brown, "Man, you know I believe in my religion. My religion says I'm not supposed to get in any wars and fight. I don't want any deals. I don't plan to fight nobody that hasn't done nothing to me, and I'm not goin' [sic] in any damn service."²¹⁵ Brown recognized the magnitude of his friend's dilemma and saw that Ali needed public support of other professional athletes. A gesture such as this demonstrated that he was not alone on his stance. Brown galvanized the help of Black professional athletes who were members of the NIEU and also linked to Main Bout. In his autobiography, Brown mentioned, "I wanted Ali to sit down with these athletes, explain his declaration. I knew Ali would need support, broader than what he had. By having a community of famous black athletes behind him, it would show the press, the public, Ali was backed by more than just the Muslims." Brown's sentiments demonstrate that he recognized Muhammad Ali had the right to refuse entry into the military as a

²¹⁵ Brown with Delsohn, *Out of Bounds*, 190-191.

human being, and if men who served in the armed forces were willing to defend him, then others, along with the federal government, should as well.²¹⁶

Brown called on John Wooten in late May and told him “to call the guys to get them to come to Cleveland for a meeting with the champ.” As he went through his Rolodex of contacts Wooten remembered, “Not one guy I called said, ‘Who’s gone pay the fare.’ All they said was ‘When and where?’ They were there to hear Ali out and determine what support, if any, they wanted to provide him.”²¹⁷ The Browns’ lineman and Executive Director of the NIEU called the men to come to the Union headquarters the morning of Sunday, June 4. Two of the men Wooten invited were Bill Russell and Lew Alcindor. Russell was a prominent figure in the NBA. He received numerous accolades from the media for his athletic achievements, and at the time of the “Summit” Russell was a player-coach with the Boston Celtics, serving as the NBA’s first Black head coach. Russell had a reputation of challenging the status quo, particularly the racism that permeated American society on and off the basketball court, which garnered him the nickname, “Felton X.” Russell stated, “There can be no neutrals in the battle for human rights. If you are for the status quo, then you are against the rights of man, because you

²¹⁶ *Out of Bounds*, 190. Branson Wright, “Black sports stars united behind Ali after ’67 summit in Cleveland,” *Plain Dealer*, 3 June 2012, A1, A10. In reference to the plan created for Ali, Bob Arum noted: ‘I was partner with a law firm in New York that had among its senior partners a gentleman by the name of Arthur Krim, who was the chairman of the board with United Artists. Arthur was also the treasurer of the Democratic Party and he was very close to Lyndon Johnson, the president of the United States. He met with President Johnson and they came up with a plan where Ali would go into the service and he wouldn’t have to wear a uniform. He’d give some exhibitions at military bases from time to time, and be able to continue his professional boxing career while all of this was happening.’

²¹⁷ *Out of Bounds*, 190; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Branson Wright, “Black sports stars united behind Ali after ’67 summit in Cleveland,” *Plain Dealer*, 3 June 2012, A1, A10.

are afraid to rock the boat.”²¹⁸ Russell protested racial inequality unequivocally, even if he had to do so in the town he played. Boston, once the center of American liberation, was also a racial battleground. A couple of years before the summit, Russell led a march from Roxbury to Boston Common where 10,000 people gathered to support the busing of Black children to White schools, as a means of garnering support for equal access to education. This gathering was a counter to the massive protests initiated by White Bostonians who were against the integration of schools in the city.²¹⁹

Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor, a student-athlete from the University of California, Los Angeles, was the only college player in attendance. During his sophomore year, the UCLA Bruins won the NCAA championship, the first of seven straight titles for the California school. That same year Alcindor also received Player of the Year and All-American honors.²²⁰ Wooten reached out to the college star, and on his “own dime” made

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Michael Covan, “The Emergence of the Black Athlete in America,” *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (November 1971), 24; Aram Goudsouzian, “Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution,” *American Studies*, Vol. 47, No. ¾ (Fall/Winter 2006), 61-85; Russell was a member of the United States 1956 Olympic gold medal team.

²²⁰ , “Alcindor May Go Right Into NBA,” *The Washington Post*, 13 February 1965, D9; Robert Lipsyte, “Alcindor Accepts U.C.L.A Basketball Scholarship from 60 College Offers,” *New York Times*, 5 May 1965, 56; , “Alcindor Dominates ’s All America Voting,” *The Washington Post*, 2 March 1967, F3; , “Lew Alcindor Named ’s Player of Year,” *The Washington Post*, 4 March 1967, D3; “Alcindor Named Player of Year: Gets 155 Votes in Writers Poll—Walker Next at 71,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1967, 20; Associated Press, “UCLA Captures Title, 79-64: Alcindor, Warren Pace Triumph Over Dayton,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 March 1967, B1; Jeff Prugh, “Opponent, Writers Find Alcindor Stuffy,” *The Washington Post*, 5 February 1967, C4; David Condon, “In the Wake of the News...,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 26 January 1967, K1; The *Chicago Tribune* attributed Alcindor’s presence in college basketball as the reason for the “reviving interest” in the sport. His talent on the basketball court was heralded as a high school player whom had the ability to play in the NBA without attending college. Essentially, he chose the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) amongst offers from over sixty schools, where he majored in history. He chose to major in this discipline so that he could “find out all I can about my people.” Jeff Prugh, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, interviewed him and concluded Alcindor was not fixated on only playing professional basketball. He was more concerned about

sure he was in attendance. For Alcindor, Ali was one of his personal heroes. Years later, the Harlem native recollected,

He was in trouble and he was someone I wanted to help because he made me feel good about being an African-American. I had the opportunity to see him do his thing [as an athlete and someone with a social conscience], and when he needed help, it just felt right to lend some support.

Therefore, showing support for him was easy. Alcindor's attendance illustrated that members of the NIEU thought highly of this young man, who had recently turned twenty years old on April 16. Symbolically he represented a "passing of the torch" for Black professional athletes who challenged inequality on and off the field.

The "Ali Draft Summit" began at 3 p.m. with Bill Russell, Lew Alcindor, Muhammad Ali, John Wooten, Jim Brown, Curtis McClinton of the Kansas City Chiefs, Jim Shorter, Sidney Williams, Bobby Mitchell, Walter Beach III, Willie Davis of the Green Bay Packers, and Representative Carl B. Stokes in attendance. Going into the meeting many of the men wanted to know firsthand why Ali refused to enlist. Some wondered if the Nation of Islam was the reason for his refusal, others thought he was afraid of the military service. Yet, there was still the concern if Ali was genuinely resisting on religious grounds. After the meeting began, an onslaught of questions and different scenarios were presented to Ali. Brown remembered, "Ali started preaching! He

developing an understanding of what responsibilities he would play in American society. Prugh mentioned, "He is searching for answers about the role of his race in the world around him, a search that has been most recently manifested in the classes he has taken at school (Islamic and African history) and book he has read ("Malcolm X Speaks")." He added Alcindor "is searching too, for his personal place in life. He wants to be known as something more than a man with a two-handed stuff shot and a 30-point average. He wants recognition as a whole person..."

delivered a sermon on the Mother Ship, Elijah, the Nation of Islam. Despite the tension outside, it was funny as hell.” He added, “Ali was in there with some of the top black athletes in America, whose intent was moderation and balance. But Ali was such a dazzling speaker; he damn near converted a few into the Nation of Islam. Guys were nodding their heads, going Hmmm.”²²¹

John Wooten remembered during the meeting that they “sat down for about six or seven hours, everybody grilling him, and came to the conclusion he was a Muslim minister and conscious objector and we could support his right not to step forward. We wanted to hear from his mouth, what this whole thing was.” For players like Wooten, Davis, and McClinton, they wanted to understand why Ali would put his career and livelihood in jeopardy not to mention the possibility of facing a five-year jail sentence. They also proposed that Ali accept the offer to perform exhibition fights for the troops, that way he did not have to pick up a gun fighting in Vietnam. While acknowledging Ali was a religious minister, the players wanted the boxer to understand the options available to him, as it was a foregone conclusion to them the court’s decision would not go in his favor.²²²

During the meeting Bill Russell asked Ali whether or not his actions were in the best interests of African Americans. With the advancements that African Americans had made by that point, Russell questioned if the champ’s actions prevented future progress.

²²¹ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; “Clay to Attend ‘Mystery Meeting’,” *The Plain Dealer*, 4 June 1967, 7C; Milton Gross, “Clay ‘Absorbed in Beliefs’,” *St. Petersburg Independent*, 8 June 1967, 15A.

²²² Ibid.

The Celtics coach recalled, “There can be no neutrals in the battle for human rights. If you are for the status quo, then you are against the rights of man, because you are afraid to rock the boat.” His question to Ali illustrated how the Black freedom struggle pervaded the mind of Russell and other Black athletes. Ali answered Russell’s question:

I’m doing what I have to do...I appreciate you fellows wanting to help and your friendship. But I have had the best legal minds in the country working for me, and they have shown me all the options and alternatives I could use if I wanted to go in. Things like going in to be an ambulance driver, or a chaplain, or a truck driver. Or joining and saying I would not kill. I could do any of those things, or I can go to jail...Well, I *know* what I must do. My fate is in the hands of Allah, and Allah will take care of me. If I walk out of this room and get killed today, it will be Allah’s doing and I will accept it. I’m not worried. In my first teachings I was told we would all be tested by Allah. This may be my test.”²²³

While Muhammad Ali viewed the events he experienced over the last year as a spiritual trial brought forth by a higher power, it was his belief in Islam that brought hostilities. Christianity was part and parcel of American society, thus Ali’s membership in the NOI cast him as a “villain” in the media. Thus, many Black athletes did not separate themselves from the harsh realities of the 1960s, and were willing to go so far as to put their jobs on the line to support a friend in the midst of a sociopolitical firestorm.²²⁴

²²³ Bill Russell with Tex Maule, “I Am Not Worried About Ali,” in *Sports Illustrated*, 19 June 1967, 18-21;

²²⁴ Bill Russell as told to William McSweeney, *Go Up For Glory*, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), 166; Russell’s nickname, “Felton X,” illustrated a widely held belief amongst Whites the Nation of Islam stirred a racial awakening amongst African Americans; *Out of Bounds*, 191; Jeff Prugh, “Opponent, Writers Find Alcindor Stuffy,” *The Washington Post*, 5 February 1967, C4; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Lane Demas. *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 28-48; Lew Alcindor suffered no repercussions for his presence. UCLA was an educational institution historically supportive of its African American athletes’ involvement in civil rights issues. For the young basketball star, he had also taken an interest in Islam, thus his show of support was a sign of solidarity with Ali.

While this group of Black men held a strong commitment to the Black freedom struggle, they also understood the importance of military service as the majority of them served in the United States armed forces in some fashion. Jim Brown enlisted in the ROTC his freshman year at Syracuse University. Upon graduating from the school he was a second lieutenant, and completed some of his basic training in Tuskegee, Alabama. John Wooten completed his military obligation in 1960, during the offseason of his second year with the Cleveland Browns. Jim Shorter served in a reserve unit and Bobby Mitchell served with the 354th General Hospital Unit in 1962 in Washington, D.C. By 1967, Mitchell was classified as 5-A, a ranking reserved for those who were over age for serving at thirty-one. Russell, who did not serve in the military, participated in several goodwill missions overseas for the federal government, and also represented the country in the 1956 Summer Olympic Games. Willie Davis participated in similar trips in 1966.²²⁵

Meanwhile, Walter Beach III served four years in the United States Air Force as a cryptographic operator deciphering coded messages. Even Carl Stokes was discharged as a Private after he served in World War II and was also awarded the World War II Victory

²²⁵ *Out of Bounds*, 54; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; Associated Press, "Mitchell Gets Army O.K. To Play Sunday," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 November 1961, B2; "Mitchell, Paluck Still in Army: Ten Redskins Leave For Training Camp," *The Washington Post*, 19 July 1962, D3; Associated Press, "GIs Getting 'Big Kick' From Football Stars," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 January 1966, C4; Associated Press, "GIs in Vietnam Enjoy Films of NFL Games," *The Washington Post*, 25 January 1966, D3; Associated Press, "Huff, Other NFL Stars Make Hit With American Troops in Vietnam," *The Washington Post*, 30 January 1966, C3; Associated Press, "Pro Stars Score In South Vietnam," *New York Times*, 30 January 1966, S2; Dave Brady, "Only Three Redskin Players 1-A in Draft, Survey Reveals," *The Washington Post*, 23 April 1967, D4; "U.S. Olympic Hopes," *Atlanta Daily World*, 8 April 1956, 8; "Russell, Cain And Jones Picked For Olympic Five," *Chicago Defender*, 14 April 1956, 12.

Medal. Sidney Williams did six months active duty in Fort Knox, Kentucky and Fort Leonard, Missouri, and at the time of the Summit was in the army reserve. Curtis McClinton, Jr. also served in the United States military at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. Once a month he went to the reserve and practiced his military specialty. For McClinton, “Being in the military [was] real. Whether you in activity duty or reserves, your ass is on the line.” The men in attendance fully understood the seriousness of the armed forces, and after engaging Muhammad Ali on numerous issues for a few hours they understood his position better.²²⁶

As the meeting adjourned around 6 pm, the group exited from the room with Jim Brown and Ali leading the way as “flash bulbs went off like a lightening bug convention.” The two sat down at the press conference table accompanied by Bill Russell and Lew Alcindor. The other members stood behind the four. Brown opened, “[T]he announcement made by the press that we met to discuss Muhammad Ali’s switch on the draft was an erroneous statement... We wanted to get to the source of the situation the champion is in.” He continued, “The long discussion we had with Muhammad Ali convinced us that the champion is sincere in his heart about his religious beliefs.” Brown

²²⁶ Interview with Walter Beach III, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone discussion with the author, June 15, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 5, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author; Personal resume of Sidney Williams, submitted with Project proposal for Job Interest and Motivation (J.I.M.) to Mayor’s Council on Youth Opportunity on behalf of The National Negro Industrial and Economic Union, 29 February 1968; In *Out of Bounds*, Jim Brown discusses some of the racial discrimination he faced while fulfilling his military obligations in Tuskegee, Alabama. Willie Davis visited servicemen and wounded soldiers in Vietnam with Johnny Unitas of the Baltimore Colts, Sam Huff of the Redskins, and Frank Gifford, a former player at the time of the New York Giants. Major Barney Gill, the group’s escort, told the press what the players did was valued since many of the places they went to were ‘not the most secure places on the campus.’

added, “We are satisfied and we part as honest and good friends.” Muhammad Ali declared, “I was invited by my friend Jim Brown to discuss with the top athletes you see here today the situation.” He followed that statement echoing Brown’s reference about the assumptions of the meeting. Ali said, “The statements printed in the press regarding my visit here at the headquarters of the NIEU is false.” He added, “All we did was talk about the black man’s problems. We’re all buddies, friends, —what we call soul brothers.” Brown and Ali made it an objective to let the media know the speculation about the gathering was wrong. There were no hard feelings amongst the men at the meeting. While the discussions were “heated,” the love and respect the men had in the room for each other did not subside afterwards.²²⁷

A reporter asked Ali about his draft status and if he had any plans to rescind his earlier decision, to which Ali simply replied, “I have no comment.” Bill Russell chided with the following remark, “Muhammad Ali is my friend...The things he had gone through has made him a lonely man.” Bobby Mitchell then added ““As long as Muhammad Ali is sincere we are with him. We can’t tell him to go or not to go into the army. We understand there are many problems involved.”” Like many of the Union members present, Mitchell reiterated that Ali made his stance specifically on the grounds of his religious beliefs, which was his right as an American citizen, and was grateful none of those in the meeting room tried to change his position. Brown ended the press

²²⁷ Chuck Heaton, “NIEU Huddle Result: Cassius Still Won’t Go,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 June 1967, 59; William (Sheep) Jackson, “Muhammad Ali Stands Firm On His Rights, Religious Beliefs,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, 10 June 1967, 1A, 15A; Muhammad Ali was one of the biggest supporters of the Union, donating \$10,000 to the organization the year before, one of it’s largest donations from a person.

conference letting those gathered know that all the athletes present, including him, “were of other faiths and beliefs.”²²⁸

As Carl Stokes left the Union headquarters, a crowd dominated by Black Cleveland residents blocked the sidewalk leading to the Union office chanting, “We won’t go! We won’t go!” Stokes told the media, “This racial situation is becoming a serious thing. It is becoming more evident every day, not only in Cleveland, but over the entire nation.” The war in Vietnam, riots, the economic disparities amongst Americans, and the denial of civil rights to African Americans by White supremacists loomed large, and by this time, had become the focal point of political discussions throughout the nation. Brigman Owens, a defensive back for the Washington Redskins, and the Regional Director for the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Union, supported the position of the members present as he saw Ali’s decision as him simply “standing up for his rights.” As a member of the National Guard himself, Owens understood not only the commitment of the boxer, but also the other athletes present. He was gratified Union members “were standing by [Ali] not allowing him to be isolated. That was a risky thing at that time for athletes. There was no question in my mind that you had to support him. Those were his beliefs.”²²⁹

Even as Brown and Ali identified the flawed reports about the call for the meeting, reporters continued to harp on NIEU’s failure to convince Muhammad Ali to

²²⁸ Ibid.; Associated Press, “Clay’s Belief is ‘Sincere’,” *The Modesto Bee and News-Herald*, 5 June 1967, B5; William (Sheep) Jackson, “Muhammad Ali Stands Firm On His Rights, Religious Beliefs,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, 10 June 1967, 15A.

²²⁹ Ibid.; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, DC. Recording in possession of author.

enlist. The next day, headlines read “Athletes Fail to Sway Clay,” “Clay Spurns ‘Join Army’ Plea,” “Negro Stars Fail To Convince Clay,” and “Jim Brown Leads The Effort: Negro Stars Fail To Talk Ali Into Joining The Army.” These captions illustrated how some reporters took liberties in the headlines they made. Addressing the false accounts put forth in newspapers, John Wooten stated, “They got it wrong. We took the position that we were not there to talk him into enlisting. We were there to support him not enlisting, or not stepping forward.” He added, “That’s different from what our goals and intentions were. If you don’t step forward, you can be imprisoned. Our position was that we wanted to support him, and why he wasn’t stepping forward.” Some of the men in attendance, like Willie Davis and Bobby Mitchell, wanted to persuade Ali to accept the call for the draft. “But after about 15 minutes of being there, I’m saying to myself, ‘No way is this guy going to change his mind,’” Davis reflected. Mitchell noted in the same vein that Ali ““convinced all of us, even someone like me, who was suspicious. We weren’t easy on him. We wanted Ali to understand what he was getting himself into. He convinced us that he was.”” Consequently, the main objective for the men in attendance was to hear from Ali, not from untrustworthy sources on why the boxing champion took his position when the United States military wanted to give him what they deemed an easy option.²³⁰

²³⁰ , “Won’t Accept Army Induction: Athletes Fail to Sway Clay,” *The Washington Post*, 5 June 1967, D1; , “Clay Spurns ‘Join Army’ Plea,” *Chicago Tribune*, 5 June 1967, C1; , “Negro Stars Fail To Convince Clay,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, 5 June 1967; “Jim Brown Leads The Effort: Negro Stars Fail To Talk Ali Into Joining The Army,” *Daily Defender*, 5 June 1967, 1,3; Associated Press, “Pro Athletes Talk to Clay,” *The Gettysburg Times*, 5 June 1967, 5; Associated Press, “Stand Unchanged: Top Negro Stars Hear Clay Story,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, 5 June 1967, 16; Branson Wright, “Black sports stars united behind Ali after ’67 summit in Cleveland,”

While Bill Russell addressed his support for Ali at the press conference following the “Summit,” he also wrote an article for the June 19, 1967 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, titled “I Am Not Worried About Ali.” In this piece, Russell addressed the misrepresented reports calling it a “return to McCarthyism in this country that the papers slant and distort the news until it is almost impossible to determine the truth.” Russell believed the reason Ali received so much animosity from others was because of his connection to the Nation of Islam coupled with its belief that all White people were devils. The focus of Russell’s article supported the idea that all American citizens had rights to religious freedom. Thus, Russell’s vouching for Ali demonstrated was confirmation that the NBA’s most notable player agreed Muhammad Ali had the right to not enlist in the military.²³¹

Muhammad Ali still had his detractors in 1967. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of New York, who were critical of Ali before, continued to address their anger in a column to the *New York Amsterdam News*. Tired of the support the African American paper provided the boxer, they stated, “Clay is not black, he’s yellow. Why don’t you have the courage to say this, it will cheer up all the wonderful Negro soldiers who are fighting and dying While Muhummed [sic] Ali is getting rich by being a slacker in the country which gave him everything.” The reference to Ali as “yellow” was their way of saying he was afraid, fearful to serve in the military. This was the VFW’s way of

Plain Dealer, 3 June 2012, A12; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, July 27, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

²³¹ Bill Russell with Tex Maule, “I Am Not Worried About Ali,” in *Sports Illustrated*, 19 June 1967, 18-21.

questioning Ali's character and manhood. Interestingly, their tone was problematic; because they believed as former veterans they spoke for African American soldiers.²³²

To assume all Black men who served in Vietnam were against these types of arguments caught the ire of some Union members, Sidney Williams in particular. From what he remembered, a large majority of the American population did not understand why Ali did not enlist in the Army. Yet, he "had already said 'No Vietcong ever called me nigger.' They resented the fact that here is this big celebrity they cannot control. He's not going to go into the military so they can use him as a tool of the government. He really believed in being a Muslim. They thought he was playing a game, but he was into the religion." Curtis McClinton shared the same sentiments. He mentioned, "We were respecting the judgment and actions of Muhammad Ali and his decision predicated on his religion. That was not a deviant to the norm and the morays to our society over a period of time." McClinton continued, "Our position was we not only honored that judgment of Muhammad Ali and his religion predicated on the fact there had been others who over a period of time that did not serve on religion. Our position was to acknowledge that."²³³

Despite his religious leanings, Muhammad Ali served as a figure of pride for many Black males, especially those who played professional sports. Los Angeles Rams defensive end, Deacon Jones, recognized the transformative power Ali represented for himself and other Black people. He explained in an interview, "Muhammad Ali was a favorite idol of mine. I had so much respect for him. Not for just his boxing, although you

²³² "Color Question," *New York Amsterdam News*, 10 June 1967, 15.

²³³ Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 24, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

got to admire that, but what he did lifted our race up more than any athlete or anybody else that I have ever known.” Abner Haynes, a Black male who played running back for the Kansas City Chiefs from 1960 to 1964 also had Ali in high regard. The boxing champion “was like a breath of fresh air for us. We hadn’t seen a brother that was for that time, that out there. What I mean by that is he was confident...you can’t have a lot of confidence living in segregation. And it’s hard to have confidence when you do not have no power.”²³⁴

While many Black athletes and attendees of the summit knew Ali’s stance was not popular, they recognized the decision to support him would be viewed unfavorably by reporters at the press conference that followed. Yet, they stood on the principle Ali was able to make his own decision. According to Walter Beach, everyone in attendance “agreed with him. We were not afraid of losing our jobs, or losing the respect from people who [did] not respect you anyway.” Beach’s assessment demonstrated through a collective effort, they were not coerced into a stance by media pressure or requests from the management of their respective teams. Fortunately, none of the men suffered any immediate consequence for their positions. However, there may have been an economic impact. According Bob Arum, the attendees of the meeting were to “become the chief closed-circuit exhibitors of Ali’s fights all over the United States...Each of them would get a particular region and they would make a nice chunk of change every time Ali fought.” Despite the amount of money forfeited because of Ali’s refusal to enlist, Union

²³⁴ *Third and Long*, directed by Theresa Moore (Chicago: Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011) DVD.

members continued to support him throughout a difficult time. Yet, his battle with military service did not end when the Summit's press conference adjourned.²³⁵

At Muhammad Ali's June 19, 1967 trial, after twenty minutes of deliberations, he was found guilty of draft evasion, a violation of the United States selective service laws. At Ali's request, the sentencing was not delayed and given shortly after the jury's decision. When asked by Judge Joe Ingraham if he wanted to speak in an effort to soften his sentence, he replied "No sir." The judge sentenced Ali for a felonious crime with a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. The average sentence for "draft dodging" was eighteen months; therefore Ali's particular punishment was harsh in relation to other cases. However, the former champ was released on bail pending an appeal, but his passport was confiscated, preventing him from participating in fights overseas. Since no boxing commission in the United States granted him a license to fight, Muhammad Ali was therefore forced to take a hiatus from professional boxing.

By 1969, Ali was also given a suspension from the Nation of Islam. Since he was no longer bringing in receipts from boxing, the NOI sought to distance themselves from Ali, putting him in a greater financial predicament. According to historian Claude Clegg III, this dismissal was due in large part for financial reasons. His refusal to enter the U.S. Selective Services had become costly on many levels. It damaged the champ financially in his attempt to avoid prison with lawyer fees. Numerous boxing commissions also prevented Ali from finding worthy opponents to produce lucrative fights. Thus, the large monetary contributions he provided the Nation prior to his publicly stated position on

²³⁵ Ibid.; Branson Wright, "Black sports stars united behind Ali after '67 summit in Cleveland," *Plain Dealer*, 3 June 2012, A10.

serving in Vietnam dwindled. Coupled with the loss of the heavyweight title, Ali was no longer a big draw in the ring or with the Nation of Islam.²³⁶

In order to meet his financial needs, Muhammad Ali lectured around the nation, and went in on a business venture with a group of men to form the Champburger Corporation. As for Main Bout, Inc., it no longer existed in its original form. Union members, Jim Brown in particular, continued to support him financially as needed. Despite his suspension from the Nation of Islam, and being stripped of his title, he continued to hold to his convictions. In 1970, in typical Ali fashion, he wrote a poem that addressed his stance on the Vietnam War. It read:

Hell no
I ain't going to go
Clean out my cell
And take my tail
To jail
Without bail
Because it's better there eating
Watching television fed
Than in Vietnam with your white folks dead²³⁷

It took three years for the United States Supreme Court to throw out Ali's draft conviction. Ali recalled in a June 1970 interview with *The Black Scholar* his legal fees totaled \$2,000,000. Ali's refusal to serve in the military was costly, but did not equate to the commitment he had to his beliefs, and to justice. His stance against the war goes on to become an important part of not only the Black freedom struggle, but for the human

²³⁶ "Convict Clay; 5-Yr. Term: Jury Takes 20 Minutes for Decision," Chicago Tribune, 21 June 1967, 1; David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*. (New York: Random House, 1998), 291; Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties*, 2nd edition. (London: Verso, 2005), 227.

²³⁷ "The Black Scholar Interviews: Muhammad Ali," *The Black Scholar*, June 1970, 32.

rights campaign of the 1960s and 1970s. Ali challenged long held notions of patriotism, and athletes deference to political issues, the creation of Main Bout and the issues they encountered demonstrated that while many pundits argued politics and sports should not mix, they were in fact part and parcel. By 1970, the Union increased its efforts to accomplish the organization's objectives on a larger scale. This was specifically seen in Muhammad Ali's return to professional boxing, as the NIEU continued to be instrumental in the showing of his fights, keeping control of the ancillary rights. In all, the Union's involvement with Muhammad Ali was just one aspect of the group's involvement in the movement for equality in the professional sports ranks.²³⁸

In the aftermath of the "Ali Draft Summit," numerous members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union became enthralled in their own dilemmas with their respective teams. However, their support of Muhammad Ali was not the reason. Rather they dealt with political and economic matters that centered on fair treatment and compensation within the professional ranks. As professional sports began to grow in size and financially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Union members challenged the bureaucracy of the National Football League on different fronts. The following chapter will examine some of the events that unfolded during this time.

²³⁸ Ibid., 32-39; Robert Lipsyte, "Sports of the Times: Foodstuffs," *New York Times*, 21 November 1968, 57; Philip H. Dougherty, "Advertising: Tapping the Affluent Minority," *New York Times*, 12 December 1968, 80; Hans J. Massaquoi, "The Unconquerable Muhammad Ali," *Ebony*, April 1969; Leonard Sloane, "Name Franchising: It Takes More Than A Star to Sell Goods," *New York Times*, 25 October 1970, F2.

Chapter 5

“A man can’t tell another man what to read:” The NIEU and the Challenge of Economic Empowerment in the National Football League, 1967-1972

Months after the Ali Draft Summit, members of the NIEU expanded their political agitation by taking a stand against their respective teams and the NFL. In 1967, Walter Beach contested Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell about the control the team had over its players, particularly with regard to their political beliefs; while John Wooten and Sidney Williams, part of a larger contingent of Black Browns players, contested team management over their financial pay. No less than a year later, Wooten found himself involved in a “racial matter” pertaining to a team golf outing. This particular incident garnered national attention as the Browns’ offensive lineman got into a public squabble with his White teammate, Ross Fichtner. Although these events pertained specifically to the Browns organization, they were part of a larger challenge brewing that culminated in 1970 with the formation of a new organization, the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), which was designed to address professional football players’ grievances collectively. Interestingly, John Mackey and Brig Owens, two members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, were a critical component of the NFLPA leadership beginning in 1969, and began the challenge of the NFL’s power over its players.

This chapter examines how NIEU members confronted NFL management and used elements of their “green power” philosophy as a means to contest the lack of political and economic sovereignty that was imposed by the league. While they promoted Black business development, they also strove for better economic opportunities for themselves as professional football players. This chapter will also discuss the role of NIEU members in the execution of the NFLPA’s contest of the league’s power structure and assess the impact of these challenges on the lives of Black men, particularly those who were members of the Union, in the National Football League in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²³⁹

During the 1966 season, on a plane ride home to Cleveland after an away game, Walter Beach was reading *Message to the Black Man*, a book by Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Elijah Muhammad. The NOI leader espoused rhetoric of Whites being “blonde hair, blue-eyed devils” and the “enemies” of Black people. He also proclaimed Whites were the cause of the dire conditions in the Black community, and the solution Muhammad proposed to end their “wickedness” was through “war.” Beach’s reading material caught the attention of Brown’s owner, Art Modell. According to Beach, the Browns’ owner recommended he not read the work, to which Beach responded, “You have to be joking. A man can’t tell another man what to read. I’m under contract to play

²³⁹ Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; UPI, “Negroes Publicize Plight: Sports Becomes Vehicle of Protest,” *The Washington Post*, 22 December 1968, E2; Associated Press, “Browns’ Coach Is Slated at Federal Hearing Today,” *New York Times*, 16 November 1970, 64; “I Was Blacklisted—Parrish,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 November 1970, C5; “Beach Is Linked To League Probe,” *Call and Post*, 5 December 1970, 13B; Associated Press, “Beach Sues NFL, Browns For Job Loss,” *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1971, D3.

football, but don't ever think you can tell me what to read." He added that his personal reading material "was not one of the things [he] was going to give up for football."

Modell countered and asked him if he was a member of the Nation of Islam, to which Beach replied, "'I've read the Torah too, but that doesn't make me a Jew.'" While Beach may have won the verbal sparring match, and retained his right to spend his spare time as he chose, his actions were not without repercussions. He noticed, "'from that point on, I had a lot of difficulty in football.'" ²⁴⁰ That summer Beach, along with two other Browns teammates, were interviewed by Hal Lebovitz of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Beach argued the city should have spent more money to help eradicate the economic problems in the Hough area. As for the rioting that happened in that community, he also was able to "sympathize with the residents of Hough, knowing their content and the causes." ²⁴¹

When his comments were printed, Art Modell reportedly told Beach he should "'concern himself more with football and less with commentary on social problems.'" ²⁴² The Pontiac native believed the views he expressed regarding the social and economic problems that caused the Hough riots was enough for Modell to begin arranging his departure from the Cleveland Browns and eventually the NFL altogether because his stance did not coincide with the owner's wishes.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.; *Third and Long*, Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011; Bernie Parrish, *They Call It A Game*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 172; In a telephone conversation on September 11, 2012, Walter Beach mentioned that while Art Modell questioned his choice in literature, he did so in an effort to make sure that some of his Southern White teammates did not get word of the defensive back's reading material.

²⁴¹ Hal Lebovitz, "3 Browns in the Know Reflect on Situation in Hough," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 24 July 1966, 1C.

²⁴² Parrish, *They Call It A Game*, 172; Philip C. Suchma, *From the Best of Time to the Worst of Times: Professional Sport and Urban Decline in a Tale of Two Clevelands, 1945-1978*. Diss. The Ohio State University, 2005.

Despite Modell's disapproval of Walter Beach's sociopolitical commentary, and unwillingness to acquiesce to the owner's demands regarding reading material, the defensive back finished the 1966 season with the Browns. Nevertheless, on Friday, July 7, 1967, two days prior to the start of Cleveland Browns training camp for the 1967 season, the team placed Beach on waivers. Former teammate Bernie Parrish saw this move against Beach as a way to address "the refusal of a player to bow to illegal and degrading rules" initiated by the team's owner. Unfortunately, being released from a team was the reality for many professional football players in the National Football League who chose not to comply with the team's demands. Modell's actions allowed any other NFL team to claim Beach, but they had to agree to take on the remainder of his contract with the Browns. However if no club selected the player after a ten-day period, he then became a free agent, and was able to sign with whatever team he liked without interference from his former squad. The New Orleans Saints, then an expansion team in the NFL, claimed Beach's rights. However, the Browns blocked his ability to go to the Saints retracting his name from the waiver list, which was an illegal move. Nevertheless, Art Modell informed him that he would put him back on waivers Wednesday, July 19.

When that day came, Beach received no interest from teams. He reached out to all sixteen teams in the National Football League through written letters and telephone calls, but none responded with a desire to sign him. A few days after Beach was officially waived by the Browns he received a letter from New Orleans Saints head coach Tom Fears that read:

Dear Walt:

I want to thank you for advising us of your availability and there is little doubt in my mind that you could make our club. After much thought and deliberation, I have decided to go with what we have and try to develop our younger boys.²⁴³

Despite their initial waivers claim, Coach Fears reasoned Beach's age, thirty-four, was the reason the team could not sign him. However, Beach still displayed the ability to play with players much younger than him, as was demonstrated the previous season when he had to recover from bleeding ulcers. Unable to find a team, Walter Beach was left with no choice but to find work outside of the NFL. He left the game with the belief that he was "blackballed" from the league. Thus, his career in the NFL was over. Beach recognized going into the 1967 season that the issues over his reading material and sentiments on the social conditions in Cleveland were part of a "series of racially oriented incidents...[that] incurred the displeasure" of Art Modell. For the Browns' owner, he did not want any friction amongst the team's players. Numerous NFL players, many of them Black, addressed their own economic gripes with several team owners the following year.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Bernie Parrish, *They Call It A Game*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 173-174

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 172; "Schafrath Browns' Co-Captain," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 23 July 1966, 56; *Third and Long*, Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011; Interview with Walter Beach III, in-person interview with the author, digital recording, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Recording in possession of author; UPI, "Ex-Cleveland Back Hedges About Role in NFL Probe," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 1970, H3; Associated Press, "Grand Jury Hears Browns' Club Official," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 1970, G6; Associated Press, "Beach Sues NFL, Browns For Job Loss," *Washington Post*, 11 June 1971, D3. Yet, by 1967, Brown was no longer with the Cleveland Browns, and unable to vouch for him as he did prior, which made Beach expendable. His age, coupled with what Browns' management deemed a "rebellious nature," put him at a disadvantage in maintaining his spot on the team. Nevertheless, the Pontiac native was not without work long as Representative Carl Stokes added him to his staff that summer to help with his mayoral campaign. When Stokes won the election on Wednesday, November 8, 1967, Beach was appointed to an administrative role as Coordinator for the Mayor's Council on Youth Opportunity (CYO). This position allowed Beach to continue his work in the community, and

By 1967, professional football attendance in the NFL and American Football League (AFL), the former's rival league, had risen 13% and 17% respectively. To capitalize on that growth, both leagues agreed to join under the banner of the National Football League. After they garnered unprecedented attention the previous year, with the inauguration of the Super Bowl, an annual matchup between the top team in the AFL and the NFL. The popularity of the league led Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) to pay \$20 million for the right to broadcast both leagues games, along with \$2 million to show the Super Bowl. The television contracts alerted many players that owners were making large profits. While there were many components that made a franchise, the players were the brawn of the team's operations. The on-field success of a team often determined the kind of financial success they experienced. Thus, players were well aware that the league was growing in popularity and experienced a prosperity that was unheralded in comparison to previous years, and led a large number of athletes to demonstrate their "discontent over salaries."²⁴⁵

During the summer of 1967, the NFL saw the highest number of player holdouts ever, with many challenging their respective team management over their financial compensation. A group of five Black players on the Cleveland Browns, Sidney Williams, John Wooten, running back Leroy Kelly, defensive back Mike Howell, and offensive lineman John Brown, challenged Art Modell over their roles with the team and their

help support the programming efforts of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union. In a telephone conversation on September 11, 2012, Walter Beach mentioned that while Art Modell questioned his choice in literature, he probably did so in an effort to make sure that some of his Southern White teammates did not get word of the defensive back's reading material.

²⁴⁵ William Wallace, "Pros' Popularity Keeps Soaring," *New York Times*, 27 August 1967, S1, S7, S9; Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

financial compensation. What ensued was their collective refusal to show for team meetings and practices until new contract agreements were met. Their decision to utilize such a method was unprecedented and caught Browns management by surprise. This particular tactic was an illustration of the political and economic consciousness these men developed, as they understood the value of their labor to the Browns. While a complete dispersal of wealth to all players was not the five men's motive, they held a great desire to improve their individual financial status. This was largely due to the limited opportunity they were afforded in the professional ranks. Players' careers were short, and oft times the contracts of Black athletes were not always guaranteed like those of Whites. Thus, the five Browns recognized it was in their best interest to get as much money and compensation possible. As Union members they promoted the advancement of Black businesses, and knew they could not do so without fighting for the improvement of their own fiscal situations as professional athletes.²⁴⁶

On Saturday, July 22, 1967 training camp for the Browns opened at Hiram College, a town southeast of Cleveland, one hour from the city limits. However, Sidney Williams, John Wooten, John Brown, Leroy Kelly, and Mike Howell were not in attendance at the noon report time. Carl Stokes, who had been the legal representative for the men the past two years, sent a telegram that Saturday to Art Modell on behalf of the players. It read: "These men have advised me to inform you that they will not report to training camp until a conclusion has been reached on their contracts. I'll be glad to meet with you at your earliest convenience." Modell responded at a press conference the same

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

day telling reporters, “I regret the actions of the five Browns players and Carl Stokes. However, I will not be intimidated by any person or group of individuals.” He added, “There is no place for actions such as this in professional sports.” Carl Stokes called Modell later that day and told him, “All five players have said that if one of them is traded to another club in the National Football League that the remaining four also must be traded.” The actions taken by these men were unprecedented since players represented themselves and handled their financial matters individually with team ownership, and not through a representative. Inferred from Modell’s comments, Wooten, Williams, Kelly, Brown, and Howell went against the expected behavior of men in professional football. Modell, in a move to put pressure on the five players, publicly stated their refusal to report warranted fines, possible suspensions, and they would be considered for trades with other teams.²⁴⁷

Art Modell was confused about why five of his players had grievances over their contracts. He told reporters, “I am rather proud of my treatment, in all areas, of our players... The Browns record over the years in regard to the treatment of Negro players speaks for itself.” He added, “Early in the club’s history the Browns paved the way for the mass influx of the Negro athlete into sports. In recent seasons under my ownership they have composed almost one-third of our squad—more than any other team in the NFL.” The Browns’ owner’s statements played on race and this annoyed Stokes who countered through a letter, “I am dumbfounded by Art Modell’s response. There is

²⁴⁷ “Strike of 5 Browns Irks Boss Modell,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 July 1967, B7; “Gridders Rebel Nationwide,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 27 July 1967, B1; Bernie Parrish, *They Call It A Game*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 113

nothing racial about the position of the players. None of them is alleging racial discrimination.” He added, ““Their response is based solely on the fact that they have not been offered the amount of money that they feel their services are worth.”” While Modell believed the player’s displeasure was over race, the real matter was twofold: financial compensation and an equal opportunity for playing time. Stokes told reporters, ““I regard Mr. Modell’s characterization of this as a racial issue as being irresponsible and out of keeping with the respect in which I formerly held him.”” Modell brought up matters of race as a tactic to use the team’s favorable treatment of Black athletes to his advantage, despite none of the players stating anything about their mistreatment as members on the Browns because they were Black; albeit, each player had a different issue that Browns management needed to address.²⁴⁸

Sidney Williams wanted an equal opportunity to start at the linebacker position. He requested a guarantee from management that he and John Brewer, a former tight end who was moved to linebacker, were given the opportunity to play in three exhibition games and compete for the starting job. Modell and his position coach opted not to make that promise. The previous season Williams played the entire year and had to “fight for playing time” while Brewer made the transition to defense. Williams was dumbfounded by this move. In an interview, he explained “The linebacker position [was] delicate. It’s damn near like quarterback. With a linebacker you have to cover someone out of the backfield, deal with that tight end on your head, fight him off. There is so much you have

²⁴⁸ UPI, “Atty. Raps Browns Owner: Says Race Not An Issue in Holdout By 5 Players,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 July 1967, 24; UPI, “Five Browns Still Out, Money Not Only Issue,” *Daily Defender*, 26 July 1967, 28; “Strike of 5 Browns Irks Boss Modell,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 July 1967, B7; Browns lawyer James Berick scheduled the meeting.

to do.” In his opinion, it was impossible for a player on the offensive side of the ball to be converted to defense, particularly Brewer in this case. Williams added, “You can not be converted from offense to defense to play that position. They did back in the 20s and 30s but at this time you were specializing in a position.” Despite the demotion, Williams went through the year with a “good attitude” and did what he felt was for the good of the team. Interestingly he was told by Brown’s management ““he [was] as good or better than any linebacker on the team,”” yet that acknowledgment was not sufficient for him. He was aware that several other Black teammates and players around the NFL had been told the same, but were never promoted, or denied the opportunity to play. He requested the team give him the opportunity to prove his ability during exhibition games. Williams believed if he was not able to showcase his talents, then he wanted the Browns to trade him to a team who valued his abilities and allowed him to play more.²⁴⁹

Art Modell believed the players had ““no basis for negotiations, period,”” especially John Wooten, since the guard signed a two-year contract the previous season. Therefore, the Browns owner believed Wooten failed to honor the contract he signed. By Monday, the Browns issued daily fines of \$100 for every day the five players were not in camp. Modell also gave the group four stipulations before they convened for negotiations: Wooten’s contract talks cease as he was signed through the 1967 season; Sidney Williams’ contract would only focus on financial negotiations, while the coaches determined his playing time; all contracts of the players were to be approached

²⁴⁹ Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

individually, and once agreements were made, they would sign then report to camp; and the “all for one, one for all” provision cease.²⁵⁰

On Thursday, July 27, Jim Brown told reporters from the Metro Goldwyn Meyer (MGM) movie set for his film *Ice Station Zebra*, that Modell was ““completely off base in telling the press what the Cleveland Browns have done for Negro players”” and that the actions of the five Browns were purely economical and that they were ““not concerned with charitable contributions made to them on the basis of race”” by the team. Brown also discussed Mike Howell’s annual salary of \$16,000, and the team’s proposal of a \$3,000 increase. Since Howell was a starter and second in the league for the total number of interceptions during the 1966 season, Brown argued the pay he received was not comparable to other players at his position around the league, nor fair for his excellent play. To illustrate this point, Brown compared Howell to another player on the Cleveland Browns whose name he did not give, but the other team member received a raise and bonus that totaled \$11,000. This was \$8,000 more than what the Browns’ offered. Thus, Jim Brown concluded Howell’s proposed pay ““by modern day standards [was] not a first class raise.”” The former gridiron star also mentioned the \$15,000 salary John Brown received as a starter on the offensive line, was ““low by any standard.”” Brown was a mastermind when it came to negotiations, demonstrated by the \$65,000 salary he earned in his last year with the Browns. In his last few years with the team, he renegotiated his pay with Modell several times, to which the Browns’ owner begrudgingly conceded. In the case of his ex-teammates, Brown understood the position

²⁵⁰ “Players go into 4th day of mass holdout,” *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, 25 July 1967, 4.

of the five men. Although he was away from the game busy with the work of the NIEU and involved in movies, he was well aware of the financial issues players faced and was willing to speak on their behalf when needed.²⁵¹

John Wooten, who the *New York Times* labeled the “ringleader” of the holdout and “a long-time [sic] disciple of Jim Brown,” was steadfast in his desire to renegotiate his contract because of what he believed was an “outstanding season.” Leroy Kelly earned \$20,000 for the 1966 season in which he replaced the retired Jim Brown, a \$45,000 difference between the pay Brown received and what Kelly was paid. That year Kelly amassed over 1,500 total yards and scored sixteen touchdowns, and was the second leading rusher in the NFL. This resulted in his selection to the All-Pro First Team as well as the Pro Bowl. Based on his performance, this was a great discount in comparison to the \$65,000 Brown made in his last year with the team. According to Brown, Kelly was “not even close to making the salary that average untried rookies [were] guaranteed.” While Jim Brown provided public support for his former teammates and Union members, he challenged the power dynamics within the NFL when he asked: “Should the owners be complete dictators in salary negotiations? Is it wrong to have legal representation when dealing with legal problems?” Brown added, “And, should untested rookies receive greater salaries than proven veterans—or should Clinton Jones (a rookie) make more money than Leroy Kelly?”²⁵² Brown posed valid points, and many of the issues he raised had been the topic of conversation amongst many NFL veterans. They believed

²⁵¹ Associated Press, “Browns Set Up Talks on Holdouts,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 July 1967, B3; UPI, “Jim Brown Lauds Striking Browns,” *The Washington Post*, 28 July 1967, D2; “Strike in Pro Football,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1967, 145.

²⁵² UPI, “Jim Brown Lauds Striking Browns,” *The Washington Post*, 28 July 1967, D2.

first year players should not make more money than them when they had yet to set a foot on a NFL playing field. The dilemma with the five Black Cleveland Browns players was not the only time that summer African American players made headlines over their contracts.²⁵³

In Oakland, California, Clem Daniels, an All-Pro running back with the Oakland Raiders, and member of the NIEU, had a contract dispute with management over his contract. The team offered him a \$2,000 increase, which he took as “tokenism and a personal insult by the Raiders to his dignity as an athlete and a man.” In San Diego, California, six African American members of the San Diego Chargers refused to report for training camp until they got new contracts from their team. All-Pro defensive backs Leslie “Speedy” Duncan and Kenny Graham, along with running back Gene Foster walked out of their training camp. The team’s head coach and general manager Sid Gillman fined the trio \$1,000 each for their failure to report, and enacted a fine of \$100 per practice session. Such actions by African American players in the NFL put many owners around the league on notice. The fact they were the primary resisters, many managers concluded the Black freedom struggle had found its way to the playing field.²⁵⁴

On August 1, 1967, in Cleveland the fines for the five Browns players reached \$1,100, and the desire for them to reach an agreement with management became a pressing matter. By this time, three of the five demands were not met. Sidney Williams dissatisfied with the lack of commitment from his coaches for playing time told Browns

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ “Gridders Rebel Nationwide,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 27 July 1967, B1; Three other Black Charger players, linebacker Frank Buncom, tight end Willie Frazier and defensive end James “Jim” Griffin held out of their teams camp.

management he no longer wanted to play for them. Modell and the coaches were “stumped, could not believe it...startled.” They tried to convince Williams to stay, but he told them they were unfair about his playing time, and he refused to change his stance. The linebacker left Modell no option but to trade him. The rights to Williams were sent to the New York Giants, who “anxiously” awaited Williams’ services. However, shortly after getting to there camp, he was released by the team and signed with the Washington Redskins. John Brown, one of the team’s starting offensive linemen was traded to the Pittsburgh Steelers who were “enthusiastic” to gain Brown, for draft choices.²⁵⁵ Mike Howell decided to report to the team once his two-week military obligation with the National Guard was fulfilled. The Browns communicated with other teams about trade opportunities for Leroy Kelly and John Wooten. Modell told reporters at a press conference, “‘If I give in to them, I’m dead. I may lose the battle but I don’t intend to lose the war.’”²⁵⁶ As William N. Wallace for the *New York Times* pointed out, the “war” Modell referred to was the “preservation of the practice of negotiating individually with each athlete and keeping his salary confidential to avoid comparisons.” The notion of confidentiality and the negotiation practices was one of the main issues “The Group”

²⁵⁵ UPI, “Giants Cut Linebacker Williams Lions, Steelers Trade Linemen,” *The Washington Post*, 24 August 1967, B4; “Giants Cut Williams,” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1967, *The Washington Post*, G3; “Shinnick Out; Colts Activate Williams,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 September 1968, B4; UPI, “Brown’s Holdout Ended; Kelly Plays Out Option,” *Daily Defender*, 8 August 1967, 25; UPI, “Compromise Ends Holdout by Browns, but Nobody’s Happy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1967, C1, C4; Associated Press, “Browns Trade Williams as Holdout Ends,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 August 1967, C2; UPI, “Kelly Back, Will Play Out Option,” *The Washington Post*, 8 August 1967, C3; “Players Gain In ‘Holdout’,” *Call and Post*, 12 August 1967, 1A; NEA, “Negro Athletes And Society: Boycotts On The Ballfields?” *Kingsport News*, 12 August 1967; Jim Ninowski, a backup quarterback with the Browns, was also a holdout, but separate from the group of five African American players. The team put him on waivers in a pursuit for a trade as was done with Williams and Brown.

²⁵⁶ William N. Wallace, “Sports of The Times: The Group,” *New York Times*, 1 August 1967, 36.

wanted to address. Carl Stokes, a lawyer himself, called the makeup of players' contracts in the NFL a form of "peonage" and suggested their legality should be tried in court. Keeping players' pay private benefitted team owners greatly. The secrecy prevented players from comparing their pay with each other. This prevented them from determining their value in relationship to others at their respective positions.²⁵⁷

After many discussions with Browns management and conferences with Stokes, on August 7, 1967, Kelly and Wooten agreed to end their holdouts and as a result reported to camp. Kelly was presented with a new contract from Art Modell, but decided not to sign it, playing under his rookie contract. His refusal to sign the offer resulted in the loss of ten percent of his salary for the year, but allowed him to become a free agent the following year. This move permitted him to sign with any team he saw fit, or re-sign with the Browns for more money. Modell was surprised by Kelly's decision. He remarked, "We shook hands on the deal. I am puzzled and mystified by this...[He] called and said the contract we had agreed on was not acceptable and that he also wanted a different level of negotiations for next year.'" As for John Wooten, he did not get a new deal, and he returned to camp in Hiram and played the final year of his two-year contract.²⁵⁸

In the aftermath of the holdout, "The Group" brought the negotiating power of athletes to the forefront of the labor discussion in professional sports. While all of their demands were not met, they demonstrated Black players had the ability to challenge ownership for better economic opportunities. As the *Cleveland Call and Post* affirmed,

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

“since the merger of the two leagues [NFL and AFL]...the players having no bargaining position and having to play at any figure that management sets is equally ridiculous.”²⁵⁹

Fortunately for the players, their understanding of this point helped usher in a new era of player’s rights with the solidifying of a union the following season. What they were not aware of was those who questioned the NFL structure were considered “a threat” to team management. As a result, league officials “did everything in its power to discredit those who challenged the system.”²⁶⁰ The actions of the five Browns players was just the beginning of more issues for men like John Wooten and Sidney Williams, as they not only encountered problems with the Cleveland Browns, but the National Football League as well.²⁶¹

The issue of fair treatment was at the heart of the matter for the holdout of five Black players in 1967. Wooten believed it was important to challenge injustices on or off the field. This belief was no more true than in July 1968 when he and teammate Ross Fichtner, a defensive back with the Browns got into a public dispute that became racial and eventually led to the dismissal of both men from the ball club. That summer, Fichtner

²⁵⁹ “Players Gain In ‘Holdout’,” *Call and Post*, 12 August 1967, 1A.

²⁶⁰ Edward R. Garvey, “From Chattel to Employee: The Athlete’s Quest for Freedom and Dignity,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 445 (September, 1979), 99.

²⁶¹ “Stars Host Stokes Party,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 21 September 1967, A1, 2D; UPI, “LBJ Backing of Stokes Stirs GOP Ire,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, 4 November 1967, 6; Dick Edwards, “Jim Brown, The Actor Talks About ‘Operation Soul Brother’,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 June 1967, 1, 43; Leonard N. Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5; While the players on the Cleveland Browns sought to renegotiate their pay, Bobby Mitchell, a former teammate and good friend of theirs signed a three-year contract with the Redskins worth \$110,000. Mitchell was rewarded for his stellar play as he finished sixth in the NFL in total receptions. However, his NIEU teammates Jim Shorter and Brig Owens had not settled with the team at the time. They were part of a group of seven players who were opting for larger contracts.

did not invite any of his Black teammates to a golf tournament at the Country Club of Ashland. This was an annual event Browns players were invited to the previous three years, and Wooten won the competition in 1967. According to news reports, at the gathering that year, the Black invitees from the Browns “stuck by themselves and did not seem to enjoy the occasion.” They were also not “interested” in being there or mingling with the other guests who were White. It was also reported there was an issue over an unpaid bill at the golf pro shop by a Black member of the team. Walter Johnson, Leroy Kelly, Jim Shorter, Sidney Williams, and Wooten were the only players present that year.²⁶²

According to Fichtner, the country club urged him not to send the African American players invitations. Wooten, offended by the suggestion regarding he and his teammates, reached out to Fichtner to understand the matter better. Wooten told him the actions he took were wrong, “and for him to get on the phone and say I’m not going to invite the black players because one or two, whoever did not pay their pro shop bill,” left him unsatisfied and disappointed. Wooten requested Fichtner present the bill as proof of the grievance, but one was never presented. Fichtner noted, “I didn’t discriminate against anyone as far as this situation is concerned. It is not a Cleveland Browns’ promotion...it is the Country Club of Ashland.” Fichtner also argued some Whites were not invited to the tournament on behalf of the club. The request of the Ashland golf

²⁶² Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author. UPI, “Browns Ask Waivers on 2 In Racial Tiff,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 July 1968, B5; Associated Press, “Browns Get No Offers for 2 Players Cut,” *Chicago Tribune*, 21 July 1968, B8; While the situation with Fichtner was strenuous in 1968, Wooten admitted in a telephone interview they have “shaken hands and hug, and it’s all behind us.” Fichtner had been with the team since 1960.

association illustrated the exclusivity of this establishment and their right to accept whomever they wanted. While Fichtner was correct to notify Wooten the gathering was not the work of the Browns, he failed to understand how this impacted his African American teammates, and put Art Modell in a predicament as well.²⁶³

Wooten believed Fichtner acted in a racist manner and was not shy about telling others as this ordeal between the two men garnered press across the nation. Art Modell, who was in no mood for distractions a second consecutive offseason because of a “racial matter,” decided to release Fichtner and Wooten prior to the opening of training camp. The Browns’ owner considered the move ““in the best interests of both the club and the players.”” Both men were devastated by the move since making a NFL squad was no easy task, and finding a team to join shortly before the start of the season was more difficult as teams had players in camp they wanted to contend for roster spots. Even more, clubs were cautious to sign players who were labeled as troublemakers. It was their belief these types of players created a toxic environment on the team. Wooten’s history and link to Jim Brown, coupled with his affiliation with the NIEU did not help eradicate the label of “racial militant.”²⁶⁴

William Wallace, a writer for the *New York Times* opined, “Pro football’s off-the-field problems with its players are not over so long as John Wooten, the former star guard for the Browns, continues to brood and plot in Cleveland.” In reference to Wooten’s dispute with Fichtner, Wallace quoted the lineman saying, “We black Browns are after

²⁶³ “Fichtner, Wooten Have Their Say To Sports Ed.,” *Call and Post*, 13 July 1968, 8B.

²⁶⁴ “Browns Involved in Racial Incident-Fichtner, Wooten Placed on Waivers,” *The Washington Post*, 20 July 1968, D3.

the hide of this white Brown.” After hearing of this reference, Wooten vehemently denied making the statement. He said, “It is absolutely untrue. What does it mean? That we were going to get together and beat up Fichtner. I don’t know what it means...I would not deny any man the right to make a living at his job. I am for total justice for everybody.”²⁶⁵ Wallace never addressed Wooten’s rebuttal, but he did acknowledge that Wooten was “a proved performer.” Wallace was also suspicious that no NFL team had interest in Wooten, while Ross Fichtner signed with the New Orleans Saints. The *New York Times* writer suggested Wooten take legal action on “charges of conspiracy and restraint of trade.”²⁶⁶ The NFL held a “conspiracy” hearing two years later, as several players were called before a grand jury to discuss their experiences.²⁶⁷

Reflecting on the golf tournament more than forty years after it happened, Wooten said, “The situation with Ross Fichtner was something I would do tomorrow morning. That is something that I could not have lived with myself if I had not done it.” Despite his release from the Browns, it was clear that Wooten felt strong about challenging his teammate on the ramifications after so much time removed from the incident. The entire situation did considerable damage to Wooten hurting his chances to sign with another NFL team. He did not know how much harm it caused until he met with Alvin “Pete” Rozelle, the league’s commissioner. The two men gathered in Canton, Ohio for the year’s Hall of Fame ceremonies and talked for over two hours to address the lack of interests from teams. Rozelle told Wooten several clubs were scared to sign him

²⁶⁵ UPI, “Browns Enroll 3 Backs,” *New York Times*, 13 June 1964, 17.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.; Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author.

for fear other racial matters would escalate on their squads, as “the owners thought we were trying to band together to create our own union and strike. The Black players band together with the [Negro Industrial] Economic Union, and then collectively strike against the NFL.” Wooten responded to the commissioner’s revelations with laughter, and told him, “This is ridiculous.” He asked how they came to such a conclusion when “they had never read one single statement from anybody in our organization, meetings, talks or anything else, that said anything about collectively banding together to strike against the NFL.” Such an idea was never an objective of Union members or for Wooten who said, “Other than him saying that, I never even heard or thought about” Black players joining to take over the NFL.²⁶⁸

The number of players, especially Black athletes, who participated in holdouts from 1967 to 1968, was unprecedented. This could be attributed to the growing consciousness amongst many African Americans influenced by the civil rights and Black power struggles. What started as a by-product of athletes wanting better compensation, became a league wide issue and eventually changed the way players and owners negotiated. The use of agents and the players’ union grew out of this movement. Members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union played an integral part in this crusade to strengthen players’ bargaining power.

While John Wooten wanted to challenge the power structure of the NFL, his relationship with the NIEU provided him no favors as Brown was considered one of the

²⁶⁸ Interview with John Wooten, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, August 3, 2010, Arlington, Texas. Recording in possession of author; William N. Wallace, “Unwanted Wooten Weighs New Move After His Release,” *New York Times*, 25 July 1968, 45.

league's biggest "rabble-rousers." As a result, the perception amongst NFL owners and officials towards the Union was not positive. Many of the Black athletes involved in the organization were notable players from the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball (MLB). Their promotion of Black economic development and business development was mistakenly perceived as an espousal of Black Nationalist ideology. Their involvement with Muhammad Ali, the top boxer at the time, and Arthur Ashe, one of professional tennis' best players, created greater fear in the mind of those who assumed a coup would take place. Those in charge of professional sports leagues understood the power of athletes. While coaches and management never openly criticized Wooten's work with the NIEU, teams made assumptions about the organization primarily on their involvement with the Black freedom struggle, which at that time began to embrace the slogan of "Black power." In essence, a "guilty by association" label was placed on the likes of Wooten, Walter Beach, and Sidney Williams. However, the Carlsbad, New Mexico native stood on his principles despite it costing him his job with the Browns, and greatly impacted the relationships he formed in Cleveland. His work with the NIEU was also affected, as he had to look for work with another team, which consequently was outside of the state.²⁶⁹

Following his meeting with Pete Rozelle, Wooten had discussions with the Los Angeles Rams and Philadelphia Eagles about joining their teams, yet a contract never materialized from those conversations. However, on August 12, 1968, he signed with the Washington Redskins for \$35,000, joining Bobby Mitchell and some of the other

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

members of the Union who were on the squad in Washington, D.C. This was a great move for him for numerous reasons. Otto Graham, a former Cleveland Browns great, was the Redskins coach, and utilized a similar system to that of the Browns. Therefore, Wooten's transition to the field was much easier in comparison to if he had gone to a different team. The Black players on the Redskins also helped him make the adjustment. As Sidney Williams noted, there were not many Black players in the NFL, and as a result they all considered each other's well-being. Many of them "thought alike" and they called each other and let them know when they came to the city for road games or just to visit. It was an example of how African American players built a community amongst themselves.²⁷⁰

While chaos ended for one former Brown, the issues that plagued Sidney Williams in Cleveland followed him to Washington the summer of 1968. As a member of the Redskins, he earned considerable playing time starting at one of the linebacker positions for a few games in his first year with the team in 1967. Since his contract was near an end, Williams wanted to renegotiate his deal with the team. To do so, he scheduled a meeting with Graham. As their conference began, Graham started the discussion off topic, as the Redskins head coach asked Williams about Jim Brown. Graham queried if he had any specific problems with him. The Redskins coach had taken offense to some critical comments Brown made about him in his book *Off My Chest*. Williams responded, "Hey man I didn't come in here to talk about Jim Brown, I came

²⁷⁰ Ibid.; Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author

here to talk about my contract.”²⁷¹ Graham was befuddled by Williams’ comment. He figured if the linebacker wanted to discuss money, he expected him to at least amuse his own interests first. Williams was aware of the rift between the two men, and his response to Graham’s question did not help him address his financial situation as negotiations ended abruptly without a discussion about his pay. When Williams returned to practice, he noticed he was unable to please his coaches. He noted, “I could be inches off, and what I was doing was wrong.” The Redskins released him a few days before the start of the 1968 season. The Southern University grad’s refusal to defer to his coach led to his dismissal from the team. Fortunately for Williams, he was able to sign with the Baltimore Colts a move that kept him employed, but also in contact with the Union’s members and programs in nearby Washington, DC.²⁷²

Later that summer in August, Arnold Pinkney, a board member and advisor of the Union, met with Art Modell to discuss hiring African Americans for executive positions with the team. He argued, “Somehow, whenever the Browns hire a secretary, she is always white... Somehow, no Negro is even considered for an executive position in the Browns organization.”²⁷³ His concerns were valid and raised a critical question: Were African Americans only good enough to be players, but not serve in other roles? This meeting with the Browns owner served as a precursor for the fight to increase the

²⁷¹ Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 24, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author

²⁷² Ibid.; Charles Maher, “Graham Puts His Mouth Where His Mind Is,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1966, B1; Otto Graham had criticized Brown, while he was a member of the Cleveland Browns, stating Modell should have traded the running back for his lack of effort on pass blocking plays.

²⁷³ “New Demands Hit Browns,” *Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1968, 15. Pinkney and Wooten were married to twin sisters. While Pinkney represented John Wooten in the racial dispute with Fichtner, he kept open communication with Modell despite Wooten’s release.

numbers of Blacks in upper level management jobs in the National Football League.

While a seed was planted for the inclusion of African Americans in management positions, players in the NFL became involved in strengthening the governing body that represented their interests, the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA).

Two members of the NIEU, John Mackey an original member of the Union, and tight end with the Baltimore Colts, along with Brigman Owens, a defensive back with the Washington Redskins, played an integral role in challenging the financial infrastructure of the NFL. John Mackey was born September 24, 1941 in Freeport, New York. He lived at a time where “if your parents saw me doing something wrong, they’d kick my butt and then tell my parents and they would thank them and then they would kick it...It was that kind of thing, you couldn’t be disrespectful.” Mackey, the son of a Baptist minister, grew up in a large family, and was one of ten children with one sister, and eight brothers, of which three were adopted. As a young adolescent he marveled at playing football and earned a scholarship to play at Syracuse University as a running back. He wanted to wear “44” because of the reverence he had for Jim Brown who he considered his “idol.” However, Ernie Davis, the team’s leading runner at the time wore the number. Refusing to be Davis’ backup, Mackey switched positions and found a new number, “88,” which became synonymous with him later on. The number change was justified in his mind as he believed he “was twice as good as number 44.” Mackey was prideful and wanted to demonstrate that he was second to none.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ UPI, “N.F.L. Leads Race for Collegians: But A.F.L. Is Making Best Showing Since Inception,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1963, 16; Bob McCullough, *My Greatest Day in Football: The Legends of Football Recount their Greatest Moments*. (New York: Thomas Dunes Books,

As John Mackey left Syracuse University in 1963 for the NFL, he played numerous positions: tight end, running back, and on defense. He graduated with a successful collegiate career setting the school records for receiving yards. His coach Ben Schwartzwalder remarked the Freeport, New York native was “our best football player.” He continued, “If some folks haven’t heard too much about John right now, they’ll hear more next year when he steps into the professional ranks.”²⁷⁵ Prior to turning pro, he was selected to play in the annual game between the College All-Stars and the NFL champion Green Bay Packers. After a decent turnout in that game, he was provided a couple opportunities to play professionally. The Baltimore Colts of the NFL drafted him in the second round, and the New York Jets of the AFL selected him in the fifth round of their draft. Mackey chose to sign with the Colts, which began one of the most remarkable careers for a man who “revolutionized” the tight end position.²⁷⁶

In the summer of 1966, Mackey along with teammate Jimmy Orr left camp after they failed to agree to the terms of their contracts with the team. Eventually the two signed contracts with the Colts prior to the start of training camp, but team management did not appreciate this move on behalf of the players. It led team officials to declare, ““never again will the Colts negotiate with a player who walks out of training camp.”” This act served as a precursor to the many financial discussions Mackey engaged over the course of his playing career. In his first six years with the team he earned All-Pro honors

2001), 156-158; Ironically, Jim Brown initially a walk-on at the school had his way paid by forty-four people from the neighborhood where he grew up in New York.

²⁷⁵ Roy Damer, “All-Star John Mackey Seen as New Pro Ditka,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 June 1963, C2.

²⁷⁶ UPI, “Colts Sign Mackey,” *The Washington Post*, 28 May 1963, C5; Associated Press, “Colts Sign Four Veterans, Give Walkout Warning,” *The Washington Post*, 30 July 1966, D3.

three times, and was selected to the annual Pro Bowl five times. Mackey was cognizant of his ability and value to his team since he was one of the league's best players.²⁷⁷

By 1969, the players associations for the AFL and NFL sought to align and form one union with central leadership. They agreed Mackey served as the best person to represent them since until this appointment, "the Association was little more than a social club dependent on lawyers to do the brainwork."²⁷⁸ Interestingly, the attorneys' work irritated Brigman "Brig" Owens. When the players negotiated with the owners, he remembered legal aids were not allowed in the room. Therefore players had "to caucus and go to the hallway and talk to our attorneys, then come back in and make our demands." He was troubled by not only the back and forth, but the fact "the lawyers would cite all these different cases. I didn't know what the heck they were talking about."²⁷⁹ Owens began going to the law library and did his own research "to figure out what the hell they were talking about." He had an epiphany and concluded, "These guys are not that damn smart." He recognized the lawyers knew how to utilize cases to their advantage as the "law [was] all about precedence." It was this realization that provided him the initiative to study law. He realized that if he wanted to better his lot in life, he needed to depend on himself and not the Redskins or anyone else.²⁸⁰

Brig Owens came into the NFL as a former quarterback at the University of Cincinnati. The school was one of a few who recruited him to play quarterback, since

²⁷⁷ Ibid.; UPI, "NFL player boss, John Mackey quits," *Chicago Defender*, 13 September 1973, 32

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

many coaches around the nation deemed Black players unfit to play the position. However, just on his name alone, he was able to catch the attention of several colleges. One in particular was Brigham Young University (BYU). With a name like “Brigman,” Owens believed the school sent him recruiting materials because they believed he was a Mormon. That belief was debunked after one of the coaches visited the high school to see him. Other schools wanted him to play running back, wide receiver, or defensive back. Yet Cincinnati was the only school that gave him the opportunity to play the position he loved. Owens demonstrated great athletic ability while at Cincinnati which garnered the attention of many NFL scouts, however he was not considered to play quarterback. In 1965, he was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys and spent his first year with the team on the practice squad. There he made the transition to defense. Owens noted he “never played defensive back before, never tackling anyone” until that moment. He understood if he wanted to play professionally he needed to make any adjustment that gave him the opportunity to show that he was a fit on the team. In Dallas, Owens had an awakening to the realities of professional football when he saw “a lot of veteran players leave, some crying. I realized it was really a business.”²⁸¹ Professional football players in training camp had to battle the “numbers game.” Teams brought in more than seventy to eighty guys to fill fifty-three spots. Hence, players were easily replaceable, especially Black players who were on teams that had racial quotas. Owens’ experiences on the Cowboys assured him life in the NFL was never guaranteed. Fortunately he played well on the practice squad and the following year the Washington Redskins traded for him to play

²⁸¹ Rich Roberts, “Brig Owens Switches Fields, but Continues His Will to Fight,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 February 1982, B14

defensive back. Owens noted this moment was ““the best thing that ever happened”” to him. The move to D.C. put him amongst people who played an important role in his life.²⁸²

While with the Redskins, Brig Owens became involved with the Negro Industrial and Economic Union due largely to Bobby Mitchell. His interest with the NFLPA was because of his relationship with John Mackey. Owens stated, “I was one who used to complain about getting things done on time.” One day Mackey approached him and said, “We need to have you come help us with the union. We need some support and your time.” Owens countered, “I don’t have that kind of time I’m going to finish up law school.” Mackey lashed back, “You little ass, you always complaining, let’s make it right. Give me a year.” What was to be a year, turned into five and a half years that Owens served as the player representative for the Washington Redskins, as well as a member of the negotiating committee that bargained on behalf of all players.²⁸³

Serving as a player representative required a great commitment as “a lot of energy was focused on negotiations, and organizing” the team. It was believed amongst players that “anybody who was a rep put their career on the line.” Yet, Brig Owens was not

²⁸² Ibid.; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author. *Owens* was born in February 16, 1943, in Linden, Texas. As a youth, his family moved to Orange County, California for better job opportunities. In an interview about his transition from California to Ohio, he remembered, “There was curiosity.” People asked ““How did you guys get this guy all the way from California? I was considered a Blue Chipper.” Others queried, ““How did you get this young man all the way from California who could turn our program around?” I had a very good spring game, and very welcomed by the Black community, and the overall community of Cincinnati. It was a great experience. A family adopted me (of Dr. Martinell Walton), a home away from home. I became his adopted son.”

²⁸³ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

worried about losing his job. Fortunately, the Redskins had coaches and team officials who were former pro-players. Yet, when Owens wanted to go to law school, there was some resistance:

I remember George Allen, when he heard I was going to law school he got pretty upset because I was one of his captains. He said I need you to call the signals, need your leadership, and so forth. I need your attention with the Redskins. And I said 'Law school already got my money, its non-refundable.' He said, 'Well I will give you your money back.' And I said 'My mom always said, "If you start something you have to finish it."' So he sat me on the sideline for two weeks. So I would give hand signals to my teammates. After dealing with pressure from my teammates, he finally put me back in.²⁸⁴

While Owen's coaches supported his role with the NFLPA, they did not permit him to go against their wishes unscathed. As evidenced above, his benching was an example of the power teams demonstrated over players.²⁸⁵

The movement of professional athletes was unique to their respective sport and league. With most occupations, workers were able to leave their jobs freely and seek a position with a competitor as long as a position was available and proper notice was given to the previous employer. However, in professional football, and particularly the NFL, a player was limited in where he worked. If he did not like his employer, he was not allowed to leave without suffering some penalty. Essentially, players had to accept the pay presented to them by owners or not play at all, consequentially losing their job.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

²⁸⁵ Edward R. Garvey, "From Chattel to Employee: The Athlete's Quest for Freedom and Dignity," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 445 (September, 1979), 92; Lawrence M. Kahn, "The Effects of Race on Professional Football Player's Compensation," in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, (1992), 295–310; Robert G. Mogull, "Football Salaries and Race: Some Empirical Evidence," in *Industrial Relations*, (1973), 109–12.

This meant if coaches and ownership had particular requests of players, especially those who were not “stars,” it was in their best interest if they wanted to keep their roster spot to oblige. There were no rules in place to protect athletes from unfair treatment.²⁸⁶

In all, the labor of the NFL was guided by a reserve system created by owners. This arrangement was comprised of five parts: (1) the choice of which players were selected by teams, (2) the length of players contracts and how long they stayed with their respective teams, (3) punishment and jurisdiction over players, (4) the ability to determine all disagreements between players and management, and (5) the reservation to trade or waive players at whim. The basis for the reserve system was the league’s annual draft, where each year college seniors made up a pool of players from which teams decided who they wanted on their squads. Athletes were completely powerless over which teams selected them, although they were not obligated to play for the club that selected them. They had the right to sit out or refuse to report, while the team had the rights to trade them to another team. Thus, a player was limited in his decision on where he played since his right to make a living was dictated by the NFL. This system created the need for an entity that combated the inequities present in the relationship between owners and players.²⁸⁷

By June 1970, the NFLPA went before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and John Mackey filed a petition to break the NFL’s

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Edward R. Garvey, “From Chattel to Employee: The Athlete’s Quest for Freedom and Dignity,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 445 (September, 1979), 92; Lawrence M. Kahn, “The Effects of Race on Professional Football Player’s Compensation,” in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, (1992), 295–310; Robert G. Mogull, “Football Salaries and Race: Some Empirical Evidence,” in *Industrial Relations*, (1973), 109–12.

refusal to recognize the group as the representative entity for all players. The owners argued they would do so if the player's association waived the right to negotiate the minimum salary players received for exhibition games "forever." Ownership also argued collective bargaining should not be an issue since an agreement was reached on that particular issue in 1968. Yet, the NFLPA wanted to address the compensation given to rookies for preseason games, along with "increased benefits in the player pension plan, the working of the option clause in the player contract, improvement in fringe benefits such as training camp...as well as severance pay, and a larger share of product licensing for the association."²⁸⁸ The last grievance dealt with the power of league commissioner Pete Rozelle. In his position he dictated player movement and team compensation at his own discretion. Hence, he limited athletes' ability to choose where they played.

John Mackey used Don Shula, his former coach with the Baltimore Colts as an example of the issues surrounding players' freedoms in the league compared with those of coaches. Shula left the team to serve as head coach, general manager and stockholder of the Miami Dolphins. However, a player was unable to break his contract and sign with another team so freely. In a statement issued to the press through the association's public relations director Tom Vance, Mackey argued, "'If Shula can break a contract, if he can leave to better himself, why can't a player?'"²⁸⁹ By July, the NFLPA agreed to holdout if their demands were not addressed with "'a satisfactory contract package.'" One spokesman for the owners mentioned the actions of the NFLPA in regards to Rozelle's

²⁸⁸ Bob Oates, "NFL Players to Demand Reduction of Rozelle's Authority," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1970, D1, D9

²⁸⁹ William N. Wallace, "Football Players to Seek New Contract," *New York Times*, 28 March 1970, 39

power have “shocked the league and will leave deep scars.” The unnamed source noted the players did not need to reduce the commissioner’s power, because it denied him “the right to exercise some of the powers” that made him “the strongest of the sports commissioners.”²⁹⁰

On July 9, 1970, John Mackey sent letters to players informing them to not report to camp until they were given further notice. The NFL countered barring all veterans from training camp, but requested all rookies to arrive as scheduled. Of the 1,300 veterans in the National Football League, only seven men decided to attend camps. To prepare for the season, veteran players worked out on their own since they could not at team facilities. Brig Owens was part of a contingent of twenty Redskins players who attended “Camp Georgetown,” where they held clandestine practices on the campus of nearby Georgetown University. Despite the players’ requests for privacy, many from the media followed them. While players gathered across the nation to prepare, NFLPA leadership tried to come to a settlement with the owners. By the end of July, they agreed to the pay for preseason games and the role of the commissioner, but failed to settle on the amount of money given for pension plans. NFL players wanted better economic security for those in retirement and for guys who were injured, similar to the provisions that were allotted to members of other professional leagues like Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League. At a press conference, John Mackey said,

²⁹⁰ “NFLPA Negotiations to Start Soon,” *Oakland Post*, 2 April 1970, 18; Associated Press, “NFL Players Association Seeks Bargaining Power,” *The Washington Post*, 9 June 1970, D2; Associated Press, “N.F.L. Players Claim Unfair Labor Practice,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 1970, C4; Associated Press, “NFL Players OK Strike if Demands Not Filled,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1970, C5; Associated Press, “Don’t Go to Camp, NFL Players Told,” *The Washington Post*, 10 July 1970, D1; Associated Press, “NFL Bars Veterans From Training Camps: Rookies Ordered to Report on Time,” *The Washington Post*, 14 July 1970, D1

“Considering the violence of the sport we feel the owners should be ready and willing to pay benefits to those individuals who are injured during the performance of the sport.” He believed the owners were not fair in the negotiations and operated “in a manner similar to the way they negotiate individual contracts—accept our offer or retire from football.”²⁹¹ The NFL owners made every attempt to denigrate the leadership of the NFLPA calling their proposals “ill-advised.” They argued, “The demands by the players association are so unrealistic as to indicate they were formulated by a party or parties completely unfamiliar with the sport of professional football, its economics and its administration.” They went so far as to compare them to Black nationalists when they contended the NFLPA utilized “Black Panther tactics.” Yet, team representatives denied that assertion as NFL players simply wanted to reap the full benefits of their work on the football field.²⁹²

The earliest sign of the strike’s end was on Thursday, July 23, 1970, when the owners presented a proposal to the players association that allowed the veterans of the Kansas City Chiefs to report to training camp to prepare for the College All-Star game, since they were the reigning league champions. However, Chiefs players decided to hold steadfast on their position with the NFLPA and continued to strike. Nonetheless, the union allowed the members of the team to participate in the exhibition. By Friday, July 31, the lockout was official, and the players were united in their refusal to report to training camp. It took a 5 a.m. meeting with eighty-seven players representing 26 teams

²⁹¹ Kenneth Denlinger, “Redskin Veterans Work Up a Sweat: Heat’s on at Georgetown,” *The Washington Post*, 18 July 1970, E1.

²⁹² Ibid.; UPI, “Meeting Set for Tomorrow: NFL Players Seek Federal Mediation,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 21 July 1970, 26.

(16 from NFL and 10 from AFL) to reach the agreement. On August 3, the players and owners agreed to a four year, \$19 million deal for the pension plan, with \$1 million going to benefits for widows, maternity and dental plans, and disability. The NFLPA sought \$26 million over four years, while club owners initially offered \$18 million.²⁹³

The pension plan for retired players was the most critical component for the players in their new deal. The association wanted a retirement design that compensated them fairly. If a player received their benefits at age fifty-five: he received \$8,280 if he played for five years; \$16,560 for ten years; and \$24,840 for fifteen years in the NFL. For those who wanted their pension at sixty years of age: he received \$12,540 if he played for five years; \$25,080 for ten years; and \$37,620 for fifteen years in the NFL. At age sixty-five, the payout was \$19,980, \$39,960, and \$59,940 for five, ten, and fifteen years of play respectively. Oddly enough, all players who retired before 1959 were not considered with the plan. Team owners, who sought to keep larger profits for themselves, evidenced by the fact they did not want to give more money for retirement benefits, considered this action a ploy. Many players did not reach the minimum five years to earn a pension, and fifteen years in the NFL was very uncommon. According to the NFLPA, by 1970 only one of every 1,000 players played professionally for fifteen years, while one of five had ten years.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Bob Oates, "It's Official: NFL Players on Strike: Mackey Claims 1,300 Veterans Support Action," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1970, C2, C6; Kenneth Denlinger, "Chiefs Decline Invitation: Players Assert Solid Support for Present Position," *The Washington Post*, 24 July 1970, D1, D3; "NFL Owners Make Offer: \$18 Million in Benefits," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1970, F1, F10

²⁹⁴ "NFL Owners Make Offer: \$18 Million in Benefits," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1970, F10; "Hall of Famers Shut Out," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1972; Kenneth Denlinger, "Position Paper Picks Holes: Players Challenge Owners' Assertions," *The Washington Post*, 26 July 1970, E1, E3

Near the end of the summer of 1970, the NFLPA's drive to become "the sole bargaining agent for the players" was amplified. The group's leadership consisted of John Mackey, considered "a poised and intelligent spokesman," Alan Miller, former fullback with the Oakland Raiders, who served as the legal counsel for the association, and Jack Kemp and Jim Bakken, past presidents of the American and National League players associations, respectively. This move set the appropriate backdrop for the many labor issues that plagued the league.²⁹⁵

During the 1970 season, a federal grand jury investigation was conducted to investigate the NFL's labor practices. This probe included former Browns teammates Walter Beach and Bernie Parrish, amongst other players. In their depositions Beach and Parrish argued they were "blacklisted" from the league.²⁹⁶ Parrish was instrumental in organizing players in the 1960s, as former Vice President of the NFLPA. This was at a time when the league's owners did not officially recognize the player's union. Parrish believed during his tenure with the Cleveland Browns Art Modell treated him unfairly. He told reporters present at the government investigation the teams' owner pushed him out of the league unfairly because of his desire to galvanize players to address the inequities present in the league. Modell brushed off Parrish's comments as a publicity ploy when he remarked, "'Mr. Parrish can say anything he wants—and he will—to promote his book.'" By November, Parrish was set to release his book *They Call It A*

²⁹⁵ Ibid.; Bob Oates, "It's Official: NFL Players on Strike: Mackey Claims 1,300 Veterans Support Action," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1970, C2, C6; "All-Time NFL Selections," *The Washington Post*, 7 September 1969, 45; Associated Press, "Colts' End Mackey Put on Waivers," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 1972, D6.

²⁹⁶ UPI, "Month-Long Session Expected: Probe of NFL Opens Monday," *The Washington Post*, 15 November 1970, C5

Game. In the book, Parrish argued Art Modell “used his owner’s power to force not only Beach and himself out of NFL but “all four of the 1964 championship game backfield out of the NFL.” Beach’s time with the grand jury lasted three hours where he addressed many issues like the banishment of players, gambling, and racial discrimination.²⁹⁷

John Sample, a charter member of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, and former member of the Baltimore Colts, Pittsburgh Steelers, Washington Redskins, and New York Jets was also called before federal investigators. He started his first three years in the league with the Colts as a defensive back and was a winner of two league championships while there. After three years in Baltimore, he played the next two seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers, where head coach Buddy Parker once told him, “[B]lack ball players don’t deserve as much money as white ball players.”²⁹⁸ This was one of numerous incidents Sample mentioned during the federal probe to illustrate the racist attitudes coaches held towards him. He believed NFL owners colluded to send him to the American Football League after the Washington Redskins released him in 1965. In the AFL, he played with the New York Jets for three years from 1966 to 1968. During his tenure with the team, he argued he was forced to play while injured, and the team also “hurt his other business enterprises.” This led him to file a \$1 million lawsuit against the Jets. Sample addressed much of the infractions he encountered as a professional football

²⁹⁷ UPI, “Grand Jury Probe: Parrish Predicts NFL Indictments,” *The Washington Post*, 20 November 1970, D3; “I Was Blacklisted—Parrish,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 November 1970, C5; Bernie Parrish, *They Call It A Game*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), vii; Parrish stated the Black Economic Union provided “financial and moral support at crucial times” in the publication of the book. The other two men Parrish mentioned who were caught in Modell’s ire were Ross Fichtner and Larry Ben.

²⁹⁸ Associated Press, “Sample Tells Probers He Was ‘Blackballed’,” *Chicago Tribune*, 15 December 1970, C1.

player in his 1970 memoir, *Confessions of a Dirty Ballplayer*.²⁹⁹

When the probe ended, the NFL was cleared of any wrongdoing. Walter Beach decided to take matters into his own hands. On May 28, 1971, Beach, a law student at Yale University, who was no longer in Carl Stokes' cabinet, officially filed a suit against the NFL and the Cleveland Browns for conspiracy "to deny him a position 'because of his race' and political and racial views."³⁰⁰ His argument was that the NFL engaged in a conspiracy to restrain trade, which violated the Sherman Act and antitrust laws. He alluded to the fact he was picked up by the New Orleans Saints the summer of 1967, but was prohibited from joining the team after the Browns blocked the deal, and contacted all sixteen NFL clubs to not provide him with a deal. Beach was also denied his pension, which was part of the lawsuit as well. The suit was not settled until 1975, when he was given his pension and back pay which dated back to his time with the Boston Patriots.³⁰¹

Despite Beach's strivings for restitution, the NFLPA gained a great deal of bargaining power with the owners by 1972. The players were not able to get all that they wanted from the owners as illustrated by their earlier grievances in 1970, but they were

²⁹⁹ Ibid., C6; UPI, "Baltimore Colts Sign John Sample," *The Chicago Defender*, 27 June 1969, 24; George Strickler, "Colts Retain Title; Beat Giants, 31-16," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 December 1959, C1; Associated Press, "Sample Blames Rozelle in NFL Blacklist Case," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1970, F7; Johnny Sample with Fred J. Hamilton and Sonny Schwartz, *Confessions of a Dirty Ballplayer*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1970). Weeb Ewbank, head coach of the team remarked Sample's "speed and size certainly qualify him for the job." Unfortunately for Sample did not win the lawsuit. In July of 1971, Sample was arrested for cashing stolen checks that totaled more than \$5,000.

³⁰⁰ Associated Press, "Beach Sues NFL, Browns For Job Loss," *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1971, D3.

³⁰¹ William Wallace, "2 Dozen Suits Plague N.F.L.," *New York Times*, 28 May 1972, S12; William N. Wallace, "They Sue and Sue...but the N.F.L. Show Goes On," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 September 1972, F25; Walter Beach's suit was filed with the Equal Employment Opportunities commission.

able to obtain a greater share of the revenue accrued from the league, received increased pensions, and better health care coverage was provided. All of this was under the leadership of John Mackey who led the charge to improve the economic conditions for players in the National Football League. Ironically, by the start of the 1972 season, there was speculation about whether he would retire from the NFL. On Wednesday, September 13, 1972, the Colts placed him on waivers. The San Diego Chargers claimed him four days later. According to Owens, after a “hot negotiation session in Chicago, when John got back to Baltimore, ‘he lost half a step,’ so they say, and he was traded to San Diego, and never played another down.”³⁰² In San Diego, Mackey rarely practiced, and playing time in regular season games was sparse. Pettis Norman, an African American who was traded to San Diego the previous year from the Dallas Cowboys, “would act like he was injured so Mackey could go and practice and get a couple of plays.” Thus, a player who was voted the best tight end for the All-Time NFL team in 1970, which spanned the leagues first fifty years, was a non-factor for any team’s plans two years later. Essentially it was a move by the Colts and Chargers to get rid of the NFLPA leader.³⁰³

At the age of thirty-two, John Mackey retired from the NFL on Tuesday, July 24, 1973. With that move, he moved into an untapped world by African Americans as a sports agent. As a result, Mackey resigned from his position as president of the NFLPA

³⁰² Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

³⁰³ Associated Press, “Colts’ End Mackey Put on Waivers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 1972, D6; Associated Press, “Mackey Goes To San Diego,” *The Washington Post*, 18 September 1972, D4; Associated Press, “Mackey Is Charger Now,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 September 1972, C5

to avoid any conflict of interests since he was a representative with WMA Sports Inc., a subsidiary of William Morris Agency, Inc. When he announced his retirement he immediately focused, telling reporters, “My joining WMA Sports is in keeping with my objective of helping the athlete’s career on and beyond the playing field...I only wanted to play 10 years and I am fortunate enough to be able to walk away from the game healthy.” The Freeport, New York native bowed out of the NFL gracefully.³⁰⁴

In all, men like John Wooten, Walter Beach, Sidney Williams, John Mackey, and Brig Owens challenge the power structure of the NFL, as the formation and recognition of the players union, gave athletes the right to bargain the reserve system. As Mackey noted, “The Union victory was important when you look back, but at the time I was just doing my job.”³⁰⁵ He continued, “Therefore, it’s not something I look back at, other than at that particular time I did the thing that was right to do, based on the situation that was going on, because it was my job to do what was right for the players.” He was essentially punished for leading the efforts for players to receive free agency, which allowed them to have control of where they took their talents. By 1972, the work of the NFLPA laid the foundation that helped redistribute some of the wealth in the National Football League. The union’s fight did not subside as the issues the NFLPA addressed in the early 1970s continued to lead discussion on labor relations in the NFL throughout the 20th century

³⁰⁴ Deane McGowen, “People in Sports: Healthy Mackey Retires,” *New York Times*, 26 July 1973, 48; UPI, “NFL player boss, John Mackey quits,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 September 1973, 32; “Mackey to Be Player Agent,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1973; George Solomon, “Mackey Accepts Post With Talent Agency,” *The Washington Post*, 13 September 1973, D3.

³⁰⁵ Bob McCullough, *My Greatest Day in Football: The Legends of Football Recount their Greatest Moments*. (New York: Thomas Dunes Books, 2001), 156

and well into the 21st century.³⁰⁶

In short, the principles of financial empowerment never lost precedence in the thoughts and actions of members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union. While these men gave much attention to the inequalities they faced on the playing field as professional athletes, they were also equally dedicated to freedom, justice, and equality off the turf. This was demonstrated by their work with the NIEU as they focused on the creation and improvement of Black businesses in their respective communities, the acquisition of funding for the organization to operate, along with the creation of offices in New York, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C. In that time the organization also developed several social projects to educate youth on how business operated to provide them with the belief they could create enterprises that would improve their communities. The Union also assisted Black business owners across the nation with the purpose of sustain and development. The following chapter will examine the programming efforts of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union from 1967 to 1972.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 156-157; John C. Weistart, "Judicial Review of Labor Agreements: Lessons from the Sports Industry," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 44, No.4 (Autumn, 1981), 109-146; John C. Weistart, "League Control of Market Opportunities: A Perspective on Competition and Cooperation in the Sports Industry," *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 1984, No.6 (December, 1984), 1013-1070; "Releasing Superstars from Peonage: Union Consent and the Nonstatutory Labor Exemption," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 104, No. 4, (February, 1991), 874-895; Richard E. Bartok, "NFL Free Agency Restrictions under Antitrust Attack," *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 1991, No. 2, (April, 1991), 503-559; Lawrence M. Kahn, "The Effects of Race on Professional Football Players' Compensation," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 45, No.2 (January, 1992), 295-310.

Chapter 6

“Men who were just crap-shooters on the city streets are now proud members of the community.” Social Programming and Business Development, 1967-1972

Throughout the 20th century African Americans were denied access to their unalienable rights as American citizens due to institutionalized racism. By 1967, members of the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, led by Jim Brown, deemed the time had come for the country to uphold its obligation to people of color. Yet Brown and many Union members knew that African Americans could not solve those issues alone; they believed the support of the federal government would help eradicate problems that were rampant in Black communities. They also knew they had to give attention to “becoming a substantial economic force” through the development of Black businesses and the provision of financial aid to those enterprises in need of assistance. The NIEU also wanted to train African Americans “to be productive citizens” with the skills they needed to be competitive in American society. Thus, from 1967 to 1972, the NIEU’s focus on “Green power” was twofold: (1) create social programs that provided African American youth job opportunities in hopes of orienting them with the inner workings of developing their own enterprises; and (2) provide technical and

financial assistance to businesses in those respective cities where they organized chapters.³⁰⁷

While the Cleveland and Los Angeles chapters grew, the organization also expanded in 1968 when branches opened in Kansas City, Missouri and Washington, D.C. This chapter will be written in two parts. The first will highlight the NIEU's social projects, particularly in Cleveland with the Hough Progressive Youth Center and Project J.I.M. It will also discuss the Union's national effort, the Food First program. These initiatives addressed youth delinquency, unemployment, and brought attention to the poverty that was rampant in communities across America. The second half will discuss some of the businesses that the Union supported and focus particularly on enterprise development in Cleveland, Los Angeles, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C. An examination of these particular enterprises will allow the reader to understand the benefit of the NIEU providing financial support, "green power," to African Americans throughout the United States.³⁰⁸

In the spring of 1967, Main Line Records released *Jim Brown Tells It Like It Is*, an LP that contained audio tracks of Jim Brown discussing numerous issues. A few of the recordings included Brown explaining why the Negro Industrial and Economic Union was created, the impact of racial violence in America, and his sentiments on the growth

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ John Wooten, "History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union," Appendix II, 3, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Carl B. Stokes Papers, Manuscript Collect No. 4370; "We made the first step...Now It's Up to YOU!!" NIEU pamphlet, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Joseph Vaudrey Baker papers, 1935-1974, Manuscript Collection No. 982, Box 2, Folder 20.

of Black Power as a “rallying cry.” There were also tracks that included Brown’s views on Black Nationalism, and his feelings about the media’s treatment on the Nation of Islam and Muhammad Ali. He was particularly intrigued by the NOI because “they believe[d] Negroes should be aware of the white man. They believe Negroes should help Negroes. They believe in neatness and cleanliness, and they hold their women in high esteem.”³⁰⁹ Brown’s primary objective with the album was to make statements with “substance” and allow people to become familiar with the NIEU’s purpose. Aside from using the press as an apparatus to promote the group, using vinyl to disseminate the ideas of the group was strategic. While many White Americans believed he was a closeted member of the NOI, he dispelled the rumor with “On How the NIEU Works.” The sentiments expressed on *Tells It Like It Is* addressed many of the socioeconomic problems, like the lack of jobs, absence of political power, dearth of business opportunities, and high crime rates that plagued cities like Cleveland and Los Angeles.³¹⁰

For Jim Brown, the Union was not restricted to Black people. He argued Whites could join the organization if they had the interests of the organization in mind. For him, it also

Demonstrated that I was not a prejudiced person. Yet the inclusion of whites was not integration that was just including people. Your reference point can’t be something that’s not true. You can’t make excuses for things. So when you try to bus people and superficial things it doesn’t work. Just give people their rights, or if you’re cheating them, make up for it. Level the playing field. Open up the opportunities that you were denying people at the same time you were taxing them. You have to

³⁰⁹ “Brown Expresses Views on Muslims, Controversy Rages,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 October 1964, 15.

³¹⁰ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

reinvest and replace that which you've taken from the people... They have a lot of situations where as a country that has tried to make up for certain things that were done to a group of people, we can't make it up, but you can reinvest some of the wealth that you have into their development so that the playing field is somewhat equal.³¹¹

In essence, Brown was not a preacher of racial hate. For him, racial integration was not the answer to the inequalities African Americans endured. He believed the best solution was providing equal access to financial resources and institutions, along with the creation of economic opportunities to those who had been disenfranchised for so many centuries.³¹²

One of the NIEU's particular motivations was to encourage Black youth to think as potential producers of goods and not just consumers of commodities. For the Union brass, inspiring children in areas where the living conditions did not encourage a positive outlook on life was important. In March 1967, the Cleveland office of the NIEU created an initiative that offered job training and employment opportunities to kids between fourteen and eighteen years of age with the opening of the Hough Progressive Youth

³¹¹ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 26, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author. Jim Brown's proceeds from the sale of the album went to the Negro Industrial and Economic Union.

³¹² "Jim Brown's Album Explodes With Truth," *Call and Post*, 11 February 1967, 9A; "New Album Releases," *Billboard*, 30 September 1967, 20; Jim Brown Tells It Like It Is was produced and written by Jeff Baxter. The two-sided album had four tracks on each side: "Jim Brown Farewell Day Speech," "Press Interview: How The Negro Industrial and Economic Union (N.I.E.U.) Works," "Comments On Black Nationalism," "Comments On Racial Violence," "Jim Brown Interviewing New N.E.I.U. Member," "Negro Pride And Heritage," "Comments On Black Muslems [sic]," and "Comments on Cassius Clay (Mohammed Ali)." By September the album was on *Billboard's* chart for new releases. The two-sided album was comprised of four tracks on each side. On side 1 there was "Jim Brown Farewell Day Speech," "Press Interview: How The Negro Industrial and Economic Union (N.I.E.U.) Works," "Comments On Black Nationalism," and "Comments On Racial Violence." Side 2 contained "Jim Brown Interviewing New N.E.I.U. Member," "Negro Pride And Heritage," "Comments On Black Muslems," "Comments on Cassius Clay (Mohammed Ali)."

Center (HPYC), a facility established through funding from the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation. The Union had three objectives with the center: (1) to educate Black youth of their “heritage” and the place of African Americans in the history of the United States with the purpose of imparting “self-respect and racial pride;” (2) “raise the sights” of Black youth so they will desire to do for self; (3) expose participants to other African Americans “who represent accomplishment and success.”³¹³

The first initiative they created was Project J.I.M (Jobs, Interest and Motivation). The Hough Progressive Youth Center served as the base for the program. In their first year, the Union provided work training and job opportunities for more than 130 Black youth. Many of the employment opportunities they found were created through a partnership with the Cleveland Board of Education’s initiative Schools’ Neighborhood Youth Corp (SNYC). On average, they were able to find jobs for participants in J.I.M. where they worked thirty hours per week earning at least \$1.25 each hour, roughly 15 cents more than minimum wage. John Wooten, Leroy Kelly (African American who played running back for the Browns), Jim Shorter and Sidney Williams, taught courses on civic engagement, leadership styles, and democratic ideals. There were also workshops on economics, conflict resolution, courses on Black history, and discussions on the relationship between education and work. The SNYC and HPYC also provided teens trips to businesses across Cleveland to help give them a sense of how companies

³¹³ “NIEU Gets Grant From the Greater Cleve. Foundation,” *Call and Post*, 11 March 1967, 1A, 16A

operated and the opportunities that were available to them. In all, the effort fulfilled its goal to strengthen the morale and self-image of young Black males.³¹⁴

Along with Project J.I.M., the Union created the Future Businessmen's Club. It consisted of a group of twenty Black males age fifteen to twenty who were all "members of a delinquent gang in the Lee-Harvard area called the Ponderosas." Interestingly, six of the young men were high school dropouts who once attended John F. Kennedy High School. The NIEU's intent was to help provide them with leadership opportunities who believed there were none in their communities. This was evident by the illegal activity many of the youth participated in, as the majority of the Ponderosas had criminal records. Thus, the Union believed many youth were in the need of structure and recreational activities. In all, the NIEU's center served 450 youth that summer.³¹⁵

Programs like Project J.I.M. and the Future Businessmen's Club were important because that summer in 1967, there was rioting in major cities with high Black populations like Cleveland, Detroit, Newark, and Washington, D.C. These revolts were largely due to many African Americans' frustrations as it pertained to police brutality, the dire economic conditions that existed, and the lack of political expression on their behalf from their representatives. Thus, the work of the NIEU was critical to combating such

³¹⁴ Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, February 25, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Alvin Ward, "A Look at Hough July 1967," Call and Post, 22 July 1967, 9B, 10B; "Project J.I.M. Provides Needed Community Program," Call and Post, 2 September 1967, 10B; The acronym was influenced by the Union's founder first name. John Wooten had provided Vice President Hubert Humphrey a proposal to support the effort. Jim Hunter served as the "public relations man" for the Union was instrumental in his creating a credit union in the Hough area. The purpose was to pull residents "away from loan sharks." It also served to educate youth in the city about consumerism. According to the guidelines of Project J.I.M., all youth had to meet the federal standards regarding the income of their families. Leroy Ervin, a community member, served as manager.

³¹⁵ John Wooten, "History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union," Appendix II,

issues as they pertained to African American youth. Throughout 1967 and 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Cleveland to promote his “Operation Breadbasket,” a program the Southern Christian Leadership Conference previously introduced in Atlanta and Chicago, to address the economic inequalities in the northeastern Ohio city. SCLC planned to boycott White businesses as a means to force them to hire Blacks. With the racial climate and uneasiness of many residents, this initiative had merit, but was not as successful as many hoped. King warned if city officials did not address the economic issues in Cleveland, there would be rioting again as seen the previous summer with the Hough riots. Also on his visit in Cleveland, he addressed a group of youth from East Tech High School and encouraged them to use nonviolence as a means of achieving their civil rights goals.³¹⁶

While King’s presence in the summer of 1967 brought the concerns of many Black Clevelanders to the forefront of the civil rights issue, the mayoral campaign of Carl Stokes kept that momentum going that fall. At that point, there had not been an African American elected mayor of a major U.S. city. He called for federal programs that created more jobs for Blacks in the private sector, provided those who were unable to find jobs a standard of living “compatible with health and dignity,” better living conditions for residents in public housing, and improved standards and funding for public education.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ United Press International, “King Warns of Racial Violence in Cleveland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 April 1967, 7; United Press International, “Dr. King Says Police Invite Riots In Ohio,” *New York Times*, 10 June 1967, 19; “Money: The President Battles With Congress,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1967, M4; United Press International, “Mayor Stokes Calls For War On Two Fronts,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 12 March 1968, 19.

³¹⁷ “Rep. Stokes Tells of ‘New Battlefields’”, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 June 1966, A1.

On Wednesday, November 8, 1967, Carl Stokes won his mayoral bid and his election was considered the solution to what all Black Cleveland residents deemed necessary to rectify the problems within the city. Stokes worked arduously to obtain support from the federal government for the city to rebuild its infrastructures and provide job opportunities for the poor and unemployed. City officials wanted to support Stokes in an effort to keep down the type of rioting that persisted in other urban areas across the nation.³¹⁸

Carl Stokes' greatest tasks as mayor came on Thursday, April 4, 1968, less than six months into his first term. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. News of his death led to rioting throughout the United States. Across the country, government officials tried their best to quell uprisings as people were filled with rage over the death of a man they considered a "savior." Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley harshly criticized policemen in the city for not shooting arsonists and looters. James Reston of the *New York Times* said it best, "At this critical point, therefore, the leaders of every community—all of them, black and white, labor and management, educational and religious—will have to mobilize to deal with their local situation, whatever it is."³¹⁹ NIEU members, saddened by the death of a friend and inspirational figure, wanted to ensure the work they had done with the city youth was not in vain, and answered the challenge to help calm the violence.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Ibid.; Murray Schumach, "Martin Luther King Jr.: Leader of Millions in Nonviolent Drive for Racial Justice," *The New York Times*, 5 April 1968, 25.

³¹⁹ James Reston, "Hate Cannot Be Burned Away," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 7 April 1968, 4A.

³²⁰ Earl Caldwell, "Guard Called Out: Curfew Is Ordered in Memphis but Fires and Looting Erupt," *The New York Times*, 5 April 1968, 1; "Negro Violence Hits U.S. Cities in Wake of Dr.

In Cleveland, Mayor Carl Stokes rode with his own convoy throughout the city's neighborhoods, primarily the Hough area, some nights until 3 a.m. talking to people for their assurance they stay calm. His objective was to keep citizens safe and prevent property damage. The last thing he wanted was another uprising in that particular community. Interestingly, Cleveland and Memphis were the only major cities African Americans were not involved in rioting. Carl Stokes expressed his gratitude towards Cleveland citizens and their efforts. He told reporters, "I think that Cleveland has really done itself proud...It has stood out among all of the cities in the United States in observing the tragedy that affected all America. It demonstrated a splendid coordinated, cooperative effort and attitude among all of our people."³²¹ NIEU members played a pivotal role in keeping the peace. They assisted Stokes in Cleveland after the mayor reached out to John Wooten to contact other Black male professional athletes to help calm the tide of violence. They also did the same in other cities across the United States.³²²

King Slaying," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 April 1968, 2; Thomas A. Johnson, "12 Are Arrested Here," *New York Times*, 5 April 1968, 1; Tom Wicker, "Thousands Leave Washington as Bands of Negroes Loot Stores," *The New York Times*, 6 April 1968, 23. Many Americans despite their race saw King as the nation's spiritual leader on civil rights. On April 3, 1968 the Atlanta minister and leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) made a visit to help bring attention to the unequal pay African American sanitation workers in the city received, and the lack of job security they held in comparison to their White coworkers. The assassins' bullet struck the right side of King's face on a tangent. It entered the mouth, fractured the jawbone, exited on the lower right side of the chin, then reentered the base of the chin just above the collarbone, tearing the suit jacket and shirt collar as it went. The bullet continued its penetration...passing through the spinal cord and finally lodging itself near the left shoulder blade. King's right check was blown open by the impact, leaving a gaping hole three inches long.

³²¹ UPI, "Cleveland Mayor Takes to Streets: Stokes Praises His City for Avoiding Racial Disorder," *New York Times*, 12 April 1968, 20.

³²² Ibid.; James Yuenger, "LBJ Pleads for Racial Peace," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 April 1968, N2; Jesse W. Lewis, Jr., "Baltimore Troubles Follow Washington Pattern," *The Washington Post*, 8

At least thirty-five Black male professional athletes, that included Wooten, Walter Beach III, Jim Brown, Gale Sayers of the Chicago Bears, and Bill Russell of the Celtics, reached out to their respective communities. Wooten delivered a telegram to numerous organizations across the U.S. that read:

We feel in the last few days the rioting and looting that has taken place in this country has been totally wrong. We understand the frustration and we understand the sorrow and shock. However, our move at this time has to be one of dignity and pride befitting a man that carried the torch of pride and love to all mankind...it is up to us to make real the plans he left with us. In a short while NIEU will have programs in your city that will be most meaningful to you economically and socially. WE don't want homeless people in your city. We don't want soup lines...don't be a part of making this kind of thing happen. Let us make this pledge that we will make our city and ourselves proud to have known and loved the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.³²³

Jim Brown echoed Wooten's sentiments. He issued a statement: "We feel it is a tragedy when a man of peace and non-violence is shot down in cold blood...There will be a need for unity and hard work not only to get rid of the negative of our society." He continued, "We will join all Americans in not letting the great effort of Dr. Martin Luther King be in vain."³²⁴

Despite the plea for peace, many African Americans across the nation took to the streets with rage. More than 55,000 troops in the Army and National Guards were

April 1968, A2; Associated Press, "Group Bids Negro Athletes Help Calm Nation's cities," *New York Times*, 9 April 1968, 31; Associated Press, "Jim Brown's Group to Help in Riots," *The Spokesman-Review*, 9 April, 1968, 12; Associated Press, "Negro Professional Athletes Asked to Help Stem Tide of Racial Unrest," *The Hartford Courant*, 9 April 1968, 24; UPI, "Cleveland Mayor Takes to Streets: Stokes Praises His City for Avoiding Racial Disorder," *New York Times*, 12 April 1968, 20; Associated Press, "Powell: 'Negroes' Face Extermination," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 20 April 1968, 15.

³²³ "Brown's NIEU Praises MLK," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 11 April 1968, B3; UPI, "Don't Let Dr. King Die In Vain: Brown," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 13 April 1968, 3.

³²⁴ Ibid.

deployed to major cities like Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Harlem, and throughout the south in Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi. In Washington, D.C. some of the Washington Redskins, like A. D. Whitfield and Brigman Owens, were called upon as well since they were both members of U.S. reserve units with the military. For Owens, the slain SCLC leader was of great influence to him. He remembered the Baptist minister saying, “A man dies a little if he refuses to take a stand.” In an interview, Owens recalled the rioting in D.C. on April 5:

We were in a restaurant over at Howard University, and when you looked down the street, you saw the planes and smoke coming from downtown Washington. You realized this was not something that would go away. My wife was working downtown, so I had to pick her up at the phone company where she worked. Her supervisor would not let her go. I got the supervisor on the phone and told him, ‘Under no uncertain terms you better let her go, and for the safety of your employees let them go home.’ A ride that normally takes me twenty minutes to get home, took us four hours. Everything was being torched, and they were doing it in their own neighborhoods, not realizing that they were torching some of their own businesses and support systems. I think people were angry and were damaging things indiscriminately for personal reasons. Businesses with the Union were impacted. Took years for some of those in the area to get back up. Some of these companies did not have insurance, so they weren’t going to be able to come back. Many were already working at a deficit, so they couldn’t afford the insurance.³²⁵

The rioting across the nation was a series of demonstrations by African Americans who were not only disenchanted with the killing of someone they revered, but also their displeasure with the particular order of society where African Americans were still denied full citizenship guaranteed to them through the 14th and 15th amendments of the United States Constitution. The destruction that ensued was the result of decades of

³²⁵ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

neglect by the federal government in relation to citizens of color and its failure to uphold federal measures in place to protect them.³²⁶

Gunnar Myrdal, a social philosopher, argued there was progress in American society, but the “Negro problem” was grossly misunderstood. The real solution “would take a revolution in white attitudes, and 20 years, and ‘trillions of dollars.’” His assessment demonstrated despite the laws Congress created and legislation the Supreme Court upheld, if the thoughts and actions of Whites did not change towards African Americans along with an economic commitment, racial problems would persist in American society. The riots of 1968 led to “White flight” as numerous businesses left urban areas, and as a result Black communities were greatly impacted. Business owners believed the rioting the previous years demonstrated their presence in areas impacted by uprisings had become a financial liability. Consequently, as they left, so did the jobs many African Americans held. From the perspective of the NIEU, it was imperative they continued their outreach to Black youth, as the mass exodus of enterprises from their communities had a great impact on their morale.³²⁷

³²⁶ Charles M. Roberts and Walter H. Pincus, “3 Slain in Chicago Many Fires Set,” *The Washington Post*, 6 April 1968, A1; Associated Press, “Baltimore, Pittsburgh Cool Again,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 April 1968, 1; “Violence Hits Nation’s Major Cities,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 April 1968, N3; “55,000 Troops Employed to Put Down City Riots,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 April 1968, 4; Dave Brady, “Whitfield Shoots Holes In Big-Back Program,” *The Washington Post*, 6 December 1967, D1, D2; John B. Willmann, “It’s Happening In Real Estate,” *The Washington Post*, 28 September 1968, D18; Dave Brady, “Whitfield Through As 1968 Redskin,” *The Washington Post*, 23 November 1968, E3; “Four Redskins Served in Area,” *The Washington Post*, 18 April 1968, C4. Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author. Whitfield and Owens were both drafted by the Dallas Cowboys in 1965, and traded the following year to the Washington Redskins.

³²⁷ James Reston, “Hate Cannot Be Burned Away,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 7 April 1968, 4A.

By the summer of 1969, Project J.I.M. expanded to year-round status supporting over four hundred Cleveland youth. With this growth, there were some changes to the program, with the launch of what they called “four phases.” The first was the “World of Work,” which focused on job placement and money management. Participants developed a budget and opened savings accounts for the money they earned from their jobs. Field trips to different businesses across Cleveland were also part of the agenda. This offered them the opportunity to see how companies functioned. The second phase, “Future Businessmen’s Club,” placed young boys and girls in groups and helped them develop plans to form their own “profit-making business enterprises.” This allowed them to get firsthand experience in developing their own ideas. The third program, “Project MEN,” an earlier initiative of the NIEU had grown to a mentorship program where over two hundred African American professionals allowed Project J.I.M. participants to shadow them on a weekly basis as a way to help young people with the purpose of gaining “interest and motivation” so they pursued their careers of interest. In this phase, youth were present in business meetings and participated in the work of the respective offices. The last component was the “Scholarship Program.” The Union also provided financial assistance to high school graduates who pursued higher educational degrees or went to trade school.³²⁸

³²⁸ “BEU Sponsors Benefit For Scholarship Plan,” Call and Post, 19 July 1969, 10A; “Project JIM Expands,” Call and Post, 14 June 1969, 5C; “Cleveland: Now! 36 Programs Serve 35,000 Young Persons,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 27 September 1968, 14; Project J.I.M. was given \$9,600 by the Cleveland: NOW! Money was used to pay salaries of twelve youth leaders who supervise youth in the program.

While addressing the issues of education with Cleveland youth over the span of three years, the NIEU also took on a national effort that utilized the work of all of the Union's offices (with three other chapters opened in Kansas City, Missouri, Washington, D.C., and Oakland, California). As a way to expose the poverty and political inequalities that existed across the United States, in February 1970, the Black Economic Union began a project called Food First. Originally called the "Adopt a County" plan, this social program was designed to tackle the needs of Black communities across the nation providing food, clothing, and the necessary tools and information for residents to "broaden their life prospects." The Union established three goals: provide food and clothing to be dispersed to residents who local leaders identified as needing assistance; seek aid through government programs and donations that provided "food, medicine and the financing of farm and small business development;" and obtain the help of other Black organizations in an effort to adopt communities in their respective locales to implement programs of assistance.³²⁹

To bring national attention to the issue of poverty, the Black Economic Union chose Holly Springs, Mississippi as their focal point. According to Jim Brown, it was "because Jacob Javits had proclaimed Marshall County the poorest county in the United

³²⁹ Ibid.; John Wooten and Carole F. Hoover, Letter to Mayor Carl B. Stokes, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, Container 29, Folder 519, 20 April 1970, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Jim Brown sent a letter to Stokes requesting a public endorsement of the Food First anti-poverty effort. It was his belief that the mayor's endorsement would "better enhance the cooperation of the Cleveland community" towards the program. National Kickoff Dinner held in Cleveland on June 14, 1970 at the Cleveland Sheraton Hotel. Invited Jesses Jackson, Mrs. Martin Luther King because both were "so articulate on the whole question of hunger in our nation." Stokes served as Honorary Chairman of the dinner. Invited Senator McGovern, Javits, and Mondale since these three men were part of the federal government's Committee on Hunger in the U.S.A. This was done to provide a "tremendous boost financially and from a public relations standpoint."

States...and they [also] had political problems as far as elections and so forth.” Located in northern Mississippi thirty minutes south of Memphis, Tennessee, Holly Springs was described as the “seat of Marshall County...submerged in a lake of great trees, and each spring the row of mansions on College and Falconer and neighboring streets, restored years ago to antebellum splendor, are opened to the public for the annual Pilgrimage” where many “gather to relive the fine old minutes of the Old South as Southerners would like them to have been.”³³⁰ The county had a population of 26,000 people of which 17,000 (65%) were Black. Coupled with an unemployment rate of 60%, the job prospects in Holly Springs were bleak as well. The industry companies employed only 160 African Americans, while 1,300 Whites outside of the county worked for companies like Wurlitzer, a company that manufactured instruments. One of the Holly Springs residents mentioned, ““Our unemployment actually increases every year. If a white man or woman

³³⁰ Jim Brown, Letter to Mayor Carl B. Stokes, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, Container 29, Folder 519, 26 February 1970, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; John Wooten, Letter to Mayor Carl B. Stokes, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, Container 29, Folder 519, 20 March 1970, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, 2; John Wooten and Carole F. Hoover, Letter to Mayor Carl B. Stokes, Carl Stokes Papers, 1957-1972, Container 29, Folder 519, 20 April 1970, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; Carole Hoover worked with the Cleveland branch of the Union. An array of NFL players accompanied the BEU on this trip. From the Pittsburgh Steelers, James Shorter, Ray May and Roy Jefferson; Cid Edwards, Jamie Rivers, Lonnie Sanders and Ernie McMillan of the St. Louis Cardinals; from the Cleveland Browns Erich Barnes, Leroy Kelly, and Sidney Williams; Jim Snowden and Brigman Owens of the Washington Redskins; from the New Orleans Saints, Mike Taylor; and Irv Cross who played with the Philadelphia Eagles. Also accompanying the players were Maggie Hathaway, longtime friend of Brown, social activist and Union contributor, and Ernest Thomas, a coordinator for the trip and community relations director of the Black Economic Union. The group gathered Wednesday morning at the Nite Nite Club, an establishment not far from the Lorraine Motel, to discuss the logistics of the trip.

comes in and applies for a job, then a black man or woman is laid off, so there will be room for him.””³³¹

As Jim Brown remembered, the objective of Food First was “to motivate the people... We wanted to take that ride to hook up with the people down there, and inspire, and go back and work and raise money and food.” The trip, which garnered national attention, began in Memphis at the Lorraine Motel, a symbolic gesture done in remembrance of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ironically, before crossing the state line, the Greyhound bus the group was aboard had some mechanical issues in Tennessee, and one of the passengers joked, ““That’s the way bussy. If you’re going to break down, break down on this side of the border.”” From there the group took the one-hour trip to Holly Springs where they met with local leaders who sought their assistance “against an establishment that so far had apparently thrived on assault by boycott, marches, protests that demonstrated misery.”³³² More than twenty Black men from amongst the professional sports ranks convened in Memphis, Tennessee to start the trip. They chose to start here as a tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. As they assembled at a local restaurant, Jim Brown told them, “Unfortunately, the majority of people in Mississippi who are starving are black and they are because of the political system... The mistake most make is one great thrust with a program, they go back home and the project falls on its face.”³³³ He wanted those in attendance to understand that they had to keep the

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Charles Gillespie, “Jim Brown Comes to Mississippi,” *The Nation*, 21 September 1970, 236-238.

³³³ Ibid., 237

program going in their respective cities once they left Mississippi since the eradication of poverty was no easy task.

The history of racial strife in Mississippi created some apprehension amongst the men in attendance. At the time, the schools in the city were being integrated, sixteen years after the *Brown v. Board* decision. Some Whites were not happy about the move to have Black and White children in Holly Springs attend the same schools. Jim Brown joked with the group “I’ve been all over the South, but I used to drive to Alabama, park my car, and fly over Mississippi.” While aboard the charter, Brig Owens remembered a group of Whites in pickup trucks followed the bus brandishing their shotguns. He ordered the driver of the bus to cut the lights off so no one outside could see who was onboard. Many of the players on the trip were on edge. When a photo opportunity came, the flash from a camera went off, and some of the men ducked thinking shots were fired.³³⁴

However, there was no racial incident for the travelers. When they arrived to Marshall County, they engaged with the residents making stops at Rust College, Mississippi Industrial College, and Cadet School. One resident told the group,

We’ve marched, picketed, boycotted. All have failed and the major reason they have failed is that we have nobody to turn to. This is a closed society. There aren’t any black-owned stores, no black-owned groceries or industries. You have our support. We don’t have anyone else to turn to in Mississippi. We don’t have a governor we can go to.³³⁵

³³⁴ Ibid.; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, February 25, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; The bus stopped at Rust College where Arverne Moore, George Caldwell and Henry Boyd boarded with the group accompanied by other residents of the town.

³³⁵ Gillespie, *The Nation*, 238

The contingent of men were received well by many of the Black folks in Holly Springs, as their status as professional athletes provided them a certain cache with the residents. During the players' visit, they saw the dire poverty many people faced. Roy Jefferson with the Pittsburgh Steelers said the living conditions of Black people in Marshall County made many of the athletes "cringe." They met a seventy-four year old woman, Anna Faulkner, who lived in a two-room home with no bathroom or windows. Her monthly income was \$75, of which \$55 was from social security. By 1970 standards, she lived in poverty, and there was a great discrepancy between her income and that of the players. William Wright, a forty-eight year old man with eight children had been unemployed for six years because of a heart problem. He received only \$18 a month. Sidney Williams remembered the used clothing and shoes he donated to people was considered "new for them." While many of the players who made the Food First trip, grew up with meager living situations, they had not experienced the poverty in Marshall County. The trip to Holly Springs exposed the depth of poverty and illustrated why economic development and social programs were needed across the U.S. For these renowned Black males to lend their support served was critical to the group's mission of helping out on a national level.³³⁶

³³⁶ "Steeler Football Stars To Aid Miss. County," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 21 February 1970, 1,8; Interview with Brig Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

When the group left Mississippi, they stayed steadfast to their mission of raising money, food, and clothing not only for Holly Springs but the Compton area of Los Angeles, east Oakland, California, the Glenville section of Cleveland, Kansas City, Missouri, and the Anacostia neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The Union conducted several fundraisers like golf tournaments with the 6th City Golf Club, basketball tournaments with local organizations and schools, and there was also a tennis tournament with professional tennis player Arthur Ashe. He and Jim Brown competed in matches in New York before thousands of spectators. Other African Americans contributed as well. Black students from Kent State University went on a four-day fast to raise awareness and money for Food First. The beverage company Yoo-hoo provided two trailers worth of their “high-protein, milk based” drinks. The Union also received a check for more than \$12,000 from the American Freedom from Hunger Foundation, Inc., to be used for Food First. There was also public support given by political figures. Carl Stokes provided public support and funds after Jim Brown requested his endorsement of the anti-poverty effort. In a letter to Brown he told him: “Hunger in Holly Springs, Mississippi, Marshall County, as well as in Cleveland and all other cities throughout the United States is, in my opinion, a priority which has to be dealt with.” Brown believed the mayor’s patronage “better enhance[d] the cooperation of the Cleveland community” towards the program. Jesse Jackson, Vice President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference also gave his support serving as a keynote speaker for the Union’s Food First dinner fundraiser.³³⁷

³³⁷ OJO, “Post Man,” *Oakland Post*, 5 March 1970, 18; “Anacostia Picked for Project,” *The Washington Post*, 31 March 1970, C2; “Russell Coaches Again!” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 9 April 1970, B2; “Mississippi-Glenville Link: ‘Food First’ Sunday Here to Be June 14,” *Cleveland*

When the Union returned to Mississippi later that year, they had more than thirty tons of food and clothing to disperse and raised \$25,000. Some of the money was given as loans for Black businessmen in the area to start their own companies, while a portion was given to buy food products for Black residents. Jim Brown believed the loans that were provided, which “were quietly done” was “the most significant” aspect of the program because there were not many Black businesses in the town. Food First highlighted the destitution that existed throughout the U.S. and encouraged discussions about the role of the federal government in the eradication of poverty. While involvement in the electoral process was not a goal, the election of the first African American to sheriff in Holly Springs was credited to the Union’s presence. This small victory could be attributed to the work of the Black Economic Union. Louis Stokes, the brother of Carl Stokes cited the work of the group in the second session of the 91st Congress. They were praised for ““putting action to words.””³³⁸ In all, Food First served as a reminder to the power of what collective action coupled with financial support did for the impoverished. The Union focused on educational opportunities, unemployment, and poverty through

Plain Dealer, 11 May 1970, 18A; “Food First Speaker Set,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 May 1970, 17A; “Soul Golf: Charity Golf This Weekend At Skywest For Poverty,” *Sun Reporter*, 11 July 1970, 35; Paul L. Montgomery, “Tennis Match Serves the Poor,” *New York Times*, 13 July 1970, 33; “Two Champs,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 18 July 1970, 34; Carrie, “and so,” *Sun Reporter*, 19 September 1970, 19; “Happy Thanksgiving,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 26 November 1970, B3; “BEU Food First A \$12,885.25 Check,” *Call and Post*, 28 November 1970, 3A; Interview with Jim Brown, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, February 25, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author. When the Cleveland Browns visited the San Francisco 49ers during the 1970 season, a “Cleveland day” was created to raise money for Food First. The total of the check from the American Freedom from Hunger Foundation, Inc was for \$12,885.25.

³³⁸ Ibid.; “Black Economic Union draws support,” *The Argus*, 6 April 1970, 10; “Jim Brown, Economic Union Cited in Congress,” *Jet*, 2 July 1970, 4; “Stokes Salutes Jim Brown in Congressional Record” *Jet*, 9 July 1970, 52.

their network of social programs, while also giving attention to African American businessmen. Between the years 1967 and 1972, NIEU chapters in Oakland/San Francisco (called the Bay Area chapter), Los Angeles, Kansas City, Cleveland, New York, and Washington D.C. committed themselves to providing financial and technical assistance to Black enterprises within their respective cities.

To support their plans for national business development, the Union had a goal of raising \$10 million, which was part of the NIEU's early objectives since its inception in 1966. These funds would allow them to develop offices in major urban areas that could reach branches in the major cities of the U.S., provide loans to Black businessmen, give advice and monetary assistance to those ventures that demonstrated a need, and support NIEU's social programs. Reaching this goal and acquiring adequate funds was one of the Union's biggest obstacles. The group had between 5,000 and 8,000 dues paying members from 1967 to 1972, and different membership rates (\$1, \$5, \$20, and \$100 for charter members). The different rates ensured that all people from different economic backgrounds were able to join the organization, however, it quickly became obvious that the \$10 million goal could not be achieved through membership fees alone. For example, the group brought in a little more than \$55,000 in membership fees in 1968.³³⁹ While some of the members of the Union wanted to depend on Black folks to raise the money, that idea was not feasible, because many of the Black male professional athletes they depended on for support did not have the means. As a result the NIEU had to seek financial support from non-members, both Black and White. Furthermore, the group

³³⁹ The Black Economic Union, Annual Report 1968, personal papers of Jim Brown; By 1969, the rate for membership was changed to \$2, \$5, \$25, \$100 and \$500 for a life membership.

turned to outside supporters to help them reach their goals, particularly the federal government and philanthropic organizations. To help them develop their proposals, Jim Brown reached out to a Harvard MBA graduate.³⁴⁰

Spencer Jourdain, a 1961 graduate of Harvard University, led the NIEU's fund-raising effort. After graduating as one of six African Americans in his class, he visited different parts of Africa as a way to explore the world. He returned the following year and completed his MBA at the Harvard Business School. From there, he took a job at Corning Glass Works in their marketing and business planning department. However, after a few years there, he heard of an opportunity to connect with the Union. Jourdain jumped at the opportunity, and helped form the National Business Planning Team. This was a faction that oversaw the business proposals presented to the Union and determined how to get them funding, or whether the NIEU would support them from funds they received. Jourdain was a strong proponent of the group's charge of self-sufficiency and Black business development, a fact that became particularly evident when he told reporters in November 1968 at the official opening of the New York office, "The only people that can help us is ourselves."³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Ibid.; Monica M. Dodge and Erika P. Pierson, "Activism Quiet on Mostly-White Campus," *The Harvard Crimson*, 23 May 2011. Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 13, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author. As a student at Harvard, he and his classmates did not see their presence there as part of a larger movement or racial statement about America. As he recalled fifty years after graduating, 'We were there to get an education and then to go out and be successful people in our chosen fields, not start a cohesive social movement.' Because of the burgeoning civil rights movement, Jourdain remembers that the administration at Harvard made all necessary accommodations for Black students to ensure they were successful. This particular proactive response from the university was a strategy to limit any unwanted protests or demonstrations about the school.

³⁴¹ Monica M. Dodge and Erika P. Pierson, "Activism Quiet on Mostly-White Campus," *The Harvard Crimson*, online edition, 23 May 2011; "Candidates for Queen," *The Chicago Defender*

To staff the Planning Team, Jourdain sought people who were educated in economics and the creation of enterprises. He turned to those he knew best, two Harvard University graduates and another from Clark College: Ofia Nwali, Dan Mitchell, and John Butler. Nwali was a Ph.D. student at Harvard who developed a relationship with Jourdain through the “deep” discussions they had on international economics. Jourdain saw Nwali as “a super fit” to begin collaborations between African Americans and Africans. John Butler was also a graduate of Harvard in 1962, and later earned an MBA from the Harvard Business School. Dan Mitchell was a graduate of Clark College and had an early history of being involved in CORE’s sit-ins and voter registration drives, so his particular knowledge and insight was a welcomed addition to the group.³⁴² For

(*National edition*), 18 October 1952, 3; Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 13, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author. Jim Brown’s NIEU Opens In Harlem,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 July 1967, 42; Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, April 13, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author. Discussion with Spencer Jourdain, July 29, 2012. Spencer Jourdain had a history of family members who were committed to the Black freedom struggle. His family oral history links an ancestor to abolitionists in the New England area and a male relative who fought with the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. His grandfather, Edwin Bush Jourdain, Sr., was a childhood friend of W. E.B. DuBois, as both grew up together in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Jourdain, Sr. practiced law in the city where he had joined with DuBois in an effort to address White racial discrimination through a crusade called the Niagara Movement. Edwin B. Jourdain, Sr. attended the conference, which led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Spencer Jourdain’s father, Edwin Bush Jourdain, Jr. was a “race man” who graduated from Harvard in 1921. One of his earliest forms of activism came in the move to desegregate the dormitories at Harvard University. Upon graduation, Jourdain, Jr., moved to Evanston, Illinois, where he served as city alderman, becoming the first African American to serve as an elected official. Thus, for Spencer Jourdain, there was always a connection to engaging inequalities prevalent in African American communities. His family had connections to the Black freedom struggle that encompassed the 19th and 20th centuries. The involvement of the men in his family left a lasting impression on the role he could play in American society.

³⁴² Ibid.; Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 22, 2012, Orlando, FL. Recording in possession of author. Edward H. Jones, “A Status Report of the Equity Development Component of The Black Economic Union,” 25 September 1970, Carl Stokes Papers, Manuscript Collection No. 4370; While an undergraduate at the

Spencer Jourdain and members of the National Business Planning Team, working with the Union “was an era of unlimited optimism and energetic hope.” While the office was strategically placed near Wall Street, the work they wanted to accomplish was not easy and overwhelming at times. For instance, numerous banks were not convinced of the business ideas the Planning Team presented. These financial institutions believed that if companies focused on selling to African Americans, they would not get a return on their investments. Hence, many of the proposals presented by the Union were not supported, which forced the NIEU to look elsewhere for money.³⁴³

In 1968, Spencer Jourdain began efforts to bring outside funding to the NIEU to help support many of the proposals the organization had received from Black business owners who sought their assistance. In the early part of the year, he submitted an application to the Ford Foundation, a private institution whose aim was to improve “human welfare” through “the reduction of economic, religious, and racial barriers to equality of educational opportunity at all levels.” In March, the Union was awarded

Massachusetts institution, there was a rise in the number of international students, especially from Africa as many former African colonies became independent from 1955-1961. According to Jourdain, he and some of the African students “formed a vibrant social group” where they had “frequent discussions about the exciting potential of African economic development as new independent nations and also the potential role of America—and African Americans—to participate in helping create that exciting future.” Ofia Nwali earned a PhD in economics from Harvard, and helped develop joint ventures with the emerging economic development activities in Africa, and sought particularly to develop an East Afrocam housing venture. According to Spencer Jourdain, John Butler rendered an “early excellent analysis on behalf [of] a minority inventor who was trying to develop a 3D television.”

³⁴³ Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 22, 2012, Orlando, FL. Recording in possession of author. Mitchell provided guidance and technical assistance to companies that came to the Union for financial help. While they particularly helped businesses in the cities where they had offices, they also helped companies in the South. The NIEU established relationship with such enterprises as the Cosby Wilson Corporation in Louisville, Kentucky, the Velberta’s Wigs and Beauty Supplies in Dublin, Georgia, and Rural Mission, Inc., on John’s Island, South Carolina.

\$520,000 from the philanthropic group. The grant was the largest given by the Ford Foundation, who also provided twenty-three awards that totaled \$3.2 million. The NIEU was also given \$250,000 from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to fund the salaries of their staff members. This money helped prepare and retain people who assisted the organization in fulfilling its objectives of assisting Black businessmen. The Union also provided people in the community with classes on marketing, accounting, advertising, and how to properly handle their taxes. All of this was done to combat the lack of knowledge among Black business owners.³⁴⁴

The Union's process by which loans were given was not very meticulous. It involved "aspiring" businessmen to be interviewed by the planning team as they presented their particular plans of starting an enterprise, or request support for sustainment or expansion. The Union then analyzed the merits of their proposals, and determined what assistance, if any, could be provided. Fortunately the money the group received from the Ford Foundation allowed them to help several businesses achieve moderate success. That same year, Curtis Robinson, an owner of a small construction company in Cleveland received a loan from the Union for \$2,000 to purchase equipment for his business. Subsequently, he got a contract from the Department of Community

³⁴⁴ Peter Kihss, "\$3.2-Million Is Granted by Ford To Help Antipoverty Programs," *New York Times*, 8 March 1968, 28; "Negro Industrial & Economic Union: Gets 4502,000 Ford Grant for Program Developments," *Call and Post*, 9 March 1968, 1A, 2A; "\$520,000 Grant Told For Industrial Union," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 21 March 1968, A5; "Ford Foundation Grants \$400,000," *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 March 1968, 31; "Playboy Gives NIEU \$10,000," *Call and Post*, 18 May 1968, 9A; "Jim Brown Opens Harlem Agency to Help Negro Businesses," *New York Times*, 16 November 1968, 29; Henry and Edsel Ford, the creators of the Ford automobile manufacturing company, initiated the Ford Foundation. However, there were Whites who supported the Union financially. In May, *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner made a \$10,000 contribution to the Union. At the time he believed the objectives of the NIEU were "worthy of support of all America."

Development in Cleveland where he provided vinyl siding for refurbished homes, which made him the first African American in Cleveland to receive this type of agreement, which highlights the lack of Blacks in this particular realm of business.³⁴⁵

New Breed Limited, a clothing group formed in 1967 that specialized in making the dashiki (a shirt designed using African styles and prints), received financial aid and technical support from the Union in 1968. The company's motto was "The New Breed cat is no longer in a future heaven, no longer the product of hazy, fantasy-ridden imaginations." This company was one venture the NIEU supported that created a niche in the clothing industry during the 1960s and 1970s. They did this by seizing Black power, a period when African Americans turned away from the misnomer "negro" and developed a greater understanding of the accomplishments of Black (African) people. Jason Benning co-founded the business with Ellis Fleming, Jack Butler, Howard Davis, and Milton Clarke. Benning, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, graduated from Morris Brown College where he earned a bachelor of science in Business Administration. Fleming and Butler provided the financial contributions to help get the business started. Milton Clark served as Vice President, helping with the day-to-day of New Breed, while Howard Davis was in charge of design. He had experience in the clothing industry as he worked with Pappagallo, a clothing boutique for seven years. In that position he was the first Black to earn the Designer's Oscar for the fashions he designed with the company. Thus,

³⁴⁵ "Premiere Benefit Helps NIEU Continue Loan Program," *Call and Post*, 12 October 1968, 4A; Scholarships, or "educational loans" were given to students to help pay for their tuition, books and school supplies. Recipients of the scholarship in 1968 were Charlotte Woods (Tennessee A&T University, now Tennessee State University), Deane Buchanan (Western Reserve University, now Case Western Reserve University), Margot Tillman (Cleveland State University), Dorothea Walker (Jane Addams Nursing School), and Phylliss Taylor (Ohio State University).

the company had competent people who understood the intricacies of the fashion industry.³⁴⁶

At its peak, New Breed employed over one hundred people. They articulated an agenda that could be defined as pro-Black, since they sought to employ African Americans. “The time may come when we need a particular talent and a white man has it,” Jason Benning noted, “but we must help our own people first...and not through a lot of do-nothing demonstrations...and a lot of reports.”³⁴⁷ This was achieved with the opening of fourteen New Breed stores across the nation from 1968 to 1970. After two years as a corporation, Benning’s operation garnered the needed support to succeed early. Where initial shares in the company were sold for \$1, after a year, they were sold for \$10. Writer James Baldwin and actor/comedian Sammy Davis, Jr. were two of the company’s major shareholders. As a result, major retail companies like Macy’s wanted to get New Breed’s clothing mass-produced because of their success. The Business Planning Team in New York developed the relationship with the large chain on behalf of the small Black-owned business.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ “Afro American Styles From New Breed,” *Call and Post*, 18 May 1968, 2B; The New Breed group was greatly influenced by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. Outward expressions of this was seen in the red, black and green flag attributed to the former and his self-improvement movement with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). With the latter, a portrait was hung in the headquarters shops in Harlem. New Breed headquarters located in Harlem, New York at 147th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. For more on the “Black is Beautiful” movement see William L. VanDeBurg’s book *New Day in Babylon*.

³⁴⁷ Margaret Crimmins, “A ‘New Breed’ of Designers, Manufacturers,” *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1969, 113.

³⁴⁸ “Afro American Styles From New Breed,” *Call and Post*, 18 May 1968, 2B; Ann Geracimos, “About Dashikis And The New Breed Cat,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 17 May 1969, 2; “Tomorrow’s Designers Today!” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 14 January 1970, 21; Edward B. Fiske, “Finding Identity, Black Nuns Put Soul Into Religious Life,” *New York Times*, 15 August

New Breed was particularly concerned with how African Americans spent their money. Howard Davis noted, “‘Negroes spend million on men’s and boy’s clothing a year, not including shoes..and all of it goes to The Man. We just want to keep some of it in the black community, building for us.’”³⁴⁹ “The Man” implied by Davis, was representative of White corporations who profited the most from Black dollars by having a presence in predominantly Black communities, but not reinvesting in the community they were located, specifically by not providing jobs to African Americans. While rejecting the “pie-in-the-sky” rhetoric, they also were against what they deemed “White dress” because Blacks folks looked “‘ridiculous in something designed for a blue-eyed European.’” Despite the need to incorporate African Americans of different backgrounds, Davis was not a supporter of females wearing dashikis, a shirt described as a “‘freedom garment’” that was “a loosely shaped long-sleeved shirt-jacket, styled with any of 19 large center front pockets.” New Breed was also used for maternity clothing, but Davis did not like females wearing their apparel. He believed the line was for men only, despite women accounting for 14% of their sales.³⁵⁰

While there was some discrepancy amongst leadership over whether women should wear their fashions, New Breed officials’ gender politics, they targeted African

1970, 22; . Spencer Jourdain helped finance Maverick International, an “all-black couture house. For info on this business see *Jet*, 5 June 1969, 63

³⁴⁹ Margaret Crimmins, “A ‘New Breed’ of Designers, Manufacturers,” *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1969, 113.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.; Stacy Kinlock Sewell, “The “Not-Buying Power” of the black Community: Urban Boycotts and Equal Employment Opportunity, 19601-964,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No.2 (Spring, 2004), 138; The first line of the company catered solely to males. By the spring of 1969, they expanded to female, baby, and unisex lines. As Geracimos mentions in her article, the definition of “dashiki” would not be found in “Webster’s New World Dictionary” or at “Brooks Brothers,” but the meaning of the word is “lost to history.”

American males from different backgrounds to embrace their styles. This was evident as Davis noted in a May 1969 interview, that New Breed clientele was “the type of guy with the Cadillac and mohair suits...Even the player type, the hustler in the sharkskin suit.”³⁵¹ Whites also bought New Breed products and made up 20% of the total sales for the company. The company’s clothing was also utilized in two motion pictures, *Up Tight* and *Putney Swope*. In Houston, Texas, a group of Black doctors requested an order of clothes from New Breed to be worn instead of the typical scrubs worn in the hospital. In all, the company was able to tap into different markets. However, when it came to getting major sponsorship, larger entities like Macy’s wanted “volume.” Thus, New Breed needed an ability to produce which meant they needed facilities that would have helped them reach the high capacity, which also meant greater financing, which was beyond their reach.³⁵²

Yet the group never lost sight of what they could do in the realm of fashion despite financial obstacles and naysayers. Kathy Aldrich, a fashion editor with the *Amsterdam News* believed the wearing of dashikis was simply a fad. She argued, “It will start to disappear in a year or two, but it won’t go away lightly. There has to be a drastic change in social patterns between the races.” While there were many people who wore New Breed and similar styles, the dashiki was linked to the recognition and embracement of one’s African ancestry. That was one of the major contributions of the company, as many Black folks across the United States wore the dashiki as part of the larger cultural movement connected to the Black freedom struggle. As Howard Davis noted, “the hustler

³⁵¹ Ann Geracimos, “About Dashikis And The New Breed Cat,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 17 May 1969, 28;

³⁵² Ibid.; Interview with Spencer Jourdain, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, May 23, 2012, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

in the sharkskin suit, is taking the process out of his hair.” This period was a clear demarcation of the change in Black attitudes towards self-image.³⁵³

In the fall of 1968, John Wooten, Jim Shorter, and Sidney Williams decided to move forward with their support of an economic venture in cosmetology. They helped create Magnificent Natural Products Company, an enterprise initiated in Los Angeles by Dennis L. Taylor and his business partner Wilbert Jackson. The men targeted African Americans who wore their hair without any chemical relaxers. At this time, the “afro” hairstyle was popular, and with the hair care industry grossing a billion dollars a year, Magnificent had a profitable market to explore. Their motto, “Products designed with you in mind,” was adorned on all promotional materials with a Black female and male wearing Afros. Their primary merchandise was the Magnificent Protein Enriched Holding Spray and the Hair and Scalp Care Shampoo. Some of the other products they promoted were cream, a setting lotion, and conditioner. These items were their biggest sellers, and allowed the company to do fairly well in sales. What started as a two-man operation, expanded to a business with “hundreds of employees” by the early 1970s. This was largely due to the work of the Business Planning Team who helped establish connections with distribution centers across the nation. They also negotiated the loans they received to get started, and helped the company establish a national manufacturing

³⁵³ Ibid.; Margaret Crimmins, “A ‘New Breed’ of Designers, Manufacturers,” *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1969, 113. The company also sought to venture out into other consumer goods like food and furniture, but that aspect of their business never came to fruition.

plant. Yet, for companies like Magnificent Natural, they needed larger financial contributions for wider success and reach.³⁵⁴

Several other Black businesses were able to sustain themselves and grow through the help of the NIEU and federal contracts. One example was Namax Builders, Incorporated, created in 1967 by Nathan Beavers, a thirty-nine year old graduate of Howard University. In 1968, he received a \$2,000 loan from the BEU to assist with his construction company, which prior to the financial assistance only employed three workers, and was “on the verge of collapse.” The money the Union provided Beavers afforded him the opportunity to accept a contract from U.S. Gypsum Company to restore fifty-four apartment units in the Hough area. These specific buildings were ravaged from the Hough riots two years prior, which stemmed from racial unrest in the community. From the work they provided, the Better Homes for Cleveland Foundation presented him a contract to renovate another one hundred fifty apartments in the Hough community. Carl T. Rowan noted, “Namax Builders could not have met its payroll until the time came when it could draw money against the two contracts if [John] Wooten and Union had not provided the \$2,000 loan.” In less than ten months, the company grew to over seventy

³⁵⁴ Dave Brady, “Advocate of ‘Scratch and Dig’: Wooten on the Line On and Off Field,” *The Washington Post*, 13 October 1968, C4; “Display Ad 25,” *Call and Post*, 24 August 1968, 11B; “Atlanta Fans Rate No.1,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 December 1970, B3, B6; Gillespie, *The Nation*, 236; Judy Klemesrud, “Jim Brown; ‘I’m No Angel, But...’,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1969, D13; Letter from John Wooten to Ron Gault, 6 February 1970, Carl Stokes Papers, Manuscript Collection No. 4370. The Union also helped several Black businessmen get franchises with fast-food chain McDonald’s. The company had offices in Cleveland at 10816 St. Clair and in Watts, California at 1314 East 41st Street. Dennis L. Taylor served as president of Magnificent. Wilbert Jackson, his business partner was general manager. John Wooten served as director of sales, while Jim Shorter, Sidney Williams, and Sumlor Harris managed sales and the promotion of their products in different outlets. Magnificent Products lasted over a decade before the company was sold to Asian investors.

employees, and with the number of subcontracts they obtained, had “\$2.3 million worth of work on the books and [were] negotiating for \$17 million more in contracts.”³⁵⁵

Due to opportunities provided to Namax, other Black companies were able to get contracts and grow as a result. McKinney Plumbing Co., another Cleveland based group, was a three man operation that did not get much work opportunities and like Beavers’ group were on the verge of failure. However, the enterprise provided a subcontract for the group worth \$200,000. This allowed the company to grow to sixteen workers. American Steel and Fabricating Company, led by Nolan Williams, received a contract for \$26,000 and hired four others to help with the construction work. Like Namax, this enterprise Steel owed their early success to a loan they received from the NIEU, along with help negotiating their contracts. By the end of 1968, American Steel grossed \$400,000.³⁵⁶

Historically, construction work had been a difficult enterprise for African Americans to enter. Due to the number of opportunities provided to other ethnic groups, particularly Whites, the Society of Registered Contractors was formed, with Nathan Beavers named president. Through his leadership, Beavers helped other African Americans obtain construction deals. Richardson Electric Company rose from three workers to twelve with \$80,000 in contracts provided by Beavers. As Beavers put it, “‘Men who were just crap-shooters on the city streets are now proud members of the community.’” Helping Black men and women from the area was a major impetus for him. He added, “‘We took one man from the ghetto and made a first-rate carpenter out of

³⁵⁵ Carl T. Rowan, Convocation Address, 14 November 1968, Colby College, Maine; The Better Homes for Cleveland Foundation was sponsored by the Catholic diocese of Cleveland.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.; The Black Economic Union, “Annual Report 1968.” Jim Brown provided this report from his personal papers.

him in six weeks. And what is so impressive is that the workmanship and loyalty of these people is a bit better than that of the employees who come through more normal channels.”³⁵⁷ Many companies were reluctant to hire African Americans, especially for positions for which they lacked training, because they needed to be taught what they considered basic job protocol. Some White businessmen, in particular, were not keen on spending time teaching new employees what they considered “basic” responsibilities. Thus, African Americans were excluded from jobs based on corporations’ racist practices. These types of actions were not just prevalent in Cleveland, but across the United States, which resulted in a push by the federal government to help eradicate this issue.³⁵⁸

Black capitalism was not only a concern of African Americans, but for politicians as well. In 1968, presidential candidate Richard Nixon made Black capitalism part of his campaign narrative. Nixon, former Vice President to U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, focused on free enterprise and the promotion of Black capitalism as a means to support “minority business” as part of the “war on poverty.” It was a strategic move on behalf of his election managers in their desire to get the Black vote. While the political objectives of African Americans in the first half of the 1960s focused greatly on voting rights, fair housing, and improvements in education, by the second half of the decade, African Americans were motivated to improve the job opportunities available along with the

³⁵⁷ “Supreme Gifts With Dunbar Picture,” *Call and Post*, 1 June 1968, 7A.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.; Staff photo by Ward, “Foreign Students Visit,” *Call and Post*, 7 September 1968, 5B; “Viewers Go on Tour of Black Businesses,” *Call and Post*, 29 March 1969, 7A; Ulf Goebel, “Black Community Leaders Deplore Hough Agency Series,” *Call and Post*, 11 April 1970, 1A. Namax Builders was located at 3970 East 177th Street. A young man who had been “fiddling around” in the tile business suddenly found himself a going concern after receiving a \$40,000 contract from Beavers.

ability to own and run their own businesses. However, Nixon was no fan of integration since he believed African Americans were the “problem” with America, and they were not mentally fit to compete with Whites. Despite these sentiments, he articulated a platform that projected Black economic development as a means to grow African American support of the Republican Party. In November 1968, it worked out well as Nixon garnered a little less than 15% of the African American vote, enough to defeat the Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey and independent George Wallace.³⁵⁹

Historian Hugh Davis Graham noted Richard Nixon’s attitudes toward economic equality and civil rights were nonetheless “inconsistent and incoherent” with his political agenda. In 1969, he nominated two southern conservative judges, G. Harold Carswell and Clement F. Haynsworth, to the Supreme Court, and recommended a constitutional amendment that prohibited the busing of students with the intent of racial balance if it was passed. However, Nixon also signed amendments for voting rights and equal opportunity that led to the creation of affirmative action programs that provided African Americans opportunities to receive federal contracts as well as employment in public and private sectors.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Lawrence J. McAndrews, “The Politics of Principle: Richard Nixon and School Desegregation,” in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 83, No.3 (Summer, 1998), 192; Hugh Davis Graham, “Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma” in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), 95; Associated Press, “Nixon Chooses 2 Judges For the Courts of Appeals,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1969, 2; Fred C. Allvine, “Black Business Development” in *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 34, No.2 (April, 1970), 1-2; Lawrence J. McAndrews, “The Politics of Principle: Richard Nixon and School Desegregation,” in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 83, No.3 (Summer, 1998), 192; Hugh Davis Graham, “Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma” in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), 95.

³⁶⁰ Hugh Davis Graham, “Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma” in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), 93-98.

In March 1969, within the first few months of his presidency, Nixon named Maurice H. Stans to the position of Secretary of Commerce. Stans previously worked in U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower's cabinet and was a partner with the accounting firm Glore Forgan, William R. Staats & Company. Nixon also appointed him head of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE), a federal agency initiated by Nixon's Executive Order 11458 that focused exclusively on the development of "minority" businesses. People of color who were supporters of Black capitalism were apprehensive about Stan's appointment because they believed he would not fully support Black business development. Several "liberal antipoverty circles" believed Stans was out of touch with the needs of the poor and people of color. As a result, they did not trust him to rule in favor of those who needed assistance. They argued organizations and businesses that would apply for funds could be denied aid based on Stans' own bias. Nixon claimed that would not be the case since it was his administration's purpose to provide economic resources to "potentially successful persons who have not had access to it before."³⁶¹ It was also an imperative of the president to increase the number of middle class African Americans, an ideal he promoted during his campaign. Over the course of four years, money designated for "minority businesses" increased from \$75 million in 1969 to \$2.6 billion in 1972, which benefited organizations like the Union, and its members, like Brady Keys whose business interests will be the focus of the following chapter.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Ethel L. Payne, "Nixon Opens Minorities' Business Unit," *Daily Defender*, 6 March 1969, 1, 2.

³⁶² Walter Ruagber, "Stans to Promote a Minority Business Enterprise: Commerce Chief to Set Up New Department to Direct Programs for the Poor," *New York Times*, 6 March 1969, 27; "Nixon Sets Up Agency to Help Blacks Own, Manage Businesses," *Jet*, 20 March 1969, 20-23;

Despite the federal government's efforts, some African Americans were not enthusiastic about the government's support of Black business development. Andrew Brimmer, an economist who served on the Federal Reserve board, was one of its most outspoken opponents. In a speech before the American Economics Association, he noted African Americans had higher debt than Whites, thus their ability to be viable consumers were small. He said, "Self-employment offers a poor economic future for colored people" because as he saw it, "in the long run, the pursuit of black capitalism may retard economic advancement by discouraging many from the full participation in the national economy with its much broader range of challenges and opportunities."³⁶³ According to Brimmer, in 1969 Blacks were 11% of the nation's population and constituted \$35 billion of personal income. While this was roughly 6.5% of the total personal income for the U.S., African Americans owned less than 2% of the household assets in the country. In all, he believed as a collective group, Blacks lacked economic resources by comparison to Whites. There was considerable purchasing power amongst people of color, but they lacked the means to be producers on a grand scale. Thus, the best way to solve the "Negroes'" financial problems was to integrate them into White companies. From his

Stans was named to his position on March 5, 1969; Hugh Davis Graham, "Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma" in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), 95; Robert E. Weems, Jr. and Lewis A. Randolph, "The National Response to Richard M. Nixon's Black Capitalism Initiative: The Success of Domestic Détente," in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (September 2001), 67; Ethel L. Payne, "Nixon Opens Minorities' Business Unit," *Daily Defender*, 6 March 1969, 1, 2; This measure was signed with thirty-six Black, Hispanic, and Native American leaders present. Curtis McClinton and John Wooten were in attendance at this meeting. Some other notable Black leaders and businessmen were Dorothy Height representing the National Council of Negro Women, Roy Innis of CORE, Myrtle Ollison of the National Association of Colored Women's Club, John H. Johnson of Johnson Publications, Napoleon Johnson of the National Urban League.

³⁶³ Talmadge Anderson, "Black Economic Liberation Under Capitalism," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (October 1970), 13

view, Black workers could at best have jobs and learn how to operate their own businesses after honing the basic skills. However, Brimmer's rationale that African Americans should not seek "self-employment" and go into business for themselves did not go over well with many Black leaders.³⁶⁴

To contest Brimmer's arguments, Jim Brown, and seven other African American leaders formed an "ad-hoc federation of black entrepreneurs." They addressed the Black economist's comments in a press conference and opined, "Where we differ with Governor Brimmer is his use of past performance of black-owned businesses to assess their potential. We contend that performances of black-owned businesses in the past is a result of the constraints and deprivation to which they have historically been subjected." They continued, "By projecting the future of black controlled businesses on the basis of these results would be no different than drawing the conclusion that Black Americans cannot learn because they have performed poorly in a deprived educational environment."³⁶⁵ For them, anyone talking negatively about ideals they supported was not beneficial to them gaining federal support for African Americans. The coalition also sent President Richard Nixon a telegram stating the time had come for the group to meet with him 'at the earliest possible date' to address the direction of the federal programs geared

³⁶⁴ "Black Capitalism Critics," *Sun Reporter*, 17 January 1970, 37; Weems and Randolph, 77; Dean Kotlowski, "Black Power-Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 72, No.3 (Autumn 1998), 409-445; James Foreman, founder of SNCC considered Blacks who saw capitalism as the way as "Negroes" and "Black power pimps." He argued that "the people must be educated to understand that any black man or Negro who is advocating a perpetuation of capitalism inside the United States is in fact seeking not only his ultimate destruction and death but is contributing to the continuous exploitation of black people all around the world." From Foreman's viewpoint, African Americans needed to think of ways to take control of the United States and not be happy with morsels, when that would not free them from the grasp of racism and poverty.

³⁶⁵ "Black Capitalism Critics," *Sun Reporter*, 17 January 1970, 37.

towards minority business. One of their main issues with Nixon was the lack of communication and the failure of his administration to consult with them about the agenda for the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE). It was their belief the idea of “green power” could be fulfilled through provisions from the government, and not a unit that dictated who received financial support.³⁶⁶

While the Union supported businesses and secured funding for the organization, they also focused on expanding their offices. One such place was the Midwest, “America’s heartland.” In July 1968, Curtis R. McClinton, Jr., a running back with the Kansas City Chiefs, was named the local director of the Union’s chapter in Kansas City, Missouri. He was also National Vice President and Executive Director for Operations of the organization. McClinton had been on the national board of the Union since 1967 when he was then approached by Jim Brown to establish a chapter in the city where he played. When McClinton obliged, Brown was “pleased and delighted” of his interest but told him the chapter was his initiative, thus, he was the leader and dictated how it operated. In essence, financial support would have to be arranged by the Kansas City office. The only resource Brown could provide him was the manpower and connections associated with the national office. In lieu of this conversation, McClinton flew to

³⁶⁶ Jan Nugent, “Unit Forms to Prod Black Capitalism,” *The Washington Post*, 7 January 1970, F7; Brown was accompanied by Dr. Edward Irons, Executive Director, National Bankers Association, and chairman of Business Administration, Howard University; Berkeley Burrell, president, National Business League; William Hudgins, president, Freedom National Bank, Harlem, (New York) and First Vice President, National Bankers Association; John Stewart, president, American Savings & Loan League, and president of Mutual Savings & Loan, Durham, North Carolina; Dempsey J. Travis, president, United Mortgage Bankers of America, and president of Sivart Mortgage Banking Company, Chicago, Illinois; Patrick Burns, Deputy Executive Director, Inter-Racial Council for Business Opportunity; and Charles Davis, Executive Director, National Insurance Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Cleveland to get a point of reference of the expectations and the type of programming efforts enacted at the headquarters. He believed in the mission in the organization, and fully embraced the task ahead in Missouri.³⁶⁷

Understanding the background and early experiences of the Chiefs fullback helps explain his desire and motivation to be involved with the Union. Curtis R. McClinton, Jr. was born Sunday, June 25, 1939 in Muskogee, Oklahoma. He was a 1962 graduate of the University of Kansas where he majored in education and business, and also an All-American running back on the football team. Following graduation, McClinton signed with the Dallas Texans of the AFL. In 1963, the team's owner, Lamar Hunt, relocated them to Kansas City, Missouri and played under a new name, the Kansas City Chiefs. It was not until his first year in Kansas City that he began to consider ways to challenge Jim Crow. McClinton struggled to find housing and that left him with no choice but to dwell in the basement of the Chief's office for \$7 a week. In addition to his housing dilemma, he was not allowed to socialize with White players because in Kansas City, Blacks and Whites "couldn't enter the same places together." He noted, "This ignited a very ticklish fiber in my body and motivated me to get involved in the community where I was going

³⁶⁷ Associated Press, "Curtis McClinton Takes Economic Post," The Washington Post, 22 September 1970, D3; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, October 5, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, December 18, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author; Letter from Curtis R. McClinton to Ronald T. Gault, "The Vertical Year," 12 March 1970, The Western Reserve Historical Society, Carl Stokes Papers, Manuscript Collection No. 4370, Container 77, Folder 1473; McClinton's father, Curtis R. McClinton, Sr. was an elected senator in Kansas and helped passed civil rights legislation pertaining to the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Curtis R. McClinton Sr. exposed his son to the "abilities of Black men." In an interview, McClinton, Jr. added, "I am what I am because of the ass kicking he gave me, and also because of what he presented to me. I am my dad."

to make a living.” In all, he played seven years with the Chiefs and participated in two Super Bowls, I (1967) and IV (1970), the latter resulted in a victory. After that victory during the 1969 season, he retired from professional football. This transition from professional football allowed him to give greater attention to his leadership role with the Black Economic Union and business development.³⁶⁸

Curtis McClinton had a great deal of financial acumen, and he used his insight to further the NIEU’s objectives. At the age of twenty-five he co-founded the Swope Parkway National Bank, serving as Director and Executive Vice-President. In 1966, the bank began with \$750,000 and fifteen people on its staff, and in eighteen months doubled the size of their employees and had more than \$7,000,000 in capital. Swope Parkway was the first financial institution in the U.S. from 1940 to 1970 to “earn a net profit in its first full year.” McClinton’s work in the banking industry demonstrated his understanding of financial institutions and how to assist businessmen achieve monetary success. Aside from his work with Swope, he was also owner of the Urban Appliance Center, the first black-owned store of its kind in the Kansas City community, which carried “a complete line of appliances, kitchen remodeling, replacing and design systems.” McClinton also

³⁶⁸ Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, December 18, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author; Discussion with Curtis McClinton, June 4, 2010; White, 76-79, *KC Town Squire; Third and Long*, directed by Theresa Moore (Chicago: Tribune Media Services, Inc., 2011) DVD. McClinton likened his time at the school to “a bent, crooked-growing tree. It was slow and backward.” He expressed that he would have rather been in the Deep South “where [he] knew where a white man stood then [sic] to be in an environment where a white man would grin in my face and shake my hand to make me think that he is not bigoted...but he is.” Very few Blacks in the city or with “jobs of any importance.” It was at the school where he began his introduction to the principles of business ownership. In his time with the Chiefs, he played in Super Bowl IV, the Chiefs were the first team to have more Black players starting than White players. This was a reality of many AFL teams.

owned a 200 family housing development, which demonstrated that McClinton had the financial acumen the Union needed not only on its executive board, but also to move the chapter in Missouri forward.³⁶⁹

As a way to educate business owners, the Kansas City branch of the NIEU provided technical assistance and financial management clinics. The workshops that the organization facilitated helped African American businessmen understand the best ways to navigate funding obstacles. These workshops also focused on construction, which was an untapped business venture for African Americans nationally, especially in Kansas City. The KC chapter hosted ten and sixteen week courses on business administration. Consequently, attendees of these classes gained contracts worth \$460,000. This provided numerous African Americans in the city with job opportunities. It also demonstrated to financial institutions that they would receive a return on their investments. Hence, other Black businessmen in the area had the chance to secure future funding. A trade association was also created for Black businessmen “so they [could] obtain insurance and save on costs by buying as a group.”³⁷⁰

Despite new business opportunities for some African Americans, other Black entrepreneurs faced economic barriers. Curtis McClinton noted, “The biggest problem [was] the inability of the black businessman to attract consumers and the dollar outside of

³⁶⁹ White, “Curtis McClinton Looks Back,” 76, 79; “The Kansas City Chiefs Gain Offseason Yardage,” 17-18; McClinton formed a scholarship in his name for athletes who wanted to go into the field of business.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 4, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. While focusing his efforts on domestic development for Black people, McClinton also sought to expand the Union’s efforts internationally, specifically to Mombasa and Nairobi Kenya. One cultural difference there was that many of the Kenyans “got football confused with soccer.” While there he talked with people about the organization and the possibilities of the group developing a relationship with Kenya.

the inner-city area.”³⁷¹ Most African Americans did not financially support Black-owned businesses, as the majority of their capital was spent outside of their communities. According to McClinton, this caused “a major loss of black capital and jobs [that] has never been regained.” This was chiefly due to racial integration, which allowed for Black dollars to be spent at White companies.³⁷² Since the majority of African American businesses were located away from Whites, they were unable to reach a larger and more diverse clientele, resulting in lower profits. In an effort to alleviate this financial strain, Curtis McClinton sought to encourage an “evolution of commerce from black goods and services to the open market.”³⁷³

The lack of management skills and financial capital were other problems many Black enterprises experienced. As Curtis McClinton noted, “Even when a man has these things and is interested in doing business he must have the customers.” He encouraged those who came to him for help to get out to the predominantly White suburbs in Raytown and Johnson County, two prime locations for businesses to attract clientele. In all, there were numerous challenges faced by Black businessmen. With the high overhead to conduct business in suburban locales, African American owners were limited in their reach. There were also restrictive codes in the suburbs that limited the opportunities for Black folks to live in these areas. Thus, opening a store in communities where African Americans were denied the right to live there was a hard sell for many businessmen of color. Their thinking was if Whites did not want them to live in the area, then there was

³⁷¹ Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, December 18, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ “The Kansas City Chiefs Gain Offseason Yardage,” 18

no utility to establish a shop. One Black real estate company encountered racial hostility when it opened its doors in Johnson County in an effort to attract Blacks to the community. It was not long before White residents disapproved of the company's presence and broke the office's windows. Black-owned businesses in Kansas City faced many problems, but many of their issues were part of a national problem. According to a survey conducted by the Ford Foundation, in 1969 there were 163,000 Black businesses in the U.S. that brought in \$4.5 billion, yet the total receipts for all companies combined in the United States grossed over \$1 trillion that year. African Americans' spending power was estimated between \$20-30 billion dollars. Consequently, more than 80% of the expenditures available to African Americans went to businesses owned by people who were not Black.³⁷⁴

While many African Americans were not able to start their own ventures, several Black players with the Kansas City Chiefs, who were dues paying members of the NIEU, embraced the concepts of "green power."³⁷⁵ For example, Otis Taylor, a graduate of Prairie View A&M College and wide receiver for the Kansas City Chiefs, created his own business. He had a good understanding of financial institutions, which he gained while serving as Vice President of Civic Plaza National Bank, a small White-owned establishment. Although the position was initially "ceremonial," because he was a professional football player, Taylor learned the inner workings of banking. The skills he

³⁷⁴ White, "Curtis McClinton Looks Back," 78; Felice Levin and Arnold Spellun, "Public and Private Support for the Development of Minority and Poverty Group-Owned Businesses-A study with special emphasis on the role of foundations," Project Evaluation (A-73), Division of National Affairs, Ford Foundation Archives, January 1975, (002317)

³⁷⁵ White, "Curtis McClinton Looks Back," 78

learned in this position allowed him the chance to go into business for himself. In 1969, he started a nightclub in Kansas City called The Flanker. Taylor joined with Ollie Gates who gained fame through his Gates Bar-B-Q. Overall, the nightclub had moderate success. In hindsight, Taylor noted in an interview that he was not ready to operate a nightclub as “it took a lot of money. I invested a lot, and I trusted a couple of guys who stole from me. I think for every dollar I put into that club, they stole two.” Despite a brief background in financing, the knowledge he needed to run such an establishment could only come from experience. Taylor admitted, “I didn’t have the know-how or the time to manage [the club] right. I needed to be there all the time, and I couldn’t, especially during the football season.”³⁷⁶ He added, “It was open for two years, and if the stealing wasn’t bad enough, when it ran out and we closed, Uncle Sam came after me and hammered me on taxes.”³⁷⁷

Junious “Buck” Buchanan, a graduate of Grambling State University and defensive lineman with the Chiefs, joined with two local Kansas City businessmen to form a few businesses. One was a nightclub called Fifty-Yard Line “in the heart of Kansas City’s black section” where they took over a once rundown establishment and provided major renovations that included “new décor and membership policy.”

³⁷⁶ Otis Taylor with Mark Stallard, *Otis Taylor: The Need to Win*. (Champaign: Sports Publishing LLC, 2003), 177.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; “The Kansas City Chiefs Gain Offseason Yardage,” *Black Enterprise*, September 1970, 16-21; “Kansas City: Coping With Modern-Day Urban Dilemmas Sobers Once Bawdy Missouri Blues Town,” *Black Enterprise*, June 1972, 47-48; The Flanker was located at Prospect Avenue and East 59th Street. Product endorsements for African American ball players, regardless of sport, were also hard to obtain. While Taylor was a standout player in the 1970s, he sought to gain financially from his fame by backing products. “Everybody will pat you on the back and tell you how great you are, but they won’t give you an endorsement opportunity to talk about their product.” Fortunately, Gates provided him the opportunity to promote his restaurant and barbecue sauce, but it did not provide great revenue.

According to Buchanan, this provided them “a better clientele.” He also formed Bucks Lounge and the Birchtree Restaurant and Lounge. Like Taylor’s club, Buchanan’s establishments did not have long-term success. They simply did not achieve enough profit to warrant the doors to stay open, despite the fact he “made money” the first month. However, that did not stop the Chiefs defensive lineman from exploring other business interests. Buchanan, along with Otis Taylor and another teammate, Ernie Ladd, also invested in All-Pro Fried Chicken, a franchise created by Brady Keys of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The three men believed they had the necessary collateral to open the business but were “plagued by money problems, strikes and construction delays.” Along with those issues, the Small Business Administration (SBA) took longer than expected to approve their loan. While the business planned to open in 1969, it took more than a year for the business to finally open.³⁷⁸

Willie Lanier, a linebacker with the Chiefs, earned a business administration degree from Morgan State University in 1967, and took graduate courses in business at the University of Missouri-Kansas City during the offseason. He was also involved in developing his own enterprises. For example, Lanier invested in Hotsy, a drive-in restaurant. Like many other players at this time, this venture was a way for the Clover, Virginia native to prepare for life after football. Lanier proclaimed, “Everything I do is a hedge against the future...I think ball players realize that it is an interim thing, that they have to try to develop outside interests for the time when their playing days are over.” Aside from the fast food business, he was also involved with a southwestern land

³⁷⁸ “The Kansas City Chiefs Gain Offseason Yardage,” 17

development firm, and was a sportscaster in the offseason for a Kansas City television show. For him, “green power” was utilizing his star power for his own economic survival.³⁷⁹

While members of Kansas City chapter of the Union made efforts to convince Blacks to spend more of their monies within their communities, not all African Americans embraced the Union’s “green power” philosophy. Some promoted armed revolution and viewed capitalism as the major reason for the exploitation of people of color. McClinton remembered that in some social circles, Union members in Kansas City were seen as “Uncle Toms promoting capitalism” because Blacks in Kansas City did not readily accept talk of economic development.³⁸⁰ One African American man who was a member of a Black nationalist organization in the city told McClinton,

You are a white boy. You talk like them, you dress like them, and furthermore, every time I see you, you with one of them. How in the hell you gone come over here and lead me? You don’t know a damn thing about me.” He continued to critique the former Chief chastising him for driving “their cars” and in essence was “no different than a house slave...able to come in and out of the house.”³⁸¹

This particular incident was hard for McClinton to accept. It was difficult for him to bear the criticisms with the understanding there were Blacks who did not want his help because he was not considered “one of them.” From the perspective of this community member, McClinton exuded “certain morays and values of the white man and his system.” In a 1970 interview, he proclaimed, “Sometimes it’s hard for them to relate that

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 19

³⁸⁰ Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, December 18, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author.

³⁸¹ Ibid.; Discussion with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, June 4, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri.

I can feel the common need. There's a constant challenge of being accepted by those with whom I'm working on a day to day [sic] basis."³⁸² Despite the racial politics, McClinton continued to promote the ideals of the Union and earned the trust of those who sought the chapter's help. While McClinton made adjustments to people's attitudes and perspectives, the national board made a move in the same vein.

On Sunday, November 17, 1968, the NIEU's leadership officially changed the organization's name to the Black Economic Union (BEU). At a news conference Jim Brown stated, "'the Negro is dead and the black man is alive.'" This was a reflection in the change of consciousness of many African Americans and a cultural recognition of racial pride. The following day, the group officially opened the Union's Washington D.C. chapter. While this particular faction had been in existence since the Union's incorporation in 1966, the office in the nation's capital did not open formally until two years later. Bobby Mitchell, a critical component of the Washington Redskins team and aspiring figure in D.C.'s political leadership, led a makeshift unit with limited funds and resources in the early years of the organization. Yet, by 1968, he took part in other ventures, particularly with Senator Bobby Kennedy. The politician from New York asked Mitchell to join him in his efforts to get African Americans to involve themselves in their community and to become a political force in their towns.³⁸³ Thus, other members of the Redskins organization and community members had to pick up the mantle of the branch.

³⁸² Robert Moore, "Curtis McClinton: Man on the Go," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, 6 August 1971, 2

³⁸³ Alton Hornsby, Jr., "The Drum Major on the Mountaintop: A Tribute To Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 62, No. 3, July 1977, 213-216; Art Buchwald, "Bobby Tackles Redskin Problem," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 November 1963, C1; "Retarded

Arthur J. Mitchell, no relation to Bobby Mitchell, led the Washington, D.C. office and was particularly instrumental in securing loans from banks in the area to help Black entrepreneurs. Brig Owens, who was encouraged by Bobby Mitchell to work with the organization, served as Regional Director. In their respective roles with the BEU, one of their primary objectives was to help negotiate loan paperwork with local banks. The Union also conducted research projects that measured how businesses could improve. This was done so companies who sought the group's help would know what they were doing well and what areas needed to be strengthened to improve their enterprises. D.C. Union members also went into Black neighborhoods to gauge the interests of businessmen. A friend of Brig Owens, David Abramson, director of Abramson and Himelfarb Advertising, Inc., accompanied Owens and other Union members as they walked around D.C. neighborhoods and evaluated shops. When they came upon Black businesses, Owens explained, "We told them who we were, and did a survey in terms of

Olympics Start Today," *The Washington Post*, 20 June 1969, C3; Dave Brady, "Redskins' Mitchell Retires After 11 Years' NFL Play," *The Washington Post*, 9 September 1969, D1; Claudia Levy, "'Black Union' Opens Here to Aid Businesses," *The Washington Post*, 19 November 1968, C2; Alex Poinsett, "The Economics of Black Liberation," *Ebony*, August 1969, 152-153. According to Bobby Mitchell's daughter Traci, because her father was affiliated with the Black Economic Union from its inception, he believed he had the wherewithal to manage the difficulties and challenges he faced as the first black player for the Redskins. The two men had a relationship that lasted from 1962 to 1968, when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. Theodore Robert Hagans, Jr., the head of the Chamber of Commerce for the District of Columbia. United States Marshal Luke Moore, Simeon Booker, a journalist with *the Washington Post*, Bobby Mitchell, formerly of the Browns, and then with the Redskins also served on the board. Several city officials also were invested with the Washington office. Some notable figures were Mayor Walter E. Washington, Howard Samuels, the head of the Small Business Administration (SBA), and Reverend Walter E. Fauntroy, the vice chairman of the City Council were involved in the groups efforts. These men were some of the leaders of government agencies the Union worked alongside. The Washington, D.C. office was located in the Anacostia area at 3230 Pennsylvania Avenue. Several professionals, volunteers, and members of the Washington Redskins to staff the chapter accompanied Arthur Mitchell.

how we could help them improve their business.”³⁸⁴ They also took the opportunity to pose questions of their own. For example, if owners were having any problems, they asked the amount of time items were in display windows or how often they cleaned their storefront. In short, they “talked to them about better ways of doing business.” Owens summed up the method of visiting shops best:

When you look at it, how do you improve the quality of the minority business environment? How do you improve the quality of the housing there? What can you do? Educating people how best to buy, maximize the dollar. [Show] how important it is to have your books in order, and not have a bunch of receipts in a box. The importance of establishing a relationship with a bank, getting to know people in a bank, so they know who you are when you come in. More than just someone going to the teller.³⁸⁵

The office also conducted programs that taught business owners about consumer-education and management training. These classes were important because in 1968 Washington, D.C. had 800,000 residents, and African Americans made up 63% of that population, however they were only 3% of the business community. This large discrepancy was a major reason the BEU made it a primary objective to help businesses already in existence.³⁸⁶

Several Black construction contractors in D.C. with whom Brig Owens worked had problems securing bonding. He noted, “We went through the whole process of going through all the hurdles minority businesses had to jump in order to survive. Jim’s whole philosophy is that you have to give them the tools to survive in order to make changes.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

You can't give handouts." Initially, Owens and Mitchell directed business owners to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for support. The SBA instituted a "6x6" program for businessmen who could not obtain funding through traditional means, like banks, through the provision of \$6,000 over six years. However, after seeing how restricted companies became after seeking help from the SBA, they realized a relationship with the SBA was not beneficial to Black businessmen because the federal agency "tie[d] your hands and shoes so tight that once you went through them you could not do anything else. They wanted your first-born." Businesses that received aid from the administration were unable to get money from banks or other financial lending institutions. If the agency declined an individual support, it made their attempts to get help elsewhere much harder. After establishing relationships with banks, the Union was able to acquire conventional financing for D.C. businessmen. They were criticized for it, but as Brig Owens explained, "people were better off for it."³⁸⁷

By the summer of 1970, the BEU's Washington, D.C. branch dedicated much of their attention to providing technical assistance for people who wanted to improve their businesses. Like Cleveland, they had different initiatives in place such as loan programs and weekly advertising clinics that were attended by over seventy businesses in clothing, liquor sales, food, and other markets. In these seminars they discussed how to create advertisements in newspapers and what print materials to use to promote their products,

³⁸⁷ Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author. Bobby Mitchell embraced the tenets of the group, seen in the formation of the Bobby Mitchell Insurance Agency, which was located at 3230. Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. The BEU received a \$198,030 grant from the Department of Commerce on June 8, 1970 to assist the Union in D.C., Kansas City, and Cleveland.

how to buy radio time, and examined the best insurance policies to buy. By 1971, the D.C. branch was able to assist forty-four businesses with technical, and in some cases, financial support.³⁸⁸ Moreover, they were able to help companies build relationships with other financial institutions, and educate them on the best practices to sustain their business. Yet, sometimes, the technical assistance given did not always equate to long-term success.³⁸⁹

One particular business that embodied this quandary was Clean-Rite Maintenance Company, a custodial business started by Nathaniel Williams out of the trunk of his car in Washington, D.C. A graduate of Dunbar High School, the D.C. native got his start working two jobs, during the day with the U.S. Patent Office, and at night with a janitorial firm. In 1968, Williams was elevated to manager with his second job and quit his federal position. This promotion ignited an interest to start his own business. Fortunately, in 1969, he was provided a \$2,500 loan from the BEU's D.C. office to get started. In 1972, the SBA contacted Williams for work opportunities, primarily cleaning federal buildings, specifically the White House, the official residence of the U.S. President, and the Blair House, the official guest residences of the President. He was

³⁸⁸ Over 200 proposals were sent to the office for help but Union board members deemed many of the applicants' ideas unworthy of financial support.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; Joseph Whitaker, "BEU Plans Ad Clinic For Blacks," *The Washington Post*, 9 June 1970, A5; "Capital Commerce: Allegheny Posts May Advances," *The Washington Post*, 10 June 1970, D11; "City and State: Md. Panel Will Probe Police 'Harassment'," *The Washington Post*, 12 June 1970, C6. In an interview with Owens he stated in the weekly clinics some of the focus was on Black businessmen could "improve the spending of dollars, and the bottom line of how important it was they could do things collaboratively and how effective it could be. It was the first of its kind in the country. It made national news."

provided \$300,000 a year for these locations. A few months later, he was awarded three more contracts to cover Andrews Air Force Base, Fort Belvoir, and Goddard Space Flight Center, which totaled \$3 million. While Williams brought in large contracts, the time commitment to run his business prevented him pursuing other outside appointments. This prevented him from acquiring any extra money for the cleaning company, and essentially left him at the whim of the SBA for work prospects. In addition, the large properties required a larger employee base, which forced Williams to hire more workers. By 1976, he owed over \$100,000 due to bad negotiations and miscalculations on federal taxes. As Vernon Thompson for *The Washington Post* reported, federal allocations were “so haphazard” for Clean-Rite, the company “eventually had to apply for credit to pay his employees on time.” This greatly affected Williams as he soon gained a reputation as a businessman who did not pay his workers, which essentially damaged his ability to secure future contracts.³⁹⁰

Thus, Clean-Rite Maintenance’s story is a troubled one. In 1969 it began as a small operation that employed no more than twenty people, but by 1972, it employed more than 300 people. Nathaniel Williams obtained \$130,000 in loans from the SBA to help him get contracts worth more than \$9 million, which might have seemed positive, but his success led to a situation in which he had more work than he could handle. When he sought a solution to the over booking, the federal government told him he had the ability to refuse the federal contracts. Paul Lodato, a spokesman for the SBA said, “‘It’s tough to look a gift horse in the mouth, but you can always say, ‘I can’t handle it.’ You

³⁹⁰ Vernon C. Thompson, “Death of a Business: Rags-to-Riches Empire Succumbs to Over-Expansion,” *The Washington Post*, 8 February 1979, DC1

should know your business well enough to know whether you can handle additional business.’” The assessment of Williams’ situation spoke to the trepidation Brig Owens expressed sending Black entrepreneurs to the Small Business Administration.³⁹¹

By 1974, at the age of forty, Williams’ “rags-to-riches” story came to an end. His quarter-million dollar home was foreclosed and so were his offices. He also had to bequeath his two Mercedes-Benz sedans to a collection agency. Along with those losses, he owed creditors more than \$500,000, which forced the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to freeze his assets. With such a large debt unsettled, there were financial ramifications that affected Williams’ family. His son dropped out of college to earn extra income for the family since his wife’s salary as the principal of Keene Elementary School was not sufficient enough. It took years before they were able to pay off their debt. Nathaniel Williams believed if he did not get involved with the SBA, his business would not have suffered such a fate where his livelihood was wiped away. Considering the fiscal decisions Williams made during his tenure over his enterprise, the SBA was only one major factor in his financial demise. The lack of technical support, manpower, and federal limitations all played a role. In essence, Clean-Rite Maintenance serves as an example of the difficulties Black businessmen experienced particularly with government funding.

Namax Builders, New Breed, and Clean-Rite Maintenance were models of how “green power” served as a means for African Americans to serve as producers in the

³⁹¹ Ibid., DC2; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 3, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author; Interview with Brigman Owens, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 14, 2011, Washington, D.C. Recording in possession of author

American economy. While these enterprises had relatively small success, and did not endure the longevity their owners hoped, they served as a reminder to opponents of Black capitalism that if given proper technical and financial assistance, African American businesses could succeed if supported adequately. While the Black Economic Union assisted African Americans with the creation of enterprises, many of the group's members developed their own ventures as well. Some of the men developed restaurants, film companies, and agencies that represented athletes in professional sports. Thus, athletes who were members of the Union wanted to create businesses to provide financially for themselves, especially when their playing careers were over. The next chapter examines one player's journey to go into business and chronicles the difficulties he encountered in his strivings to use "green power" to develop businesses in Black communities across the United States.

Chapter 7

“They wanted to control you...They only wanted you to play football.”

Brady Keys, the NFL and the Quest for Green Power

On Thursday, February 29, 1968, the Student Action Coordinating Committee, a student group at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, invited John Wooten to speak for their Black National History Week. In his address he spoke on various topics such as the purpose of the Black Economic Union, the role of Black athletes in helping rid societal ills, and the importance of player unions in professional sports. He told attendees, ““The Negro in professional sports today represents a new thought and a new push into the economic mainstream of this country...Nowhere else can the Negro immediately hope to go out into the employment field and make an average of \$15,000 to \$20,000 beginning salary.”” Wooten added, ““The athlete realizes that he must do this to secure his future.””³⁹² While much of the Union’s impetus was on helping other African American businessmen with their business ideas, many of the Black men affiliated with the BEU also knew they had to utilize those principles for themselves.³⁹³

³⁹² “Recognition Programs At Ohio U.” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 17 February 1968, 5; The average salary for an African American male in 1968 was under \$6,500.

³⁹³ “NIEU Executive Joins National Leaders On Ohio U. Campus For Black History Week,” *Call and Post*, 2 March 1968, 6A; Department of Commerce, *Consumer Income*, (Washington, DC, 1969), 2-5; Floyd McKissick of CORE, and comedian Dick Gregory were also in attendance. Smokey Robinson and the Miracles provided a concert for attendees as well.

Black Economic Union members fulfilled their mission by creating their own enterprises, and there were a wealth of examples. Jim Brown was the brainchild of Main Bout Inc., he started his own film production company, and throughout the 1970s Brown became involved in the music industry serving as the manager for such musical talents as the Friends of Distinction, the Temptations, and Earth, Wind, and Fire. Willie Davis, a member of the Green Bay Packers, earned his M.B.A. from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business in 1968 and was a member of the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company marketing team in the “Windy City” beginning in 1963. After he retired from the NFL in 1969, he went into sports broadcasting. Brig Owens started his own law practice, and Curtis McClinton, Jr. established his own financial institution in Swopes Parkway National Bank, along with an appliance center in Kansas City. Bill Russell owned a restaurant in Boston, had a rubber plantation in Liberia, and was also “the sole distributor” of American music in the West African country. Bobby Mitchell had his own insurance agency, and was a consultant for Pepsi. Muhammad Ali, aside from Main Bout, joined with a group of businessmen to form the Champburger Corporation.³⁹⁴ Paul Warfield sold Firestone tires, and Sidney Williams worked at his shop, and also was one of the first African Americans in Los Angeles to sell Mercedes Benz luxury cars. Irv Cross, former member of the Philadelphia Eagles and BEU member since its inception, had dealings with the Yoo-hoo Beverage Company in Carlstadt, New Jersey. These men,

³⁹⁴ Due to the dietary restrictions of the Muslim faith, neither pork nor shellfish were sold at the restaurants.

through their own entrepreneurial acumen, utilized the principles of the BEU to develop their own businesses.³⁹⁵

The aforementioned professional athletes represent just a few examples of how BEU members sought to secure a livelihood for themselves away from the playing field. This chapter will assess the entrepreneurial efforts of one Black Economic Union member, Brady Keys, because an examination of his experiences will illustrate how he

³⁹⁵ Charles Heaton, "Browns' Stars Gain Control of Title Fight's Local TV," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 March 1966, 29; "What's Happening IN Westchester," *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 April 1967, 25; "'Big Jim' and His 'Friends'," *Sacramento Observer*, 29 May 1969, 14; "The Friends of Distinction," *Sacramento Observer*, 3 December 1970, B14; "Friends of Distinction to star at Oriental," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 27 November 1971, 21; Kay Bourne, "Magical Earth, Wind, & Fire dazzles L.A. sneak preview," *Bay State Banner*, 3 November 1977, 1; Don Waller, "Grooving to 30 Years of Earth, Wind, & Fire," *Billboard - The International Newsweekly of Music, Video and Home Entertainment*, 14 July 2001, 30, 45-46; Yussuf J. Simmonds, "The Los Angeles Sentinel Wishes Jim Brown 'A Happy 75th Birthday,'" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 February 2011, A16; "Star Green Bay Packer Joins Schlitz Team Here," *The Chicago Defender*, 2 February 1963, 5; "Research Analyst Newest Member of Famed Schlitz Family," *The Chicago Defender*, 22 June 1963, 18; "Davis to Get Master's at U. of C.," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1968, C2; Associated Press, "Packer End Gets Masters In Business," *The Washington Post*, 8 June 1968, D5; "Grambling Gridiron Signs TV Contract," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 April 1970, 34; "Schlitz Promotes Black To Top Midwest Post," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 13 June 1970, 3A; John Weyler, "Former Packer Doing Well," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1977, H12; Yusuf J. Simmonds and Jason Lewis, "Beyond the Sports Field," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 16 February 2012, A1; In 1971, Willie Davis was offered the head coaching position for the football team at Harvard University. Davis bought his first radio station in 1977 in Inglewood, California, which began All-Pro Broadcasting. He helped form Alliance Bank of Culver City, California; Interview with Curtis McClinton, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, December 18, 2010, Kansas City, Missouri. Recording in possession of author; "The Kansas City Chiefs Gain Offseason Yardage," *Black Enterprise*, September 1970, 17-18; UPI, "Russell Invests in Africa Rubber," *The Chicago Defender*, 14 January 1961, 24; UPI, "Russell Branches Out," *The Washington Post*, 20 February 1963, D3; "Celtics coach, Bill Russell to Speak," *Sacramento Observer*, 22 May 1969, 28; John Carmody, "The Pro," *The Washington Post*, 12 October 1969, 269; "Bobby Mitchell Offers Advice To Young Black Athletes," *Sacramento Observer*, 9 December 1971, B14; Geoff Brown, "Famous Names That Failed To Succeed In Business Ventures," *Jet*, 22 March 1979, 56-59, 65; Robert Lipsyte, "Sports of the Times: Foodstuffs," *New York Times*, 21 November 1968, 57; Personal resume of Sidney Williams, submitted with Project proposal for Job Interest and Motivation (J.I.M.) to Mayor's Council on Youth Opportunity on behalf of The National Negro Industrial and Economic Union, 29 February 1968; Edward H. Jones, "A Status Report of the Equity Development Component of The Black Economic Union," 25 September 1970, 11, Carl Stokes Papers, Manuscript Collection No. 4370.

embodied the Union's objective of bringing Blacks into the mainstream of the American economy through the creation of enterprises. As Brady Keys stated, "We needed to get together to bring about change. Jim as big and powerful as he was could not do it alone. Brady Keys as big and powerful as he was could not do it alone, but together could bring about change."³⁹⁶ An examination of his entrepreneurial endeavors will explain the obstacles he and many other Black men faced as they strove for success as businessmen.³⁹⁷

Brady Keys was born on Tuesday, May 19, 1936 in Austin, Texas, and was raised by his mother A.C., and aunt Clara. His mother worked as a domestic and beautician, and remarried when Brady was nine years old. It was a move that affected him greatly as he "had trouble adjusting to the marriage" and "resented having to share his mother."³⁹⁸ When his mom and her husband moved to Los Angeles, California, Keys stayed in Austin with his aunt Clara. However, by the age of fifteen he left Texas to join his mother in L.A. He described his early childhood as "just another one of countless, nondescript black boys—doomed to a lifetime of emptiness, inside some ghetto."³⁹⁹ Fortunately for

³⁹⁶ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

³⁹⁷ Edward H. Jones, *Blacks in Business*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), 191-192; Edward H. Jones uses the phrase "psychological catalyst" as one of the motivating factors for other Black businessmen to take risks with their companies after seeing success.

³⁹⁸ Eric B. Roberts, *From Football to Finance: The Story of Brady Keys, Jr.*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), 10.

³⁹⁹ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

him he was afforded the opportunity to play sports at Polytechnic High school, where he was involved in four sports and dominated in baseball and football.⁴⁰⁰

When Keys' senior year ended in 1954, the Brooklyn Dodgers offered him a \$10,000 contract to sign with them. He spurned the team, opting to go to college on a football scholarship receiving offers from UCLA and the University of Southern California (USC). Keys opted to play for the former, but because of poor grades he was unable to start right away. Thus, he enrolled at East Los Angeles Junior College to improve his scores and meet UCLA's academic standards. Unmotivated by school, Keys only lasted a year at the junior college. He remembers "telling jokes with a guy by the name of Richard Pryer [sic]. He didn't get his grades and neither did I." Thus, he was expelled from the school and began a very active party life, coupled with a job that only paid \$1.65 per hour.⁴⁰¹

No longer enrolled in school, Brady Keys still yearned to play football, so he joined the semi-pro Eagle Rock Athletic Club. In an exhibition game against the Los Angeles Rams at the Rose Bowl he was able to get his big break. Keys demonstrated his athletic abilities as he gained over 100 yards rushing on ten carries. This performance caught the attention of Fido Murphy, a scout for the Pittsburgh Steelers. After the game, Murphy presented Keys with the opportunity to sign with the practice team. Keys turned

⁴⁰⁰ "Poly Records Third Straight Eastern Victory," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1953, B3; John De La Vega, "Brady Keys Holds Key to Poly's Grid Hopes," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September, 1954, C3; "Poly Star Zips Hurdles in 19.5 to Pace Victory," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 1955, 10; "E.L.A. Hands Harbor First JC Defeat," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 1955, B2.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; 9-18; A.C. Keys remarried to Garland Franklin.

down the offer because he felt the deal was a slight at his talents. He believed he should be on the official roster. Murphy provided an alternative for Keys instructing him to enroll at Colorado State University (CSU), and play there until he could be drafted as a free agent by the team. He adhered to that advice, and during that time married Anna Marie Woodson. At CSU Keys was a standout for the Rams football team and maintained a 3.2 grade point average while studying business administration. Despite an 8-12 record, Keys played well enough to ensure Fido Murphy upheld his promise the Pittsburgh Steelers would select him when he became eligible.⁴⁰²

On Monday, November 30, 1959, the 1960 NFL Draft commenced and the Steelers selected Keys in the fourteenth round. He was signed to an \$8,000 a year contract. That year, Fred Williamson, a friend of Jim Brown's as well as a member of the Black Economic Union, showed the rookie "the ropes." He instructed the Austin, Texas native on how to conduct himself as a professional. While Williamson's time with the team was short, (he was traded to the Oakland Raiders the following year), he left Keys with important advice: "'Don't be patronizing with veterans.'"⁴⁰³ These directives were designed to protect Keys, who adhered to Williamson's advice and made sure he was focused on taking care of his own affairs and not worried about others. In all, the NFL was a competitive business and mixing personal with business was not a good strategy for any player who sought longevity in the league.

⁴⁰² Ibid.; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 18-20; "Eracs Tied by Marines," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1958, C5; UPI, "Soph Keys Leads Colorado State," *The Washington Post*, 15 November 1959, C7.

⁴⁰³ "Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967," *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011

During his rookie year, Keys spent the majority of his time on special teams returning punts and kickoffs. However, in 1962, he was switched to defensive back after an injury to another teammate put him in the starting lineup. He and Johnny Sample, another African American on the team, paired to be formidable foes for Steelers opponents. That year the team had its best season in thirty-seven years going 9-5. During the 1963 season, Art Rooney, the Steelers owner, remarked “not one of the exceptional wide receivers in the National Football League caught a touchdown on Brady.”⁴⁰⁴ The team rewarded him for his stellar play in 1964 with a new contract. However, everyone in Pittsburgh was not receptive of Keys. While playing with the team, Keys wanted to make his home in the area. At the end of the 1965 season, he and his wife looked for a home in Upper St. Clair, an affluent suburb of Pittsburgh. The home they were looking to buy was set ablaze. As a result, they moved their family back to Los Angeles, California while Keys continued to play for the Steelers.⁴⁰⁵

By 1966, his athletic skills proved effective as Keys garnered a reputation as a staunch defender, and was named an All-Pro and to the Pro Bowl team for that season.⁴⁰⁶ During that season, at the age of thirty, Keys began considering his post-retirement plans. He recognized that he would not be able to play long, and wanted to utilize his

⁴⁰⁴ Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 2

⁴⁰⁵ United Press International, “FBI Probes Fire In Negroes Home,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 30 December 1965, 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Associated Press, “Steelers Rout Cowboys, 37-7,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1961, 45; UPI, “Skoronski in Tough Spot, Replacing Packers’ Ringo,” *The Washington Post*, 21 July 1964, B2; *From Football to Finance, Jr.*, 2, 29-35; During the offseason, Keys worked with his real estate firm and also as a personnel executive and employment interviewer with Douglas Aircraft. In 1966 he also read *The Franchise Boom* by Harry Kursh. This book helped him understand the possibilities of creating his own business. He believed that he had a recipe for fried chicken that people would love, and he decided to test his theory. Johnny Sample was also a financial contributor to the BEU. The Steelers mark of 9-5 in 1962 would

background in business once he was done playing. He asked himself, “How long can I play football? How long can I play business?”⁴⁰⁷ Impressed by the Black Economic Union’s work, Keys reached out to Jim Brown and John Wooten in an effort to see how he could contribute to the organization. He remembered, “I used to love playing the Browns and Jim Brown. He and I had a grudge like you would not believe.” Keys added, “Lots of people were scared to tackle him – and he hurt me once. But he used to call me the Black Missile. We fought a lot then but became big friends after we were done playing football.”⁴⁰⁸ Keys saw the BEU as an important organization and joined the group in 1966 after Jim Brown and John Wooten contacted him to see if he would be interested in the promotion of Muhammad Ali’s fights under the banner of Main Bout in Pittsburgh. Since he had the necessary connections that would assist them, they felt Keys would be a welcomed addition. This business venture was the Texas native’s first introduction to the Black Economic Union. With the BEU’s help, the Steelers cornerback started his first business, Keys Auto Detail, later that year. A financial advisor at a bank told him the venture was “lucrative” and Keys bought fifty percent of the company. According to Keys, the company “failed miserably,” and he lost \$10,000, which was all of his savings. Yet, this failure did not deter Keys.⁴⁰⁹

During the summer of 1966, Keys, along with his mother and a couple of friends concocted what he called “a superb batter” for chicken. At a family gathering they served their recipe to the Keys clan, and it was well received. After the encouragement, Keys

⁴⁰⁷ Joy Jones Keys, “Celebrating the Keys Group Company 30th Anniversary,”

⁴⁰⁸ “Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967,” *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.; “Business and Black Stagnation,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1974, A5.

concluded to move forward with his plan to begin his own restaurant with fried chicken as the staple product.⁴¹⁰ Keys decided to utilize his connections with BEU leadership, particularly with Jim Brown as a way to get access to Bill Stennis of Golden Bird Fried Chicken and National Vice President of the Union. Keys wanted to build a relationship with the restaurateur because Stennis had established himself in Los Angeles in 1957 with the creation of his first restaurant. Over the next decade, his enterprises became a staple across the city. Brady Keys took notice and wanted to learn from the Philadelphia, Mississippi native. However, the Golden Bird founder was not initially eager to help Keys because he was under the impression the Steelers cornerback was his competition. Nonetheless, as Keys “told him I was not going to compete with him. Once I convinced him that I was not going to compete with him, he began to help me.”⁴¹¹ After working in Stennis’ restaurant pro bono and learning how to manage a business, Keys decided to establish his own restaurant.⁴¹²

In 1966, the average family income in the United States was \$7,300. Brady Keys earned roughly \$45,000 that year with the Steelers, but was unable to get the necessary loan to start his business. Eager to start his business, the Austin native was dumbfounded by his inability to get the vital start up money to begin his business. He told Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times*:

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.; *From Football to Finance*, 42; “Rites Held in Los Angeles For ‘Golden Bird’ Founder Willie ‘Bill’ Stennis, 69,” *Jet*, 12 July 1993, 51.

Every day I would read in the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* about all this money available to Negro businessmen. This [was] not true. There's money if you want \$10,000 for a little drug store, if you want to open a fruit stand. As long as you stay a consumer, there's money. But not if you want to be a producer.⁴¹³

To secure funding, Keys turned to Steelers owner Art Rooney, Sr. Keys remembered after a few seconds of presenting the request, all he “heard was silence on the line. I had to ask if anyone was still on the line. Mr. Rooney answered back ‘I am. I’m just trying to figure out how fast to get you the money!’”⁴¹⁴ Rooney wired Keys the \$10,000 he needed to get started, and as repayment expected him to be “successful.” This was a small favor for the All-Pro defensive back that would prove to be fruitful. While the Steelers owner was serious about Brady Keys’ business success, members of the coaching staff, particularly head coach Bill Austin, made attempts to keep him from beginning his business. They did not want their players doing anything “that did not fit the mold.” Most NFL coaches believed football was to be the only focus for players during the season. In their view, players who focused on developing their business plans did not make for a successful year. In essence, Keys was a businessman before the NFL allowed its players, Black or White, to be involved in matters off the field. There were no written guidelines on what a player should do during the season because the expectation was that he would focus on his craft as a footballer. In the offseason athletes were able to do as they wished, since they

⁴¹³ Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; “Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967,” *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011.

needed income for their families during the six months they were not covered by their respective teams. From the perspective of Keys, “They wanted to control you. I was one of the last persons to control. They only wanted you to play football.” Despite the efforts to block his plans Key moved forward as suggested by Art Rooney, Sr. and made preparations to open his first restaurant.⁴¹⁵

At 4:30 pm on Friday, January 27, 1967, All-Pro Fried Chicken opened its doors in San Diego, California. The timing of its grand opening was perfect because Keys had played in the Pro Bowl five days earlier, and he used the game and his status as one of the top players in the league to catapult the enterprise. He began the business in what he called ““the most adverse conditions.”” Keys argued businessmen base the success of their companies on ““the most favorable conditions, and that’s why most businesses fail.””⁴¹⁶ Keys’ restaurant started with two fryers, and due to the influx in customers, after two weeks he added a couple more to meet the demand. After three months, All-Pro in San Diego underwent renovations, because he ““had to tear up the place and put in new equipment.””⁴¹⁷ While the success of the first store created great possibilities, the second All-Pro restaurant in San Diego flopped miserably. This was for two reasons: location

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; Associated Press, “Steeler Star: Keys Turns Chicken—Into Profits,” *The Washington Post*, 20 August 1967, C3; Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50; “\$2.2 Million Capital Set For All-Pro Chicken,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 May 1970, 1, 4; The All-Pro Chicken menu used football terminology for meals: the first down, second down, third down, extra point, field goal, touchdown, and Brady Keys all-pro special.

⁴¹⁶ Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 44

⁴¹⁷ Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50

and the fact that Keys was “unfamiliar with the eating-out habits of white suburbia.”⁴¹⁸

What he learned from this failure was that he needed to do more research on how to find the necessary capital to promote his business and have an understanding of optimal locations for restaurants. Since the upcoming season was approaching, and Keys wanted to prepare for the physicality of the game, he relied on his business partner Tom Reich to handle the matters of All-Pro. In all, it was a fascinating time for Keys as he began his business efforts.

As the 1967 season got underway, Art Rooney, Sr. encouraged his defensive back to promote his business venture during a press conference. Coach Austin was not enthused and told Keys to go against the owner’s request. Keys told the head coach he had no right to tell Rooney what to do, and neither did he as a player since he was not owner of the team. Austin replied, “I’ll get you.” Needless to say, the press conference was held and the following day, Keys had write-ups in numerous national publications like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Forbes* about his efforts to develop eateries.⁴¹⁹

In terms of Brady Keys football career, because of his double duty as a professional football player and a businessman, Steelers coaches started to believe that he did not give the necessary attention to honing his football skills that offseason in comparison to other players. This story gained more attention specifically after the

⁴¹⁸ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; The first All-Pro was located at 5067 Logan Street.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.; “Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967,” *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011

Steelers began the 1967 season 1-3. During this time Keys suffered an injury to his knee, and requested to coaches and trainers that he not be forced to play. Despite his wishes, the plea was ignored and he played in the Steelers next two games, which they lost to the New York Giants and the Dallas Cowboys on last minute touchdowns that were given up by Keys. Ironically, after the Cowboys game, Steelers coach Bill Austin told reporters Keys “let us down again.” As a result of the losses, the coaches needed a scapegoat for the team’s dismal 1-5 start. As promised, Austin “got” him. The head coach convinced Art Rooney, Sr. that the twenty-eight year old, was “over the hill.” The next day, the club traded him to the Minnesota Vikings for two future draft picks.⁴²⁰

As the Steelers tried to get Brady Keys to quit his entrepreneurial efforts, so too did officials with the Minnesota Vikings. In Minneapolis, Keys utilized a great deal of his time focusing on improving All-Pro Fried Chicken, much to the dismay of Vikings head coach Bud Grant who argued, “Brady’s preoccupation with money might distract the contented Vikings when they should be concentrating on football.” Jim Brown’s retirement from the NFL and transition to movies coupled with the amount of money he made served as an example to other players that there were ways to make just as much money if not more outside of professional football. In that spirit, Brady Keys sought to secure his future through All-Pro Fried Chicken. Bud Grant told several people within Vikings Management the cornerback did not play professional football, but rather he

⁴²⁰ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; UPI, “Steelers Trade Keys to Vikings,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 26 October 1967, 38; UPI, “Keys, All-Pro Back Traded By Pittsburgh,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 October 1967, F2; Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 32; “Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967,” *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011

“played business.” Grant also encouraged Keys to give up his business efforts in order to play for the team.⁴²¹

Needless to say, Keys did not adhere to his coaches’ wishes, and was no longer enthralled with playing in the NFL. The dilemma was Keys had the prospect to make more money going into business for himself than as a football player. At that time, being a professional athlete was considered one of the highest paid professions since players made more in six months, than what the majority of Americans made in a year. Thus, “green power” was a reality for Keys who not only had an NFL salary, but also money from All-Pro Chicken. While he loved playing the game of football, and appreciated the pay he received, his desire to play the game began to wane. As the hustle and bustle of professional football began to overwhelm Keys’ business desires, he pondered retirement after the 1967 season. He understood the economic realities of playing professional football, and at any moment his career as an athlete would be over. Alternative work opportunities were a necessity for professional athletes.⁴²²

Since Keys was determined not to give up All-Pro, Bud Grant made true on his promise that he would not be a member of the Minnesota Vikings. At the end of season, executives for the St. Louis Cardinals inquired to Vikings officials about acquiring the rights to Keys. When Cardinals management had the opportunity to talk to Keys, they said, “We want to trade for you.” Keys responded, “You shouldn’t do that because I’m not going to fit your mold. I’m not your spook. I’m a thinking man and I’m a

⁴²¹ “Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967,” *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 50-51.

⁴²² Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 51

businessman.”⁴²³ After run-ins with his last two teams, the Steelers and Vikings, Keys had grown tired of appealing to the whim of coaches. He wanted to make sure the Cardinals understood he was not giving up his business efforts. Unfazed by his retort, St. Louis management asked that he feed the team during his first training camp. This was just the gesture Keys needed, but it was also misleading.⁴²⁴

As Brady Keys prepared for the upcoming 1968 season, he began discussions with Tom Reich about taking All-Pro Fried Chicken national. In order to do so, he had to get the financial capital to push the company to other cities. Based on the plans devised after the failure of the second San Diego restaurant, the two men determined they needed \$500,000 to ensure successful expansion. Reich proposed they create three franchises “in white areas [that] served as the ‘launching pad’ of All-Pro’s program” in Syracuse, New York. Like the second San Diego store these units also failed. Disappointed by the failures, Keys regrouped and got funding for more units. To do so, they joined with Walter E. Gregg, former president of Crucible Steel. While Keys wanted to impact the Black community, he believed he needed buy-in from Whites first. From his point of view, they had the necessary capital to help him create his national vision. However, because of the early failures, the recipe for success was not apparent.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.; Allan Jaklich, a *Chicago Tribune* writer joked the name of company reminisced of a “Sunday TV cartoon series for children”

⁴²⁵ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author. All-Pro was not all-Black. While Brady Keys served as President and Chief Executive, there were whites on the board of the company. Walter E. Gregg, a former executive with the Crucible Steel Corporation served as chairman; attorneys Thomas M. Reich and H. Arnold Gefsky, were executive vice president and

Keys' idea to start a fried chicken business was not endorsed by many of those close to him, and for good reason, since most food enterprises did not last long. Leonard "Len" Burnett, a close friend and teammate of Keys with the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1961 laughed at his friend for his idea of All-Pro Chicken. Burnett asked, "Who the hell you look like trying to start a fast food restaurant?"⁴²⁶ There was good reason for Burnett's skepticism as numerous African Americans with large followings tapped into the fried chicken market only to fail. In 1968, famed gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, considered the "Queen of Gospel," started her own company, Mahalia Jackson Chicken System Inc., and opened restaurants in Memphis, Tennessee. Her slogan was "It's Gloree-Fried, and that's the gospel truth." The opening day was such a success that she believed the great number of people, primarily African Americans, were sure to return. Weeks after the inaugural gathering, numerous Black men and women walked in front of the store "with their hands up in a Black power salute" with boxes of food from White-owned Kentucky Fried Chicken.⁴²⁷ Jackson, frustrated by lack of support, reportedly said, "Niggers still think the White man's ice is colder, and the White man's water is wetter."⁴²⁸ In lieu of low sales, the "Queen of Gospel" perceived her own people betrayed her. Yet, there are many factors that can be attributed to lack of success for Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken: oversaturated market, the quality of their product, and a genuine relationship and investment on behalf of the company in the community. Essentially, the business

secretary respectively, and Walter D. Thomas, an education consultant, was vice president of inner-city affairs.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Robert A. DeLeon, "Man Behind Changes to Make Radio, TV Relate to Blacks," *Jet*, 21 December 1972, 23.

⁴²⁸ Geoff Brown, "Famous Names That Failed To Succeed In Business Ventures," *Jet*, 22 March 1979, 65.

closed operations after a year of operations as the stock for the company went from \$40 to \$.50. Brady Keys was destined not to follow the same path as the famed singer.⁴²⁹

While a few All-Pro stores were opened in 1967, All-Pro had difficulty expanding in 1968. None of the banking institutions that Keys and Reich reached out to were willing to lend them financial support. The former Steelers cornerback blamed race, because for “a Black man in the sixties trying to raise money, there was nothing but obstacles.” He remembered several conferences and meetings with Reich and Gregg where potential supporters were caught off guard by the presence of Keys. He believed none of them wanted to support a company where the president and primary stockholder in the company was African American. As Keys recalled,

The banks and the investment house, they gave me canned good excuses. ‘Mr. Keys, you don’t have enough assets in your company.’ Well if I had enough assets I wouldn’t be there asking for money. ‘Mr. Keys, you don’t have enough management talent in your company.’ This was a lie. I had a big white lawyer and a bright steel executive on my board, but I made clear that I was the president and the chief officer. So when they talked about management talent, you know they were talking about me.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ Bill Rawlins, “Singers Try Chicken Business,” *The Washington Post*, 7 July 1968, F1; “Mahalia Chicken Execs Graduate,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 28 January 1969, 6; Jack Nelson, “Negro Must Own at Least 50%,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1969, F9; James J. Nagle, “Food Franchising Whirls in a Star Galaxy,” *New York Times*, 4 April 1969, 47; “Display Ad 30,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 20 June 1970, 15; Geoff Brown, “Famous Names That Failed To Succeed In Business Ventures,” *Jet*, 22 March 1979, 56-59, 65; Edward H. Jones, *Blacks in Business*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), 178; For more on the life of Mahalia Jackson see: Jules Schwerin, *Got to Tell It: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lorraine Goreau, *Just Mahalia, Baby*, (Victoria, Australia: Firebird Press, 1998); Roxane Orgill, *Mahalia: A Life in Gospel Music*, (Somerville: Candlewick, 2001); Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 53-54; All-Pro headquarters were located at 2945 Banksville Road in Pittsburgh. Len Burnett played a key role in Keys’ business ventures working together for over forty years. As of 2012, they had worked together in business for forty years.

⁴³⁰ Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50

Keys may have been justified in his claims regarding the racism he experienced during his visits to financial institutions. However, many of the issues financiers brought to his attention had validity. He did not have enough assets as he was just starting his enterprises, which had moderate success at best. Also, many bankers had great reason not to support Keys' ventures since many professional athletes' businesses were not very lucrative despite their celebrity. Regardless of the "management talent" supporting him, it is fair to assume, based on his background alone, Brady Keys' economic ideas did not warrant the financial support he sought. In all, Keys was not deterred; he was determined to see his business aspirations fulfilled. Fortunately he would get much needed financial help from an unlikely source. Buddy Young, one of the early African American players of the NFL with the St. Louis Rams, directed him to financial advisors with First National City Bank of New York. After discussing his business plans with them, All-Pro was given a \$150,000 deal, and the bank bought twenty percent of the company. Interestingly, this arrangement did not sit well with his new team despite their initial support.⁴³¹

While Cardinals management was open to Keys serving the team during training camp that was not the case when the season started. One of St. Louis' coaches told him "we don't do things like you do. We don't play business here. We just play football." Keys responded, "well, you shouldn't have traded for me...I'm not just a football player.

⁴³¹ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; "Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967," *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 59-73.

I'm smarter than that. I can eat and tie my shoes at the same time."⁴³² Despite their reservations, the Cardinals kept him on the team because they needed to utilize his talents in the defensive backfield. However, the coaching staff's animosities came to fruition on Sunday, October 13, 1968. That day St. Louis played the Cleveland Browns for its fifth game of the year. During the matchup, after a defensive stance against the Browns' offense that led to a fourth down, Keys headed for the Cardinals sideline. Apparently he was not moving fast enough to the chagrin of one coach who yelled, "'Hey, you idiot, why don't you run?'" Keys lost his composure and ran over to the coach, grabbed him and shouted "'Hey man, who're you talking to?...I'll kill you! I'll kill you!'"⁴³³ Cardinals' players and coaches broke up the skirmish and Keys was benched for the rest of the game, which they won 27-21. In the aftermath of the blowup, Keys was eventually benched for the rest of the year. As the season ended, the Cardinals went 9-4-1 just missing the playoffs by one victory.⁴³⁴

Reflecting upon that year Keys noted, "I was the poster boy, but when it looked like I was going to be big and out of control that's when they decided to sit me down. The team ostracized me. Players white and black ostracized me. The black players didn't want to get in trouble being apart of my program."⁴³⁵ In this context, many NFL teams were particularly nervous as the prior summer numerous Black players around the league challenged their teams' for better pay and more playing time. As John Wooten referenced

⁴³² Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 57

⁴³³ Ibid., 58

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 57-58; Associated Press, "Cards Upset Browns, 27-21," *The Washington Post*, 14 October 1968, D2; Associated Press, "Cards Win, 27-21," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1968, C2.

⁴³⁵ "Brady Keys, Steelers Cornerback, 1961-1967," *Pittsburgh Sports Daily Bulletin*, 1 November 2011

in his meeting with NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, there was talk amongst owners, that there was a plan for Black players to takeover the league. This notion coupled with Brady Keys' business interests and his failure to defer to his coaches put him out of good standing with many ball clubs. As was custom with his previous teams, there was a willingness on the part of the Cardinals to get rid of him.

In February 1969, the St. Louis Cardinals traded Brady Keys to the New Orleans Saints. Instead of continuing his professional football career in another city, Keys decided he would not play that season. On Monday, July 7, 1969, prior to the opening of training camp, he officially announced his retirement from the NFL. In his statement he spoke of plans to donate at least \$15,000 a year to the NFL players' pension fund. As he told reporters, "I feel I owe the league something." In a way he did, the money he earned playing football allowed him to provide for his family, and also aid his franchises.⁴³⁶

By 1969, All-Pro had seven franchises worth nearly \$2 million. Because of this success, Keys was ready to target the Black community, an area he considered a priority especially in regards to his work with the Black Economic Union. Therefore, the first restaurant established in a Black community was opened in April 1969 in the Bedford-

⁴³⁶ Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 66; Bob Oates, "Keys 'Fears' Snow Will Regain Form Against Cardinals," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 1968, C1; UPI, "Keys Retires From Football," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 July 1969, B2; "About Pro Football," *New York Times*, 16 February 1969, S2; UPI, "Keys Quits NFL To Sell Chicken," *The Washington Post*, 8 July 1969, B3; UPI, "Keys Retires From Football," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 July 1969, B2; UPI, "Keys Retires From Football," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 July 1969, B2; While Keys believed he needed to repay the NFL, the league also had to pay him. Keys received the help of lawyers from First National City after he was "tipped" that he was "blackballed." According to Keys, "They said we can't make the NFL keep you but we can make it worth your while to leave. They told me not to talk to anyone – even Pete Rozelle- that they would get lawyers and file a \$50 million dollar lawsuit against the NFL.

Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, New York. Waldo Jeff, an African American man who was a counselor at Queens College, and former teammate of Keys at Colorado State University, ran the franchise. Within their first month, the business brought in \$4,000 a week. The success of the Brooklyn location demonstrated to potential financiers that All-Pro had the ability to provide a return on their investments, particularly in Black communities.

For many years, White investors avoided supporting Black businesses, especially those in African Americans neighborhood due to the economic ramifications of the riots that engulfed the nation in 1968 in response to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. The damage to businesses that occurred as a result of the looting scared many banks from supporting African American enterprises. Yet, All-Pro's modest success came at a cost, as "there was an awful lot of hardship and frustration." Keys noted, "Now if I had that kind of trouble with contacts and a good job and something of a name, what about other Negroes?" As the All-Pro brand grew and gained recognition "bankers kept saying, 'Mr. Keys, you're doing something no Negro ever did before.'"⁴³⁷ Yet, banks were not willing to assist Black business owners like they helped Keys. The All-Pro President believed if he achieved at his business, he would be an example that other African Americans can accomplish their goals, and not have to endure the hardships he witnessed in the early stages of starting his company.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Robert Lipsyte, "Sports of the Times: All-Pro Chicken," *New York Times*, 26 August 1968, 50.

⁴³⁸ Robert A. Wright, "Family Recipe Pays Off for a Negro Athlete," *New York Times*, 7 June 1969, 47; Philip H. Dougherty, "Advertising: Lots of Action on the Avenue," *New York Times*, 20 June 1969, 65; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 57-59; Allan Jaklich, "Chicken Outlets Pad Athletes' Roosts," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 February 1969, C10; He incorporated All-Pro

Brady Keys deeply resented himself for not using his celebrity to further the cause of the Black freedom struggle in the 1960s, but saw the formation of All-Pro as a way to contribute. By 1969, Brady Keys understood the importance of his role as an African American businessman in tangible and symbolic terms as well. Keys noted, “I want to be a model for the jillions of black people who want to go into business. What I’m trying to do, I think, will do more to ease the racial problem than all the poverty funds. We want to be part—a significant part—of the system.”⁴³⁹ For him, his primary focus of bringing other Blacks into entrepreneurship by embracing the Black Economic Union’s ideology of “green power” through owning their own franchises.

In October 1969, after months of conference calls, meetings, and negotiations with financiers, All-Pro Fried Chicken secured more than \$3 million in investments. This was a great achievement as Brady Keys was able to do what many Black businesses failed to do: acquire enough capital to ensure long term growth. Also that month, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced a new initiative to recruit “minority groups” to own and operate franchises, which was a component of President Richard Nixon’s initiative to assist “minority business” development. All-Pro aligned with this program to recruit African Americans to own and operate at least twenty-five franchises by the end of 1971. While Keys fell extremely short of his goal of one hundred All-Pro restaurants

Enterprises Inc. in 1968, which later served as the parent company of his Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King chains. Had a company plane, a twin engine Apache. Raymond League, the first Black account executive with J. Walter Thompson, and executive of Zebra Associates provided financing to Waldo Jeff for his All-Pro Chicken franchise in Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York

⁴³⁹ Robert A. Wright, “Family Recipe Pays Off for a Negro Athlete,” *New York Times*, 7 June 1969, 47, 52

functioning by the end of 1969, he did establish fifteen, with many owned by professional athletes.⁴⁴⁰

With \$30,000 needed to purchase an All-Pro franchise, many sports stars were captivated by Keys success, and in 1970 numerous “All-Pros” invested in the company. Lou Brock, a member of the St. Louis Cardinals of Major League Baseball (MLB) owned a restaurant in the city in which he played. In February 1970, All-Pro Fried Chicken opened in Kansas City. Building upon his relationship with Curtis McClinton, Keys inspired Ernie Ladd, Otis Taylor, Buck Buchanan, and Jan Stenerude, teammates of McClinton with the Kansas City Chiefs and BEU supporters, to invest in his restaurants. This particular association between these men is critical as it represents an effort by Black male professional athletes to combine their monies to serve as a foundation for business development in Missouri. Altogether, six other All-Pro franchises opened across the city that year. That same month, Willie Stargell, a first baseman with the Pittsburgh Pirates of Major League Baseball (MLB) bought into Key’s franchise, and formed Stargell’s All-Pro Chicken. Stargell’s restaurant had early success, but it did not come easy for him. He noted, “I have been working long hours in the community, trying to show people that I am a part of the community, not one of those guys that come around

⁴⁴⁰ Allan Jaklich, “Chicken Outlets Pad Athletes’ Roosts,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 February 1969, C10; United Press International, “20 Firms Join Plan For Negro Franchises,” *The Washington Post*, 3 October 1969, A2; United Press International, “20 Firms Join Plan For Negro Franchises,” *The Washington Post*, 3 October 1969, A2; The other companies who supported this effort were Dairy Queen, Uniroyal, Burger King, Dunkin’ Donuts, Car-Matic, Arby’s, Bresler’s, Thirty-three Flavors, Ziebart Process, Rayco, All-Pro Chicken, Convenient Food Mart, Mopar, Carvel, Lums, House of Pancakes and Dunhill System. Some of the other companies who joined were McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, B.F. Goodrich, and Davis Paint.

once a day to pick up the money.’’⁴⁴¹ The Pirates infielder not only wanted to be successful, but he wanted to position himself as a symbol of advancement. This was a means to uphold the BEU motto “produce, achieve, prosper.”

While Black professional athletes were admired for their prowess on the athletic field, off it many African Americans desired they demonstrate a commitment to helping others. As Stargell’s aforementioned comments suggest, people in the Black community were not blindly supportive of business because African American professional athletes were attached to them. However, Stargell had a connection to the Pittsburgh community, particularly the Hill District. The Pirates first baseman sponsored a baseball league for youth there, and during the offseason gave his time to community centers working with children. Bob Vogel, an offensive lineman with the Baltimore Colts also bought a restaurant. Vogel, White, added to the interracial element of All-Pro. He joined with Lonnie Sanders, a former St. Louis Cardinals teammate of Keys who also owned a franchise. The two men sought to start twenty chains in the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland areas utilizing federal funding to aid their commercial interests.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ “Pirate Baseball Star Opens All-Pro Chicken In Hill,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 February 1970, 18;

⁴⁴² Display Ad, *New York Times*, 5 September 1968, 78; “All-Pro Chicken Opens New Outlet in Kansas City,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 February 1970, 13; “Pirate Baseball Star Opens All-Pro Chicken In Hill,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 February 1970, 18; Claude Harrison, “Pirates’ Willie Stargell Is All Business on and Off Playing Field,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 17 April 1971, 17; Sam Goldaper, “Roundup: Stargell Hits 3 Home Runs for the 4th Time,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1971, 49; Murray Chass, “Stargell Clouts 26th As Pirates Defeat Mets, 6-2,” *New York Times*, 24 June 1971, 47; Claude Harrison, “Pirates’ Willie Stargell Is All Business on and Off Playing Field,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 17 April 1971, 17; Murray Chass, “Mets Trounced By Pirates, 6-0,” *New York Times*, 22 June 1971, 23; Cassandra Hayes and Rhonda Reynolds, “25 Years of Blacks in Franchising,” *Black Enterprise*, September 1994, 125, 126; Advertisements for All-Pro Chicken read: “Wanted: Big-League Investors for All-Pro Chicken, Inc. ...a leading new entry in the big money fast-food franchise industry.” The corporation was described to

While numerous players achieved success, there were also many others with failed ventures in the restaurant business. New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath started Broadway Joe's Inc., an eleven chain fast food restaurant that lost \$243,900. This particular flop hurt Namath regarding future partnerships, as investors looked elsewhere seeking the endorsement of other players instead of the Super Bowl III MVP. Mickey Mantle, famed baseball player with the New York Yankees, also joined with Namath for an employment agency called Mantle Men and Namath Girls, Inc. However, their outreach was "dormant" and the company did not have much success. Mantle was also chairman of Mickey Mantle's Country Cookin' with eleven restaurants that closed after two years of operations. The BEU attributed such shortcomings to the inability of many businessmen to connect with the communities they served. There was an understanding amongst Union members, that their status as professional athletes would not guarantee them financial success. They had to be intimately involved in the success of the respective neighborhoods where their businesses were located.

Art Modell, Cleveland Browns owner, argued players were "'exploited by the entrepreneur and the promoter because of the value of their names.'" He added, "'They're used to the public adulation so the idea that their name alone can bring in business sounds logical.'"⁴⁴³ Many representatives for athletes began to ensure that none

potential financiers as "a rapidly growing nation-wide franchise system of modern, fast-food outlets featuring the new "Southern Crisp" taste in chicken and a unique, new ALL-PRO Sports concept." The Kansas City All-Pro was located at 75th Street and Prospect Street. Stargell's restaurant was located in the Ellis Hotel at 2044 Center Avenue in the Hill District. Every time he hit a homerun, whoever placed an order in his restaurant at that time received their food for free. This was a great strategy to get folks into the business.

⁴⁴³ Carole Martin, "Franchising: A Big Loser for Athletes," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1971, E1, E4

of their players had to invest their own funds. Charles Barnes of Sports Headliners, Inc., a representative of Orenthal James “O.J.” Simpson, a running back with the Buffalo Bills, told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, ““If we don’t have to put up the money, and he gets an employment contract and stock, we’d consider it.””⁴⁴⁴ Essentially several companies made “use of a star’s name to cover up poor merchandising.” What separated Brady Keys from the likes of Namath and Mantle is that he was not a “front man” for any company. All-Pro was his idea and not initiated by an outside enterprise, which was to his benefit.⁴⁴⁵

In late May 1970, All-Pro Chicken was recognized as one of the United States’ ten largest interracial owned businesses as it totaled \$2.2 million in stock and notes. Several major corporations like Aetna Life, The Travelers Insurance Company, Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company, and Berkshire Life Insurance Company bought stock in the enterprise. Their investments served as the impetus for Keys to enact his plan for the company to “significantly expand” by 1972 through franchising. To do so, a venture was formed with Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), a food conglomerate who brought in more than \$100 million a year with 3,500 franchises throughout the world with roughly 3,000 restaurants in operation across the United States primarily in White communities. They sought to expand into Black communities particularly those in the major urban areas. Dick Beeson, the Executive Vice-President for KFC contended African Americans would not buy their product from a “Kentucky colonel,” who from

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Paul Delaney, “Namath Tells Franchise Inquiry Business Isn’t a Passing Fancy,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1970, 21; Despite business failures, Mickey Mantle’s clothing stores had success.

their viewpoint was a symbolic bastion of slavery. Fundamentally, KFC officials were aware of the racial dynamics at play. “Black people eat a lot of chicken,” Beeson added, “Why shouldn’t we sell it to them?” With the success of All-Pro Fried Chicken in Black communities, KFC leadership recognized that in order to reach the market of African Americans, they had to change their marketing format. Brady Keys represented that transformation which allowed their brand to extend into Black neighborhoods.⁴⁴⁶

The symbolism of Colonel Harland Sanders was not the only issue KFC had to handle. In previous years, the Kentucky based company had come under fire for the colonel’s support of the presidential nomination of former Alabama governor George Wallace, who staunchly supported segregation. This was illustrated in his 1963 inaugural address when he declared “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” Sanders was a business icon that was the founder and symbol of KFC, thus the chicken retailer’s connection to a racial separatist coupled with their effort to reach African Americans was not a good recipe for success. In the spring of 1970, John Y. Brown, Jr. reached out to All-Pro executives to meet with Brady Keys. After exchanging pleasantries, Brown said to Keys, “I heard some nice things about you, Brady... What can I do to help you?” Keys retorted, “I am not seeking help. You asked me here to see you, and I’m ready to listen. I’m the president of a company much like yours. A better question to ask would be: What can we do to help each other?”⁴⁴⁷ From that point, Keys and Brown developed a working relationship, which led to the formation of Brady Keys

⁴⁴⁶ “\$2.2 Million Capital Set For All-Pro Chicken,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 May 1970, 1, 4; Aaron Latham, “Black, White Firms Form Partnership,” *The Washington Post*, 16 September 1970, B1; Proceeds from the stock sales were used to build thirteen more restaurants.

⁴⁴⁷ Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 86

Kentucky Fried Chicken. As a means to prepare for the integration of the two companies, in June 1970, the Brady Keys Urban Talent Development, Inc. was formed. It provided \$350,000 to teach two thousand African Americans over the course of two years industry administration. The training program provided interested franchisees the skills to run their own restaurants, and the knowledge of the economic responsibilities of business ownership. They served as the first cohort of owners of the Brady Keys Fried Chicken franchises. By 1970, African Americans comprised only 2.5% of the franchising population, and this group would help increase the number of business owners. In all, All-Pro Chicken through the deal with Kentucky Fried Chicken had more than 135 restaurants in eleven cities owned primarily by Black athletes.⁴⁴⁸

By September 1970, the All-Pro/KFC venture was made official at the Congressional Hotel in Washington, D.C. Representatives of both companies announced they were joining together to form one hundred new franchises called Brady Keys Kentucky Fried Chicken. Catering to cultural and racial politics, all photos of Colonel Harland Sanders were replaced with images of Brady Keys on signs, packages, and advertisements. With sixteen All-Pro restaurants in existence at the time, Keys had fourteen under construction, and eighty others under commitment from others seeking to join the company. The new partnership opened five stores in Detroit, Michigan. Both companies also agreed to an equal split of investments (which totaled \$200,000), costs

⁴⁴⁸ Aaron Latham, "Black, White Firms Form Partnership," *The Washington Post*, 16 September 1970, B1, B11; "All-Pro, Kentucky chicken firms merge," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 September 1970, 28; "All-Pro Chicken will join with Kentucky Fried," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 21 November 1970, 17; Leah Michele Wright, "The Loneliness of the Black Conservative: Black Republicans and the Grand Old party, 1964-1980" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2008), 211; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 87-92; The first store opened at 2281 Gratiot Avenue in Detroit, Michigan.

and profits. Fortunately this effort had the support of the Nixon administration, who promoted the belief franchising was the way to create jobs and business opportunities for African Americans.⁴⁴⁹

By 1971, Brady Keys had developed a reputation as a business magnate and caught the attention of Washington policy makers. Despite the many naysayers who argued the government's funding of "Black capitalism" was a failure, the All-Pro president served as an example of the benefits of federal support for Black business. Donald Rumsfeld, a Republican congressman from Illinois, urged Nixon to promote his program as a way to attract Blacks to the "Party of Lincoln." Jim Brown also encouraged Nixon to endow programs orchestrated through the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE). The BEU founder believed federal support, and not so much allegiances to political parties, was needed to assist Black businessmen and this unit was one of several ways to do so. Intrigued by his work, Nixon selected Keys to his National Advisory Council with OMBE. Along with that appointment, he was also chosen to serve on the Equal-Opportunity Committee of the International Franchise Association, making Keys the first African American to be on that organization's board. During a meeting he told committee members, "Franchising will have a very significant impact on our GNP. By 1980, all food will be bought frozen or pre-cooked, and the rest will be bought through the services provided by the fast-food concept." He added, "Franchising in the

⁴⁴⁹ "All-Pro, Kentucky chicken firms merge," New Pittsburgh Courier, 19 September 1970, 28; "All-Pro Chicken will join with Kentucky Fried," The Baltimore Afro-American, 21 November 1970, 17; Both companies each contributed \$1 million to finance the venture. Colonel Sanders left the company earlier that year, but was retained as an ambassador for the company receiving a \$60,000 salary.

1970's will provide the foundation for growth and development of Black Capitalism much greater than in any form of business."⁴⁵⁰ In January 1971, Brady Keys joined with Model Cities to continue his training program. Classes for this program focused on interest rates, bookkeeping, and the necessary skills to run their own businesses or take part in All-Pro Chicken franchises. By February, over sixty people completed the training, but only a third of them were placed with jobs. Many people, as Keys noticed did "not want to go out and look for a job." In 1960, fast food accounted for \$500 million, while in 1970 it accumulated for \$6.5 billion.⁴⁵¹

In the fall of 1971, Brady Keys spoke before a U.S. Senate sub-committee on the value of franchising as a means to boost the American economy and the benefits it provided African Americans in urban areas. From his experiences, he gathered the presence of Black businesses were a necessity not only as entities that provided jobs, but also to serve as positive institutions for the communities they served. As Keys told biographer Eric B. Roberts, when White business owners who had a long history of selling goods in African American neighborhoods began "defecting from the black communities, the vacuum they left was not being filled by black entrepreneurs."⁴⁵² In essence, the lack of financial capital, and acumen in many cases left the majority of Blacks without the wherewithal to start their own business. To help fill this void, the

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.; Joy Jones Keys, "Celebrating the Keys Group Company 30th Anniversary," 3.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.; Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 92; In January 1971, Brady Keys joined with Model Cities to continue the business acumen development training for interested Blacks. Classes for this program focused on interest rates, bookkeeping, and the necessary skills to run their own businesses or take part in All-Pro Chicken franchises. By February, over sixty people completed the training, but only a third of them were placed with jobs. Many people, as Keys noticed did "not want to go out and look for a job."

⁴⁵² Roberts, *From Football to Finance*, 81-82

Department of Commerce provided funding to several fast-food chains in an effort to bring African Americans and other historically marginalized groups into franchise ownership. Kentucky Fried Chicken, a restaurant that specialized in fried chicken, was one business that took an interest in expanding to African Americans.

John Y. Brown, Jr. the President of KFC saw Brady Keys as “a leader in the black community” who was optimistic about the collaboration. Keys noted KFC had ““never been active in the Black community in any meaningful way.”⁴⁵³ He added, “This venture will show that Blacks and Whites can work together. Just imagine what would happen if this concept of ours were duplicated by 100 other corporations.”⁴⁵⁴ As the two corporations agreed earlier in September 1970, the foodservice group gave Keys “Black America,” which consisted of hundreds of stores, and as soon as the partnership was finalized, he transitioned his All-Pro Chicken operations and opened the restaurants with Kentucky Fried Chicken. The first two were in Detroit, Michigan, and quickly became two of the most profitable in the nation. Shortly after the creation of these locations, in March 1971, Brown, Jr. began talks to sell KFC to Heublein Incorporated, a company that specialized in food and alcohol sales. Their acquisition of the fried chicken giant provided them \$200 million in revenue. The conglomerate sought to exploit a market where there was an average of 150 million meals served outside of the home in the United States, and commercial eateries like fast-food restaurant accounted for \$28 billion annually.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Associated Press, “Heublein, KFC Plan Merger,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1971, C12.

⁴⁵⁴ “All-Pro, Kentucky chicken firms merge,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 September 1970, 28.

⁴⁵⁵ “Heublein, Incorporated 1971 Annual Report,” *America’s Corporate Foundation*, 1-4.

While the sale of the company was advantageous for John Y. Brown and KFC officials, it was not beneficial for Brady Keys. All of the paperwork for the deal was to be handled in Connecticut, so Keys flew out to the northeast, but did not take any legal counsel with him. He believed he had enough insight on the negotiations and knew what to expect, but Keys was wrong. When he arrived to the meeting location, Heublein executives told him, “What we are going to do is finance six stores with you. Our six stores will be better than your one-hundred thirty five.” No provisions were made on his behalf for him to keep his territory rights to the restaurants he gained from his earlier arrangement. Keys agreed to the deal after they convinced him that they would invest “millions of dollars” into the franchises. In retrospect, he noted, “If I had not been too big, too bad to seek help, I would still be in business in today.”⁴⁵⁶ By the end of 1971, Heublein had its’ eleventh straight year of record gains, and grossed over \$600 million in total net sales from all of their businesses with KFC providing a 19% increase in sales with KFC, as they expanded the total number of overseas stores to 600. The company exhibited the vigor of a corporation who wanted to tap into international markets as a way to expand their profits. While Heublein increased their presence internationally, domestically Brady Keys holdings in KFC were decreased.⁴⁵⁷

This marked a turning point for Keys as he financed several Burger King franchises, a fast food restaurant that specialized in the sale of hamburgers. By early

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author; “Heublein, Incorporated 1971 Annual Report,” *America’s Corporate Foundation*, 1-4.

1973, this investment proved fruitful, but it was not without some early difficulties. The “finicky customers” he encountered early urged him to modify the chain’s most notable sandwich, the Whopper. He responded by customizing the sandwich based on customers’ orders, as a means for them to “Have it your way.” Key’s catchphrase caught on and was soon endorsed by Burger King headquarters. The slogan “turned out to be the fast-food chain’s last great advertising campaign.”⁴⁵⁸

Despite the rejections Keys encountered early on, by 1973, Brady Keys was able to capitalize on his past successes to get the necessary funding for his businesses, primarily through federal programs supported by the Nixon administration that aided “minority businessmen.” Fortunately for some Black professional athletes, their “degrees, reputation, and personal finances afforded them a certain kind of privilege that, combined with government support, created favorable conditions for entrepreneurial success.”⁴⁵⁹ Knowing the leverage he held as a former professional athlete, Keys knew to use the federal support to his advantage. He did so by creating several All-Pro Fried Chicken and All-Pro Burger King restaurants on the eastside of Cleveland, as well as in Detroit and New York.

By 1974, Brady Keys’ was the highest grossing Black restaurateur in the nation earning \$7 million a year as chicken and hamburger restaurants flourished, and he relied on federal grants to expand his business interests. During that time, he secured over \$5.5

⁴⁵⁸ Display Ad16, *Call and Post*, 16 December 1972, 14A; Cassandra Hayes and Rhonda Reynolds, “25 Years of Blacks in Franchising,” *Black Enterprise*, September 1994, 125, 126

⁴⁵⁹ Leah Michele Wright, “The Loneliness of the Black Conservative: Black Republicans and the Grand Old party, 1964-1980” 210-212. All-Pro restaurants in Kansas City, Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh and Newark were closed after filing for bankruptcy.

million in loans to help him open over fifty franchises in major cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Newark, and Washington, D.C. These restaurants provided thousands of jobs and were a great source of revenue for the company. By 1974, Keys was considered the “food industry’s leading minority businessman.”⁴⁶⁰ Such success allowed him to grow his company. In August 1974, he acquired several franchises with A&W International, a subsidiary of the United Brands Company (UBC) and the oldest food chain in the United States. Keys reached an agreement with UBC to form seventy franchises in Black communities across the United States. As a result, he built franchises in New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland as a way to strengthen his holdings in the restaurant business that he lost after the merger with KFC in 1971.⁴⁶¹

Unfortunately, by 1974, the company began to have many issues. Curtis Hill, the director of operations for the company’s restaurants in Cleveland noted, “‘We’re not doing as well as we had expected but that can be attributed to the economic situation in Cleveland...Most of our stores are located in the inner city where unemployment is highest and money is scarce.’”⁴⁶² Hill’s point demonstrates that while All-Pro wanted to help develop the communities where they existed, it was not profitable for them to be in locations with such dire poverty. Coupled with that was the lack of competent managers to direct the restaurants. Often Keys recruited leadership from Detroit and New York to

⁴⁶⁰ “Business and Black Stagnation,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1974, A5.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.; Associated Press, “Restaurants Loan to Spur Black Chain,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1971, 10; “All-Pro Chicken To Open 19 New Restaurants,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 January 1972, 25; “\$5 Million Loan for Brady keys,” 10 March 1973, 17B; “Fast-Food Franchise Given \$5.5 Million Loan by EDA,” *The Washington Post*, 16 March 1973, D12; Leah Michele Wright, “The Loneliness of the Black Conservative: Black Republicans and the Grand Old party, 1964-1980,” 210-212.

⁴⁶² James Lawrence, “Brady keys Official Denies Chain Is White Controlled,” *Call and Post*, 7 April 1973, 1A, 4A.

head the chains in other cities, like Cleveland. While he wanted to provide opportunities for African Americans in the city, he had trouble finding suitable candidates to operate the stores. Frustrated, Keys told a reporter with the *Call and Post*, “I don’t know what’s wrong with this city.”⁴⁶³ While successful in other cities, All-Pro developed over fifteen eateries that sold fried chicken and hamburgers in Cleveland, seeing its’ best year of sales in 1973. By the following year, the economic recession “reduced All-Pro from a proverbial shooting star to a flash in the pan.”⁴⁶⁴ Unfortunately for Keys, the company was unable to get an economic foothold in the city.⁴⁶⁵

The demise of All-Pro chicken was not fully a direct result of Keys’ alignment with KFC. Yet, the magnitude of the deal has to be considered. While Keys was enthusiastic about that fateful collaboration, forty years later he noted, “That was the single biggest mistake I made in my entire life. I don’t think I ever made a bigger mistake by joining up with Kentucky Fried Chicken...I had my own...one hundred thirty-five franchises.”⁴⁶⁶ Despite what All-Pro may have been, Brady Keys formed the Keys Group in 1976, which assisted other corporations as they explored “Black markets.” He understood the power of franchising and how to reach people, and was able to do so over four decades employing thousands. While many of the All-Pro stores closed by the 1990s, Keys went into radio and television production, and also opened stores in several airports across the United States. In 2004, he sold his last Brady Keys Fried Chicken

⁴⁶³ “Firms Is Seeking Black Managers,” *Call and Post*, 22 September 1973, 1A, 4A.

⁴⁶⁴ Richard Nevins, “Millions of Dollars Lost As Brady Keys Fast Food Empire Collapsed From Within,” *Call and Post*, 2 October 1976, 19A

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.; William O. Walker, “Down The Big Road: Can We Survive,” *Call and Post*, 13 October 1973, 2B.

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with Brady Keys, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, September 29, 2011, Orlando, Florida. Recording in possession of author.

restaurant, ending the franchise's run of thirty-seven years.⁴⁶⁷

As a businessman, Brady Keys accomplished a great deal during the 1960s and 1970s. In comparison to other entrepreneurs at the time, his trajectory was an anomaly compared to the typical path taken by Blacks and Whites alike. Keys started in a predominantly White community in San Diego with the help of \$10,000 from Pittsburgh Steelers owner Art Rooney, Sr. From that assistance he transformed his business idea into one of the largest Black-led corporations in the United States. Despite the restrictions placed on him by numerous NFL officials and financial institutions, Keys was steadfast on expanding his commercial interests. What followed were numerous firsts for the Austin, Texas native: the first Black person to be primary principal and chief operating officer of franchising company in the United States; one of the first people in the U.S., regardless of race to own two different fast-food franchises; the first African American to be on the board of the Equal-Opportunity Committee of the International Franchise Association, and was the majority investor in Pennky Mining and Oil Company, making him the first Black man to do so in that industry. While these firsts were important, they hold greater value because after forty years as a businessman, Brady Keys was able to bring thousands of African Americans directly and indirectly, from different socioeconomic backgrounds into jobs and business ownership, upholding the goal of the Black Economic Union. He was able to “produce, achieve, [and] prosper” bringing others into the mainstream of the American economy, a true manifestation of green power.

⁴⁶⁷ Allan Jaklich, “Chicken Outlets Pad Athletes’ Roosts,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 February 1969, C10; Keys Technology Group, “The Early Years of Brady Keys, Jr.,” accessed November 11, 2012, http://keysgroup.com/read_the_history.html; “Keys Group Milestones,” accessed November 11, 2012, <http://www.keysgroup.com/milestones.html>.

Chapter 8

Epilogue

In the forty years since the Black Economic Union was founded as the Negro Industrial and Economic Union, only two chapters—Cleveland and Kansas City—are in existence today. While the organization’s mission has changed, these two units still focus on Black business development, as well as construction and the development of urban housing. Long gone from the BEU are the men who initiated these offices. Many of the original Union brass left the group by 1975 for two primary reasons, with the first based on personal interests. Many of the men involved had different visions and expectations of their roles within the organization. Thus, they engaged new opportunities outside of the organization when they were presented the opportunity to do so. The second was for financial reasons. While Jim Brown wanted African Americans, and particularly Black athletes, to fund the organization, that particular goal was not fully reached. They depended heavily upon federal funding. While the organization was able to raise \$2 million the BEU fell short of their ultimate goal of \$10 million. With the benefit of hindsight, this goal was perhaps a bit too ambitious. Although Union members may have earned considerably more money than the average American, they were not financially well off enough to donate the necessary amount to reach their initial objective. However, this did not deter Union members from their aims. As A. Deane Buchanan noted, “Most

of the athletes were dealing with survival issues.”⁴⁶⁸ While the players were able to give financially, many of the programs the Union created depended primarily on outside funding. This greatly affected their overall utility since there were regulations and stipulations on how the money could be allocated.

Additional funding issues existed because of BEU’s allocation of loans and other financial support. Monetary aid was also a matter addressed annually, based primarily on the BEU’s dependence upon private money from such sources as the federal government and the Ford Foundation. Assisting African American enterprises was a major priority for the organization, and often quantity took precedence over quality. Jim Brown contended that the Union helped four hundred Black businesses over the organization’s tenure from 1966 to 1974, but the majority of those enterprises did not have longevity, thus leading to closed businesses and loan defaults. When entities like the Ford Foundation granted the Union financial support, the funds lasted only three to four years. This created problems for the BEU because once the funding was gone they had to seek funding elsewhere which was not guaranteed. While the Black Economic Union did not last as long as many of the men would have liked, many of its members sustained their activism post 1970s. As the life of Brady Keys exemplified, Black Economic Union members made lifelong

⁴⁶⁸ “Black Builders Contending For More Of The Construction Pie,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 December 1973, 28; Claudia Levy, “Units Funded By OMBE Back Agency,” *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1975, D7; “BEU grant,” *Call and Post*, 8 March 1984, 15A; Interview with Judge A. Deane Buchanan, in-person interview with the author, digital recording, September 24, 2010, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Recording in possession of author; “BEU grant,” *Call and Post*, 8 March 1984, 15A; “Two Rehabilitated Buildings Bring New Life To University Circle Area,” *Call and Post*, 8 November 1980, 9B; Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author.

commitments to the betterment of the Black community. They also continued to challenge the NFL on racial politics particularly with administrative positions, and participated in several community service projects.⁴⁶⁹

In April 1971, the headquarters of the Black Economic Union moved from Cleveland, Ohio to Los Angeles, California. As the national offices moved out west, John Wooten sought other interests as well. That same year, he helped form Pro Sports Advisors, Inc., a sports management agency where he served as President and represented over one hundred players from the professional football, basketball, and baseball ranks. He served in this role for several years before becoming a scout with the Dallas Cowboys in the late 1970s. After more than a decade in that position, Wooten held numerous high-level positions in the NFL. In 1989 he was promoted to Director of Pro Personnel for the Cowboys, two years later he was appointed the Director of NFL Player Programs, and in 1994, he was named Vice President and Director of Player Personnel Operations with the Philadelphia Eagles, making him one of the highest-ranking African Americans in the league. Wooten's tenure in the NFL exposed him to racial inequalities among players and even coaches. This eventually led to his involvement with the Fritz Pollard Alliance - an organization dedicated to the eradication of the 'good-ole boy system' and the promotion of "minority" head coaches in the NFL. Today, he serves as

⁴⁶⁹ A. Deane Buchanan, in-person interview with the author, digital recording, September 24, 2010, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Recording in possession of author.

Chairman of the group, and continues to raise awareness about the dearth of coaches of color in the league.⁴⁷⁰

Wooten was not the only member of the BEU to remain connected to the NFL. During the 1970s, Willie Davis was a color commentator for NFL games with NBC. By the 1980s, Davis was the recipient of several football accolades. In 1981, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Five years later he received the Walter Camp Many of the Year award (1986), the Career Achievement Award from the NFL Alumni (1987), and was elected as a member of the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame (1988). He also served on the board of numerous companies like Alliance Bank, MGM, and Johnson Controls. He even went on to create the Willie Davis Distributing Company, and was the “largest West Coast operation for 12 years” of Coors beer, which made it the second largest Black owned company in Los Angeles next to Berry Gordy’s Motown Records. In addition to his distribution company, Davis also owned five radio stations: two in

⁴⁷⁰ “John Wooten Directs NFL Player Programs,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 September 1991, 6; Gerald Eskenazi, “Sale of Cowboys Expected Today, and Landry Might Be Out,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1989, 49; Associated Press, “Cowboys’ Buyer Hires a New Coach,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1989, S5; “Superlatives Pour In For Jones,” *The Washington Post*, 27 February 1989, D4; “Cowboys Name Wooten Director Of Pro Personnel,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 24 August 1989, B4; “Charlie Cherokee Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 3 April 1971, 5; “BEU Moves Main Office,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 15 April 1971, B6; “BEU Moves National To L.A.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 August 1971, A12; “John Wooten Directs NFL Player Programs,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 September 1991, 6; “NFL Establishes Continuing Education Program for Players,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 28 November 1991, B2; “Philadelphia Names Wooten To Position in Front Office,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 22 March 1994, 6; “Wooten Named Eagles V.P.,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 April 1994, 7; “Ex-Football Pros Seek Hire Ground in NFL,” *Afro-American Red Star*, 22 March 2003, A1; Daniel Gray, “NFL’s First Black Head Coach Inducted into Football Hall of Fame,” *The Tennessee Tribune*, 11 August 2005, B1; In this position as Director of NFL Player Programs, Wooten reported to NFL Executive Vice President of Labor Relations Harold Henderson. Wooten represented “outstanding players,” such as Otis Armstrong (drafted by the Denver Broncos in 1973, first round, ninth overall), Charley Taylor (NFL Hall of Fame, class of 1984); Darryl Stingley (drafted by the New England Patriots in 1973, first round, nineteenth overall); and Buddy Bell who played with the Cleveland Indians in Major League Baseball.

Milwaukee, and one each in Los Angeles, Houston, and Seattle. In the 1980s, these business interests grossed \$15 million annually.⁴⁷¹

After his days in the NFL, Sidney Williams worked with the BEU until 1974 and then obtained an advanced degree in business from Pepperdine University. Following his graduation, he served as a legal aid for the 10th district of the Los Angeles City Council for two years. From 1976 to 1979, he was Project Manager with the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency. Williams used his business acumen from the BEU and Pepperdine and worked with Mercedes-Benz, from 1979 to 1993, and became the first African American in Los Angeles to own a dealership that sold the automobile. In 1994, U.S. President Bill Clinton, appointed him as the United States Ambassador to the Bahamas, the first African American to serve in that capacity. Despite lacking any foreign policy experience, Williams worked in this position for four years where he helped develop the United States' relationship with the Caribbean country.⁴⁷²

Curtis McClinton continued his own pursuits after he left the Black Economic Union. In retirement, McClinton pursued degrees in higher education. He earned a

⁴⁷¹ "Blanda Chosen To Hall Of Fame," *Oakland Post*, 8 February 1981, 5; Gordon S. White, "Pro Hall Inducts 4 Members," *New York Times*, 2 August 1981, S9; Bob Oates, "Tackling the Business World: For All-Pro Lineman Willie Davis Those Million Dollar Contracts Were Waiting in Another World," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1982, E3, E15.

⁴⁷² Interview with Sidney Williams, telephone interview with the author, digital recording, March 29, 2011, Los Angeles, California. Recording in possession of author; "Today in Congress," *The Washington Post*, 16 November 1993, A4; Al Kamen, "In the Loop," *The Washington Post*, 29 November 1993, A17; Steven Greenhouse, "Clinton Is Faulted on Political Choices for Envoy Posts," *New York Times*, 13 April 1994, A15; Deborah A. Culp, "Cultural Exchange at Best," *Michigan Citizen*, 18 February 1995, A2; "The Mysterious Others: Political Husbands," *New York Times*, 14 March 1999, SM15; Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Williams told them "his football skills helped him develop 'strategic thinking and negotiating skills,' that would prove valuable in a diplomatic career." Despite the lack of experience, his nomination for Ambassador to the Bahamas was held at 8:30 am in the Senate on November 16, 1993.

master's degree from Central Michigan University, and graduated from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Following graduate school, he went on to serve as Director of Real Estate Marketing with Amtrak during the 1970s. Under U.S. President Jimmy Carter, he was appointed the Director of Special Projects with the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration in 1980. During his tenure in this position he was given the Parren J. Mitchell Special Achievement Award for his "untiring support and assistance" to the financing of "minority business."⁴⁷³ In 1983, McClinton was chosen Deputy Mayor for economic development in Washington, D.C. by then Mayor Marion Barry. In this role he helped businesses in the district secure funding from financial institutions. Aside from his federal work, McClinton was inducted into the Kansas City Chiefs Hall of Fame in 1994, the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 1999, and the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in 2007.⁴⁷⁴

By 1974 Brig Owens was no longer working with the Union as he utilized his juris doctorate from Potomac School of Law as Assistant Executive Director and Associate Counsel to the NFLPA from 1979 to 1984. In 1985, Owens created Super Leaders, a nonprofit organization that aspired to help schoolchildren from Washington, D.C. graduate from high school. Each year the organization assisted 50 to 100 students each from seven schools in the D.C. area. In 1990, the NCAA bestowed Owens with the

⁴⁷³ "Private Sector Investors Awarded," *Washington Informer*, 17 April 1980, 16

⁴⁷⁴ "Black Business: A New Beginning?" *Black Enterprise*, January 1980, 21; "Curtis McClinton Honored," *The Skanner*, 14 May 1980, 19; "Receives Doctorate," *Jet*, 17 July 1980, 16. Eric Pianin and LaBarbara Bowman, "Curtis McClinton Jr. May Succeed Donaldson: Former Chiefs Star Expected To Take Deputy Mayor's Job," *The Washington Post*, 21 September 1983, C1, C8; "Black Super Bowl History," *Miami Times*, 24 January 2007, 10D. McClinton also received an honorary doctorate from Miles College in 1980.

NCAA Silver Anniversary Award for his community service in the nation's capital. By 1994, Super Leaders aided more than 2,000 students complete their educational requirements through a support system made up of volunteers from the organization. In addition to his work on the non-profit sector, Owens was hired as a sports agent representing many notable players such as Washington Redskins players Doug Williams and Art Monk, 1994 #1 overall pick Dan Wilkinson, and New York Knicks basketball player Charles Smith. Today he is a partner with Bennett & Owens, a law agency that caters to sports management and real estate.⁴⁷⁵

After his playing days were over, John Mackey served as a representative for players with the William Morris Agency, Incorporated. He also worked for the Indiana Black Expo, which was "known for its extensive programming for youth and families, health initiatives and business workshops," as the History Management Coordinator.⁴⁷⁶ In 1992, twenty years after he retired, John Mackey was enshrined in the NFL Hall of Fame, a selection that was long overdue, since he was recognized by his peers as the greatest tight end to play the game. He attributes his long-awaited induction to his involvement with the NFLPA. In a 2000 interview with Canton news reporters, Mackey stated that his push for better pay and healthcare benefits for retired players displeased members of the Hall of Fame selection committee. More than fourteen years after his induction, the

⁴⁷⁵ "Wilkinson Released In Salary Cap Saga," *New York Times*, 30 July 2003, D7; Christine Brennan and Neil H. Greenberger, "Williams Released in Redskins' Youth Movement," *The Washington Post*, 31 March 1990, G1; David Aldridge, "Redskins' Monk Gets Browns' Attention," *The Washington Post*, 26 February 1994, G1, G3; Leonard Shapiro, "Monk Aims For Record Grab Today," *The Washington Post*, 10 December 1994, C7; Display Ad 22, "How Do You Convince Kids in DC They Can Actually Go Further in the Seat on the Right?" *The Washington Post*, 16 December 1994, A23; Clifton Brown, "Smith and Knicks: Bad Blood Still Flows," *New York Times*, 28 December 1996, 37.

⁴⁷⁶ Danyella Davis, "Indiana Black Expo reaches 40-year milestone," *Recorder*, 9 July 2010, 3.

NFLPA and the NFL agreed to a much improved retirement package for players. A section titled the “88 Plan,” which was later dedicated to Mackey for his hard work and commitment, guaranteed retirees “\$88,000 a year for nursing or day care for any former players with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, or \$50,000 a year for home care.”⁴⁷⁷ A few years later Mackey was diagnosed with dementia. Within ten years of his diagnosis the former athlete and BEU member passed on July 6, 2011 in an assisted-living facility. Many believe his illness was directly related to the numerous concussions he suffered in his career and the physicality of playing football for a decade. His condition brought attention to the financial plight, as well as, the physical and mental well being of NFL players in retirement.⁴⁷⁸

Long known as the “Jackie Robinson” of the Washington Redskins, following his retirement after the 1968 season, Bobby Mitchell served in the front office with the Redskins as Director of Pro Scouting, Executive Assistant to the President, and Assistant General Manager. The latter position he held for nineteen years. While he had minor aspirations to become a coach, his ultimate goal was to be the General Manager of the team. After forty-four years with the team, the opportunity never presented itself due to the racial practices of team ownership. It was an ordeal which Mitchell greatly resented. In 2003, Mitchell was awarded the inaugural Paul “Tank” Younger Award by the Fritz Pollard Alliance. While holding back his tears, he told those in attendance, “I spent over

⁴⁷⁷ Ron Wynn, “NFL Legend Passes,” *The Tennessee Tribune*, 14 July 2011, 5B.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.; Ken Denlinger, “Outcasts No More, Mackey, Davis Enter Hall Today,” *The Washington Post*, 1 August 1992, D2; Jack Chevalier, “Football Hall of Fame to honor former inductees,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*, 28 July 2000, 2C; “Hall of Famer Mackey dies at 69,” *La Prensa*, 10 July 2011, 3B; Ron Wynn, “NFL Legend Passes,” *The Tennessee Tribune*, 14 July 2011, 5B; John Gibeaut, “Thrown for a Loss,” *ABA Journal*, Vol. 97, Issue 11 (November 2011), 16-17; “Remembrances,” *The Washington Informer*, 29 December 2011, 18.

40 years with the Washington Redskins and the best I could do was an internship. I interned for 40 years. Maybe this alliance won't let that happen again."⁴⁷⁹ Aside from his work in the NFL, Mitchell also worked closely with the Leukemia/Lymphoma society in Washington, D.C. helping them raise millions of dollars in donations for research.⁴⁸⁰

In 1986, Walter Beach was inducted into the Central Michigan University Hall of Fame. More than forty years after he played his first professional football game, Beach was still concerned with image politics within the NFL. In 2003, he composed an op-ed to the *New York Times*. He wrote:

When watching games now, it saddens me to observe some players' behavior. Often they are dancing and making faces (sometimes signing a football or talking on a cellphone) after a successful play, even if their team is losing. Scoring touchdowns, making tackles and interception passes are what professional players are supposed to do. That is their job. The dancing and jiggling that goes on after these plays often seems like show-business behavior and cheapens athletic excellence.⁴⁸¹

He added "You don't get extra points for how well you dance in the end zone."⁴⁸²

These types of celebrations in Beach's view were disrespectful to the game. In the 1990s and early 2000s, he served as Chief of Recreation for Brooklyn Parks with the New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation. Today, he handles the

⁴⁷⁹ Sam Doku, "Bobby Mitchell Honored for 44 years of Diligence to the Redskins," *The Washington Informer*, 26 March 2003, 25; Marvin Wamble, "NFL's Bobby Mitchell honored with FPA's Younger Award," *Michigan Chronicle*, 9 April 2003, C1.

⁴⁸⁰ Dave Brady, "Redskins' Mitchell Retires After 11 Years' NFL Play," *The Washington Post*, 9 September 1969, D1; Sam Doku, "As Doku Sees It: Bobby Mitchell and the Fight to Retire His Number," *Washington Informer*, 26 March 2003, 24; Sam Doku, "Bobby Mitchell Honored for 44 years of Diligence to the Redskins," *The Washington Informer*, 26 March 2003, 25; Marvin Wamble, "NFL's Bobby Mitchell honored with FPA's Younger Award," *Michigan Chronicle*, 9 April 2003, C1. A sports field in the Congress Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C. was named in honor of Mitchell in 2000.

⁴⁸¹ Walter Beach III, "Stop Preening," *New York Times*, 21 December 2003, SP9

⁴⁸² Ibid.

east coast operations of his friend Jim Brown's organization, Amer-I-Can in New York.⁴⁸³

Jim Brown was elected to the NFL Hall of Fame the first year he was eligible in 1971. He continued his acting career over the next forty years starring in over thirty films. Some of his most notable pictures were *100 Rifles*, *Three the Hard Way*, and *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka*. Brown also lent his time and money to a film company Nathaniel Productions, and partnered with famed comedian and actor Richard Pryor to form Indigo Productions where he served as President. In 1988, Brown founded the Vital Issues Project, which grew into Amer-I-Can, a life skills development program that reaches out to gang members and prisoners as well as students in American schools. Twenty-four years since its inception, the program continues to teach a fifteen-step course that provides its participants with the "foundation and tools for achieving a prosperous life." As of 2012, the program is sponsored in fourteen states.⁴⁸⁴

Despite his business interests, over the years Brown has held steadfast to the belief that professional athletes, especially Black players, can make change in American

⁴⁸³ Amy Waldman, "Bias Case Gains Against the City: U.S. Agency Finds Evidence of Parks Dept. Discrimination," *New York Times*, 5 February 2001

⁴⁸⁴ Associated Press, "Pro Football Hall of Fame Inducts 7 Saturday," *The Washington Post*, 25 July 1971, C7; "Jim Brown enters Hall of Fame," *Sacramento Observer*, 11 February 1971, B11; Jodie Valade, "Finding Holes: Jim Brown had a way of making something out of nothing. These days, he's trying to do the same thing off the field," *Plain Dealer*, 5 September 2004, C1; A.S. "Doc" Young, "Jim Brown: Part I," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 4 August 1977, A7; Shelby Sankore, "The Color of Comedy: Black, White, Gray," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1979, N7; Lee Grant, "Pryor Denies Racism in Brown Case: Brown Firing," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 December 1983, F1; Associated Press, "Richard Pryor Ouster of 4 Blacks Criticized," *New York Times*, 17 December 1983, 14; Keith Corson, "Trying to Get Over: African American Directors After Blaxploitation, 1977-1986" (PhD diss., New York University, 2012), 139; A.S. Doc Young, "Jim Brown: Man of Action," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 May 1990, A7; Tracey L. Walters, "Prepare for Success: The Amer-I-Can Way," *about...time*, 31 January 1994, 18; William Reed, "Jim Brown: He got game," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 May 1998, 5.

society through political and social activism. For him, “If they came together, they could raise millions of dollars from the government, millions of dollars from the public.” He added, “They can have a tremendous impact on the violence, a tremendous impact on the schools. But they have to do it collectively. Everyone does it individually, now. Individual charity work is like giving someone a fish. Collective change is what’s needed. That’s like teaching people how to fish.”⁴⁸⁵ As was the case for African Americans throughout the 20th century, police brutality, lack of jobs, health disparities, poor schools, and a criminal justice system that punishes Blacks at a disproportionate rate are several issues athletes today could address collectively. Many former Union members recognize today’s players address issues particularly through their own foundations and they give financially to social causes. Nonetheless, there has yet to be a collective effort of Black men who were unified and willing to bring to the forefront the problems within the nation since the 1970s. For Jim Brown, many players from his period “gave up careers for black freedom, equality and justice,” as the 1960s and 1970s “was an era of political consciousness.” He believes current players are engulfed in “an era of money and buffoonery and fooling around...these guys are just interested in a new contract.”⁴⁸⁶

Today, some of the same questions are raised about the contributions of African American athletes to the larger Black freedom struggle. There has been a greater presence of Black men amongst the professional sports ranks. As of 2011, the NFL and NBA each have revenue of \$8 billion and \$5 billion respectively, which means Black athletes have a

⁴⁸⁵ Jodie Valade, “Finding Holes Jim Brown Had a Way of Making Something out of Nothing. These Days, he’s trying to do the Same Thing off the Field,” *Plain Dealer*, 5 September 2004, C1.

⁴⁸⁶ Tony Grossi, “Cleveland’s ‘Goal’ Model,” *Plain Dealer*, 15 October 2006, C8.

far greater earning potential than the men who played before them. Yet African American professional athletes have expressed their displeasure about the power dynamics that exist within the professional ranks.⁴⁸⁷ In June 1999, Larry Johnson was asked by NBA officials to address the media for a few questions but he refused. As a result, he was fined \$25,000 by the league. The following day he referenced himself and his teammates as “a bunch of rebellious slaves.” The media exploited his comments and when asked to address his statements, the Knicks forward said

I might get put out of the league. But let's say this: No one man can rise above the masses or the condition of his people. I am privileged and honored by the situation I'm in. No question, I have an excellent opportunity. And this is a beautiful country. Yeah, we've made beautiful strides, but what percentage of black people has made that stride when I go back to my neighborhood and see the same thing? I'm the only one who came out of my neighborhood. All of them dead, on drugs, selling drugs. Am I supposed to be honored and happy just by my success? Yes, I am. But I can't deny the fact of what's happened to us over years and years, and we're still at the bottom of the totem pole. I can't turn to my head to that. That's my point.⁴⁸⁸

Larry Johnson earned close to \$12 million that season to play basketball. This salary was far greater than the contracts of Bill Russell and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar during the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, his reference to the institution of slavery displeased many media members and some former players. However, his comments had merit as the NBA, along with the NFL, lacked African Americans in positions of management and power.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ Maury Brown, “Nets’ Ball in NBA’s Court,” *Variety*, 21-27 February 2011, 13; Kevin Clark, “Management Secrets of the NFL: The League’s Best Team Office Habits; Your Guide to Owning a Franchise,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 September 2012, D7; William Reed, “Within the NFL Money Machine,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 16 October 2012, 11A; Jason Gay, “The Money Train That Is Sports TV,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 December 2012, A28.

⁴⁸⁸ Selena Roberts, “Johnson Responds To Walton,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1999, D5.

⁴⁸⁹ Selena Roberts, “Johnson Insists Knicks Are Not ‘Mainstream’,” 23 June 1999, D3; Clyde Haberman, “Knicks Limp Their Way Into Hearts,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1999, B1.

According to The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) after the 2011 season, 78 % of all players in the NBA were African American, along with 47% of head coaches, 23% general managers, and 13% presidents or CEO of franchises.⁴⁹⁰

TIDES also did an assessment of the NFL. While, African Americans were still absent from having a majority stake in the ownership of a team, they had a strong presence in the league with 67% as players, 19% were head coaches, 19% served as general managers, 8% as vice presidents, and 8% operated in management positions.

Interestingly, while many White NFL coaches have gone on to coach collegiate football, no former African American head coaches have been selected to lead a major college program.

There are some parallels between the disparities of the African American presence in the NFL and the NBA and the economic inequities that exist for African Americans as a financial group in American society. In 2007, African Americans had \$900 billion in spending power. That same year, Black-owned businesses accounted for \$137 billion. While this is a great increase from the \$30 billion average of the 1960s, it only accounts for .45% of the \$30.2 trillion in sales produced by all businesses in the United States. Moreover, considering the amount of money available to Blacks, their dollars were spent amongst other racial groups at a higher rate.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Richard Lapchick with Philip Costa, Tamara Sherrod, and Rahman Anjorin, "The 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League," published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 13 September 2012, 2-5; Richard Lapchick with Antoinette Lecky and Aaron Trigg, "The 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Basketball Association," published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 26 June 2012, 1-3; Forty-one percent of NBA officials were African American during the 2011-2012 season.

⁴⁹¹ A. Bruce Crawley, "Black back, report mainstream media," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 18 July 2010, 11A.

In September 2012, Nielsen, an information company that helps businesses understand the buying attitudes of consumers, published a report called *African-American Consumers: Still Vital, Still Growing*. They predicted that by 2015, Black Americans would have a spending power of \$1.1 trillion. While rated as one of the largest consumer groups per capita, African Americans fail to support business growth or development for Black-owned enterprises. In essence, not much has changed since the beginnings of the BEU, but that is not to say their work was for naught. Hundreds of corporations opened across major urban communities in the United States, thus creating employment opportunities and economic independence to African Americans. Union members also changed the landscape of professional sports by challenging the reserve system, compensation of players, and retirement benefits. These developments were not only for the betterment of African Americans, but the NFL and NBA as a whole. There has not been a group to form like the BEU since its inception. It is for these reasons the story of the Black Economic Union should be told in hopes that present and future professional athletes can see themselves in the same fashion and assess their role in society.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² The Nielsen Company, *African-American Consumers: Still Vital, Still Growing*, 2012 Report, 1.

Bibliography

Government Documents

Federal Bureau of Investigation Surveillance Files, FBI Files on Black Extremist Organizations, Part I: COINTELPRO Files on Black Hate Groups and Investigation of the Deacons for Defense and Justice.

Special Collections

Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio

Mayoral Manuscript Collections

Carl B. Stokes

University of Rochester Libraries, Rare Books & Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library, Rochester, New York

Walter Cooper Papers

Kansas City Public Library

Oakland History Collection, Oakland History Room. Oakland Public Library, Oakland, California

Unpublished Documents

John Wooten, "History of Negro Industrial and Economic Union," Appendix II, 2.

Video Recordings

Berman, Brigitte. *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel*. Produced by Brigitte Berman. 124 min. Metaphor Films, 2009. Digital videodisc.

Lee, Spike. *Jim Brown: All American*. Produced and directed by Spike Lee. 140 min. 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks/HBO Sports, 2002. Digital video disc.

Moore, Theresa. *Third and Long: The History of African-Americans in Pro Football 1946-1989*. Produced and directed by Theresa Moore. 180 min. T-Time Productions, 2011. Documentary.

Audio Recordings

Brown, Jim. *Jim Brown Tells It Like Is*. Cleveland: Main Line, 1968.

Books

Primary Books

Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem with Peter Knobler, *Giant Steps*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983.

Ali, Muhammad with Richard Durham, *The Greatest: My Own Story*. New York: Random House, 1975.

Brown, Jim with Myron Cope. *Off My Chest*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964.

Brown, Jim with Steve Delsohn. *Out of Bounds*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 1989.

Brown, Paul with Jack Clary. *PB: The Paul Brown Story*. New York: Atheneum, 1979.

Carlos, John with Dave Zirin. *The John Carlos Story*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011.

Owens, Jesse with Paul G. Neimark. *Blackthink: My Life as a Black Man and White Man*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970.

Owens, Jesse with Paul Neimark. *I Have Changed*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1972.

Robinson, Jackie with Alfred Duckett. *I Never Had It Made*. New York: Putnam, 1972.

Russell, Bill and William McSweeney. *Go Up for Glory*. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966.

Sellers, Cleveland, with Robert Terrell. *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

Smith, Tommie with David Steele. *Silent Gesture: The Autobiography of Tommie Smith*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007.

Taylor, Otis with Mark Stallard. *Otis Taylor: The Need to Win*. New York: Sports Publishing LLC, 2003.

Secondary Books

Adelman, Melvin, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Alexander, Rae Pace, ed. *Young and Black in America*. New York: Random House, 1970.

- Allen, Frederick L. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1931.
- Allen, Robert L. *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969.
- Andrews, David L., ed. *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Austin, Curtis. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the making and unmaking of the Black Panther Party*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008.
- Baker, Aaron and Todd Boyd. *Out of Bounds: Sports, the Media, and the Politics of Identity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Bass, Amy. *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: the 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Bell, William K. *Fifteen million Negroes and Fifteen Billion Dollars*. New York: William K. Bell Publications, 1956.
- Biondi, Martha. *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Bontemps, Arna *Famous Negro Athletes*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1964.
- Brown, Paul with Jack Clary, *PB: The Paul Brown Story*. New York: Atheneum, 1980.
- Burns, Stewart. *To the Mountaintop: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Sacred Mission to Save America 1955-1968*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Capparell, Stephanie. *The Real Pepsi Challenge: The Inspirational Story of Breaking the Color Barrier in American Business*. New York: Wall Street Journal Books, 2007.
- Carmichael, Stokely with Michael Thelwell. *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)*. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Carrington, Ben. *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2010.
- Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

- Cashin, Sheryll. *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.
- Clegg, Claude Andrew. *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997.
- Coakley, Jay. *Sports in Society: Issues & Controversies*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007.
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye, and V. P. Franklin. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*. New York: NYU Press, 2001.
- Countryman, Matthew J. *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Denlinger, Ken and Paul Attner. *Redskin Country: From Baugh to the Super Bowl*. New York: Leisure Press, 1983.
- Denzil, Batchelor. *Jack Johnson and His Times*. London: Phoenix Sports Books, 1956.
- Dionisopoulos, P.A. *Rebellion, Racism, and Representation: The Adam Clayton Powell Case and Its Antecedents*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970.
- Dittmer, John. *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Duru, N. Jeremi. *Advancing The Ball: Race, Reformation, and the Quest for Equal Coaching Opportunity in the NFL*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Edwards, Harry. *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*. New York: The Free Press, 1969.
- Eisen, George and David K. Wiggins, eds. *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- Gorn, Elliot J., ed. *Ali: The People's Champ*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Ezra, Michael. *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.
- Fairclough, Adam. *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

- Freeman, Mike. *Jim Brown: The Fierce Life of an American Hero*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006.
- Gibson, D. Parke. *The \$30 Billion Negro*. London: The Macmillan Company, 1969.
- Glick, Brian. *The War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do About It*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- Gregory, James N. *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migration of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Grossman, James. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Hamilton, Charles V. *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma*. New York: Atheneum, 1991.
- Harris, David. *The League: The Rise and Decline of the NFL*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.
- Hartmann, Douglas. *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Hauser, Thomas. *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- Haygood, Wil. *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.
- Henderson, Edwin B., ed. *The Negro in Sports*. Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1939.
- Henderson, William L. and Larry C. Ledebur. *Economic Disparity: Problems and Strategies for Black America*. New York: The Free Press, 1970.
- Hill, Lance. *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

- Isaacs, Stan. *Jim Brown: The Golden Year 1964*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.
- Jackson, Thomas F. *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Jeffries, Hasan K. *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Jones, Charles E., ed. *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998.
- Jones, Edward H. *Blacks in Business*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971.
- Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.
- Kusmer, Kenneth L. *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- La Feber, Walter. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Lapchick, Richard E., ed. *Fractured Focus: Sport as a Reflection of Society*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1986.
- Lapchick, Richard. *Broken Promises: Racism in American Sports*. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984.
- Lazerow, Jama, and Yohuru Williams, eds. *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Lawson, Steven F. *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.
- Litwack, Leon. *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Knopf, 1998.
- Lomax, Michael E., ed. *Sports and the Racial Divide: African American and Latino Experience in an Era of Change*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008.
- Long, Michael G., ed., *First Class Citizenship: The Civil Rights Letters of Jackie*

- Robinson. New York: Times Books, 2007.
- Lynd, Alice. *We Won't Go: Personal Accounts of War Objectors*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968
- Maltz, Maxwell. *Psycho-Cybernetics: A New Way to Get more Living Out of Life*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960.
- Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.
- Marable, Manning. *Black Liberation in Conservative America*. Boston: South End Press, 1997.
- Marable, Manning. *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. New York: Viking, 2011.
- Maraniss, David. *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- Marqusee, Mike. *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties, 2nd edition*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Martin, Charles H. *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.
- Martin, Jr., Waldo. *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998.
- Matlin, Daniel. "'Lift Up Yr Self!' Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition," *Journal of American History* (June 2006).
- Melanson, Philip H. *The Murkin Conspiracy: An Investigation into the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Praeger, 1989.
- Morris, Aldon D. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Free Press, 1984.
- Murphy, Frank. *The Last Protest: Lee Evans in Mexico City*. Kansas City: Windsprint Press, 2006.
- Ofari, Earl. *The Myth of Black Capitalism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970.
- Ogbar, Jeffrey O.G. *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*.

- Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Olsen, Jack. *The Black Athlete, A Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport*. New York: Time-Life Books, 1968.
- Oriard, Michael. *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Oriard, Michael. *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football From the Sixties to the BCS Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Orr, Jack. *The Black Athlete: His Story in American History*. New York: The Lion Press, Inc., 1969.
- Parrish, Bernie. *They Call It A Game*. New York: The Dial Press, 1971.
- Payne, Charles and Adam Green. *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*. New York: NYU Press, 2003.
- Payne, Charles. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Pluto, Terry. *When all the World was Browns Town: Cleveland's Browns and the Championship Season of '64*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Quirk, James and Rodney D. Fort. *Pay Dirt: The Business of Professional Team Sports*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Reichley, A. James. *Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981.
- Remnick, David. *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*. New York: Random House, 1998.
- Rhoden, William. *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete*. New York: Broadway, 2007.
- Roberts, Eric B. *Football to Finance: The Story of Brady Keys, Jr.*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.
- Ross, Charles K. *Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the*

- National Football League*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Ross, Charles K. *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
- Runstedtler, Theresa. *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Schulman, Bruce. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001.
- Sheppard, Harold L., ed. *Poverty and Wealth in America*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970.
- Shropshire, Kenneth L. *In Black and White: Race and Sports in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Smith, Thomas G., *Showdown: JFK and the Integration of the Washington Redskins*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.
- Snyder, Brad. *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight for Free Agency in Professional Sports*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006.
- Staudohar, Paul D. and James A Mangan, ed. *The Business of Professional Sports*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Sullivan, Patricia. *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Thomas, Evan. *The Man to See: Edward Bennett Williams Ultimate Insider; Legendary Trial Lawyer*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.
- Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York: Vintage, 1967, 1992.
- Tyson, Timothy. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Van DeBurg, William L. *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Watterson, John Sayle. *The Games Presidents Play: Sports and the Presidency*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

- Weinberg, Kenneth G. *Black Victory: Carl Stokes and the Winning of Cleveland*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968.
- Westheider, James. *The African American Experience in Vietnam*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2008
- Whitaker, Matthew C. ed. *African American Icons of Sport: Triumph, Courage, and Excellence*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Witherspoon, Kevin B. *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.
- Wiggins, David K. *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997.
- Wiggins, David K. and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Williams, Robert F. *Negroes with Guns*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998.
- Woodward, Komozi. *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Zirin, Dave. *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People, and Play*. New York: The New Press, 2008.
- Articles*
- Allvine, Fred C. "Black Business Development" in *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 34, No.2 (April, 1970), 1-7.
- Bond, Julian et al. "A Symposium: Black Power—It's Meaning and Measure," *Negro Digest*, (November 1966), 20-37.
- Creedon, Pam. "The Super Bowl and War: Change in the Theatre for the Masculine Myth," *Football Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1/2 (2004), 108-121.
- Dorinson, Joseph. "Black Heroes in Sport: From Jack Johnson to Muhammad Ali," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 1997), 115-135.
- Dyerson, Mark. "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of

- Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Winter 1989), The North American Society for Sport History, 261-281.
- Evans, Jr., Arthur S. "Blacks as Key Functionaries: A Study of Racial Stratification in Professional Sport," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (September 1997), 43-59.
- Hugh Davis Graham. "Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma" in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), 93-106.
- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Use of the Past," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No.4 (March 2005), 1233-1263.
- Harpalani, Vinay. "The Athletic Dominance of African Americans—Is there a Genetic Basis?" *Journal of African American Men*, Vol. 2, Issue 2-3 (Fall 1996-Winter 1997), 39-56.
- Hunter, David W. "Race and Athletic Performance: A Physiological Review," *Journal of African American men*, Vol. 2, Issue 2-3 (Fall 1996-Winter 1997), 23-38.
- Kahn, Lawrence M. "Discrimination in Professional Sports: A Survey of the Literature," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April 1991), 395-418.
- Lewis, Jr., Richard. "Racial Position Segregation: A Case Study of Southwest Conference Football, 1978 and 1989" in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (March 1995), 431-446.
- Lomax, Michael E. "The African American Experience in Professional Football" in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1999), 163-178.
- McAndrews, Lawrence J. "The Politics of Principle: Richard Nixon and School Desegregation," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 83, No.3 (Summer, 1998), 187-200.
- Miller, Patrick. "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 1998), 119-151.
- Sailes, Gary A. "Betting against the Odds: An Overview of Black Sports Participation," *Journal of African American men*, Vol. 2, Issue 2-3 (Fall 1996-Winter 1997), 11-22.
- Smith, Thomas G., "Civil Rights on the Gridiron: The Kennedy Administration and the

Desegregation of the Washington Redskins,” *Journal of Sport History* Vol. 14, No. 2 (1987): 189-208.

Smith, Thomas G., “Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League, 1934-1946,” *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1988): 255-281.

Vertinsky, Patricia and Gwendolyn Captain. “More Myth than History: American Culture and Representations of the Black Female’s Athletic Ability,” *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 1998), 532-561.

Weems, Jr., Robert E. and Lewis A. Randolph, “The National Response to Richard M. Nixon’s Black Capitalism Initiative: The Success of Domestic Détente,” in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (September 2001), 66-83.

Wiggins, David K. ““Great Speed But Little Stamina.” The Historical Debate Over Black Athletic Superiority,” *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 16, No.2 (Summer 1989), 158-185.

Dissertations

Corson, Keith. “Trying to Get Over: African American Directors After Blaxploitation, 1977-1986.” PhD diss., New York University, 2012.

Suchma, Philip C. “From the Best of Time to the Worst of Times: Professional Sport and Urban Decline in a Tale of Two Clevelands, 1945-1978.” PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2005.

Wright, Leah Michele. “The Loneliness of the Black Conservative: Black Republicans and the Grand Old party, 1964-1980.” PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009.

Reports

The Nielsen Company, *African-American Consumers: Still Vital, Still Growing*, 2012 Report.

Lapchick, Richard with Philip Costa, Tamara Sherrod, and Rahman Anjorin, “The 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League,” published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 13 September 2012.

Lapchick, Richard with Antoinette Lecky and Aaron Trigg, “The 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Basketball Association,” published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 26 June 2012.

Newspapers

Atlanta Daily World
Baltimore Afro-American
Chicago Daily Defender
Chicago Tribune
Cleveland Plain Dealer
Cleveland Press
Cleveland Call & Post
The Edwardsville Intelligencer
The Final Call
Kansas City The Call
Los Angeles Sentinel
Los Angeles Times
Miami Times
Michigan Chronicle
New Jersey Afro-American
New Pittsburgh Courier
New York Times
New York Amsterdam News
Oakland Post
Oakland Tribune
The Philadelphia Tribune
Pittsburgh Courier
The Portland Skanner
The Recorder
The Tennessee Tribune
The Wall Street Journal
The Washington Afro American
The Washington Informer
The Washington Post, Times Herald

Periodicals

Black Enterprise
Ebony
Jet
Playboy
The Saturday Evening Post
Society Magazine
Sports Illustrated
Time

Interviews conducted by author

Sababa Akili, June 20, 2012, (Phone Interview)
A. Deane Buchanan, September 24, 2010, Cleveland Heights Municipal Court
Jim Brown, October 26, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Jim Brown, November 10, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Jim Brown, November 12, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Jim Brown, February 25, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Jim Brown, March 24, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Jim Brown, June 6, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Brady Keys, September 29, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, October 5, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, October 21, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, October 25, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, November 23, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, December 1, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Curtis McClinton, December 18, 2010, (Phone Interview)
Brigman Owens, March 3, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Brigman Owens, March 14, 2011, (Phone Interview)
John Wooten, July 27, 2010, (Phone Interview)
John Wooten, August 3, 2010, (Phone Interview)
John Wooten, August 4, 2010, (Phone Interview)
John Wooten, May 17, 2012, (Phone Interview)
Sidney Williams, March 23, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Sidney Williams, March 24, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Sidney Williams, March 29, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Spencer Jourdain, April 13, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Spencer Jourdain, May 3, 2012, (Phone Interview)
Spencer Jourdain, May 23, 2012, (Phone Interview)
Spencer Jourdain, June 22, 2012, (Phone Interview)
Walter Beach III, April 12, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Walter Beach III, May 27, 2011, (Phone Interview)
Walter Beach III, December 28, 2011, Macungie, Pennsylvania
Walter Beach III, October 24, 2012, (Phone Interview)

Email messages

Terri Mitchell, e-mail message to author, April 12, 2011.