

**Youth Activism and the Black Freedom Struggle in  
Lawnside, New Jersey**

by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of youth activism during the black freedom struggle in Lawnside, New Jersey; one of ten self-governing African American communities in the United States. A critical factor in Lawnside's narrative is that its young people both historically and today do not experience integration until the high school level where they are a distinct minority of the student body in a white community's high school. During the civil rights/black power era, Lawnside's young people created their own activist organization called the Young Blacks of Lawnside that pursued an agenda of non-violence, community improvement, educational advancement, and peaceful activism. Many African American youth from Lawnside were also inspired to address inequality and African American educational and cultural concerns at their high school by engaging in acts of collective violence and non-violent direct action. In these protest efforts, which included a boycott, two sit-ins, and a protest march, female students often held positions of influence and leadership and students acted with little direction or interference from parent groups or African American civic leaders.

**Keywords:** African American history; civil rights movement; black power; black freedom struggle; segregation; education

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the people of Lawnside, New Jersey.

## **Acknowledgements**

The genesis of this thesis is my direct family connection to the South Jersey area. I have always lived in Canada but grew up hearing stories from my mother, Nancy Kellaway, who grew up in Haddon Heights and graduated from Haddon Heights High School in 1972. One of those stories was about the temporary closing of her high school because of racial fighting; an occurrence which seemed unbelievable based on my upbringing. This thesis brought my mother and I closer together and I am truly grateful for her inspiration.

In Vancouver and at Simon Fraser University I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Spear for her assistance and advice as senior supervisor for this project, Dr. Karen Ferguson for her critical insights and service on my committee, Ruth Anderson, the Graduate Program Assistant for her efforts and support, Dr. Willeen Keough, Dr. Nicolas Kenny, Dr. Roxanne Panchasi, Dr. Bidisha Ray, Dr. Andrea Geiger, and Dr. Gerardo Otero for the amazing graduate course work experiences. I would like to thank Dr. Paul Garfinkel for an excellent and enjoyable Teaching Assistant experience which gave me new assessment and instructional ideas and strategies. Thank you as well to Professor Garfinkel and his wife, Dr. Emily O'Brien for inviting me to Christmas dinner when I was far from home. The staff at interlibrary loan were great at finding the rare documents this project required. I would also like to thank Rachel Dawson, the Graduate Awards Manager, for her guidance and support through the financial aid process and Dave Chokroun for his technical advice in formatting this thesis. Thank you to Samantha Thompson for her friendship, positivity, and outstanding effort in the creation of our historical walking tour, which was entitled, "This City is Ours: A History of Contentious Space in Vancouver." Finally, a big thank you to Kendra Nelson for always being there whenever I needed a laugh, a hug, or company over a five-dollar meal.

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## Table of Contents

Approval .....	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Dedication .....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents .....	ix
List of Figures .....	x
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction, Historiography, Lawnside, New Jersey History, New Jersey African American History, and Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	2
Historiography and Literature Review.....	5
Lawnside and New Jersey History.....	16
Methodology.....	27
<b>Chapter 2. The Young Blacks of Lawnside .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 3. African American High School Student Activism at Haddon Heights High School.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Primary Sources .....	105
Archives and Collections .....	105
Government Documents.....	106
Newspaper Articles .....	106
Oral Interviews .....	110
Published Primary Sources.....	111
Unpublished Documents .....	111
Secondary Sources .....	112

## List of Figures

Figure 1	This map demonstrates the locations of Lawnside, Barrington, Haddon Heights, Haddonfield, and Camden, which are all located in New Jersey's Camden County. ....	2
Figure 2	This pictures depicts an African American couple engaging in the suburban American dream. Lawnside was a location where African Americans could realize this goal without experiencing exclusion or discrimination. ....	23
Figure 3	The 1932 3HS senior trip to Mount Vernon, Virginia. The African American student in the center is I.R. Bryant. ....	66
Figure 4	The 1951 Lawnside Elementary School Grade 8 Graduating Class. ....	68
Figure 5	The African American player in this picture is Philip Johnson. Johnson lettered in football, basketball, and baseball at 3HS during the 1922-23 school year ....	73
Figure 6	The Lawnside Board of Education Resolution adopting Dr. King's birthday as a holiday is framed alongside a thank you letter from Coretta Scott King in the entrance of both the Lawnside Public School and Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church. ....	83
Figure 7	Denise Greene presenting Principal Gordon Bucher with a petition after the 1971 Lawnside student protest march to Haddon Heights High School. ....	92
Figure 8	This is a joint project between students at Lawnside Elementary School and Haddon Heights Middle School in 2001. This demonstrates the ongoing nature of elementary school segregation in these communities. ....	101

## **Chapter 1.**

### **Introduction, Historiography, Lawnside, New Jersey History, New Jersey African American History, and Research Methodology**

*Scattered throughout the Garden State, particularly in its southern half - which appeared to observers to be Dixie's northern outpost, complete with scrubby truck farms and tumbledown shacks – were rural and small-town settlements, populated by the descendants of slaves and agricultural laborers. There New Jersey more closely resembled North Carolina than New York.*

*- Thomas Sugrue, Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*

## Introduction



**Figure 1** This map demonstrates the locations of Lawnside, Barrington, Haddon Heights, Haddonfield, and Camden, which are all located in New Jersey's Camden County.

Howard Gillette Jr., *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), x. Reproduced with permission.

On May 12, 1971, Haddon Heights High School (3HS), in the borough of Haddon Heights, New Jersey, erupted in bloody and dramatic racial violence. The incident was the culmination of six years of racial tensions at the school that finally reached the boiling point. Haddon Heights is a typical American white suburban middle-class town. That it experienced racial tensions during the time of the civil rights/black power era is because even though Haddon Heights was and continues to be an almost entirely white

community, it had a longstanding educational send/receive relationship with the nearby borough of Lawnside; one of at least ten self-governing African American towns in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Lawnside's autonomy insulated its inhabitants from many of the struggles and disruptions experienced by some African American communities during this time period. However, the absence of a high school in Lawnside created a dependency on a white community that exposed its youth to issues of racism and exclusionary treatment. African American students from Lawnside formed a significant minority of the student body at 3HS. Many of these young people participated in both non-violent and violent acts of protest and resistance in efforts to address grievances and improve how African American students were treated. They were also influenced by a locally developed youth organization named the Young Blacks of Lawnside. This thesis is an examination of African American youth activism in Lawnside, New Jersey.<sup>2</sup>

The study of Lawnside allows for an examination of African American youth activism during the civil rights/black power era in a self-governing African American community. This is important because many African American organizations and leaders who were influenced by black power ideology were striving for local self-determination. Lawnside provides a case study of what can happen when this dream is realized. To my knowledge, no academic work has explored the civil rights/black power era in this specific political setting.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine the early history of Lawnside and the regional, state, and federal political processes which impacted its growth and

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<sup>1</sup> Geographer Harold M. Rose documented nine other African American towns with their incorporation date in parentheses: Brooklynn, IL. (1874), Mound Bayou, MS. (1898), Robbins, IL. (1917), Fairmount Heights, MD. (1927), Glenarden, MD. (1939), Lincoln Heights, OH. (1946), Urbancrest, OH. (1947), Kinloch, MO. (1948), and Grambling, LA. (1953). Harold M. Rose, "The All Negro Town: Its Evolution and Function," in *Black America: Geographic Perspectives*, eds. Robert T. Ernst and Lawrence Hugg (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 354.

<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to write this thesis from Lawnside's perspective only to manage the scope of the project for this academic undertaking. I do not wish to minimize the importance of Haddon Heights' and Barrington's histories and the voices of the former students from these communities who were affected by race-relations at 3HS. As an outsider to the communities with no personal stake I have strived to be as objective as possible in my interpretations of the events addressed in this thesis. I hope to further historicize race-relations at 3HS from the Haddon Heights and Barrington perspectives in future work to better put the narratives of these three communities in conversation.

development as a community. It will also address the historiography related to, and methodology used to conduct research for this project. The body of the thesis will focus on two interrelated political movements involving Lawnside's youth. The second chapter will be an analysis of how young people from Lawnside developed their own activist organization known as the Young Blacks of Lawnside who worked to improve the governance of the community and stressed the principles of non-violence and educational advancement. This thesis introduces Gordon Higgs, the President of the Young Blacks, as a key leader and historical actor because of his leadership efforts and connections with other east coast African American organizations.

The Young Blacks are an example of a non-violent African American organization during the black power era that eschewed revolution and worked within the American system emphasizing the importance of education for professional and career advancement. This youth organization rejected radicalized approaches because of Lawnside's autonomy, its community spirit, and the existence in the community of successful role models who achieved prosperity working within the system. The Young Blacks affected significant political change in Lawnside municipal politics, inspired African American students to demonstrate agency for the achievement of racial equality and fair treatment at 3HS, and assisted with movement related activities in other communities and alongside other African American organizations. The Young Blacks had a progressive organizational attitude toward female members for the time, which resulted in women serving in executive roles in the organization and acting as key spokespersons during high profile media events. Thus, my case study contributes to a recent effort by historians to locate female leadership in African American student movements and within African American organizations during the apex of black power influence.

The third chapter will be an analysis of African American student activism at 3HS. African American youth from Lawnside engaged in both non-violent and violent actions during the civil rights/black power era. Members of the Young Blacks were categorically opposed to violent measures, but other young people in Lawnside had different opinions as evidenced by the racial violence which occurred between 1965 and

1971. African American students in this community learned methods of non-violent direct action such as sit-ins, boycotts, and protest marches through the well-publicized actions of African Americans throughout the country. Black power ideology also influenced students to address cultural concerns in grievances expressed to 3HS school authorities in both 1970 and 1971.

This thesis will demonstrate four key determinations about African American youth activism during the civil rights/black power era. Firstly, in Lawnside, the patterns of female youth activism trouble traditional conceptions of post-war American gender roles because: African American women were student leaders in high school demonstrations, young women engaged in, and initiated acts of violence, and they were influential members of a youth oriented African American activist organization. Secondly, the grievances expressed by African American youth in Lawnside were similar to their counterparts in other locations because of the actions and ideologies expressed within the wider civil rights/black power era. Thirdly, the radicalization of the civil rights movement during the shift to black power ideology was moderated in Lawnside due in part to the municipal political autonomy enjoyed by the community. Finally, a result of this politically moderate climate was the development of a youth directed activist organization that sought accommodation with existing American political and educational regimes.

## **Historiography and Literature Review**

Historians Lizabeth Cohen, Beryl Satter, Ira Katznelson, Thomas Sugrue, and Walter David Greason all explore how the policies of the federal government promoted segregation in housing and education.<sup>3</sup> The United States Federal government instituted laws which effectively barred African Americans from gaining the benefits of many of the social programs of President Roosevelt's New Deal. For example, government

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<sup>3</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); and Walter David Greason, *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013).

agencies like the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) designated any neighbourhoods containing African Americans as blighted communities ineligible for government insured home mortgages, a practice called ‘redlining.’<sup>4</sup> In addition, the FHA also stipulated that white parents had a right to send their children to schools which did not have an incompatible racial element.<sup>5</sup> The much lauded GI Bill that provided veterans with tuition assistance and vocational training also favoured white Americans because the majority of American universities had prejudicial acceptance practices, especially in the south where many African Americans still lived. There were so few spaces in historically African American colleges that admittance became highly competitive and many capable candidates were denied admission.<sup>6</sup> Thus, New Deal social and economic programs unfairly advantaged white Americans while severely inhibiting African American advancement. These government programs essentially subsidized the migration of white families to newly constructed suburbs with the social supports of low-interest mortgages and student loans.<sup>7</sup> As we will see, Lawnside’s self-governing status and relationship with Haddon Heights allowed African Americans to own property, build and in some cases finance their own homes, and receive an integrated high school education.<sup>8</sup> Despite these opportunities, Lawnside was significantly impacted by the wider civil rights movement and by the turn to black power ideology.

There has been great debate and evolutionary change over the meaning and connection which historians and other scholars ascribe to the civil rights movement and black power ideology. Early scholarship and contemporary public perceptions posit that the civil rights movement was a just and virtuous crusade that helped achieved landmark

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<sup>4</sup> Katznelson, 163.

<sup>5</sup> Paul R. Dimond, *Beyond Busing: Reflections on Urban Segregation, the Courts, and Equal Opportunity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Katznelson, 131-132.

<sup>7</sup> Greason, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Lawnside residents pooled their money and created the Lawnside Building Association shortly after it was incorporated as a borough in 1926. The association gave residents the ability to finance the construction of new homes before it was dissolved in the 1930s due to the struggles of the Great Depression. Karen E. Quinones Miller, “An Old Town Where Familiarity Breeds Contentment,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Mar. 7, 1993, 101.

victories such as the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act through non-violent methods of direct action.<sup>9</sup> In many early historical narratives, African American activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, and Rosa Parks alongside white liberal politicians such as the Kennedy brothers, and Lyndon Johnson struck down Jim Crow regimes and led America on the path to racial equality. These early histories often place the origin of the civil rights movement as the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court decision and end the movement with the 1965 Voting Rights Act.<sup>10</sup> Much historical scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s then sees the movement splintering in part because of the influence of black power ideology. The black power era is traditionally placed in historical scholarship within a time frame between 1965 and 1975.<sup>11</sup> Scholars such as Allen Matusow, Doug McAdam, Charles Payne, Nancy J. Weiss, and William H. Chafe view black power as a negative influence on the trajectory and impact of the movement.<sup>12</sup> The mainstream association of black power with violent rhetoric, urban rioting, and sensationalized media images of uniformed African American men with afros brandishing assault rifles also had an influence on

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 7; Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 112; and Peniel E. Joseph, "Introduction: Toward a Historiography of the Black Power Movement," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights – Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Clayborne Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 27; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, no. 4 (Mar. 2005): 1234.

<sup>11</sup> Kimberly Springer, "Black Feminists Respond to Black Power Masculinism," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights – Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 107.

<sup>12</sup> Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring, 2007): 270; Nancy J. Weiss, "Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 39, 54; and William H. Chafe, "The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 138.

scholarship.<sup>13</sup> For example, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's 1973 history about the Congress for Racial Equality states:

In five years, the black protest movement had accomplished more than in all the preceding fifty. Yet with expectations outracing change, many militants had become cynical and bitter about American society – a mood of pessimism that was exhibited also among the masses of the North where civil disorders erupted annually. White support for the movement was greater than ever before, yet activists were growing increasingly hostile toward white liberals, suspicious of white participants, and more separatist in their outlook.<sup>14</sup>

Here we see Meier and Rudwick describe a shift in ideology. They also refer to African American activists as pessimistic and cynical militants. Recent scholarship has challenged these scholarly approaches.

Historians have demonstrated the positive contributions of black power organizations to African American communities. Robert O. Self, Matthew Countryman, Anne Valk, Howard Gillette, and others have emphasized the meaningful impacts of grassroots activism and the organizational efforts of black power organizations.<sup>15</sup> These include the creation of foodbanks, after school tutoring, literacy, and history classes for both youth and adults. Black power organizations also campaigned against police brutality, urban poverty, housing conditions, and campaigned for and won municipal political power.

Several historians have reconceptualised the traditional timelines associated with the civil rights/black power era. Scholars such as Sugrue, Self, McAdam, Peniel O. Joseph, and Jacqueline Dowd Hall argue that the timelines must be extended.<sup>16</sup> Dowd

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<sup>13</sup> Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era," in *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohura Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 15; and Valk, 112-113.

<sup>14</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 329-330.

<sup>15</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postward Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Valk, *Radical Sisters*; Countryman, *Up South*; and Gillette Jr., *Camden After the Fall*.

<sup>16</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*; Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party;" Doug McAdam, *Political Processes and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

Hall stresses that struggle by African American activists for racial equality both predate and outlast the traditional timelines.<sup>17</sup> However, as Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang argue, Dowd Hall's use of the term 'long civil rights movement' erases the impact and importance of black power.<sup>18</sup> Self and Joseph were inspired by Dowd Hall's long movement thesis but applied the concept to black power.<sup>19</sup> Cha Jua and Lang also critique the long movement approach because it elides key differences in various periods of the civil rights/black power era. They argue that conditions during the New Deal were not the same as in Johnson's New Society, and that the nature of political repression during the early cold war created a different space for radical action than the repression experienced in the late 1960s and 1970s by the FBI and other law enforcement and government agencies.<sup>20</sup>

The re-interpretation of the civil rights/black power era has also impacted the terminology used to describe this time period. In 1986, Clayborne Carson proposed a new title, "black freedom struggle," to define the African American movement for racial equality. Carson's reasoning was that:

The notion of a black freedom struggle seeking a broad range of goals suggests, in contrast, that there was much continuity between the period before 1965 and the period after. Contrary to the oft-expressed view that the civil rights movement died during the mid-1960s, we find that many local activists stressed the continuity between the struggles to gain political rights for southern blacks and the struggles to exercise them in productive ways.<sup>21</sup>

In 2005, historian Jeanne Theoharis also argued for a unifying title when she wrote, "Framing it as the black freedom movement... has moved our understandings of the

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1982); Peniel E. Joseph, "Community Organizing, Grassroots Politics, and Neighborhood Rebels: Local Struggles for Black Power in America," in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement."

<sup>17</sup> Dowd Hall, 1235.

<sup>18</sup> Cha Jua and Lang, 271.

<sup>19</sup> Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party;" and Peniel E. Joseph, "Community Organizing," 11.

<sup>20</sup> Cha-Jua and Lang, 271, 273. For an overview of government suppression of civil rights and black power organizations see William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), 162-165.

<sup>21</sup> Carson, 27.

movement beyond a dichotomy between civil rights and Black Power both ideologically and chronologically.” Cha Jua and Lang also argue for a unifying term while cautioning that the conditions for change and the possibilities to demonstrate agency and achieve goals can vary greatly depending on time and location. They believe that:

Recognizing the Civil Rights and Black Power movements as waves in a broader more complex river of resistance and affirmation, the Black Liberation Movement, is not tantamount to acceptance of a declension narrative, emphasizing a “golden age” of nonviolent protest followed by a period of black militancy and racial chauvinism.<sup>22</sup>

Carson’s term has been accepted and used by many scholars to the present and is appropriate to describe the Lawnside experience from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s. Like Cha Jua and Lang, I also wish to emphasize that my use of the umbrella term ‘black freedom struggle’ to describe the Lawnside case study does not mean I am homogenizing the movement for change in this community.

The black power movement had a distinct ideology which was formulated and popularized in the mid to late 1960s. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael popularized the phrase “black power” while marching in Mississippi in defiance of white racism and threats of violence.<sup>23</sup> Soon, many African American activists throughout the country would embrace the mantra of black power prompting national leaders and intellectuals to develop the ideological underpinnings of a mass movement. The black power experience in the United States saw regional and national organizations such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Black People’s Unity Movement (BPUM), the US organization, and the Black Panther Party embrace its mantra. For example, SNCC evolved from a civil rights organization committed to non-violence to a black power approach which defended armed self-defence.<sup>24</sup> A critical position I am taking is that black power manifested itself in different ways due to the vagaries of local conditions. As such, it is impossible to

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<sup>22</sup> Cha-Jua and Lang, 268, 270.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 12.

define what black power exactly is because it meant different things to different people at the grassroots level.

Among the many characteristics attributed to black power ideology are: an agenda of racial and cultural pride, control over local institutional bodies and governments, support for alternative religious practices, educational and curriculum reform, prison reform, land-based reparations, a critique of capitalism, support for African American owned business and industry, and a linking of the domestic movement for racial equality with transnational struggles against colonialism and imperialism.<sup>25</sup> The 1968 Black Power convention held in Philadelphia produced a manifesto which expressed a critique of capitalism and the convention's economic grievances. It stated: "The American capitalist system is an inherently evil system (amoral) which has historically brought about or supported the oppression and/or exploitation (physical and material) of non-white people throughout the world." It continues by directing African Americans, "To sever the false relations with the white Racist Americans and develop Black independent institutions which will reject the lies and myths that the white Racist have projected against the non-white world in general and the African and Asian world in particular."<sup>26</sup> Cha Jua and Lang explain the transformation which took place in the movement as it evolved out of civil rights doctrines, tactics, and culture. They explain that key,

Transformations produced immediate changes in ideology, practices, strategies, leadership, membership, discourses, and symbols. Indeed, they produced a new people – "black" people..., and was reflected at a mass level in African Americans' embrace of new cultural forms and symbols—the Afro and other natural hairstyles, as well as African-derived clothing, names, social values, and holidays. It affected styles of walking, handshakes, tastes in music and art, and language.<sup>27</sup>

Stokely Carmichael attempted to infuse black power ideology in a community setting through his organizing efforts in Lowndes, Alabama, a rural county. There, black power

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<sup>25</sup> Cha Jua and Lang, 274; and Joseph, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>26</sup> "Black Power National Conference," (unpublished manuscript, Aug. 29-Sep. 1, 1968), conference program. Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<sup>27</sup> Cha Jua and Lang, 279.

meant community control over local governing bodies such as the board of education, sheriff, coroner, and taxes.<sup>28</sup>

Black power ideology has been judged by some as a patriarchal and misogynist movement due to the pronouncements and actions of some key leaders of national organizations. For example, after the arrest of all the male leaders in the Philadelphia branch of SNCC, the national organization sent former executive director James Forman with four other male long-time party members to take control of the office from the remaining female members.<sup>29</sup> Angela Davis explained her experience in the California based US organization founded by Maulana Karenga stating:

I was criticized very heavily, especially by male members of Karenga's organization for doing "a man's job." Women should not play leadership roles, they insisted. A woman was supposed to "inspire" her man and educate his children.... The constant harangue by the US men was that I needed to redirect my energies and use them to give my man strength and inspiration so that he might more effectively contribute his talents to the struggle for Black liberation.<sup>30</sup>

These patriarchal sentiments were also shared by Amiri Baraka, an African American political leader who gained national prominence for his writing and organizing efforts in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the work of Anne Valk in Washington D.C., Countryman in Philadelphia, and Christina Greene in Durham, North Carolina, has demonstrated that women were key leaders in prominent urban centers and also impacted black power initiatives at the community level.<sup>32</sup> This complicates the prevailing notion that all black power based African American activist organizations were patriarchal male dominated enterprises.

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>29</sup> Countryman, 218.

<sup>30</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography: With My Mind on Freedom* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 159-160.

<sup>31</sup> Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 338-339.

<sup>32</sup> Valk, *Radical Sisters*; Countryman *Up South*; and Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Key events and organizational strategies associated with African American activism had different meanings, purposes, and parameters at different times and in different regions and locations. Self explains the difficulty many historians face in the attempt to interpret the civil rights/black power era in an extremely diverse American nation. He stated:

What is needed is a framework that emphasizes the interplay of region, ideology, and strategy. It is clear that regional and local political economies with their own cultural, political, and structural constraints presented unique and specific versions of segregation and discrimination. The post-war civil rights movement emerged within these regional and local contexts across the country.

As we will see, the Lawnside case study was shaped by regional political economies and specific local conditions. I also heed the call by Cha Jua and Lang to view “Civil Rights and Black Power as successive waves of a broader BLM [black liberation movement], differentiated by strategy and tactics, organizations, leadership, membership, ideology, discourses, symbols and practices.”<sup>33</sup> In this thesis, I will demonstrate how the black freedom struggle evolved and developed in one location that was influenced by specific regional and national trends including the campaigns for civil rights and the ideological turn to black power.

Black power historians have traditionally focused their attention on large cities in the North and the West such as Oakland, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago. Self made a salient point that many African Americans developed a colonial analogy for America due to widespread white suburbanization and the resulting abandonment of many African Americans in declining and economically exploited city centers; a phenomenon that occurred in all regions of the country.<sup>34</sup> For example, Sugrue, Kruse, Gillette, and Self have documented the spectre of white flight and urban decline in such diverse American locations as Detroit, Atlanta, Camden, and Oakland. Despite this spatial-economic trend, American race-relations and the experiences of African Americans were shaped by many other locally determined factors.

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<sup>33</sup> Self, *American Babylon*, 275, 332-333.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

As Joseph explains, black power impacted American life throughout the nation and not just in big cities.<sup>35</sup> This statement is a call to historians to investigate how the civil rights/black power era unfolded in smaller population centers. Theoharis argued that, “We have much less of a sense of Black power as a grassroots movement that grew out of local conditions as well as a growing national consciousness.”<sup>36</sup> In commenting about the importance and paucity of localized studies of African American civil rights activism, Carson commented, “Blacks in these communities developed their own goals and strategies which bore little relation to national campaigns for civil rights legislation.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, this thesis presents the narrative of the black freedom struggle in a small-town setting; an area which has been understudied by historians.

The effort by historians to bring the civil rights narrative North and link it with black power should also not elide the key differences between the deep South and the North and West. Lang has argued that the deep South and border states have different regional characteristics which shaped how the civil rights movement proceeded and developed. He writes, “Regional differences in black-white relations were stark and fundamental, and the regional differences between southern and northern black freedom struggles were equally as decisive.” Cha-Jua and Lang add that the, “the fallacy of arguing for North-South continuity is that it ignores regional variations in political economy, frequency and modes of racial violence, levels of political incorporation, and the stark differences in wages and wealth between African Americans in the South and the North.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!”: High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A.,” in *Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108.

<sup>37</sup> Carson, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Cha-Jua and Lang, 281.

Sugrue, Greason, and Giles Wright all emphasize how New Jersey is a peculiar state that includes aspects of both northern and southern culture, customs, and attitudes.<sup>39</sup> Sugrue summarized New Jersey as follows:

Scattered throughout the Garden State, particularly in its southern half - which appeared to observers to be Dixie's northern outpost, complete with scrubby truck farms and tumbledown shacks - were rural and small-town settlements, populated by the descendants of slaves and agricultural laborers. There New Jersey more closely resembled North Carolina than New York.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Lawnside's existence, location, and historical experience must be viewed in this context.

While many historians have brought attention to the civil rights struggles in the northern states, some continue to identify the South alone as the key site of racial violence, hatred, and exclusion. For example, in a 2010 anthology about 1970s radical movements, historian Scott Rutherford cited a newspaper report which, "described the world of First Nations people in Kenora [Ontario] as reminiscent of the injustices endured by African American men and women in the southern United States."<sup>41</sup> Historian Mary Louise Roberts also used the trope of the egalitarian north, writing in a 2013 book, "Black soldiers, especially those who hailed from the North, were often traumatized by [white southern] officers."<sup>42</sup> This simplistic north-south binary can serve to exonerate and excuse northern racist practices that have been revealed by Sugrue, Cohen, Satter, Countryman, Lisa McGirr, Patrick D. Jones, and others in their explorations of African American activism and northern white racism.<sup>43</sup> These narratives coupled with the

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<sup>39</sup> Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State, 1988), 17; and Greason, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Scott Rutherford, "Canada's Other Red Scare: The Anicinabe Park Occupation and Indigenous Decolonization," in: *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 78.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II and France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 200.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996); Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; Satter, *Family Matters*; Countryman, *Up South*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Patrick D.

enthusiastic support in many areas of the north for Alabama Governor and segregationist George C. Wallace in his 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns demonstrates the pervasiveness of racism and inequality in America regardless of region.<sup>44</sup>

## **Lawnside and New Jersey History**

Lawnside is one of the oldest African American communities in the United States with roots stretching back to the late seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup> African Americans in this location which was originally known as Free Haven, were supported by the efforts of local Quakers and abolitionists. The community was a haven for African Americans resisting slavery and existed near several routes along the Underground Railroad.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Lawnside's early growth and development as a community fits into the larger narrative of African American history in New Jersey. Several other small African American settlements also developed in the state such as Gouldtown, Guineatown, Saddlertown, and Timbuctoo.<sup>47</sup> These communities were, in part, the result of New Jersey's deep connections with the Underground Railroad. However, this legacy of racial sanctuary is also troubled by the state's history of slavery and its nineteenth and early twentieth century political record.

New Jersey has a problematic and ambiguous history of race-relations. In 1804, the state passed only a gradual emancipation law regarding slavery, which resulted in the

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Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> For information about Wallace's support in the North during his 1968 Presidential campaign see Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969); Samuel Lubell, *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1970); Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President: 1968* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969); Steven V. Roberts, "Wallace Backers Say Why They Are: At Rally, They Give Voice to Their Dissatisfactions," *The New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1968, 32; and Sydney H. Schamberg, "For Most of the Policemen in Syracuse, Wallace Will Be the Man," *The New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1968, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Smiley, "A True History of Lawnside," (unpublished manuscript, 1921, 32). Rutgers University, Alexander Library, Special Collections; and Morris Smith, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 26, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Mary E Pendleton, "Walking the Railroad Through South Jersey to Freedom," *Courier Post*, Nov. 1, 1987; and Joseph Busler, "N.J. Vital Stop on Path of Slave Escape Routes," *Courier Post*, Feb. 7, 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Greason, 125.

continued enslavement of people right up to the Civil War.<sup>48</sup> New Jersey also voted against Abraham Lincoln in both 1860 and 1864, and only legally abolished slavery in 1866 after the thirteenth amendment was formally incorporated into the U.S. Constitution.<sup>49</sup> New Jersey's nineteenth century legacy of slavery and widespread sympathy for the Confederate war effort extended into the twentieth century with pervasive Jim Crow practices. For example, the state elected and advanced the career of Governor and then President Woodrow Wilson whose ideology and worldview defended white supremacy as the natural order of things.<sup>50</sup> Future Presidential advisor E. Frederic Morrow's account of racist and segregationist practices in Hackensack, New Jersey, during the 1920s demonstrates the pain and frustration that African Americans experienced because of caste exclusion from institutions such as schools and private businesses including swimming pools, movie theatres, and restaurants.<sup>51</sup> In 1950, A young Martin Luther King Jr. experienced discrimination first hand in the South Jersey area when his party was refused service at a restaurant in Maple Shade, New Jersey, just seven miles from Lawnside. King and some fellow African American students from Pennsylvania's Crozier Theological Seminary, refused to leave the restaurant citing New Jersey's antidiscrimination laws and were finally chased away by the owner who brandished a gun and fired a warning shot in the parking lot.<sup>52</sup> Legal protection for African American equality and civil rights were only achieved by the end of the 1950s due to the concerted efforts of African American activists in conjunction with New Jersey lawmakers and enforcement officers.

New Jersey, like much of America, was a hotbed of Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s. There is evidence that Haddon Heights was the site of a large Ku Klux Klan rally in 1921 and that the Klan also rode in to terrorize a Catholic school picnic in Haddon

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<sup>48</sup> Clement Alexander Price, *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1980), 77.

<sup>49</sup> Wynetta Devore, "The Education of Blacks in New Jersey, 1900-1930: An Exploration in Oral History" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1980); Price, 77; and Greason, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Greason, 84.

<sup>51</sup> E. Frederic Morrow, *Way Down South Up North* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1973).

<sup>52</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 130.

Heights during this time.<sup>53</sup> As an African American settlement, Lawnside was also targeted. Isaac Rutledge (I.R.) Bryant, a long standing civic leader in Lawnside and School District President recalled, “I was just a little boy, but I remember being scared as hell watching them [the KKK] burn a cross on a lawn, right where the barbershop is now on Warwick Road.”<sup>54</sup> When Lawnside became incorporated as a borough in 1926, a white neighbourhood known as Woodcrest was included within its territory. These homeowners tried unsuccessfully to secede from Lawnside before moving out of the community. It is alleged that the Woodcrest residents on several occasions burned crosses in Lawnside.<sup>55</sup> The presence of the Klan in these Camden County communities was not an aberration as New Jersey was the third strongest Klan supportive state in the northeast with 60, 000 members at its apex in the 1920s.<sup>56</sup>

Historian Giles R. Wright argues that South Jersey with its Quaker presence was less hostile toward African American habitation and migration until the late nineteenth century when their influence waned and the region began to more resemble the attitudes prevalent in Philadelphia, Maryland, and Delaware.<sup>57</sup> While New Jersey is nominally in the North, I assert that the state, especially its southern region must be viewed as a border state that has its own unique set of local conditions.

In the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century Lawnside was a rural community with limited employment options for its residents. Most men in the community at the time worked small plots of land or as agricultural workers

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<sup>53</sup> Roger Hutchinson, a man who grew up in Haddon Heights wrote, “The year before I entered first grade, probably 1921, perhaps the biggest Ku Klux Klan meeting ever to take place in South Jersey was held in Haddon Heights.” Hutchinson’s claim that it was the largest Klan rally in the southern portion of the state is a highly dubious proposition due to the absence of a Haddon Heights rally in other histories written about New Jersey Ku Klux Klan activity that highlight large rallies elsewhere. The evidence for Klan activity in Haddon Heights was presented at a Haddon Heights Historical Society meeting on March 27, 2000. The unpublished minutes of the meeting are stored in the Haddon Heights Public Library. The meeting took place prior to the release of the Haddon Heights Historical Society publication, “The Ideal Suburb.”

<sup>54</sup> Steven Levy, “South Jersey’s Oasis of Soul,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 17, 1977, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Kristin Hunter, “Soul City North,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, May 1973; “Decision Reserved on Plea to Split Lawnside Borough,” Mar. 7, 1939, in “Lawnside the Way it Was,” (unpublished manuscript, Feb. 19, 1990), community brochure. Camden County Historical Society, Lawnside Collection.

<sup>56</sup> Greason, 95.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, 17.

on white owned farms. Lawnside's rural nature was captured in a 1963 article which explained that, "As recently as 15 years ago only 10 percent of the borough's roads were paved. There were more pigs in the community than people! Each family had at least 10; one family was known to have 195 pigs. The air was thick and pungent with an obnoxious odor."<sup>58</sup> Women from the community frequently secured employment as domestic workers in the nearby and affluent communities of Haddonfield and Haddon Heights. Up until the 1950s, it was still a common sight to see female African American domestic workers dressed in uniforms waiting for the public bus to Haddonfield.<sup>59</sup>

In 1926, Lawnside became an official borough of the State of New Jersey and soon developed the community institutions needed to effectively self-govern. Up until 1926, Lawnside was part of what was known as Center Township.<sup>60</sup> This political entity was rapidly dissolving as segments of the territory received incorporation as boroughs. To prevent Lawnside from imminent division and parcelling out to neighbouring towns, a delegation led by William E. Williams traveled to the state capital and successfully petitioned for the community to receive borough status.<sup>61</sup> Lawnside residents worked hard to develop community institutions which were staffed and directed by African Americans. Community members took pride in the education of Lawnside youth in the town's elementary school, and the development of its town council, fire department, and police force. The town also developed a thriving jazz scene which in its heyday in the 1930s and 1940s attracted artists such as Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Billie Holliday, Billy Eckstine, and Arthur Prysock.<sup>62</sup> A key question is how Lawnside fits in with other African American suburban communities.

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<sup>58</sup> Leon R. Benson and Ida Mae Roeder, "Lawnside Changed Since War: Returning Servicemen Seek Suburbs," *Courier Post*, Apr. 12, 1963, 11.

<sup>59</sup> David Dent, *In Search of Black America: Discovering the African-American Dream* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 62. This bus was nicknamed "The Cook's Tour" and has been described as so small that half the passengers had to stand. The service was only offered four times per day to accommodate the typical domestic labour schedule. Hunter, "Soul City North."

<sup>60</sup> Levy, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, Jul. 26, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Levy, 29; Thomas Bergbauer, "Lawnside Was Popular Spot for Jazz Clubs," *Courier Post*, Feb. 17, 2005, 6B; and Jim Walsh, "When Lawnside Jumped," *Courier Post*, Feb. 17, 2005.

Historian Andrew Wiese has theorized that there are four main archetypes that describe African American suburban communities.<sup>63</sup> These are the industrial suburb, domestic-service suburb, the unplanned subdivision, and the bungalow suburb. Lawnside experienced certain aspects of all four of Wiese's African American suburban archetypes because the community has existed through several eras as a segregated and later self-governing community. Lawnside residents gained employment as industrial labourers in nearby Camden and Philadelphia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were domestic workers in affluent neighbouring white communities beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, constructed their own homes like other African Americans in unplanned subdivisions, and had developers create housing developments catering to middle-class home buyers as seen in the post-war bungalow suburbs. Therefore, Lawnside does not fit neatly into any of Wiese's archetypes which further demonstrates its special nature. The Lawnside experience is that of a self-governing African American small town in a mid-Atlantic border state, which is surrounded by white suburbs and is near a major metropolitan city. How the black freedom struggle operated in this location with these factors will not be the same story as elsewhere in America. In short, location matters. Lawnside's citizens were also favourably impacted by regional economic development around the same time that the community gained borough status.

In the twentieth century, African Americans in South Jersey increasingly secured employment in nearby industrial centers such as Camden and Philadelphia. Lawnside is located just nine miles from Camden and thirteen miles from Philadelphia. Camden once boasted a thriving industrial sector in the first half of the twentieth century with RCA and Campbell Soup being the most prominent employers. This is reflected in the rapid expansion of African American industrial workers in New Jersey from a total of 8345 in 1910 to 31, 871 by 1930; a growth rate of over 280 percent.<sup>64</sup> Many Lawnside residents also gained industrial employment when defence industry jobs opened up during the

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Greason, 128.

Second World War.<sup>65</sup> These employment opportunities had a positive impact on Lawnside.

Lawnside's attractive location and identity as a small town or suburb open to African Americans caused the community to grow rapidly after the Second World War. Many of the other suburban communities outside of Philadelphia and Camden were or are historically white and continued to be so because of both institutional and informal practices.<sup>66</sup> Lawnside's status as an autonomous African American community attracted families who wanted to migrate from the inner cities to realize the suburban dream. One migrant, Flora Young, a Professor at Glassboro State College whose husband Dr. William Young was Lawnside's community doctor for decades, described what it felt like to move to Lawnside in 1954.

We were impressed with the stability. First of all it was unique in that it was African American predominately. Most people owned their homes. Which created a very stable middle class community. Those that worked out of the town had good paying jobs. They worked at RCA, Campbell Soup. Some were domestics for the very rich in Haddonfield and then it was such a wonderful location for those that wanted to go further. Seven miles to Philadelphia, 90 miles to New York, 60 miles to Atlantic City, 143 miles to Washington, D.C. A wonderful location, and you were impressed that here was an effort being made to man the town, carry on all of the business of the town and being able to do it quite well, administratively. You had your own mayor, police force, fire company and then there were a number of entrepreneurs – the cleaners, the barbers, an occasional store. Then you had a few teachers. And you were also impressed with the number of clans.

Young also described the community as, “small town middle class America noir.”<sup>67</sup> In a 1963, *Courier Post* article about migration to Lawnside, Leon R. Benson and Ida Mae Roeder wrote that, “The new settler was mostly professional or a government worker. This fact alone was destined to change the face and fate of Lawnside.” Benson and

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<sup>65</sup> Quinones Miller, 106.

<sup>66</sup> Laurie Lahey states that Camden did not receive a single FHA secured mortgage between the creation of the federal body in 1934 and 1966. This demonstrates the existence of redlining. Laurie Lahey, “The Grassy Battleground”: Race, Religion, and Activism in Camden's “Wide” Civil Rights Movement” (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2013), 32.

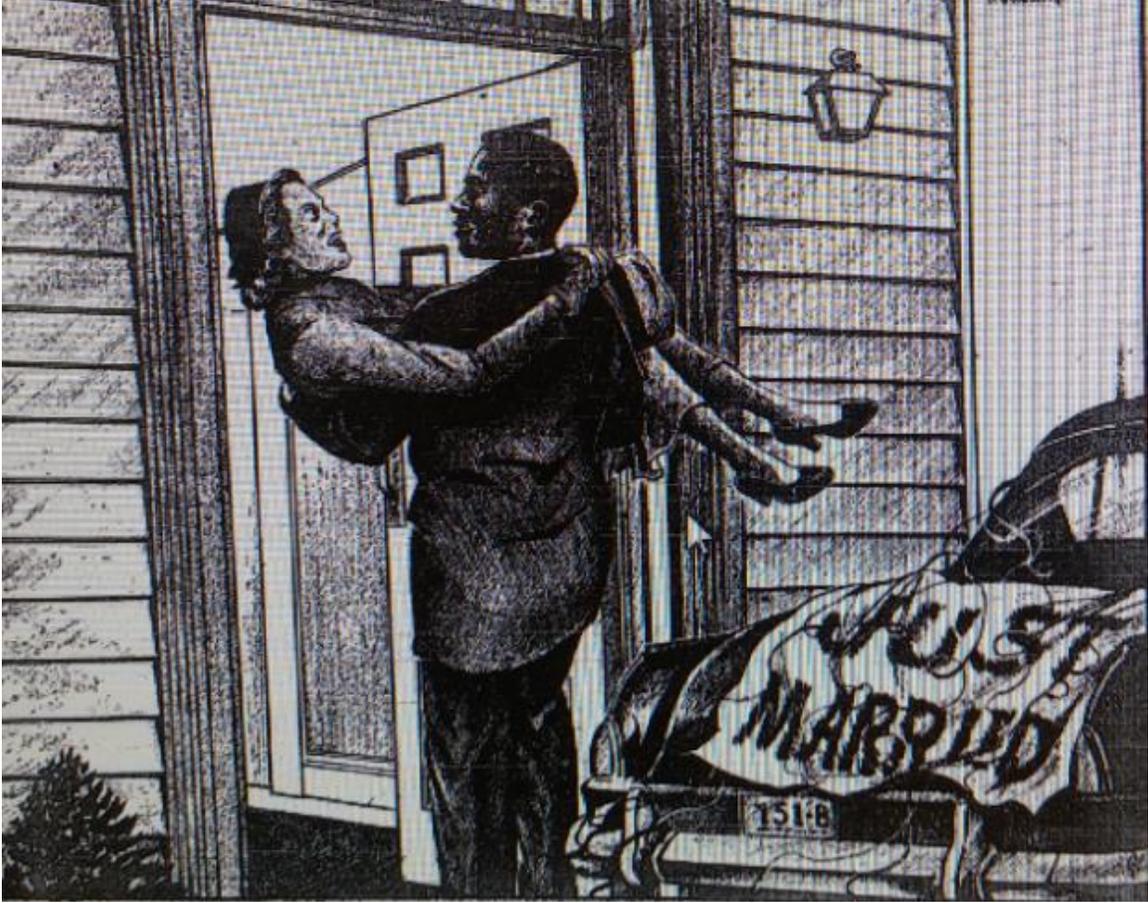
<sup>67</sup> Flora Dorsey Young, Interview by Dr. James Rada, and Linda Shockley, Jun. 23, 2006, 1-3, “Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

Roeder also cite the example of Reverend E.I. Johnson who moved to Lawnside because the only homes or property he could find elsewhere were aged or extremely overpriced.<sup>68</sup> Both the new arrivals and established residents benefitted from the employment and educational opportunities that began to open up for African Americans in the previous decades of the twentieth century. A woman born in 1954 who grew up in Lawnside reflected upon her idyllic childhood in a 2016 interview: “I had my mother, my father, a sister, a dog (laughter). I had a close-knit neighbourhood. I didn’t have to carry a door key because that’s how secure my environment was at home.”<sup>69</sup> By the 1960s, many Lawnside teens had parents who had already achieved middle class economic status or had aspirations that their children could achieve financial success and social standing through the educational opportunities available to Lawnside’s young people.

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<sup>68</sup> Benson and Roeder, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous Woman, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 2, 2016.



**Figure 2** This picture depicts an African American couple engaging in the suburban American dream. Lawnside was a location where African Americans could realize this goal without experiencing exclusion or discrimination.

*Pittsburgh Courier*, June 18, 1955

In the 1950s and 1960s, Lawnside developed at a rapid pace and saw the construction of new housing developments that attracted African American home buyers.<sup>70</sup> The first housing development in the community, Home Acres, was constructed in 1954 and consisted of modest homes.<sup>71</sup> This development contributed to a positive net migration into the community between 1950 and 1960 of 369 people, which represented a

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<sup>70</sup> Vincent R. Zarate, "Power is Black in Lawnside," *Newark Sunday News*, Oct. 6, 1968.

<sup>71</sup> Hunter.

17.1 percent increase in the town's population.<sup>72</sup> From 1960 to March, 1970, there were 273 housing structures built in Lawnside and the population rose from 2155 to 2757.<sup>73</sup> This included the posh Warwick Hills development that featured modern two story homes.<sup>74</sup> Commercial investment into Lawnside increased the town valuation 2000 percent in just a six-year span from a figure of \$1 million in 1967 to \$21.5 million by 1973.<sup>75</sup> Thus, by the 1960s, Lawnside was a community on the rise although it remained impacted by state laws and New Jersey's unusual political culture.

New Jersey is the most politically fragmented state in America with 566 independent municipalities that have tremendous power and autonomy.<sup>76</sup> Each New Jersey municipality not only has its own police force, but also, town government, fire department, and most importantly for this study, school board.<sup>77</sup> The state decreed in 1894, "that each city, borough and incorporated town shall be a school district, separate and distinct from the township school district." It is this law that explains why Lawnside with one elementary school is its own school district as is every other small town in the state. The key exclusionary weapon that municipalities were also given in New Jersey was unquestioned control over zoning which was defended by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1926 and sanctioned by the New Jersey State Supreme Court in 1927.<sup>78</sup> This political structure is what afforded Lawnside its political autonomy and also contributed to New Jersey's pattern of residential segregation.

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<sup>72</sup> *Report on Population in the Camden County Urban Region, Camden County, N.J.*, a Report published in Sep. 1962 by the Camden County Planning Board, Camden, N.J. Rutgers University State Data Center, Camden N.J.

<sup>73</sup> *Table 1 Population, 1970 and 1973, and Related Per Capita Income (PCI) For Revenue Sharing Areas, 1970 U.S. Census of New Jersey Detailed Housing Characteristics.* Rutgers University State Data Center, New Brunswick, N.J.

<sup>74</sup> Quinones Miller, 101.

<sup>75</sup> Hunter.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara G. Salmore & Stephen A. Salmore, *New Jersey Politics and Government: Suburban Politics Comes of Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 201.

<sup>77</sup> I was amazed how many small independent communities exist in the Haddon Heights area. For instance, driving along the Black Horse Pike this summer I passed through Runnemede, Haddon Heights, Bellmawr, Mount Ephraim, Audubon, Oaklyn, and Woodlynne within five minutes. I also saw police cars from several of these borough's independent forces.

<sup>78</sup> Alan J. Karcher, *New Jersey's Multiple Municipal Madness* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1998), 10, 82.

Municipalities throughout New Jersey enacted restrictive zoning laws which prevented the construction of multi-unit dwellings such as duplexes and apartment buildings.<sup>79</sup> Lot size minimums were also designed to price out undesirable migrants.<sup>80</sup> Sugrue demonstrates that restrictive and discriminatory zoning was commonplace in other areas of the North.<sup>81</sup> Haddon Heights was not immune to this phenomenon. For example, in 1947, over 150 residents attended a borough council meeting to object to a proposed apartment building on Prospect Ridge Boulevard. A petition to protest the proposed building collected 128 signatures and stated that, “the proposed apartments would result in the influx of transient residents and would decrease the value of properties.”<sup>82</sup> The *Courier Post* also had numerous articles in 1971 and 1972 about various South Jersey communities that enacted restrictive zoning ordinances.<sup>83</sup> The most egregious example I located was in nearby Medford, New Jersey where a section of the town was zoned for ten acre lots.<sup>84</sup> Thus, there were numerous barriers both formal and informal which kept places like Barrington and Haddon Heights white while making Lawnside even more unique as an inclusive residential suburban space.

New Jersey’s peculiar political culture of home rule and strong municipalities fostered the conditions for pervasive segregation. Greason explains that states with small cities and expansive farming areas such as New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut saw their rural hinterland rapidly transformed into residential suburbs between 1950 and 2000.<sup>85</sup> New Jersey Historian Paul Schopp identified ninety-five antebellum African American communities in the West/South Jersey area.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Lawnside however, many

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<sup>79</sup> John Standring, “Stratford Residents Protest Plans for Apartments Over Offices,” *Courier Post*, Jan. 28, 1972, 16.

<sup>80</sup> Cohen, 231.

<sup>81</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 237.

<sup>82</sup> “Citizens Protest New Building,” *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Apr. 2, 1947.

<sup>83</sup> The most contentious meetings observed through an analysis of the *Courier Post* during 1971 and 1972 were held in Pennsauken which directly borders Camden and has now undergone considerable racial demographic transition. “Suits Attack Pennsauken Zoning Law,” *Courier Post*, Feb. 11, 1972, 24.

<sup>84</sup> “Medford Okays New Zone Law,” *Courier Post*, May 10, 1972.

<sup>85</sup> Greason, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Paul W. Schopp, “Black Communities in West/South Jersey,” unpublished manuscript, Apr. 2014, PDF file.

of these communities became absorbed into white dominated municipalities because they did not gain political autonomy. For example, Timbuctoo, like Lawnside, was an established African American settlement in the early nineteenth century supported in part by an adjacent Quaker community (Mount Holly). After succumbing to suburban sprawl and experiencing out migration in the twentieth century, the only remaining above ground evidence of African American habitation is a cemetery.<sup>87</sup> In other cases, such as in Mount Laurel, African American neighbourhoods were purposefully eradicated due to power imbalances with white municipal officials who sought to redevelop rural lands for suburban development.<sup>88</sup> The suburbanization of New Jersey is illustrated by the stark decrease in its number of farms from 23,838 in 1950 to just 8,400 in 1971. Farmland acreage also decreased from half of the total state land in 1950 to one-fifth of the total in 1971.<sup>89</sup> Lawnside was able to survive obliteration as a community because of the power its African American citizens held due to the community's borough status.

Despite its conservative political culture and widespread support for slavery in the nineteenth century, New Jersey slowly transformed into one of the more progressive states regarding race-relations. New Jersey's 1884 Civil Rights Act was a watershed piece of legislation which barred segregation in public schools and accommodations although these practices continued for many decades.<sup>90</sup> After the Second World War, New Jersey passed the following civil rights related acts: a Fair Employment Practices Law (1945), a regulatory body named The Division Against Discrimination (1945), a new Constitution (1947), which included an anti-discrimination provision that applied to education and militia service, and constitutional amendments banning discrimination in public accommodations (1949), the Armed Forces (1953), and public housing (1954).<sup>91</sup> By the end of the 1950s, all New Jersey public accommodations and educational facilities

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<sup>87</sup> Christopher P. Barton and Patricia G. Markert, "Collaborative Archaeology, Oral History, and Memory at Timbuctoo, New Jersey," *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* 1, no. 1 (2012): 82-83.

<sup>88</sup> David L. Kirp, John. P. Dwyer, and Larry A. Rosenthal, *Our Town: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Greason, 163.

<sup>90</sup> Price, 142. This landmark legislation was weakened in 1917 when damages for civil rights offenses were now awarded to charities chosen by the state. Wright, 54.

<sup>91</sup> Price, 258; and Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 115-116.

were legally open to African Americans. Howard University Professor Marian Thompson Wright credits African American agency for the progressive turn in New Jersey politics while also crediting white allies.<sup>92</sup> Yet, despite the achievement of legal equality in New Jersey, there remained restrictions on African Americans in some social practices as well as some recalcitrant school districts which strove to maintain segregation well into the 1960s.<sup>93</sup>

## Methodology

As initially conceived, this thesis was going to explore the interplay between Haddon Heights and Lawnside students at 3HS with a focus on the 1971 racial incident. However, during my first research visit in the summer of 2016, I learned that a third community, Barrington, also sent students to 3HS and had an important relationship with Lawnside. I then set about gathering as much information as I could about all three communities, 3HS, and New Jersey African American history. Such a project turned out to be more than a single Master's thesis could take on and I decided to focus on Lawnside because of the rich historical narratives I had discovered as well as its fascinating history on the underground railroad and its status as a self-governing African American community.

A study of Lawnside during the civil rights/black power era is supported by rich and varied source materials. Government documents, census information, and school board minutes provide information and data that situate the events which unfolded in Lawnside. Regarding the 1971 racial incident, I was able to get accounts written by local reporters, articles written by the students themselves, the official public response by Haddon Heights Board of Education officials, and the memories of the event through oral history testimonials and social media posts. Local newspapers provided an immediate spotlight on events as they unfolded, and exposed the biases of the journalists through the

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<sup>92</sup> Wright, 70.

<sup>93</sup> New Jersey continued to have a reformist State Supreme Court that was attentive to civil rights issues in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Court ruled against restrictive municipal zoning practices in multiple trials known as the *Mount Laurel* decisions, and against unequal municipal funding for education in *Robinson v Cahill* (1973) and the multiple rulings in *Abbott v Burke*.

language they used, the issues they focused on and did not focus on, and the opinions they expressed. Oral history interviews help support the documentary record and bring to life hidden events and understandings that are absent from the historical record. They also provide a crucial window into the mind of a subject who reflects on a former time and reveals the psychological impact of past events and outcomes. This information cannot be parsed from school board minutes or local newspaper articles. It was surprising how deeply events such as the 1971 racial violence and school closure continued to affect individuals nearly five decades after they happened. I acknowledge that oral sources can contain factual errors, distortions, and may reflect a subject's current attitudes as opposed to their past opinions and understandings. Testimonials can also be used to obscure past indiscretions. I believe this project has asked questions and explored research topics that have not been addressed in these communities. I hope that it will provide an opportunity for other future researchers to build on my contributions.

This thesis employs a wide array of primary source evidence gathered during an extensive research trip to New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania in the summer of 2016. The following archives, libraries, and depositories were consulted: The New Jersey State Archives, the New Jersey State Library, the New Jersey Historical Society, the Haddon Heights and Lawnside Boards of Education offices, the Camden County Public Library branch in Voorhees, N.J., the Gloucester County Historical Society, the Camden County Historical Society, Temple University's community vertical files in their Urban Archive, the Haddonfield Public Library, the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Paul Robeson Library at Rutgers University's Camden Campus, and the Alexander Library at Rutgers University's New Brunswick Campus. The Haddon Heights Public Library has a near complete collection of 3HS yearbooks, undigitized copies of local newspapers such as *The Suburban*, and *The Weekly Visitor*, 3HS school photographs and other school documents and memorabilia. This archive also has a vast store of miscellaneous documents about the community itself ranging from deeds to the minutes of the town's Rotary Club which have been collected and stored by the Haddon Heights Historical Society. The 3HS school library is the location of all copies of *The Scribe* referenced in this thesis. The reference section also

lists the archival location of rare published documents, unpublished manuscripts, and undigitized local newspapers.

In addition to this archival evidence, I conducted over thirty oral history interviews with current and former residents of Barrington, Haddon Heights, and Lawnside in 2016 and 2017. Most interviewees who grew up in Haddon Heights or Barrington contacted me directly after *The Philadelphia Inquirer* published an article about my research.<sup>94</sup> The *Inquirer* article also generated a number of public social media posts containing first hand testimonials of the 1971 racial incident. Some, however, decided to leave the past behind. At least three members of the 3HS Class of 1971 initially contacted me and then went silent after speaking with each other about the potential impact of my research just a few short months before their forty-fifth school reunion. I also received an anonymous email which curtly ordered me to stop this research project; an action that further demonstrates the contemporary meaning of my work. Unfortunately, I received very few direct emails from former 3HS students from Lawnside as a result of the *Inquirer* article.

In Lawnside, I was fortunate to have met Linda Shockley, the community's historical society president when I visited the Peter Mott House; the oldest building in the community and a historic site because of its use as a haven for slave resisters during the time of the underground railroad. Ms. Shockley contacted several former 3HS students from Lawnside on my behalf. One of the individuals she got me in touch with was Morris Smith, the Lawnside School District President from 1963-1974. Mr. Smith is very proud of Lawnside's history and thought it very important that I become familiar with the community's culture and people. Mr. Smith invited me to attend service at Mt. Zion AME Church, to the 147<sup>th</sup> Still Day family reunion, to the annual Ralph Jordan III memorial fundraiser, to the Lawnside Elementary School, and into his home. During these events I was able to speak informally to many Lawnside residents and got some contacts for formal interviews. Despite my best efforts, I was only able to do six interviews with Lawnside residents including Ms. Shockley and Mr. Smith. Some declined because at the time my research focus was about the racial tensions at 3HS and

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<sup>94</sup> Kevin Riordan, "An Old Racial Incident Intrigues Scholar," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 24, 2016, B02.

not youth activism in Lawnside as it would become. An admitted weakness of this project is the paucity of information concerning the Young Blacks of Lawnside and my overwhelming reliance on Gordon Higgs as a source. I hope that by historicizing an understudied African American organization and introducing its charismatic President, I will provide an opportunity for other historians to build on this initial research contribution. Although I was unable to conduct many interviews with former and current Lawnside residents, there are pre-existing oral sources about the community.

This thesis utilizes the “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project,” a collection of twelve oral history interviews collected by the Lawnside Historical Society in 2006. The project has the following stated objective:

The project was begun with the idea of capturing the handed down stories of those residents who can trace their lineage to the freedom – seekers escaping along the Underground Railroad. It became apparent that other important stories about the growth and development of this unique African-American town in southern New Jersey needed to be told as well. With Tell Lawnside’s Story, we are broadening the scope of our project to let others talk about education, government, church, civic and social life.<sup>95</sup>

This source addresses the question of education in several of the interviews and is thus a vital source for this thesis. However, there is no analysis or interpretation of the interviews offered by the project’s organizers. As such, the interviews have never been historicized, nor to my knowledge have they been utilized by any other researchers.

Oral history methodology was a key component in my historical research. During some of my first few interviews, I found myself at times questioning the narratives expressed by my interview subjects because their statements did not accord with what I had read in newspaper accounts. I then recalled the advice of scholars such as Alessandro Portelli and Dori Laub and halted this practice immediately. Laub and Portelli both believe that it is unimportant whether or not testimonials match objective

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<sup>95</sup> “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

facts.<sup>96</sup> Portelli explains, “the credibility of oral sources is a *different credibility*.” He expounds on this point stating:

The importance of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in. Therefore there are no ‘false’ oral sources... The diversity of oral history consists in the fact that ‘untrue’ statements are still psychologically ‘true’, and these previous ‘errors’ sometimes reveal more than factually accurate accounts.”<sup>97</sup>

The racial incidents at 3HS in 1969 and 1971 were documented by both school board minutes and by several newspapers. As such, the discrepancies that came up in oral narratives did not cloud my overall picture of these events.

I was also mindful that I would be speaking with subjects who might possess objectionable opinions about race. The work of historian Kathleen Blee prepared me for this situation. Blee interviewed former Ku Klux Klan members in Indiana and explained that there are two main approaches to conducting oral history interviews. The first is the clinical approach of the distanced, neutral interviewer and the second is an engaged and sympathetic approach.<sup>98</sup> During my interviews I was able to speak amicably with all subjects and avoid a confrontational tone despite the content of the conversations. A key topic I used to determine the political values of my subjects was to ask about their thoughts on the 2016 Presidential Election which featured the polarizing candidacy of Donald Trump.<sup>99</sup> Those who were Trump supporters often had very different attitudes about race than those who favoured Hillary Clinton. I also have been careful to protect the identities of participants who wished to be anonymous or in some cases I used my

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<sup>96</sup> Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Learning,” in: *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. S. Felman and D. Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 27; and Alessandro Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” *History Workshop* 12 (Autumn 1981), 100.

<sup>97</sup> Portelli, 100.

<sup>98</sup> Kathleen Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (1993), 603-604.

<sup>99</sup> I attended a Donald Trump Rally in Connecticut in August of 2017 and wrote about the experience in *The Barrie Examiner*. I discuss in the article how most white Americans from various class backgrounds over the age of twenty-five who I either met or interviewed were supporting Trump. Jason Romisher, “Taking in Donald Trump,” *The Barrie Examiner*, Aug. 17, 2016.

own discretion with interview subjects I felt could be impacted if their identity was included. In these cases, I left out or changed the details in my narratives such as the years they attended 3HS, the communities they grew up in, the varsity sports they participated in, and other descriptors. I also thought it inappropriate to include the names of the young people involved in the racial incidents at 3HS because they were minors at the time the events occurred.

To review, this thesis will demonstrate that African American political autonomy moderated the revolutionary drive in Lawnside during the radical phase of the black freedom struggle. African American youth from Lawnside participated in both non-violent and violent actions that sought to address grievances and demands also expressed by African Americans in other communities. Lawnside youth did not have their activist efforts coopted by adults and outsiders, they were led to a significant degree by female leaders, and many were involved in a non-violent activist organization committed to educational advancement and accommodation with capitalist enterprises.

## Chapter 2.

### The Young Blacks of Lawnside

*We are on some sacred ground. And we gonna have to start helping our people and do anything we possibly can do. And help the students and let them see that there is some light at the end of the tunnel. And the only way to achieve that is through education. That was the common denominator. Without that, nothing would have ever survived.*

– Gordon Higgs, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 12, 2016

In 1968, a group of young Lawnside residents organized themselves as the Young Blacks of Lawnside. This chapter will examine the impact and activities of this organization, based principally on a series of interviews with Gordon Higgs - the former President of the Young Blacks. The Young Blacks proactively engaged in municipal politics, inspired African American student agency for the achievement of racial equality and fair treatment at 3HS, and supported the activist efforts of other African American communities and organizations. Furthermore, the Young Blacks are an example of a non-violent African American organization during the black power era that eschewed revolution and emphasized the importance of education for professional and career advancement. The organization remained committed to advancement within the existing systems in American society despite involvement with radical African American leaders and organizations and the conversion of much of its leadership and membership to the Nation of Islam (NOI). The Young Blacks rejected radicalized approaches because of Lawnside's political autonomy, its community spirit, and the existence of successful role models who achieved prosperity working within the system. Although the leadership was mostly male, African American women achieved executive positions and acted as media spokespersons within the Young Blacks. Female members also developed into key leaders of the African American student body at 3HS. Therefore, an analysis of the Young Blacks of Lawnside contributes a case study of the civil rights/black power era in a small-town setting, adds to the existing literature emphasizing the role of women as key activists and leaders within African American organizations, and it also gives insight into

how black power influence operated in a political setting where African American municipal control was already fully developed.

The 1960s were an incredibly turbulent time in the United States. Youth from Lawnside were confronted with media images of sit-ins, police brutality, boycotts, protest marches, and urban uprisings.<sup>100</sup> As the 1960s progressed, the issues of civil rights, race-relations, and integration ripped America apart. Throughout the nation cities like Newark, Camden, Plainfield, Philadelphia, Detroit, Washington, Los Angeles, and countless others burned in chaotic confusion. Even though Lawnside was at peace, many of its citizens still internalized the fears and anxieties associated with the black freedom struggle. Amid this uncertainty, the community developed an activist youth organization in 1968 called the Young Blacks of Lawnside. The Young Blacks would have a profound effect on Lawnside youth and helped guide them on the path toward professional achievement as well as through one of the most violent and turbulent periods in American history.

Higgs captured the confusion and uncertainty of the late 1960s when America teetered on the brink of revolution and mass insurrection. He recalled attending meetings where, “we would all sit there and try to figure a lot of things that were happening at the time. Cause things were happening spontaneously. Especially after the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King – everything was just helter skelter. You know – society was mad.” Higgs also insightfully recalled how Lawnside youth had no experience with activism prior to the formation of the Young Blacks. He stated how, “since this was all new... so nobody can really predict the future on how things were gonna come out.”<sup>101</sup> The myriad challenges that unfolded for the nation’s African American youth were also recalled by Higgs who related,

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<sup>100</sup> While the uprisings of the 1960s are often referred to as riots, I have chosen to use the terms "uprising" and "rebellion" instead to describe the urban violence and upheavals that shook America in the 1960s and early 1970s. The term "riot" has pejorative connotations that delegitimize the structural causes and inequalities that engendered discontent in many African American communities. For a general overview of the historiographic debate over the interpretation of the 1960s urban uprisings and the use of the terms riot and rebellion see Heather Ann Thompson, “Urban Uprisings: Riots or Rebellions?” in *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, ed. David Farber and Beth Bailey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> Gordon Higgs, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 23, 2017.

Yeah so the time period in between '65 and '70, the Vietnam War started in '64 and then you had the racial unrest, you had Philadelphia '64, Watts, Newark and Plainfield in 67 - riots. This country was experiencing for the first time major racial unrest. Also with Muhammad Ali out there crusading not to go to the Vietnam War, very impressively you know – bidding people to not go. So the vibrations for that was out there too. Then the drug culture. The drugs came in heavy based on the movement, based on the war, the drugs flooded the black community immensely. I don't know if that was coincidental, I don't know if it was a plan. But it came in. So with those three factors hitting the African American male pretty heavy, there was a lot of confusion that came out of that. There was a lot of lives lost in the war. A lot of peoples going to Canada. A lot of peoples taking highly deadly drugs. And a lot of peoples joining the movements to try and find some identity within themselves and their families. So within that time period of '65 and '70 it was like a trigger. So in my time period see that was the age of 16-21. From 16-21 for a young man them years is very vital in his development and growth. So therefore, personally, it sparked me to go into the direction to try and help my people out as best I can. This is when I joined the Young Blacks of Lawnside which was a group that would make sure that our people would get our rights and that we wasn't picked over.<sup>102</sup>

It was crucial that Higgs came of age during a confluence of disruptive social currents such as the Vietnam War, 60s drug culture, African American mass protests, and the many urban rebellions. Like many other young Americans he was inspired to effect change in the wake of such gripping and monumental events. Higgs giving credit to Muhammad Ali's influence also demonstrates the importance of national figures to local activists and organizations.<sup>103</sup>

Higgs' family background and personal history helped shape the agency he exercised as leader of the Young Blacks. He moved to Lawnside in 1965 at the age of 16 from Camden; a community where he would continue to have close friends and deep family connections. Higgs' father was a union leader of Local 222 which was a

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<sup>102</sup> Gordon Higgs, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>103</sup> In a 2016 interview, a man who still resides in Lawnside recounted his activities during the 1971 school closure. While most youth participated in rather mundane practices, he biked over and socialized with Muhammad Ali at his house in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Anonymous Man, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 2, 2016.

labourer's union in Camden.<sup>104</sup> His mother was a school teacher and he credits his parents for instilling in him the importance of education.<sup>105</sup>

The Young Blacks were not the first Lawnside group to stress the importance of education to the community's young people. Flora Young explained that Lawnside operated a bit differently than predominately white communities where there was a business community with leaders that provided guidance and financial support to its citizens. In Lawnside, she explained, "Black physicians had to play a major part, along with ministers and teachers, of being mentors and motivators for young blacks to go forward."<sup>106</sup> A prime example of community mentors in Lawnside were both Flora Young and her husband, Dr. William Young. In 1963, the Youngs who met as students at Howard University started a youth group that took children to visit African American colleges in the south, went on educational field trips, and brought prominent African American role models to the community as guest speakers.<sup>107</sup> Examples of the speakers who came to Lawnside on the Youngs' behalf were James Fowler who was chosen to reintegrate West Point in the late 1930s, Dr. David Driskell who holds nine Honorary Doctorates and is a Professor at the University of Maryland, Dr. John Hope Franklin who received a PhD from Harvard, and Philadelphia radio personality John Bandy.<sup>108</sup>

The Youngs' efforts had a profound impact on the lives of many Lawnsiders. One youth who was influenced by the group was future New Jersey State Senator Wayne R. Bryant who as a high school junior served as President of the Lawnside youth group. Another young man in the group named George Banks planned to attend Rutgers University in New Jersey before changing his mind after a trip with the Youngs to visit Virginia's Hampton University, a historically black college. Flora Young explained that after graduation, Banks "got one of the best paying jobs in New Jersey at Johnson & Johnson." She also recounted a running joke which existed in Lawnside: "Don't go down

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<sup>104</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Dent, 118.

<sup>107</sup> Gail Leberman, "Lawnside Fetes a Doctor for Helping Many Youths," *Courier Post*, Wed July 27, 1977, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Flora Dorsey Young, Jun. 23, 2006, 1.

to Young's corner because if you go down there and hang out on the corner they are going to ship you out to college." There was truth behind the joke as Flora Young recalled the time that Dr. Young took Sammy Jackson and Harold Smith and drove them to North Carolina, enrolled them in college, and left them there.<sup>109</sup>

The Youngs also provided financial assistance including the repayment of loans to Lawnside youth. Harold Smith, a construction dealer, explained that Dr. Young provided him with financial aid for college, use of an apartment, assistance finding a job, and a loan for his first car. Dr. Young also provided free medical services to needy patients and was available for emergency house visits throughout the night. He explained his rationale for involvement with Lawnside's youth:

I feel any exposure, regardless of how far these kids go academically, at least takes them further than they or their families have ever been before. It makes them able to help their kids move two steps further. And that's the way all minorities have survived.<sup>110</sup>

By 1966, the Youngs' youth group petered out as Lawnside's young people looked for a more activist organization that addressed the currents of the civil rights movement. The Young Blacks would soon rise to address this need.

The Young Blacks received assistance from some Lawnside community leaders and established mentors. Dr. Young worked with the organization by attending history classes, assisting with instruction, and engaging in dialogue. Higgs explained that, "Dr. Young was always receptive to anything we did. He helped us out immensely... He was always in our corner." A dentist in Lawnside, Dr. Evans, also attended history classes and worked in a similar capacity to Dr. Young. Reverend Earl Pierce offered space at Lawnside's Chapel Annunciation where the first meetings of the Young Blacks took place. Reverend Speights at Lawnside's Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. church also offered the facility for meetings and assisted the Young Blacks with the implementation of their community programs.<sup>111</sup> As we will see, intergenerational divisions and an absence of

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<sup>109</sup> Flora Dorsey Young, Jun. 23, 2006, 1-4.

<sup>110</sup> Leberman, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

support for youth initiatives at key moments did occur in Lawnside. However, the supports afforded by community leaders to the Young Blacks demonstrates the community spirit of Lawnside and the receptivity of some of its elders to youth activism. Activist efforts did not go as smoothly in other African American population centers such as Atlanta, where young reformers keen on achieving rapid civil rights gains dramatically clashed with older leaders who defended a gradualist approach.<sup>112</sup> A key difference in the capacity for cooperation between elders and youth in Lawnside was that its citizens were not confronted with a recalcitrant white municipal government.

The Young Blacks was founded in 1968 and developed in two distinct waves. The first wave was more inspired by the early period of the civil rights movement and has been described by Higgs as an offshoot of the mainstream NAACP Youth Movement. This organizational ethos is surprising because black power ideology had profoundly shaped other African American organizations in America beginning in 1966. The Young Blacks were initially mentored by an adult named Louis Moore and had a membership of about fifteen members. This phase was short-lived and dissipated when participants went away to postsecondary education. In the fall of 1968, Higgs then advanced to the position of President of the Young Blacks which ushered in the second wave. He explained that SNCC leader H. Rap Brown provided the inspiration for the group to take a more radical direction:

At the time, things were moving pretty fast. You had guys like Rap Brown, with college degrees getting up on cars, that were frustrated, hollering at the top of their lungs, that they were tired of being abused, mentally and physically and was ready to stand-up and talk and do something about it. So this group that came behind the first group, had a little more spark and were ready to attack the social issues and see where they fit in with different organizations.<sup>113</sup>

Much of the focus of the Young Blacks community involvement and the bulk of the membership in the organization were high school students enrolled at 3HS. As chapter

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<sup>112</sup> For more on Atlanta during the civil rights/black power era see Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>113</sup> Gordon Higgs, Interview by Clinton Higgs Jr., Aug. 10, 2006, "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

three will demonstrate, involvement in The Young Blacks motivated some Lawnside students to question their social and political circumstances in their school community and to mobilize to effect change.

Education and non-violence were the two guiding principles of The Young Blacks. Higgs passionately explained the reason for these twin pillars:

The group's basic thing, because it was an all-black community so there was no let's go fight another race. It was taken within ourselves knowing that Harriet Tubman used to walk this land of Lawnside. The name Lawnside was Free Haven during slavery. Knowing that Harriet Tubman had to get every slave she took from down south at least to Free Haven. So with that organization we instilled within our body that we are on some sacred ground. And we gonna have to start helping our people and do anything we possibly can do. And help the students and let them see that there is some light at the end of the tunnel. And the only way to achieve that is through education. That was the common denominator. Without that, nothing would have ever survived.<sup>114</sup>

Youth in the community were inspired to address issues of inequality at 3HS in part to improve their educational prospects. A key example of the difference in conditions in Lawnside vis-à-vis other African American population centers was the effect of Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. At least 130 American communities erupted in protests and violent urban rebellions in the aftermath of the assassination.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, Lawnside remained calm and its youth gained greater access to education as a consequence. Higgs stated that in the immediate aftermath of King's assassination he received a phone call from Glassboro State College offering several scholarships to Lawnside youth with the only requirement being a high school diploma.<sup>116</sup>

The Young Blacks had a positive impact on community development in Lawnside. The organization not only held political meetings with an educational focus, they also managed a very popular athletics program. If youth did not attend meetings,

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<sup>114</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>115</sup> Thompson, 110.

<sup>116</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

they could listen to the political messages of The Young Blacks on the basketball court.<sup>117</sup> Higgs explained the general activities of the organization stating:

So what we were doing was youth programs, we had dances and all kinds of events to raise monies. We had a summer league, which was well received, which could have been one of the better ones in the state, if not the country, who had many, many athletes in this summer league that went on and excelled greatly in the game called life. All avenues, from your Doctors, to your Reverends, to your professional athletes.<sup>118</sup>

The *Courier Post* reported in January 1972 that The Young Blacks Summer Basketball League held a banquet for the sixty-five players who participated in the league. The MVP award went to a young man who played for a team called ‘The Blackness.’<sup>119</sup>

The Young Blacks also campaigned for jobs creation programs in Lawnside and negotiated with employers to reinvest in the community. Higgs expressed during a borough council discussion on community development that, “If we’re going to be an all-black community, why not support black industry? Why not let the people see their own people run the show... The old time process of exploiting our people is out.”<sup>120</sup> Despite this black power inspired rhetoric, the Young Blacks pragmatically worked with white owned corporate interests seeking to invest in Lawnside. This action demonstrates that the organization did not subscribe to the anti-capitalist strain of black power ideology. One of these employers was the Pathmark Supermarket chain who opened a grocery store in Lawnside. Pathmark not only hired nine members of the Young Blacks they also donated the funds to run the organization’s basketball program.<sup>121</sup> Higgs remarked on the strong relationship with Pathmark: “Whatever we wanted as an organization or needed help with... they helped us with.” Higgs also emphasized a key difference in approach that the Young Blacks took as opposed to other more radical African American organizations. He stated how the Young Blacks exercised professionalism by wearing

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<sup>117</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Higgs, Aug. 10, 2006; and Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> “Black League Slates Banquet,” *Courier Post*, Jan. 13, 1972, 61.

<sup>120</sup> Dan Lynch, “Mayor Says Growth in Lawnside Depends on Green, not Black Power,” *Courier Post*, Apr. 3, 1969, 13.

<sup>121</sup> Higgs, Aug. 10, 2006.

suits with a briefcase to meetings with corporate types and avoided “running around with jeans and dashikis talking about blowing the community up.”<sup>122</sup>

The Young Blacks became an active voice in Lawnside municipal politics and attended borough council meetings beginning in the summer of 1968.<sup>123</sup> *Courier Post* reporter Dan Lynch documented the activities of the Young Blacks at several Lawnside borough meetings in the spring of 1969. Lynch reported at one meeting that The Young Blacks submitted a list of “demands.” The suggestions put to Council by the Young Blacks sought basic community improvements such as better street lighting, road paving, elimination of police dogs, and a new ambulance. The Young Blacks departed the meeting prematurely, announcing to Council that they must leave so they “can be home before the police pick us up for curfew violations.”<sup>124</sup> On their way out, Higgs, according to Lynch, declared, “We shall return and we’re coming back stronger.” One youth also yelled that the police were a “bunch of chumps.” He was immediately upbraided by Higgs who retorted, “Come on man. The police aren’t used to radicals.”<sup>125</sup>

Lynch was present at the next council meeting but this time members of The Young Blacks chose not to engage with the town council because of the white reporter’s presence. Paul James, The Chairman of the Young Blacks, stated that they did not speak because Lawnside should remain “a united black community” in the presence of an outsider. This tactic demonstrates a distrust of the white controlled media and mirrors the tactics H. Rap Brown used at a 1967 speech in Camden that Higgs attended. This also reveals that the Young Blacks chose to keep the differences they had with Lawnside government officials private; a mature course of action for any political organization let alone one directed by young people. These differences could be worked out in Lawnside and did not need to be announced to a potentially hostile white controlled media. One

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<sup>122</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Zarate.

<sup>124</sup> Lynch reported that the charged atmosphere during the Young Blacks exit was given some levity when Councilman Bryson Armstead also left the Council chambers announcing that he too had to leave to avoid a curfew violation. The statement concerning police control in Lawnside may have been for dramatic effect as Higgs recounted in a 2017 interview that both he and the members of the Young Blacks had a good working relationship with the Lawnside police force.

<sup>125</sup> Dan Lynch, “Lawnside Militants Demand Better Town, *Courier Post*, May 8, 1969, 17.

member of The Young Blacks exclaimed during Lynch's second visit that, "The press is evil. Whitey comes in here and gets his news and he's happy."<sup>126</sup> Of course the phrase 'evil press' provided the headline for Lynch's story.

The Young Blacks were less successful in engaging with Lawnside School District officials. Members of the youth organization attempted to attend Board of Education meetings and were essentially frozen out. Morris Smith, the President of the Lawnside School District from 1963-1974 explained his approach to the Young Blacks' efforts.

Because of what was going on around the country, young people in Lawnside, particularly the males thought they could come to the board meetings and challenge us as a board. And they had a group called the Young Blacks. And they would come to the board meetings and challenge us in terms of what they thought was going on or not going on. And I didn't put up with a lot of foolishness. I either shut it down or adjourned the meeting. So we wouldn't have a lot of uprising at the board meetings in Lawnside.<sup>127</sup>

This demonstrates that the Lawnside Board of Education under Smith's leadership had a conservative attitude toward youth activism. Using the term 'foolishness' to describe their efforts indicates a paternalistic disregard for the attitudes and modes of expression exhibited by members of the Young Blacks. This position would have a significant effect on the direction of youth activism at 3HS.

Lawnside received both national and in-state attention by the print media in 1968, where the question of black power in the community was explored. *The New York Times* published an article entitled "Postwar Prosperity Brings Green Power to Black Town," addressing the formation of The Young Blacks while also dismissing its impact on the community.<sup>128</sup> Ellen Benson, Lawnside's long time postmistress, was asked by a reporter to describe the condition of youth in Lawnside. She stated that, "Because of television they are becoming more aware, but they can't put themselves in the picture. There isn't

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<sup>126</sup> Dan Lynch, "'Evil Press' Dissuades Lawnside Group from Badgering," *Courier Post*, Jun. 5, 1969, 29.

<sup>127</sup> Smith, Jul. 26, 2016.

<sup>128</sup> "Postwar Prosperity Brings Green Power to Black Town," *The New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1968, 48.

any bitterness. They feel sympathetic, but they've never had to live like that." Benson was referring to Lawnside's isolation from the violence and chaos of the long hot summers of urban rebellions throughout America in the 1960s and the poverty associated with many urban African American population centers. Sixteen-year-old Lawnside youth, Lonnie Crawley minimized the attractiveness of black power in Lawnside stating that, "Every black person has reason to learn about black power... but the reason might not seem to be as strong here as in the rest of the country." Crawley did raise an issue that would turn out to be a prescient warning about conditions at 3HS. He stated: "There's almost no participation by blacks in the social groups at the school. They [African American students] don't try – there's nothing for them."<sup>129</sup>

Vincent R. Zarate, a reporter with the *Newark Sunday News* also wrote a piece entitled, "Power is Black in Lawnside." Zarate essentially found The Young Blacks to be a pointless enterprise because of the governmental autonomy enjoyed by African Americans in Lawnside. Zarate wrote, "The group called the 'Young Blacks' who wanted black power in a town already black is one of the many racial twists a white notices in this small town." Zarate continued with an attitude of incredulity, that the Young Blacks "went to the mayor and council this summer and demanded 'black power.' The black mayor and six black councilmen and the black clerk and black tax collector and black police chief looked up in astonishment."<sup>130</sup>

Both Zarate and the *Courier Post's* Dan Lynch wrote about The Young Blacks and failed to comprehend the significant grievances Lawnside high school students had with their educational experience at 3HS. Perhaps, Lawnside's relative prosperity influenced both reporters' incomprehension regarding the radicalized behaviour of Lawnside youth. Furthermore, the name Young Blacks, in conjunction with the age and race of the activists most likely engendered stereotyping. Neither reporter explored the philosophy of the organization or interviewed any members associated with it. The easy narrative they painted was of a group of naive African American youth imitating black power organizations in a location that did not warrant such drastic measures. This facile

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<sup>129</sup> "Black-Governed Community Prospers," *Decatur Daily Review*, Nov. 15, 1968, 8.

<sup>130</sup> Zarate.

appraisal seriously underestimated the character and sophistication of the Young Blacks' measured approach to community improvement and youth activism. An analysis of the Young Blacks also gives insight into the issues of gender, class, generation, and religion.

Female members of the Young Blacks were able to serve as spokespersons for the organization and advanced into leadership positions. Recent scholarship has challenged the notion that women were secondary figures in African American organizations during the black freedom struggle. Higgs stated that, "Well at the time... females... was laying in the background with most organizations. But the Black Panther Party did have some females who were out front." In the Young Blacks, Higgs confirmed that, "There were some highly ranked females in our organization." Marie Young, the daughter of Flora and Dr. William Young was a member of the Young Blacks executive in the position of Secretary and had one of the five offices in the group's Lawnside headquarters. Higgs also mentioned the contributions of Linda Foster whom he described as one of the smartest members in the organization. He was so impressed with Foster's intellect and communication skills that she often joined him for radio interviews conducted on Temple University's WRPI in 1971. Higgs summarized the Young Blacks position on women as follows:

We seen women as equals because we had three or four women who were brilliant. And a couple of them have Doctor's degrees now. You know one is an entrepreneur in Atlanta, Georgia, a multi-millionaire. So we didn't look at the inferiority complex with women because when we would meet and have our meetings and have open floor discussions it seemed like the women was really on point with many of the situations that were going on in the country and they was basically a lot smarter than the men.<sup>131</sup>

This statement may in part represent Higgs' 2017 ideas and it may also be an effort to appeal to the perceived sensibilities of an academic outsider. However, Marie Young's position on the Young Blacks executive coupled with Linda Foster's role in speaking for the organization attests to the respect that the Young Blacks had for the capabilities of its female members. The activities of female student leaders at 3HS explored in chapter three also supports this point. Furthermore, these roles contrast with Valk's study of

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<sup>131</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

Howard University, where joint efforts involving male and female African American activists often had prescribed gender roles with female students serving as organizers and logistics operators and male students serving as spokespersons and security personnel.<sup>132</sup> A key counterpoint is that respect for female ideas and the examples of Young and Foster do not change the fact that the majority of the leadership in the Young Blacks was male. Nevertheless, the leadership demonstrated by female members of the Young Blacks further supports the work of historians such as Valk, Greene, and Countryman who challenge the notion that women played a second-class role in the movement for African American equality.

Higgs did not sense any class divisions amongst Lawnside youth or within the community in general, but did explain a difference in outlook based on age. Most of Lawnside's politicians in the 1960s and early 1970s were elderly. Higgs recalled that during the height of youth activism in Lawnside, town councillors Smith and Lyons were in their eighties, and Mayor Hilliard T. Moore, and councillors Cotton and Regan were also of advanced age. One bone of contention that Higgs related was that older members of Council had an issue with youth referring to themselves as black.<sup>133</sup> Journalist David Dent interviewed James Benson, an elderly man who had lived in Lawnside his whole life. Benson explained his take on African American descriptors stating:

The bottom line was, we were Negroes then. And Negroes had accomplished something down through the years... What has the black accomplished? We have identified ourselves as a different species rather than being proud of who we are. We've separated ourselves. Why do I have to be separate? Let me be me.<sup>134</sup>

Here we see a complete divergence in attitude with a member of the older generation looking back fondly to a time when African Americans were often called negroes. Meanwhile, many African American youth in the 1960s took pride in adopting the term black and rejected the term negro as racist and anachronistic. The whole movement for black power embraced this definitional shift and gave the word black, revolutionary

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<sup>132</sup> Valk, 119.

<sup>133</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Dent, 63.

overtones. Higgs further elaborated on the tensions between youth and government leaders in Lawnside, stating how, “There was a lot of arguments, and there was a lot of conversations, ... [they would say] ‘wait till you get older – you’ll see.’” Higgs reflected on the Young Blacks relationship with community elders:

But I often think if some of them people were around today I would like to go talk to ‘em. Because they figured that we would fail and we was just beating a dead horse. And I would like to show ‘em some of the people [mentored by the Young Blacks] that were really successful.<sup>135</sup>

Even now, in his mid-sixties, the differences between Higgs and the community power brokers of the 1960s who questioned the purpose and efficacy of the Young Blacks still resonates.

Religion was not a divisive issue for the Young Blacks despite the embrace of the Nation of Islam (NOI) by several members of the organization. Lawnside is a community with a strong Christian tradition with several thriving congregations at its various churches. In the 1960s, many Lawnside youth went in a different direction spiritually. Higgs and the nucleus of the leadership of the Young Blacks joined the NOI.<sup>136</sup> He estimated that about one-quarter of the membership of the Young Blacks also converted. Higgs was careful to emphasize that the NOI was an organization with the same goals and purposes as the Young Blacks. He also explained that involvement in the NOI did not increase or promote revolutionary ideas and the membership “remained calm.”<sup>137</sup> Higgs may have felt compelled to make this distinction because as historian Edward E. Curtis IV explains, the mainstream media often, “Criticiz[ed] the movement as an anti-American or black supremacist organization.” In contrast, Curtis describes the NOI as a rich and ethical religious culture that brought members, “dignity, hope, civilization, self-determination, pride, peace, security, and salvation.”<sup>138</sup> In a remark which demonstrates the lack of division that religion caused in the Young Blacks, Higgs

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<sup>135</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Higgs, Aug. 10, 2006

<sup>137</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>138</sup> Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4-6.

stated how, “It is a shame today how the country is so divided amongst the Christians and the Muslims. We never had any of that. None.”<sup>139</sup> One of the contributing factors to the spirit of religious tolerance in Lawnside is the absence of racial oppression in the community. Nations that are historically divided by both race and religion have the potential for minorities to experience a double jeopardy of exclusion and inequality. The embrace of the NOI by some members of the Young Blacks was just one indication of the influence of African American ideologies on the youth of Lawnside.

H. Rap Brown’s speech in Camden on August 30, 1967, reflected the anger and frustration that many African Americans felt, and broadcasted to a receptive audience the message and tone of the black power movement. A crowd of approximately 4,500 people attended the speech including Charles ‘Poppy’ Sharp, a man who became a key movement leader in Camden, and Gordon Higgs.<sup>140</sup> At the outset of his speech, Brown commanded his followers to remove members of the press identified by their equipment and whiteness who he referred to as “hunkie cameramen.” As mentioned, this distrust of white controlled media was also expressed by members of the Young Blacks. Brown described the United States as being in the throes of a domestic revolution and exclaimed to his raucous audience that “the only way to defend yourself is go out and get guns.” The anti-establishment rhetoric continued as Brown emphatically declared, “We are at war. Anytime President Johnson sends troops to Detroit and tanks down the streets of Newark, you know we’re at war.” He also quoted Chairman Mao’s belief that “Power comes from the barrel of a gun.” Brown also complained that the United States was guilty of genocide for malnutrition related deaths in impoverished African American communities and the loss of African American lives in Vietnam. He made a key statement that addressed the priorities of non-violent African American reformers such as Martin Luther King Jr. Brown remarked, “I can’t talk about being equal. I have to talk about being free. And you can’t be partly free.”<sup>141</sup> This speech resonated deeply with ‘Poppy’ Sharp.

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<sup>139</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>140</sup> Gillette, 75; Lahey, 157; and Higgs, personal correspondence.

<sup>141</sup> “Brown Rattles Sabres at Convention Hall Rally,” *Courier Post*, Aug. 31, 1967, 15.

Sharp founded Camden's Black People's Unity Movement in the immediate aftermath of Brown's speech.<sup>142</sup> He stated: "Rap addressed all of us, but I felt he was talking directly at me. I had to make a decision in my life at that point. In making the decision, I wound up taking the suffering of the community on myself." Brown's message instilled a will and resolve in Sharp that left him feeling that "there was no other choice" but to commit himself fully to the movement. BPUM soon became an incredibly influential organization in Camden city politics. Its leaders saw the organization as an agent to advance participatory democracy for the people of Camden and established housing, fair wages, and self-respect as its key priorities. BPUM also believed that, "All the people in our community should contribute to positive change," and saw political, economic, and social self-determination as the overriding objectives for the city's African American population. BPUM leaders described Camden's African American population as a colony which was "controlled for and by people outside of the community."<sup>143</sup> BPUM would pursue a confrontational approach with Camden city officials and police.

Howard Gillette described BPUM's protest methods under Sharp as "distinctly militant."<sup>144</sup> One of BPUM's first demonstrations was the occupation of part of Camden's luxury Northgate apartment complex in protest over the city's relocation of a displaced African American family to a house with substandard conditions. This action resulted in a standoff with heavily armed city police in riot gear.<sup>145</sup> The following day, Sharp was arrested after taunting police in front of City Hall. A few days later Sharp was arrested again for inciting a riot in the South Jersey community of Bridgeton due to the content of a speech he gave there.<sup>146</sup> BPUM's activist efforts did result in Camden's political establishment ceding some power to BPUM in the form of political appointments. In 1973, Sharp was given a position in the administration of new Mayor Angelo Errichetti and fellow BPUM member Randy Primus was elected to city

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<sup>142</sup> Sharp chose to name his fledgling organization BPUM after meeting with Walter Palmer who was a key leader in Philadelphia's own BPUM. Gillette, 77. Other than the shared name, Camden's BPUM had little contact or coordination with their Philadelphia namesake. Lahey, 164.

<sup>143</sup> Gillette, 77-78.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>145</sup> Lahey, 174.

<sup>146</sup> Gillette, 78-79.

council.<sup>147</sup> Primus was later elected Mayor in 1981 after Camden had transitioned to a majority African American and Puerto Rican population.<sup>148</sup> Notwithstanding the eventual electoral success of BPUM members in Camden, their early confrontational and violent methods when confronting a white political power structure were not emulated by the Young Blacks of Lawnside.

The Young Blacks attended meetings held by other African American organizations and leaders with both radical and mainstream ideas. Higgs stated that members of the Young Blacks often attended the meetings of New Jersey and Philadelphia based organizations but stayed away from activism in Philadelphia because “there was enough going on in Jersey.” He also related that the Young Blacks attended meetings as far away as Newark and were a known organization on the east coast. Higgs further stated that he had a close relationship with Charles ‘Poppy’ Sharp. He recalled: “I would say roughly twenty, twenty-one years old I used to take Poppy Sharp to all the national meetings in New Jersey.... And I used to attend his meetings and I was a really good friend of Poppy Sharp’s until he died.”<sup>149</sup> Higgs also had other contacts with prominent African American leaders.

Higgs connected at meetings with Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army (BLA) member Assata Shakur. The BLA was a clandestine African American organization that espoused violent methods for a variety of complex reasons.<sup>150</sup> Historian Joy James stated that “Along with Harriet Tubman, [Assata] Shakur would become one of the few black female figures in the United States recognized as a leader in an organization that publicly advocated armed self-defense against racist violence.” James also stated that Shakur’s prominence and notoriety in the movement is such that “there

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<sup>147</sup> Terry Bitman, “Poppy Sharp is Named to Camden Youth Post,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 12, 1973, 27.

<sup>148</sup> Gillette, 101.

<sup>149</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>150</sup> Akinyele Omawala Umoja, “Repression Breeds Resistance: The Black Liberation Army and the Radical Legacy of the Black Panther Party,” *New Political Science* 21, no. 2, 1999: 132. Umoja outlines a tension in the historical interpretation of the BLA with some scholars believing that the organization was an outgrowth of the Black Panther Party and others asserting that its origins pre-dated the demise of the Panthers and thus, the organization had independent origins. Umoja argues that the repression experienced by the Black Panther Party fed the ranks of the BLA, contributing greatly to its growth and development.

are no men in the East Coast Panthers whose stature equals hers.”<sup>151</sup> Shakur rocketed to national prominence after her involvement in a May 2, 1973, gun battle on the New Jersey turnpike involving New Jersey state police and the African American activists she was travelling with. She stated that she was shot with her hands up surrendering and again while lying on her back. Shakur was then found guilty for the death of a state trooper but escaped after six years, fleeing in exile to Cuba.<sup>152</sup> The State of New Jersey and the FBI have both issued bounties for her capture and recently President Trump called for Shakur’s extradition.<sup>153</sup> Higgs’ contact with Shakur further demonstrates that a key member of the Young Blacks engaged with African American activists who defended violence as a just tactic to effect change.

The Young Blacks provided a moderate voice in meetings with other more radical organizations and resisted pressure to intensify their approach. Higgs proudly recalled that the Young Blacks always maintained their identity and autonomy in any joint efforts or meetings with other African American organizations. He stated: “[when] we went to Philadelphia, we were The Young Blacks of Lawnside. We were not the Black Panthers, we was not BPUM, we wasn’t the African Americans, we wasn’t RAM. We were the Young Blacks. We was the anointed ones.” Higgs’ claim that the Young Blacks were the “anointed ones” stems from Lawnside’s proud history as a key location along the Underground Railroad. The strength and pride in the organization is also demonstrated by the fact that only one member of the Young Blacks joined the Black Panthers after a recruitment presentation held in Lawnside.<sup>154</sup> Higgs stated that the Young Blacks sought to influence the actions of other more militant African American organizations to take a more peaceful approach. Regarding these interactions, Higgs stated that, “Whatever we had to offer each organization, we tried to offer and give them some insight.” The Young Blacks also refused to radicalize their organizational approach despite pressure to do so from other leaders and organizations. Higgs stated:

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<sup>151</sup> Joy James, “Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency,” in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 139, 141.

<sup>152</sup> “Assata Shakur: The Continuity of Struggle,” *Souls* 1, no. 2, 1999: 93.

<sup>153</sup> Aria Bendix, “Cuba Won’t Negotiate Trump’s New Policy,” *The Atlantic*, Jun. 19, 2017.

<sup>154</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

A lot of times some of the other organizations would try to lean on us to try and convince us that we were dealing with it in the wrong way. But we told them, no! We in it for the youth – youth programs to help them get their education. For them to continue with their schooling – this is what we were all about. All that radicalization, all that fighting – go see the Black Panthers.<sup>155</sup>

This moderate philosophy also determined the sort of movement related activity the Young Blacks would participate in outside of Lawnside.

The Young Blacks frequently assisted other African American organizations with movement related activities. Higgs explained that one of the primary purposes of the Young Blacks was “to help other Black organizations with their plight.” He further stated, that, “We would march [in] some of the marches and supported them 100% morally.” For example, they took part in a demonstration in New England with the Black Panther Party to protest and raise awareness about the incarceration of some female Panther Party members. In 1969, Ms. Irene Smith, who was both the New Jersey and Gloucester County President of the NAACP, enlisted the assistance of The Young Blacks as security in an Easter week boycott in nearby Woodbury, N.J. The Young Blacks were summoned to Woodbury because the police threatened Ms. Smith that they would withhold security for their public protest. Smith was in a precarious position because an African American demonstration in a majority white community with a history of antipathy to civil rights could turn ugly. The Young Blacks filled this security vacuum by organizing approximately 100 people to support and protect the Woodbury demonstration.<sup>156</sup> The protest march in Woodbury became contentious when the town police arrested Ms. Smith and her husband.<sup>157</sup> Fortunately, violence was avoided. The Young Blacks also collaborated with Sharp and the Camden BPUM by travelling to Clayton, New Jersey, to protest its town officials’ decision to exclude a float by the African American community in the Homecoming Day parade. Higgs explained that “we sat there in Clayton and calmed things out there and let the people know that we are not

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<sup>155</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>156</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Lyford Moore, “Irene Smith Released from Prison: NAACP Leader Arrested During Protest,” *Courier Post*, Mar. 31, 1969, 15.

going to tolerate this kind of thinking.” Clayton, New Jersey was just one of several joint projects The Young Blacks participated in with Camden’s BPUM.<sup>158</sup>

The Young Blacks avoided any movement related activity that called for acts of violence in part because of the unique position that Lawnside held as a self-governing African American community, as well as the philosophy of the group’s leadership. H. Rap Brown and other radical African American leaders’ calls for armed self-defence or even insurrection did not appeal to the Young Blacks. Higgs stated that, “We were not of the revolutionary type or the ones to holler black power to like destroy, set fires to buildings.”<sup>159</sup> For example, Philadelphia officials alleged that RAM planned to poison police with cyanide laced food and drink in the event of a riot.<sup>160</sup> In reference to plots of this nature, Higgs explained that, “Anytime we heard anything like this will go down, we back off, and we would continue [with non-violent movement activities] because we was in sacred land already.” Higgs simply described the Young Blacks philosophy vis-à-vis other more radical organizations as “more sensible.”<sup>161</sup>

To Higgs, Lawnside was indeed sacred ground: a place that represented a beacon of light and hope to other African Americans in their communities who often struggled to escape poverty and institutional inequality. Higgs recalled his amazement at the community spirit exhibited by Lawnside residents when his family moved there from Camden in 1965. This profound respect for the community also shaped his vision for the direction of the black freedom struggle in Lawnside. Higgs stated:

We was satisfied with the way our life was – our father got us out of the city, got us out of the ghetto, out of the projects, got a big beautiful home. We came to this town where everybody mostly have money... there wasn’t no panhandler in front of the liquor store, panhandler on the corner. And everybody loved everybody including the horn, they waved at you, and it was like – Wow! What’s this place? In the city ain’t nobody speak to you, put on their horn. Every time you pass someone in the yard – they

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<sup>158</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>159</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>160</sup> “Says RAM Planned to Kill LBJ, Hoover,” *Warren Times-Mirror and Observer* (Warren, PA), Sep. 29, 1967, 9.

<sup>161</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

cutting grass – they be waving at you. And we be like Wow! - me and my brothers noticed this – we said, man! This must be Mecca.” So we already knew we didn’t want to tear nothin up. Where a lot of African Americans in the other city was talkin about burn baby burn. And we was like no, no, - once you already established you get your own thing and the only way you gonna get your own thing is to go to school and get your monies, get your own monies. Open up your businesses, your industry – then you have your own.<sup>162</sup>

Perhaps Higgs was able to achieve a leadership role amongst Lawnside youth who were from established families in the community because he recognized how unique and special Lawnside truly was.

Higgs described Lawnside as a “blueprint for how African Americans are supposed to continue living.” African American community leaders such as Sharp in Camden and Carmichael in Lowndes, Alabama, as well as other leaders manifested black power ideology into a plan for community control that could have been labelled the Lawnside plan. Higgs explained that Lawnside already had achieved the major objectives sought by other African American organizations. He stated how, “They wanted to be on city council, they wanted to be Mayor, they wanted to be in the government, they wanted to control their own destiny and they wanted to be judged by people of their own peer. So we already had that going for us here.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, Lawnside’s position as a self-governing African American community profoundly shaped the Young Blacks rejection of violence and revolution.

For the most part, Lawnside youth did not experience negatively impactful relationships with police. This removed one of the key stress factors that exacerbated racial tensions in many African American communities both historically and today. Higgs related that police officers from the surrounding white communities stayed out of Lawnside in the course of routine police work. He stated, “If somebody was speeding in Barrington and they made it to Lawnside the Barrington cop would turn back around and go the other way. There were no interventions with the police forces of Haddon Heights

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<sup>162</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

or Barrington as far as the movement was concerned.”<sup>164</sup> In contrast, police in other communities viciously repressed radical African American organizations. An example is the 1970 raid on the Philadelphia Black Panther Party headquarters where the men were stripped down to their underwear, shot at with automatic weapons, and photographed in a symbolic affront to their masculinity.<sup>165</sup>

A key factor which also moderated the Young Blacks activist pursuits was the existence in the community of successful African American role models. As discussed in Chapter One, Lawnside was a community on the rise in the 1960s with the construction of housing developments, the addition of new businesses and industry, and increasing migration into the community by well-educated and affluent people. Higgs explained how the professional achievements and community building efforts of Lawnside’s Bryant family had a profound impact on the prospects African Americans felt they could achieve if they excelled academically and attained professional credentials. He related how the Bryant family “were all well to do” and marvelled how they were able to attain careers with the federal government.<sup>166</sup> This began with Horace Bryant Sr. who was the first African American calendar clerk in the state Assembly. His son, Horace Jr., advanced to become the state commissioner of banking and insurance which made him New Jersey’s first African American state cabinet member.<sup>167</sup> Horace Jr. also had a long and distinguished career in Atlantic City politics.<sup>168</sup> I.R. Bryant, another son of Horace Sr., had a distinguished career with the Internal Revenue Service and later served as the President of the Lawnside School District.<sup>169</sup> I.R. Bryant’s son Mark Bryant, was a long-serving Lawnside mayor, and another one of his son’s, Wayne Bryant, earned a law degree and established a thriving Camden based practice before entering politics where

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<sup>164</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>165</sup> Countryman, 232.

<sup>166</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> Alan Guenther, “Lawmaker Works to Ensure Rights,” *Courier Post*, Feb. 1, 1998. 12.

<sup>168</sup> “Horace J. Bryant Held Cabinet Post,” *Courier Post*, Apr. 14, 1983, 47.

<sup>169</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

he advanced to the position of State Senator before being jailed on corruption charges.<sup>170</sup> Higgs also mentioned the influential Still family as Lawnside community role models. The Stills claim descent from famed nineteenth century African American abolitionist William Still and his brother Dr. James Still; a legendary medical doctor known as ‘The Father of the Pines.’<sup>171</sup> Regardless of the veracity of the ancestral links to William Still and his brother James, the people of Lawnside take great pride in this connection and the fame and notoriety of such prominent African American role models was an inspiration to many in Lawnside. Higgs discussed the nature of this inspiration explaining how, “We had this air about ourselves in this town. Hey – we are the descendants of Dr. Still and people of this nature... We had seen the achievements of the black man. So let’s all get together and try and elevate one another and take this thing to the next level.”<sup>172</sup> For the Young Blacks, this next level meant a commitment to education for the purposes of professional advancement.

To conclude, Lawnside developed a youth-directed activist movement focused on assisting other African American communities and organizations, the educational advancement of its community’s youth, and better community governance. While the Young Blacks attended black power events and had strong connections with radical organizations and leaders, they rejected revolutionary and violent goals and methods. This moderate approach is due to Lawnside’s political independence, communal spirit, and the inspiration its young people received from the examples set by successful community role models. The Young Blacks also challenge the prevailing image of African American organizations in the black power era as violent, revolutionary, and misogynist due to their efforts at community building, their non-violent ethos, strong focus on education, religious tolerance, space for female leadership and ideological contributions, and their overriding belief that the existing institutions in America could provide prosperity and hope.

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<sup>170</sup> Angela Delli Santi, “Former N.J. Sen. Bryant sentenced to 4 years, *The Daily Journal (Vineland, N.J.)*, Jul. 25, 2009, 1.

<sup>171</sup> New Jersey historian Paul Schopp has done extensive research on 19th century African American history in New Jersey and has determined that the Lawnside Stills are not the descendants of Levin and Charity Still who were William Still, and Dr. James Still’s parents.

<sup>172</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

### **Chapter 3.**

## **African American High School Student Activism at Haddon Heights High School**

*When the black student body is no longer feared as a destructive monster and is understood as the potentially constructive body of concerned students that it is, better relations between the different races of the student population and better relations with the faculty and administration will begin to materialize*

– Linda Waller, “Right On!,” *The Scribe (Haddon Heights, N.J.)*, Jun. 16, 1971, 2.

African American student activism by Lawnside youth at 3HS demonstrates that their grievances and methods of non-violent direct action were consistent with those expressed by other African American youth in a variety of locations. African American students from Lawnside had varying positions regarding the use of violence. Members of the Young Blacks did not participate in collective or individual acts of violence and aggression in their engagement with whites from neighbouring communities or at 3HS. However, other African American youth from Lawnside did engage in fighting and aggressive behaviour. They also participated in acts of collective action with a great deal of unity such as, sit-ins, a boycott, a protest march, and the issuing of suggestions and demands to school administrators.

The educational concerns of young people in Lawnside were commonly expressed by other African American youth throughout the United States. This chapter begins with a thematic overview of four case studies of African American high school student activism in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Maywood, Illinois, and Plainfield, New Jersey. These studies provide a comparative portrait to measure the actions and outcomes of Lawnside student activism. In contrast to youth in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Maywood, and Plainfield. African American students from Lawnside organized themselves and acted with little direction from parents, community activists, and African American organizations from outside their community. The next section of the chapter is a history of race-relations at 3HS from 1916 to 1965. The third section of the chapter

examines the efforts of African American students to address inequality and respond to chaotic and unpredictable events which transpired between 1965 and 1971.

The leadership demonstrated by African American students from Lawnside, including the efforts of Marie Young, Denise Greene, Linda Whittington, and Linda Shockley reveal that young women were instrumental to African American student activism at 3HS. To my knowledge no other mixed gender African American organizations or the few existing case studies of African American high school student activism reveal the same degree of female leadership and agency exhibited by Lawnside students at 3HS.

Historian Jeanne Theoharis emphasizes the importance of studying high school student activism and the paucity of research that has been done in this area. She states that the “political activism of high school students provides a crucial-but understudied-window into the character and direction of the black freedom struggle. High school students had blazed the trail in many crucial battles of the civil rights movement.” Theoharis further argues that, “although scholars have examined the movements for community control of schools that grew in cities in the late 1960s, little attention has been paid to the ways young people also spearheaded these efforts.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, this thesis will present a narrative of African American high school student activism; another topic which has been understudied by historians.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!”: High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A,” in *Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108, 110.

<sup>174</sup> In January 2018, the African American Intellectual History Society hosted a Student Activism Forum showcasing new scholarship on African American high school student activism. Focusing on Detroit, Dara Walker, a doctoral student in history at Rutgers University, explains that an adult group called The League of Revolutionary Black Workers initiated the organization of the city’s high school students into a city-wide organization called the Black Student United Front (BSUF). The League worked with BSUF members to develop student leaders who engaged in significant activism in the city’s schools. Tess Bundy, an Assistant Professor at Merrimack College, details that African American students in Boston formed black student unions, engaged in walkouts, sit-ins, boycotts and formed a citywide organization named the Black Student Federation. As in the Detroit case study introduced by Walker and the case studies of Maywood, Los Angeles, Plainfield, and Philadelphia, Boston students were also supported by adult-led African American organizations such as The Black United Front and the New Urban League. Neither Walker nor Bundy introduce any significant female student leadership figures in their posts. Dara Walker, “Black Power and the Detroit High School Organizing Tradition,” *African American Intellectual History*

African American student activists in Maywood, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles expressed grievances with their high school education. In 1967, Maywood was a mixed-race and middle-class community where African American students made up about twenty percent of the student body.<sup>175</sup> After a large fight that year in the school cafeteria a list of grievances was presented to school officials which included, a human relations program for teachers, improved emphasis on the instruction of black history, the end to corporal punishment, and an investigation into the school's cafeteria service.<sup>176</sup> That same year, African American students from several Philadelphia high schools that were both mixed-race and predominately African American argued for the inclusion of African American studies in their school's curriculum, the right to wear African styled clothing, the right to organize and form African American student clubs, exemption from saluting the American flag, and the removal of police from all schools.<sup>177</sup> In Los Angeles, Jefferson High School students formed a black student union in 1966 and four high schools boycotted school on Malcolm X's birthday in 1967. A 1968 walkout at six Los Angeles high schools in which the majority of students were people of colour, sought improved quality of education through a revised curriculum, committed and attentive teaching staff, community input into school operation, and effective preparation for college programs.<sup>178</sup> In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Lawnside students also advocated for an African American student club, community input into school decision making, and the inclusion of African American content in the school curriculum.

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Society, Online Forum on Student Activism, Jan. 11, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-power-and-the-detroit-high-school-organizing-tradition/>; Tess Bundy, "Black Student Power in Boston," African American Intellectual History Society, Online Forum on Student Activism, Jan. 9, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-student-power-in-boston/>.

<sup>175</sup> The median home value in Maywood was \$18, 000 according to Jerome Skolnick's 1969 report. In comparison, The 1970 U.S. Census listed the median home value in Haddon Heights at \$18, 700 and Lawnside at \$14, 500. Lawnside's housing stock included some homes that were built by the owners themselves due to federal redlining of African American population centers. Up until the 1960s, the U.S. government would not ensure mortgages where African Americans lived and considered such places as blighted. During the 1960s, Lawnside did have several new housing developments erected by developers but there continued to be many ad hoc constructed units as part of the town's housing stock.

<sup>176</sup> Skolnick, 123.

<sup>177</sup> Countryman, 225, 228.

<sup>178</sup> Theoharis, 109-110, 117.

Students in Maywood, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Plainfield had their grievances and concerns taken up and coopted by adult leaders, parents' groups, and African American organizations. In Maywood, the African American student walkout after the 1967 cafeteria fight was immediately supported by local NAACP officials who took it upon themselves to present school administrators with a petition.<sup>179</sup> In 1967, a general walkout by African American students at multiple Philadelphia schools was based upon negotiations between school board officials and African American community leaders and activists in conjunction with student leaders. Philadelphia also experienced a shift in activism from efforts for school desegregation to an improvement in the quality of education as well as an emphasis on community control of schools and a curriculum that emphasized African American studies. At the forefront of this call for change were Black People's Unity Movement (BPUM) activists. During the late 1960s, BPUM helped stoke tremendous interest amongst African American youth about black nationalist ideas which included African practices and values, racial pride, and black history. The movement for educational reform in Philadelphia occurred in concert with the articulation of black power ideology in Philadelphia's African American organizations. Outside of BPUM, major leaders of the African American community in Philadelphia such as the city's NAACP President, Cecil B. Moore, were actively involved in the city's educational crisis.<sup>180</sup>

In Plainfield, parent groups raised issue with ongoing segregation in the city's schools. During the 1962-63 school year parents led a series of pickets outside schools. Inaction by Board of Education officials prompted a parent group to file a lawsuit to desegregate the all-African American Washington School. During the beginning of the 1963-64 school year a weekly Thursday night protest march was held. The remedy of busing of African American students to majority white schools was also criticized by parent groups as an ineffective solution because white students were not similarly

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<sup>179</sup> Skolnick, 123.

<sup>180</sup> Countryman, 225, 228, 240, and 256.

bused.<sup>181</sup> African American students also experienced inequality once Plainfield moved to desegregate its schools.

A key point of contention in Plainfield was the mistreatment and streaming of African American students into general level courses. At Plainfield High School, African American students were confronted with racist graffiti on school property and experienced frequent episodes of racially motivated fighting. School officials used standardized tests to stream students into three academic tracks. This resulted in only five percent of African American students being placed in the upper level track. Eighty percent of those grouped into the lower two tracks graduated with only a ninth or tenth grade performance level.<sup>182</sup> Thus, African American students in Plainfield were streamed into general level classes and school protests were led and organized by parent groups with little involvement by student leaders and organizers.

African American student activists in Los Angeles received significant support from African American organizations, parents, community leaders, and Chicano student activists. The 1967 school year at Los Angeles's Manual Arts High School did not begin with student activism but with a concerted educational campaign for change by organizations such as the NAACP, the Black Congress, and the United Parents Council.<sup>183</sup> This involved protests in front of the school and pickets in front of the superintendent's home by parents and activists. This was not an isolated event as African American parents, students, and activists had been protesting conditions in the Los Angeles school system for more than a decade prior to 1967. The campaign even attracted attention from national civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, James Forman, and James Farmer.<sup>184</sup> Further protest actions involved sit-ins, lawsuits, and demonstrations at school board meetings and individual schools. The inclusion of demands regarding black studies curricula, the creation of a black student union, and the

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<sup>181</sup> Thomas Sugrue and Andrew P. Goodman, "Plainfield Burning: Black Rebellion in the Suburban North," *Journal of Suburban History* 33, no. 2 (May 2007): 577-578.

<sup>182</sup> Sugrue and Goodman, 578.

<sup>183</sup> The Black Congress was a Los Angeles based umbrella organization that linked many African American organizations.

<sup>184</sup> Theoharis, 111, 114.

call for the celebration of African American school holidays demonstrates that many African American youth in Los Angeles were influenced by black power ideology.

The demographic situation in Los Angeles which saw alliances formed between African American and Chicano students and community activists raises an interesting comparative point with the other case studies. The alliance of people of colour for change in Los Angeles schools is a development not seen in my research about Lawnside/Haddon Heights or in the Maywood, Philadelphia, and Plainfield case studies. This demonstrates that the black freedom struggle cannot be flattened out to fit neat racial or location based conclusions and again stresses the importance of location and demographics in studying the contours and outcomes of the civil rights/black power era.

A 1948 article by Noma Jensen in the *Journal of Negro Education* gives an excellent overview of how pervasive segregation was in New Jersey's system of education. The survey which informed Jensen's article was initiated by the New Jersey State Conference of NAACP branches. Some white superintendents and school board members interviewed for the survey argued that it was African Americans who wanted segregated facilities and that their presence was the only way that African American teachers would gain employment. Jensen claims that African American teachers in the state also had three times the workload of their white counterparts.<sup>185</sup> The Lawnside Elementary School was curiously left unmentioned as one of the Camden County schools of note in the segregation survey. The survey also elided the many all-white districts because there was no evidence of segregationist practices there due to residential segregation.

The Camden County schools mentioned by Jensen are illustrative of the segregationist practices in the immediate vicinity of this case study. Berlin, a mixed-race town in Camden County, operated an African American school until the 1950s. Marian Thompson Wright described the Berlin School as follows: "This two-room building is located out in the woods, has a leaky roof, and is heated by two pot bellied stoves. Very

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<sup>185</sup> Noma Jensen, "A Survey of Segregation Practices in the New Jersey School System, *The Journal of Negro Education* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1948): 84-88.

little in the matter of materials for instruction is provided. The outdoor lavatories are without doors.” The Berlin segregated school situation was only resolved when the East Berlin African American school mysteriously burned down on the first day of school in 1953. Wright commented that “the phenomenon accomplished without incident what years of discussion by state and local school officials had failed to do up to that time.”<sup>186</sup> Berlin was not the only Camden County community to practice educational segregation.

The City of Camden and the borough of Haddonfield also had segregated schools. Camden had full elementary school segregation as late as 1946.<sup>187</sup> By 1948, two elementary schools still existed where the entire teaching staff and student body were African American. In the wealthy community of Haddonfield, which is situated very near both Lawnside and Camden, there existed elementary school segregation until the fourth grade.<sup>188</sup> The legacy of segregationist practices in Haddonfield is brought to light through the case of a Ms. Theresa M. Dansbury. Ms. Dansbury was the last teacher of the town’s African American school, which closed in 1948 after having just thirteen students. The African American school in Haddonfield had received tuition payments from neighboring districts seeking to offload their token numbers of African American children. Ms. Dansbury claimed that the Haddonfield Board of Education administrators tried their best to eliminate her from the system but could not because of tenure. She initially received several offers from other communities which she did not apply for and when she turned them down was offered retirement with full pay. Ms. Dansbury never returned to a regular classroom position the final fourteen years of her teaching career. She served out her days as an itinerant remedial reading teacher and upon her retirement in 1962, there were no African American teachers in the Haddonfield school district.<sup>189</sup> Camden County was not an outlier in educational segregation with the aforementioned NAACP survey revealing that the practice was rampant throughout New Jersey.

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<sup>186</sup> *Camden and Environs, Civil Rights U.S.A., Public Schools, Cities in the North and West*, a staff report submitted in 1963 by Albert P. Blaustein to The United States Commission on Civil Rights, 38-39. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>188</sup> Jensen, 85.

<sup>189</sup> Blaustein, 36.

Woodbury, New Jersey, a twenty-minute drive south of Haddon Heights, was one of the most recalcitrant municipalities in the transition toward integrated schools. The 1963 Camden County Civil Rights Commission chose to investigate the situation in Woodbury despite the town being in Gloucester County because of the urgent need for government intervention. The Commission described Woodbury as a city, “which has long resisted attempts at integration.”<sup>190</sup> By 1963, most New Jersey school district officials understood that segregation in its schools was no longer tenable and moved to halt the practice without the prodding of the state.<sup>191</sup> Woodbury was an exception and twice saw the State intervene prior to 1963 to correct segregationist practices. The Carpenter Street Elementary School in Woodbury was a *de jure* segregated facility prior to 1947. African American children who lived too far away to walk to Carpenter were sent at the town’s expense to other districts rather than accommodate them at the Woodbury schools reserved for whites. In 1948, School officials gerrymandered school district lines to ensure continued segregation in its schools. In 1954, district lines were squared off after numerous protests but this resulted in only a token number of white children attending the school.<sup>192</sup> The Carpenter Street School was finally closed in 1964 to facilitate integration.<sup>193</sup>

When Lawnside’s near neighbour Haddon Heights first opened its original high school in 1910, it was one of the few communities in Camden County to offer high school education with spaces available for pupils from other towns. As a result, children from many communities including Lawnside attended school there.<sup>194</sup> I located no

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<sup>190</sup> Blaustein, 2.

<sup>191</sup> School districts throughout New Jersey moved to desegregate their schools once they were legally required with only a few exceptions such as Woodbury. The Salem County educational oral history project reveals that several African American schools which were still good buildings that could be put to public use were simply torn down. This demonstrates how white officials understood the injustice of these facilities and sought to erase any historical markers of their presence; James Pope, Interview by Tamara Barnes, Dec. 4, 2010, 131-132. “Oral Histories of African-American Schools and Churches in Salem County, New Jersey,” compiled by Tamara Barnes, New Jersey State Archives in Trenton, NJ, Control # SZHIS001.

<sup>192</sup> Blaustein, 42-43.

<sup>193</sup> “Council Pleads School Cause in Woodbury: Board is Silent After 2nd Defeat on Expansion,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer New Jersey Section*, Jan. 9, 1966, 1.

<sup>194</sup> The Supervising Principal’s Report from March 3, 1925, listed students from Audubon, Barrington, Center Township (Lawnside was part of Center Township until 1926), Clementon Township, Gloucester

evidence of any serious plan for Lawnside to ever build its own high school, likely because of the small size of the community and financial troubles brought about by the Great Depression. The first evidence I discovered of integration at 3HS was in 1916 when two African American students, Henrietta Alberta Faucet of Lawnside, and Bertha Elizabeth Manigault of Magnolia graduated from the old 3HS school located on the King's Highway.<sup>195</sup> The new school building, which is still in use, was erected at considerable expense in 1924.

Soon thereafter, the neighbouring town of Audubon announced that they would also be building a high school. This caused panic amongst the Haddon Heights political power brokers who hired a lawyer to lobby against the construction of the Audubon school. The documents concerning this 'crisis' argued that the new school would not only draw away Audubon pupils but those from other nearby communities.<sup>196</sup> Each community that sent students to 3HS was required to pay a per-pupil tuition payment to the community as part of a send/receive relationship.<sup>197</sup> Over the years as more high schools were built, the majority white community of Barrington along with Lawnside were the two communities that served as sending districts and sources of valuable tuition funding for 3HS.<sup>198</sup> A 1954 letter was sent from the President of the Haddon Heights School District to the State Commissioner of Education's Office. In addition, a brochure was sent out the same year by the Board of Education to Haddon Heights citizens about a referendum on a proposed middle school. Both documents emphasized how important

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Township, Haddon Township, Laurel Springs, Magnolia Borough, and Winslow Township. Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Mar. 3, 1925.

<sup>195</sup> Ms. Faucet's yearbook description stated; "I know her by her cheerful air. Her bright black eyes and curly hair." Ms. Manigault's description read; "An unsophisticated maid." Yearbook descriptors were not written by the students themselves at this time. "The Record of the Class of 1916," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook.

<sup>196</sup> Sydney T. Smith to the Haddon Heights School District, Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Dec. 9, 1924.

<sup>197</sup> For example, Lawnside paid \$15, 372 in tuition in 1971 for 170 students. Donna Kovalevich, "Lawnside Agrees to Pay Tuition Bill," *The Suburban*, Aug. 19, 1971, 1.

<sup>198</sup> In 2015, the affluent Borough of Merchantville made an agreement to send their pupils to 3HS and remove them from the Pennsauken school system. Merchantville is located several towns away from Haddon Heights and their students pass by other high schools on their commute. Pennsauken is now a racially mixed community; Matt Skoufalos, "New Deal with Haddon Heights Culminates 30 Years of Work for Merchantville Schools," <http://www.njpen.com/new-deal-with-haddon-heights-culminates-30-years-of-work-for-merchantville-schools/>.

students from receiving districts were to the functioning of the school and by extension the revenue each non-resident student generated from each sending district.<sup>199</sup> This monetary importance did not however, translate into decision making or budgetary power for the citizens of Lawnside or Barrington.<sup>200</sup> Thus, Lawnside students have always represented an important source of revenue for the operation and upkeep of 3HS. This arrangement also formed a constellation of racially segregated communities; two white, and one black, that have historically shared a high school since its construction in 1924.<sup>201</sup>

The 1920s was a formative period for the establishment of school culture at 3HS. This decade saw a tradition develop where the graduating class would travel to Washington D.C. - a segregated city at the time, and Mount Vernon, George Washington's former plantation which exploited slave labour. I was unable to locate any records of how the school dealt with segregation on these school trips nor how African American students might have felt about a visit to a slave plantation. Various Senior trip pictures from the 1920s include no African American students.<sup>202</sup> In 1932, future Lawnside civic leader I.R. Bryant attended the Washington/Virginia trip, which demonstrates that it was not offered on an exclusionary basis. Unsurprisingly for the 1920s, 3HS also hosted a minstrel show in 1925 as a fundraiser for the athletic field.<sup>203</sup> This unique American cultural form was part and parcel of the racism and xenophobia present in much of America during the 1920s.

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<sup>199</sup> Haddon Heights School District President to L.L. Jackson, Assistant Commissioner of Education, Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Jul. 9 1954; and "Looking Ahead to the Future of Our Children," Haddon Heights School District, 1954. Haddon Heights Public Library.

<sup>200</sup> Linda Shockley, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 9, 2017.

<sup>201</sup> Barrington did experience a degree of integration beginning in the 1960s in part because multi-unit dwellings such as apartment buildings were erected in the community.

<sup>202</sup> The Haddon Heights Public Library has a collection of 3HS school photographs from the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>203</sup> Supervising Principal's Report, Haddon Heights District School, "Board of Education Minutes," Oct. 7, 1924.



**Figure 3 The 1932 3HS senior trip to Mount Vernon, Virginia. The African American student in the center is I.R. Bryant.**

Haddon Heights Public Library

The pattern where Lawnside students attend a predominately African American school up until the eighth grade before becoming a distinct minority in high school created psychological barriers for some Lawnside students. The impact of segregation in education was recognized in the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* ruling which stated how segregation “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their [African Americans] status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”<sup>204</sup> Walter ‘Butch’ Gaines who graduated from 3HS in 1955 explained his mindset transitioning from the Lawnside Elementary School to 3HS. Gaines stated:

I always had the impression that all white kids were smart. I don’t know if that is something they [Lawnside Elders] instilled in me when I left Lawnside School for Haddon Heights. They would say, “When you go to Haddon Heights, you’ve got to do this and you got to do that and you’re going to be around white kids.” So I always had this impression that white kids were smart. And when I got down there, I said, “Shoot, these

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<sup>204</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 182.

kids are dumber than I am.” And not a whole lot of them were smarter than I was.<sup>205</sup>

Gaines’ statement summarizes the inferiority complex that some Lawnside students may have internalized before arriving at 3HS. Lorraine Pollitt who attended 3HS in the early 1970s elaborated on the impression that Lawnside teachers had on the reception their graduates would receive at 3HS: “The teachers... instilled in us that when you leave here [Lawnside Elementary School] nobody’s going to care about you at the next place, which was Haddon Heights. So when you go there, you do your best.”<sup>206</sup> Some Lawnside teachers and elders therefore stressed to the community’s children that they would not have caring teachers and would have to be absolutely perfect to achieve academic success when they transitioned to high school. This must have been quite a psychological burden for some.

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<sup>205</sup> Dent, 70

<sup>206</sup> Lorraine Pollitt, Interview by Dr. James Rada, Linda Shockley, Raymond Fussell, and C. Joyce Fowler, Aug. 10, 2006, “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.



**Figure 4** The 1951 Lawnside Elementary School Grade 8 Graduating Class. Lawnside Historical Society, 2004 Pictorial Calendar.

The most notorious example of inequality which occurred at 3HS throughout its history was the long running practice of streaming African American students into general courses making them ineligible for college. Sugrue explains that this was a common practice in northern school districts. For example, in the 1920s Philadelphia school officials used intelligence tests to justify segregated education and Chicago officials classified three-quarters of its southern born African American students as ‘retarded.’<sup>207</sup> Journalist David Dent, who interviewed several Lawnside residents for his book *In Search of Black America* summarized 1940s graduate Ellen Benson’s opinion about academic steering at 3HS as follows: “African Americans had to be well beyond above average to ward off the school’s discouragement from taking college-track courses. Since [Benson] was near the top of her class, [she] didn’t face as many raised eyebrows as other peers might have when she chose courses like chemistry. ‘Butch’ Gaines explained the incredulity that a 3HS guidance counselor inadvertently expressed when

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<sup>207</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 171, 182.

Gaines went off to college. The counselor phoned Gaines' house to ask if he was available to wash some windows. Gaines explained his mother's response: "My mother said 'No, sorry, he's not here, you know, he's in college.' It was like silence on the phone ... she [the counselor] couldn't believe it."<sup>208</sup>

Linda Shockley, who finished sixth in the graduating class at 3HS in 1972 after achieving sterling academic results explained that both she and other high achievers from Lawnside also faced and overcame academic steering.<sup>209</sup> Shockley related how when future State Senator Wayne Bryant wanted to take college preparatory classes he was denied entry. His father, I.R. Bryant had to go to the school and inform the administration that he would select his son's classes, not them. Shockley alluded to the class barriers that may have prevented some Lawnside parents from confronting school authorities. She explained that I.R. Bryant was well-educated and worked for the I.R.S., whereas her mother "was a domestic... [who] cleaned other people's homes, but she knew [what] was important to me so she advocated for me." Shockley's mother phoned the Principal when 3HS elected to shut down an academic opportunity in conjunction with Rutgers University because she was the only student interested. The following is Shockley's account of the conversation:

Shockley: Yeah, [Principal Bucher] said [the Rutgers Program is] not necessary then. And, my mother called there and said, "my daughter really wants to participate in this and she needs your approval" or whatever. And he said, "well, one monkey doesn't run the show."

Interviewer: In those words?

Shockley: That's what he said. And my mother said, "don't go anywhere because this monkey is coming up there."<sup>210</sup>

A female classmate of Shockley's from Lawnside credited her elementary teachers for "instill[ing] in us a sense of capability," while also lamenting the lack of support from the 3HS guidance staff. She recalls a guidance counselor directing her to look for work and

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<sup>208</sup> Dent, 61, 70.

<sup>209</sup> Linda Shockley's maiden name was Waller and it is under the name Linda Waller that she contributed to *The Scribe*.

<sup>210</sup> Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016.

asking questions such as “why are you in here,” and “why are you looking at those [college information] books.”<sup>211</sup> Kenneth Macgregor, who began his teaching career at 3HS in 1959, became a Vice-Principal in the late 1960s, Principal in 1971, and later Superintendent answered, “Yes” unequivocally when questioned whether academic steering took place at 3HS.<sup>212</sup>

Despite these barriers to success, some African American students were able to defy racist expectations and achieve academic excellence. Greason describes the educational opportunities that opened up in New Jersey for African Americans and the influences which inspired many students. “Principals, teachers, and visiting speakers,” writes Greason, “charted courses toward secondary education, college attendance, and professional training that created artists by 1920, engineers by 1950, and corporate executives by 1970.”<sup>213</sup> This generational trend was evident in Lawnside. In 1922, at least three African American students – Geneva Still, Jennie Williams (Gunby), and Tamar Huggs (Smith), graduated from 3HS. All three were employed as domestic workers to support their education at Glassboro State Teacher’s College where they all earned teaching degrees.<sup>214</sup> In 1929, Ruth Coleman of Lawnside was the first African American valedictorian at 3HS.<sup>215</sup> Carl A. Still also graduated from 3HS in 1929 and attended the University of Pennsylvania where he studied Law.<sup>216</sup> Clarence Still was born in 1929 and grew up in Lawnside. He stated that “most of the children [from Lawnside] that graduated did get a chance to go to college.”<sup>217</sup> ‘Butch’ Gaines stated, “most of the kids who left there during that time [the 1950s] did a pretty good job... They were teachers, they worked for Bell Telephone...They found jobs they could raise their family on and

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<sup>211</sup> Anonymous Woman, Aug. 2, 2016.

<sup>212</sup> Kenneth MacGregor, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 27, 2016.

<sup>213</sup> Greason, 62.

<sup>214</sup> Lawnside Historical Society, Inc., 2009 Pictorial Calendar. Camden County Historical Society, Lawnside Collection.

<sup>215</sup> “Lawnside Girl Leads High School Class at Haddon Heights,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jun. 20, 1929, 13.

<sup>216</sup> “The Garneteer,” Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1929.

<sup>217</sup> Clarence Still, Interview by Veronica Tingle and Dr. James Rada, Aug. 10, 2006, “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

do for their family.”<sup>218</sup> According to Ellen Benson, and in contrast to the posted grade point averages in the 3HS yearbook, an African American student named Al Mitchell finished first in the graduating class in 1946 but had to share the distinction of Valedictorian with a white student.<sup>219</sup> If Mitchell was not slighted, this demonstrates the perception of inequality which Benson carried with her more than five decades after her graduation.

In 1945, Lawnside citizens created a scholarship club for high school graduates who were moving on to a post-secondary education.<sup>220</sup> The first recipient was Ellen Benson who used the funds to pay for her tuition at Temple University.<sup>221</sup> In 1951, Morris Smith graduated from 3HS and won the Lawnside Scholarship Award before moving on to Michigan State University where he received a Bachelor of Science Degree with a major in Chemistry.<sup>222</sup> Mr. Smith became an executive at Scott Paper Company and served as President of the Lawnside School District from 1963-1974.<sup>223</sup>

Many Africans Americans from Lawnside take great pride in the educational achievements of their community members. I had a chance encounter with Mr. Smith in December of 2016 after getting to know him very well the previous summer. He was beaming when he informed me that his granddaughter, Alexis Smith, who finished second in the 3HS graduating class of 2012, had just graduated summa cum laude from the University of Alabama. In August of 2016, I also met one of Mr. Smith’s sons who had graduated from 3HS in 1978 and later earned a law degree and is presently serving as

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<sup>218</sup> Walter Gaines, Interview by Dr. James Rada and Shamele Jordan, Jun. 24, 2006, “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections

<sup>219</sup> Ibid; and “The Garneteer,” Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1946.

<sup>220</sup> Ellen Jackson Benson, Interview by Dr. James Rada and Linda Shockley, Aug. 10, 2006, “Tell Lawnside’s Oral History Project.” Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections. Rebecca Batts Butler credits Lawnside’s Sarah Linesse Miller for founding the scholarship club. Rebecca Batts Butler, “Profiles of Outstanding Blacks in South Jersey During the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s,” (Reynolds Publishers Inc.), 36.

<sup>221</sup> Benson, Aug. 10, 2016.

<sup>222</sup> Phil Dunn, “King for a Day: MLK’s Birthday has Long Been a Lawnside Holiday, *Courier Post*, Jan. 20, 2014, 1.

<sup>223</sup> Linda Shockley, “I Just Never Understood...,” *Advisor Update*, Fall 2013, 10a.

a judge. Gina R. Wardlow, a Lawnside native who went on to postsecondary studies explained the nature of this community spirit:

I can remember getting angry with my parents for what I called boasting about my achievements. However they were quick to inform me that my accomplishments both within and outside of Rutgers University not only brought them personal joy but ignited joy and pride within the community and was a testimony to the history of Lawnside.<sup>224</sup>

Lawnside students also experienced inequality and achieved some notable successes in extracurricular and athletic pursuits at 3HS.

African American students broke down colour barriers in athletics at 3HS despite exclusionary treatment. The first evidence of African American participation in athletics at 3HS was during the 1922-1923 school year.<sup>225</sup> That year, Philip Johnson was the only African American student to play Varsity athletics, lettering in not one, but three sports; football, basketball, and baseball.<sup>226</sup> After Johnson's graduation there were very few African American members of the football, basketball, or baseball teams until the 1960s. The only sport where African Americans were encouraged to participate was track and field, where they excelled, and earned 3HS multiple conference championships.<sup>227</sup> One African American student named William Miller earned a track scholarship to Arizona State University and represented the United States at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, Finland where he won a silver medal in javelin. The legacy of unequal treatment marks 3HS to the present day as the school's athletic field is named after George 'Cap' Baker who coached football, baseball, and basketball at 3HS from 1936 to

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<sup>224</sup> Gina R. Wardlow, "Lawnside, New Jersey: A Living History," unpublished Essay prepared for the Livingston College Honors Program, last modified May 3, 1993, Rutgers University, Alexander Library, Special Collections.

<sup>225</sup> The 3HS yearbook and student newspaper records are incomplete in the 1910s and early 1920s with more consistent records after the construction of the new school building in 1924. My statements regarding African American participation from the 1920s to the 1950s are based on very solid evidence from these sources. Unfortunately, I cannot speak with absolute certainty that Manigault and Faucet were the first African American graduates of 3HS nor that Philip Johnson was the first African American athlete at 3HS because of incomplete records.

<sup>226</sup> "The Garneteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1923.

<sup>227</sup> Smith, Jul. 26, 2016. Haddon Heights High School Hall of Fame Plaques and Trophies at Haddon Heights High School also provide evidence to support this statement.

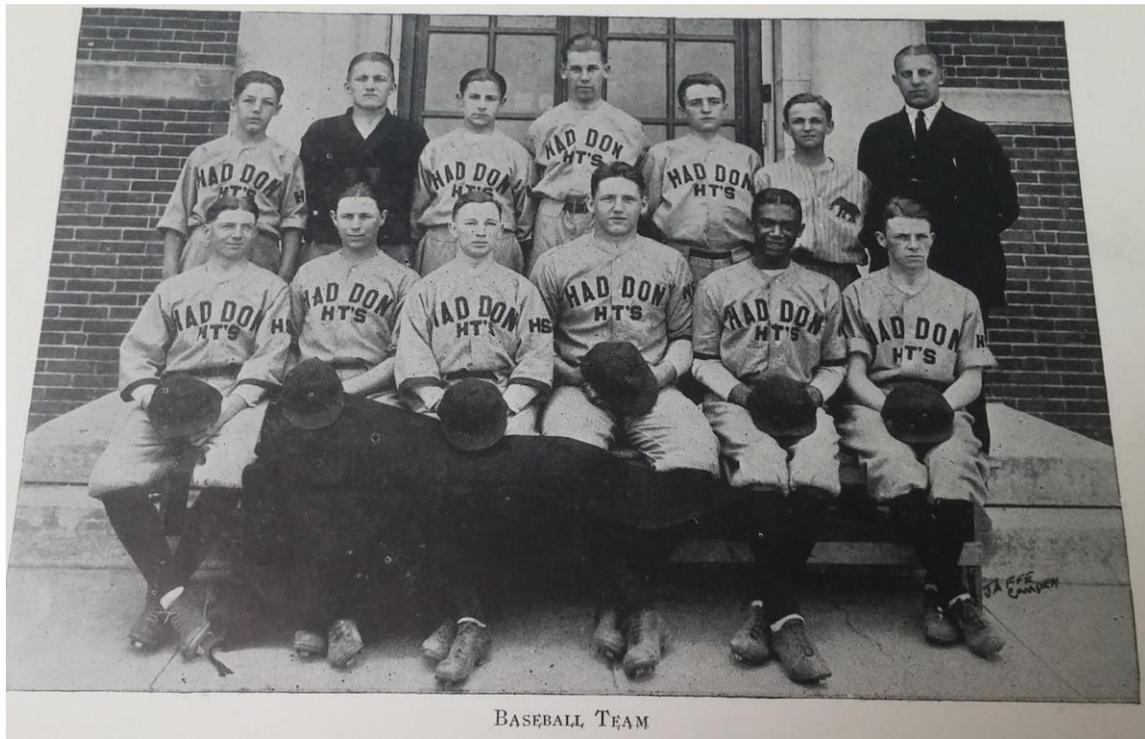
1952.<sup>228</sup> Clarence Still, a local historian who spearheaded the effort to preserve the Peter Mott House, summarized Coach Baker's attitude to African American athletes in the 1930s:

Still: We had a coach, Coach Baker. He didn't want no black folks on his football team. And so one of the boys here got a team together to go down there and beat Haddon Height's football team.

Interviewer: Did he want you guys to play after that?

Still: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. He found some good players.<sup>229</sup>

Another Lawnside student who attended 3HS in the 1940s and '50s also indicated that Coach Baker practiced exclusionary treatment toward African Americans.<sup>230</sup>



**Figure 5** The African American player in this picture is Philip Johnson. Johnson lettered in football, basketball, and baseball at 3HS during the 1922-23 school year

Haddon Heights High School, "The Garneteer Yearbook," 1923.

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<sup>228</sup> Haddon Heights High School Hall of Fame Display.

<sup>229</sup> Still, Aug. 10, 2006.

<sup>230</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 22, 2016.

The problem of equity in sport and extracurricular activities was still acute in the 1960s and into the 1970s. The first evidence I found of integration on the cheerleading squad was in 1961 and on the swim team in 1957 although this did not represent a breakthrough in either regard as the teams remained overwhelmingly white until the 1970s.<sup>231</sup> Higgs explained the experience of African American athletes on the football team at 3HS in the mid-60s stating:

I played on the football team and I was a good football player. We had five African Americans there and all five African Americans were the fastest on the team and I was the only one that played. I was a running back and in practice I couldn't be tackled. So they took me out of the running back position at 167 lbs and made me an offensive guard. And the community was outraged, I was outraged, but I hung in there and this was the vibration and the tone of what's happening at Haddon Heights. Last year I seen my assistant football coach and he fessed up. And he said that's just the way they were told to do things back then. He said, you were plenty fast, you had a good career ahead of you, and we had to do what we had to do. They were playing inferior players and they was losing the game. All five guys from Lawnside was qualified to start at 22 positions. And I was the only one who had a chance to play.

Higgs also related that his brother Reggie was used as a defensive specialist on the 3HS basketball team and was never passed the ball by his teammates. He described his brother Reggie as one of the best offensive players in the South Jersey area who was able to score twenty-five points per game in organizational basketball.<sup>232</sup> Yearbook evidence does show African American athletes who did excel at 3HS in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Al Coleburn was an All-Colonial Conference running back in 1959, and Bob Hardy was a Varsity football co-captain in 1961.<sup>233</sup> Nevertheless, a Lawnside student who graduated from 3HS in the 1970s was cut from a Varsity team as a junior and then excelled as a senior on the team. Despite this success, his coach did not believe in him and did not assist in aiding his recruiting efforts. This student had to take the hard road by going to various junior colleges before earning a roster spot on the Varsity team at a

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<sup>231</sup> "The Garneteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1957 and 1961.

<sup>232</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>233</sup> "The Garneteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1960 and 1962. Note: Football is a fall sport so the yearbook entries are staggered to the following calendar year.

Division One College program which led to a professional career.<sup>234</sup> The 3HS major male athletic teams have not achieved much success in terms of wins and losses in recent memory. Higgs attributes this to a pattern of top Lawnside athletes going to Haddon Heights and having their prospects for athletic success take an errant turn. Higgs stated that “something always seems to go wrong when they get up there.” As a result, parents have looked to other options for their athletically gifted children. A local parochial school, John Paul II in Haddonfield, has been a favoured destination and has actively recruited Lawnside athletes with athletic scholarships.<sup>235</sup>

Non-athletic extracurricular activities were open to African American students but on an unequal basis. ‘Butch’ Gaines explained his experience in the 1950s at 3HS: “After about a year’s time we sort of got our feet on the ground and got involved in the many things they had for you to get involved in: the glee club, the choir and the band. You could be a reporter for the school paper, *The Scribe*, and then there was the sports.”<sup>236</sup> Morris Smith who graduated from 3HS in 1951, recounted that it was “unheard of” for African American students to participate in school dances during his time.<sup>237</sup> African American participation in school activities did occur from the 1920s to the 1960s in most activities although majority white student participation was always the norm and there were significant exclusions from many school clubs, sports, and activities.

In 1954, the year of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, African American students at 3HS participated on all freshmen athletic teams, the Glee Club, Choir, Yearbook staff, *Scribe* staff including two editors, Band, the Prom, the Senior Trip, Quill and Scroll, International Relations Club, Assembly Club, and were Baton Twirlers.

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<sup>234</sup> This student travelled throughout the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a college athlete and recounted an example of discrimination at a Denny’s restaurant in Utah. On two occasions this athlete and other African American teammates sat for extremely long periods of time before getting rude and dismissive service. In 1994, Denny’s agreed to pay \$54 million dollars to settle a class-action lawsuit “filed by thousands of black customers who had been refused service or had been forced to wait longer or pay more than white customers.” Stephen Labaton, “Denny’s Restaurants to Pay \$54 Million in Race Based Suits,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 1994.

<sup>235</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>236</sup> Gaines, Jun. 24, 2006.

<sup>237</sup> Smith, Jul. 26, 2016.

However, no African Americans were on student council or participated in the Junior or Senior Play. Amongst varsity teams for both boys and girls, only football and track had African American participation. A look beyond 1954 demonstrates that inequality in school activities remained pervasive until the late 1970s and 1980s. This is when the first African American students became Prom Queen or King, Homecoming Queen, Student Council President, as well as chief editor of *The Scribe*.<sup>238</sup>

Disparate treatment of Lawnside students was facilitated by the failure of 3HS school officials to diversify its teaching staff until the 1960s and early 1970s. The 1963 State investigation into segregation in Camden County Schools indicated that 3HS first integrated their teaching staff in 1963 when an African American teacher was hired to instruct History and Spanish.<sup>239</sup> The existence of an all-white faculty at 3HS prior to 1963, and an overwhelmingly white staff thereafter impacted the treatment of African American students. Ellen Benson explained her impression of the teaching faculty's treatment of Lawnside students during the 1940s: "When we got there, there was a, what do I want to say, racist attitudes in the faculty. And then there were others who welcomed the Lawnside students and wanted them to do well." Benson cited the example of a warning she received before entering 3HS to, "watch out for this certain teacher cause she's going to ask about your background and tell you you came from Africa."<sup>240</sup> Linda Shockley explained that her sister recounted an incident where a teacher asked several students about their backgrounds: "She asked an Italian girl about her family history, then a Jewish child, before she got to a Lawnside girl and she said, you have no history." Not all white faculty members engaged in such racially offensive behaviour. Shockley, like Benson, also recounted teachers at 3HS such as English teacher Ms. Westermeier who spent her entire career at 3HS, who were very supportive towards, and did not discriminate against, African American students.<sup>241</sup> I also interviewed several long time 3HS teachers who had very progressive attitudes and were quite willing to speak to me about their political and racial views. Like Higgs' comments on gender, the

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<sup>238</sup> "The Garnetter," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, Various Editions.

<sup>239</sup> Blaustein, 39.

<sup>240</sup> Benson, Aug. 10, 2006.

<sup>241</sup> Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016.

possibility exists that these teacher's sentiments reflect a 2016 mentality and may not fully capture the essence of their attitudes and conduct in the 1960s and 1970s.

3HS was also a typical American high school which ignored, minimized, and distorted African American history and culture in both curriculum and instruction. Sugrue relates that some critics believed that school instruction made African Americans the victims of cultural deprivation.<sup>242</sup> Lawnside students were exposed to some black history at their elementary school but were not at the formative high school level. The first year a 3HS teacher designed a course which addressed African American and Asian American studies was in 1968.<sup>243</sup> As we will see, incorporating African American studies into the curriculum at 3HS was a major student grievance issued during the height of the black freedom struggle.

During the 1963 government investigation into Camden County school segregation, Leonard B. Irwin, Haddon Heights School District Superintendent, argued that there were no problems concerning race-relations at 3HS. He praised the educational relationship between Haddon Heights and Lawnside, and stated that Lawnside students were "excellent members of the student body."<sup>244</sup> Thus, the 3HS school administrators at that time did not see the need to further diversify the teaching staff, address regimes of inequality, or explore how the curriculum could be revised to address the cultural needs of the entire student body. Perhaps, like many Americans they were socially constructed to see racial inequality as natural and were thus caught off guard by African American student activism in the 1960s. Within two years, Irwin's rosy picture of race-relations at 3HS would be torn asunder.

From 1965 to 1971, 3HS erupted in a series of violent episodes which culminated in the temporary closure of the school in 1971 because of a spontaneous explosion of racial violence. The first major incident of a fight on school grounds between white and African American students took place in September of 1965. Principal Gordon Bucher's

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<sup>242</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 472.

<sup>243</sup> "Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship," *Courier Post*, May 14, 1969, 15.

<sup>244</sup> Blaustein, 40.

reaction was to create an Interracial Council which was designed ostensibly to facilitate dialogue to prevent future conflict.<sup>245</sup> Higgs was a member of the Council during the 1966-1967 school year. He stated that the Council functioned in name only, had no meetings, and was only active just in case something happened.<sup>246</sup> The next major incident occurred when black and white students engaged in a mass fist fight at a football pep rally in October of 1968.<sup>247</sup> This resulted in the decision by 3HS officials to mobilize and reorganize the Interracial Council. The Council now had twelve representatives with equal numbers of African American and white students and held information and awareness sessions in fifteen different classrooms during the 1968-69 school year.<sup>248</sup>

In November and December, 1968, Haddon Heights hosted two packed School Board meetings where white parents lobbed claims of assault against their children by ‘gang attacks’ by African American students.<sup>249</sup> There were no gangs in Lawnside and these accusations indicate the ignorance that some Haddon Heights and Barrington residents had about their neighbours. For example, one Haddon Heights resident who attended 3HS in the 1960s and early 1970s related the reaction of her parents when she went home and informed them that she was invited to and planned to attend a party in Lawnside. She stated, “I wasn’t allowed to go because it was in a black neighbourhood...my father said it would be too dangerous for me to go down there.”<sup>250</sup> Thus, Lawnside’s municipal borders continued to represent a highly alienated borderland with little cross-cultural contact with the communities of Haddon Heights and Barrington other than the shared use of 3HS.

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<sup>245</sup> M.O., “Inter-Racial Body Created at Heights,” *The Scribe*, Haddon Heights, N.J., Oct. 28, 1965, 1. *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>246</sup> Higgs, Aug. 10, 2006.

<sup>247</sup> “Tension Along Border: Cure Sought for Racial Strife,” *Courier Post*, May 12, 1969, 19.

<sup>248</sup> Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship, 15.

<sup>249</sup> “Tension Along Border, 19. I was unable to uncover any evidence to determine what caused these early fights. The Haddon Heights Board of Education minutes have no information about the 1968 Board of Education meetings and there was very little supporting information in school and local newspapers. I speculate that the first few fights were not taken too seriously. The 1969 and 1971 incidents were a different story.

<sup>250</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, August. 8, 2016.

On April 10, 1969, 3HS experienced the worst episode of racial violence it had experienced to date. That morning at least thirty-six young men engaged in fighting entirely along racial lines. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* attributed the ‘melee’ to “Negro Retaliation” for three nights of fighting that long weekend at a burger stand that straddled the border between Barrington and Lawnside. In one of the precipitating fights, it was alleged that white youth attacked a much younger African American boy.<sup>251</sup> Thus, the preceding days of violence at the burger stand were a trigger factor for the violence at the high school. However, that episode alone may have simply exacerbated long standing frustrations that Lawnside youth felt because of their educational and social experiences at 3HS. Regardless, one African American student explained that approximately twenty Lawnside students gathered outside of school the morning of the tenth with the intention of “retaliating against the individual white boys who started the trouble.” Police and faculty eventually broke up the fight approximately half an hour after it started. One youth suffered a fractured nose, another was so bruised he missed school for eleven days, and eight others suffered minor injuries. Fearing for their security, most of the Lawnside members of the student body left school and made their way home on foot through Barrington.<sup>252</sup> In a 2016 interview, Kenneth MacGregor stated that he often drove or followed African American students home to ensure their safety.<sup>253</sup> African American students would also express the same fears over personal safety in the aftermath of a larger instance of racial violence in 1971.<sup>254</sup>

Oral testimonies and school board minutes also augment the media reports of the 1969 episode of collective violence, although these are somewhat unreliable because many former students and staff have conflated the 1969 event with their memories of the larger 1971 racial incident. However, this much is clear. All eighteen students from Lawnside who participated in the fight were suspended while only one white student was eventually suspended two weeks after the incident. Three Lawnside students received

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<sup>251</sup> “Negro ‘Retaliation’ Blamed in Fight at Haddon Heights,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Edition, Apr. 12, 1969, 1.

<sup>252</sup> “Tension Along Border,” 19.

<sup>253</sup> MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.

<sup>254</sup> Haddon Heights School District, “Board of Education Minutes,” May 16, 1971.

suspensions ranging from three to ten days and two were expelled for the remainder of the school year.<sup>255</sup> It is also notable that Haddon Heights school administrators included a young woman from a prominent Lawnside family who also had close ties to senior members of the Young Blacks on the discipline list. This woman was uninvolved in the actual fighting but was implicated as a leader of the Lawnside cohort during the altercations.<sup>256</sup> Higgs attributed her inclusion and the disciplining of other members of the Young Blacks to targeting by Haddon Heights school officials.<sup>257</sup>

The unequal disciplinary approach elicited charges of discrimination and criticism from Lawnside community leaders. Lawnside's mayor, Hilliard T. Moore stated that the discipline of African American students "may have been biased."<sup>258</sup> A group of fifty Lawnside residents also presented the Haddon Heights Board of Education with a signed statement questioning the fairness of their decision making.<sup>259</sup> This is the most notable collective action by Lawnside parents acting on behalf of their children during this troubled time. Part of the degree of alienation that Lawnside students felt at 3HS was that the school was not part of Lawnside, and thus, their parents were not a notable presence in the school community. This reality and the conservative approach of Lawnside civic leaders would give Lawnside youth a space to exert acts of agency not seen in other African American school protests, which were often led by adults and community organizations.

Immediate responsibility for the 1969 fight has been attributed by multiple sources to Lawnside youth. In a 2016 interview, Kenneth MacGregor ascribed blame for the brawl directly to a specific Lawnside student.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, at a 2016 community event I attended in Lawnside, several former 3HS students recalled that same student as angered and on a mission to do something. Higgs' testimony also supports this conclusion: "The two guys who got expelled were not members of the Young Blacks.

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<sup>255</sup> "Tension Along Border," 19.

<sup>256</sup> Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Apr. 23, 1969.

<sup>257</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>258</sup> Lawnside School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Apr. 21, 1969.

<sup>259</sup> "Tension Along Border," 19.

<sup>260</sup> MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.

They were the aggressors and they started everything. They misunderstood the whole concept.” In a 2017 interview, Higgs also condemned the use of violence and absolved the Young Blacks from any involvement in the planning or execution of such an act. Higgs who had graduated from 3HS in 1967, declared that, “It would probably never had went down if it was pre-planned. It was spontaneous. If I’d known or the Young Blacks known that that was going to happen that day in the high school it would have never happened.” Higgs categorically condemned the actions of Lawnside youth who initiated this violence and drew on historical examples to justify his position stating:

Because if you read the past situations you never got nothing done that way. You always end up with the raw part of the deal. You can go all the way back to Harper’s Ferry with John Brown, Denmark Vasey, all the revolts. Nobody got anything done positive about that except a bunch of lost lives and a bunch of hurt people. We were 100% totally against stuff like that.<sup>261</sup>

Higgs’ statements demonstrate genuine frustration that Lawnside youth participated in a collective act of violence as it represented a setback for the movement. For Higgs, suspensions, expulsions, creating ill will, and inviting retribution were all counterproductive to the overall goal of getting educated and earning professional credentials. Thus, the Young Blacks methods were much more in line with pre-1965 civil rights based organizations and not those of many of the black power inspired groups they associated with.

The immediate aftermath of the fight sparked white student vigilante behaviour and sentiments.<sup>262</sup> On the day of the fight, Haddon Heights police arrested six white youths who were driving in the area of the school armed with clubs and bricks. These youths were charged with disorderly conduct. For several nights after the fight, carloads

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<sup>261</sup> Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.

<sup>262</sup> A Barrington resident named James Vine formed an organization called the Committee for Human Understanding which held meetings that attempted to facilitate community discussion in the wake of the April 1969 violence. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Vine was ostracized and treated with contempt by some Barrington residents for his efforts. Vine claims that Haddon Heights School District officials attempted to turn him away when he arrived at a scheduled appointment to present his organization’s recommendations. He believes this is because there was an informant in his group who tipped off school officials about the group’s input. Hoag Levins, “Couple Ostracized for Urging Racial Discussions,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Section, May 11, 1969, 1; and James Vine, Interview by Jason Romisher, Oct. 18, 2016.

of white youths drove into Lawnside along Warwick Road.<sup>263</sup> The youths armed themselves with pipes and chains seeking trouble by “hurling bottles, rocks, and insults from their car windows.”<sup>264</sup> A group of 3HS students from Barrington and Haddon Heights also sought to create a white protection group in response to the racial violence in April 1969. The group’s stated purpose was to “stop any more trouble by black militants.”<sup>265</sup> Presumably it was whites who also shot at two homes in Lawnside in the aftermath of the event. In May 1969, the *Courier Post* reported that Luther Wright of Lawnside was awoken at 3am by a loud noise. Authorities discovered three bullet holes in Wright’s home and identified a .38 caliber slug lodged in his bedroom doorway. A second shooting at a separate home in Lawnside shattered the window of a children’s nursery.<sup>266</sup> Fortunately, there were no significant acts of violent retaliation for these actions by Lawnside youth.

African American students from Lawnside also engaged in non-violent direct action at 3HS. In 1969, African American students at 3HS engaged in their first major act of political rebellion. On April 9, 1968, the day of Martin Luther King’s funeral, the Lawnside Board of Education claims they were the first institutional body in the United States to make Dr. King’s birthday a holiday.<sup>267</sup> On January 15, Lawnside students participated in a sit-in on Dr. King’s birthday to be in solidarity with their community’s holiday and to argue for its adoption by 3HS school officials.<sup>268</sup> The students maintained a silent protest despite warnings of detention and suspension by Principal Bucher if they did not go immediately to class. When a school bus arrived to take the Lawnside students home, Marie Young finally rose and explained the reason for the protest.<sup>269</sup> According to Shockley, while no suspensions or punishments were meted out, nothing was written

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<sup>263</sup> The Whitehorse Pike and Warwick Road are two busy roads which go directly through Lawnside. It would be difficult for the small Lawnside police force to maintain a constant police presence at several points along these thoroughfares.

<sup>264</sup> “Tension Along Border,” 19.

<sup>265</sup> “Home Course in Hate: Race Trouble Doesn’t Start at School,” *Courier Post*, May 13, 1969, 13.

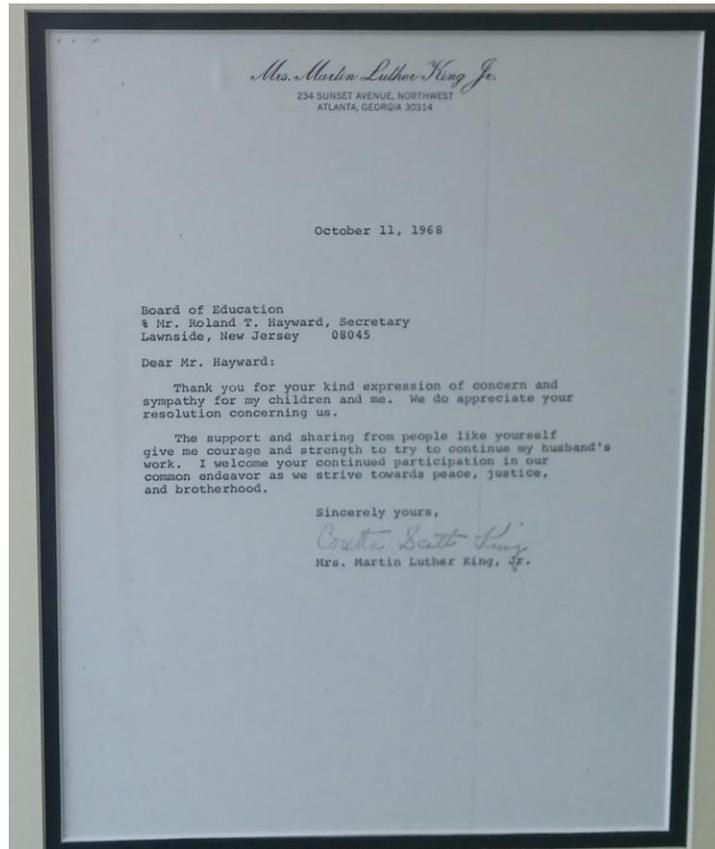
<sup>266</sup> “Tension Along Border, 19.

<sup>267</sup> Lawnside School District, “Board of Education Minutes,” Apr. 9, 1968.

<sup>268</sup> Linda Shockley, “I Just Never Understood...”

<sup>269</sup> Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016.

about the event in the school newspaper, *The Scribe*, and nothing was done to address the complaint.<sup>270</sup> This instance of activism by Lawnside students demonstrates the internalization of a key aspect of black power ideology which was the celebration in schools of African American holidays.



**Figure 6** The Lawnside Board of Education Resolution adopting Dr. King's birthday as a holiday is framed alongside a thank you letter from Coretta Scott King in the entrance of both the Lawnside Public School and Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church.

On January 12, 1970, Lawnside students organized a second sit-in at 3HS to protest the dismissal of Ms. Corbin, a young, recently hired African American teacher.<sup>271</sup> Higgs recalled that Corbin was beloved by the Lawnside students and that she sought assistance and support from The Young Blacks in order to keep her job.<sup>272</sup> Kenneth

<sup>270</sup> Linda Shockley, "I Just Never Understood..." Several Lawnside citizens familiar with this event also claim that the *Courier Post* denied interest in covering the sit-in.

<sup>271</sup> "Student Sit-Ins at HHHS," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 12, 1970, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

MacGregor explained that Corbin was repeatedly late, had been given multiple warnings which escalated to an ultimatum, and was finally dismissed when her conduct did not improve.<sup>273</sup> Corbin acknowledged that Superintendent Gansz had stated that the reason for her dismissal was continued lateness, but she believed the real reason was her complaints over an unfavourable teaching schedule; a disagreement which the *Courier Post* described as “protesting” in nature. Corbin also claimed that her lunch was shortened to twenty-two minutes.<sup>274</sup>

Lawnside students believed there were other reasons at play. They did not appreciate the answers administrators provided to students who directly inquired about the dismissal. The sit-in included 108 students who were all from Lawnside with no white student participation. The students stayed seated until 1:40 p.m., when they moved to the girls’ gym to meet with Board of Education Superintendent Herbert Gansz, the school administration, various faculty members, and the Superintendent of Camden County Schools.<sup>275</sup> However, the sit-in and the support of The Young Blacks was not enough to save Corbin’s job.<sup>276</sup> Her dismissal left 3HS with just one African American teacher, a void which Superintendent Gansz was eager to fill. Gansz declared that 3HS had made “vigorous efforts” to hire African American faculty members but had experienced difficulties with recruitment due to high demand.<sup>277</sup>

The 1969-70 school year passed without violence but did include another notable instance of constructive efforts by Lawnside students. In the spring of 1970, students from Lawnside presented a list of five suggestions to the school administration which codified the grievances they felt needed to be addressed. They wanted more African American instructional emphasis in History, Sociology, and English Literature. They also called for more representation on the school’s Interracial Council as well as the recruitment of African American teachers. The administration did heed their suggestions

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<sup>273</sup> MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.

<sup>274</sup> “Blacks Stage Boycott in Firing of Teacher,” *Courier Post*, Jan. 12, 1970, 11.

<sup>275</sup> “Students Sit-In at 3HS,” 1.

<sup>276</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.

<sup>277</sup> “Blacks Stage Boycott in Firing of Teacher,” 11.

and hired a few African American teachers over the coming years. There were also attempts to redesign the curriculum and the library increased its holdings of African American history and literature from seventy books to over 500.<sup>278</sup> There were other notable efforts by Lawnside students to effect change at 3HS.

Linda Shockley was motivated to help erase the silence of the African American student body at 3HS by contributing to the student newspaper. She began writing articles that demonstrated a great degree of political understanding and insight. Writing in *The Scribe* in 1970, Shockley described and discussed the Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Conference at Temple University which was organized by the Black Panther Party. In her article, she brought the words of Huey Newton to a white community's high school student newspaper. Shockley concluded her article by stating, "Power or self-determination to the people."<sup>279</sup> In another article, she discussed what was known in those times as 'Black History Awareness Week:'

The fact is apparent that black history has been the object of mutilation, neglect and intentional deletion by historians of remote and recent past. The valuable knowledge was denied us in a flagrant attempt to frustrate any avenue of inspiration for our self-determination. Somehow, we have managed to keep this precious information alive and achieve a degree of self-determination and respect...The week marks a period in which blacks make a special effort to reveal the motivating and too long whispered realities of our heritage. The many achievements made by blacks merit attention because the strenuous, highly racist (sic) conditions under which they were contributed warrant it... Negro History Week can only serve as the beginning of an earnest attempt by the history department and its members to infuse black history into what is now called U.S. history... The black student, of history and of life has... [the]obligation to educate himself as much as possible in the wealth of his heritage. The ignorance of our counterparts is often frustration in the classroom but we must always remember that "The future's success lies in the lessons of the past."<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> "Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship," 15.

<sup>279</sup> Linda Waller, "Black News," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), 2.

<sup>280</sup> Linda Waller, "A Beautiful Heritage Long But Needed," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights N.J.), Feb. 12, 1971, 2.

This statement encapsulates the frustration and sense of cultural alienation that African American students often experienced in a white dominated educational system. It also explains a key motivation for protest by Lawnside students at 3HS. Shockley's contributions to *The Scribe* were another form of political activism exercised by Lawnside students.

Shockley's discussion of how history has traditionally been taught and the importance of African American history to the education of all youth in America was a critique also levied by African American activists in the case study analyses done in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Maywood. The protests that gripped America in the summer of 2017 over the legacy of Confederate monuments speaks to how politically fraught the interpretation of American history can be. The frustration and cultural alienation that African Americans felt when confronted with a whitewashed history curriculum that justified and normalized actions such as slavery, the forced removal of indigenous people, and numerous examples of aggressive foreign wars leading up to the quagmire that was Vietnam were so eloquently expressed by Shockley.

On the eve of the chaotic events at 3HS on May 12, 1971, there had been little substantive change in the educational culture at the school despite multiple instances of violent conflict and non-violent activist efforts by the school's African American students. Lawnside youth had engaged in two sit-ins and issued a list of suggestions that school administrators tried in part to address. In response, there were efforts to decrease tensions through school clubs and information sessions, a handful of African American teachers were hired in a very competitive labour market, black studies courses were made available, and the school library did increase its holdings of African American cultural literature. Still, the school continued to have the following unequal characteristics: an inadequate African American studies program, very few staff members of colour, the continued streaming of African American students into general level courses, inadequate guidance department supports for African American students, inequality in some athletic and non-athletic extra-curricular activities, the absence of an African American cultural club, and the continued alienation of African American children from Lawnside who

arrived across a racial borderline as ninth graders. All that was needed was a spark to ignite this powder keg of inequality.

On May 12, 1971, Haddon Heights High School experienced a spontaneous explosion of bloody and chaotic racially motivated fighting. At that time, approximately 200 of the 1500 students at 3HS were African American.<sup>281</sup> The instigator of the violence was a female student from Lawnside who was allegedly disciplined the day before the school melee for a violent incident involving a white male student.<sup>282</sup> The next morning, this student was sent home along with another African American female student for fighting with two white female students.<sup>283</sup> She then returned to the school, got into a heated conversation with Principal Bucher that allegedly reached a crescendo when the student kicked him.<sup>284</sup> A white female student from Haddon Heights described what happened next:

I remember the principal standing near the front, and a black female student talking to him very loudly and angrily. I then went to the other side of the cafeteria and saw groups of black male students sitting at tables near the windows, and across the aisle, white male students were sitting at tables. (The tables were long, rectangular tables.) Everyone seemed upset, maybe yelling at each other, and looking around. All of a sudden, the two groups of male students rushed at each other and were fighting. There was a tremendous amount of noise with yelling and tables and chairs being pushed and knocked over, and I recall seeing a chair that someone had flung fly through the air.<sup>285</sup>

News of the fighting spread quickly through the school and several students left class to partake. A middle school teacher named Ms. Bottinelli had a classroom near the cafeteria. Her 2016 account captures the fear and chaos of that eventful morning:

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<sup>281</sup> Robert E, Bradley, "Schools Shut After Racial Fights Will Reopen Monday," *Courier Post*, Sat. May 15, 1971, 6. The figure of 1500 is the total number of students at the school which includes the grade seven and eight middle school students of which none were African American.

<sup>282</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Sep. 13, 2016.

<sup>283</sup> "Fight Breaks Out at Heights High School," *The Suburban*, May, 13, 1971, 1. The white female students were also sent home.

<sup>284</sup> Anonymous Man, Aug. 2, 2016.

<sup>285</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 26, 2016.

I had a class of 7th grade boys. One of the boys was teaching the class that day as a student teacher... In addition to my 30 kids, I had 15 6th graders and 2 mom's visiting to see what the school was like for next year when they would enroll...My classroom was directly across from the cafeteria. I heard loud noises, bangs, crying, screams outside my door. I quickly went out the door, realizing I could hardly open it and something bad was happening, but I pulled down the shade and locked the door so no one could get to my kids... Someone was frantically banging on the door. I opened it a crack and saw one of my 7<sup>th</sup> graders from another class. I pulled him by his shirt into the room and locked the door again. His hair was ruffled and his shirt was ripped out. The mothers in the room were wide eyed and frightened. Another bang on the door. Two of my Lawnside girls were seeking refuge. They were scared and angry and a little bloodied. I took them to my sink to wash the blood off. The mothers had gathered the kids together and started losing it. My kids were calm, quiet and waiting for direction from me. Another knock on the door. Police. I had to keep everyone locked in until they told me it was safe to release people in groups. I released the panic stricken mothers and visiting kids first. Then I released my two kids in 2 groups. Kids were told to go straight home. Run home.<sup>286</sup>

After police had secured the building and restored calm, officials ordered the remaining students to vacate school property. Some Lawnside students were sent home on a bus that unloaded everyone at Borough Hall. In 2016, I spoke to a man from Lawnside who was not yet of high school age in 1971. He vividly recalled the scene in 1971 of beaten and bloodied students getting off the bus in Lawnside that day.<sup>287</sup> There were no serious injuries reported and only one student was treated at hospital for head and facial bruises.<sup>288</sup> The aftermath of the violence and chaotic confusion further demonstrated how vast the racial divide was at 3HS and its associated communities.

Community, school, and state officials scrambled to ascertain the causes of the violence and determine which students and how many were involved in the fighting and violence. School administrators closed 3HS for the next two days as they earnestly sought solutions to the chaotic unrest and a return to normalcy.<sup>289</sup> Some teachers from

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<sup>286</sup> Connie Bottenelli, "You Might Have Grown Up in Haddon Heights if you Remember," Facebook Group post, Jul. 26, 2016.

<sup>287</sup> Conversation at the 2016 Ralph G. Jordan III Fundraiser.

<sup>288</sup> Carol Comegno and Dan Lang, "2 High Schools Hit By Racial Strife," *Courier Post*, May 13, 1971, 1.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

3HS met with concerned parents at Lawnside's Mt. Pisgah AME Church where they engaged in dialogue and listened to concerns.<sup>290</sup> The State of New Jersey ordered an inquiry into the violence and dispatched an official task force from the New Jersey Department of Education. The Task Force members were William Block, an assistant in the State Department of Education's Office of Equal Educational Opportunity, and Ronald Lewis, Director of the Department's Office of Program Development. Task Force members Block and Lewis attended a community meeting in Haddon Heights and made some pointed comments afterward. Block stated, "This situation is really the fruition of elementary school segregation. If the students are isolated racially from kindergarten up and then brought together in high school, it's a volatile situation." Lewis added, "The lack of communication is there. I find the same fears and stereotypes here that kind of pervade the country."<sup>291</sup> Supporting Block and Lewis' discussion of elementary segregation as a key factor in racial tensions at 3HS were the remarks of a white 3HS student who participated in fighting with Lawnside students. He indicated that most of the problems occurred with younger students and by the senior grades bonds and familiarity negated racial disturbances.<sup>292</sup> This sentiment was also expressed by Principal Bucher in the aftermath of the 1969 incident of racial violence.<sup>293</sup>

The school administrators at 3HS were determined that the school would reopen on the Monday following the violence and devised a transitional approach in order to maintain order and control. In their plan, the different cohort levels of students – freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior – would return to 3HS on different half days.<sup>294</sup> This plan failed because Lawnside students and community leaders refused to send a fraction of the African American student body into Haddon Heights due to security concerns.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Helen Panesis, "Heights High is Disrupted by Incident," *The Town Crier & Herald* (Haddonfield N.J.), May 20, 1971, 1.

<sup>291</sup> Bradley, 6.

<sup>292</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 29, 2016.

<sup>293</sup> "Home Course in Hate," 13.

<sup>294</sup> "Black Students Boycott School," *The Suburban*, May 20, 1971, 1.

<sup>295</sup> Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," May 16, 1971.

Lawnside students also resisted the plans of the 3HS school administration. On May 17, 1971, Linda Whittington, a student from Lawnside and a member of the Grievance Committee at 3HS, announced at a press conference that Lawnside students had boycotted a meeting with 3HS school officials because the administration had failed to enact a series of suggestions submitted by the Grievance Committee. The Committee had asked the administration to: ensure amnesty for all participants in the violence, reopen the school with all students returning together, and give the Grievance Committee the right to patrol the hallways and mediate disputes. Whittington also told reporters that four African American students had tried to go to school on Monday, the first day of the failed, planned transitional reopening of 3HS, and two were attacked and left school running.<sup>296</sup> In this atmosphere of fear and distrust, Lawnside students decided to make a grand statement.

The day after Whittington's press conference, 172 African American students made the long march from Lawnside to 3HS to deliver a list of thirteen demands to the school administration.<sup>297</sup> The protest march began at Lawnside Borough Hall and proceeded along Warwick Road and Mercer Avenue in Barrington before turning at First Avenue in Haddon Heights. The march symbolized the true racial divide that separated the communities and the hostility experienced by some Lawnside students who felt they were in enemy territory. Fifty years after he attended 3HS, Higgs still recalls the sight of African American garden gnomes in the yards of white homeowners and being called a chocolate baby on the walk to school.<sup>298</sup> The most egregious example of white homeowner anger at the parade of African American bodies walking past their homes everyday, was the woman who named her dog "Nigger" and would intentionally place the dog in the yard and call it when Lawnside students were passing by.<sup>299</sup> The starkness of the racial divide is also illustrated by a former Haddon Heights resident from the class of 1972 who remarked that the African American students from Lawnside were no different than the furniture at school to him. He also described them as nonentities who

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<sup>296</sup> Dan Lang, "Black Students Stage Protest," *The Courier Post*, May 18, 1971, 1, 4.

<sup>297</sup> Douglas Campbell, "Blacks List Demands, Still Boycott Classes," *The Courier Post*, May 19, 1971, 27.

<sup>298</sup> Higgs, Aug. 12, 2006.

<sup>299</sup> Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016; and Anonymous Woman, Aug. 2, 2016

were not even worthy of his consideration.<sup>300</sup> Furthermore, a female student from Lawnside also recalls being stared at when showering during physical education class and overhearing white students remarking how the African American students did not in fact have tails.<sup>301</sup> The protest march was thus, both a statement against inequality at 3HS as well as a show of power and determination in the face of racist community behaviour.

The students from Lawnside selected Denise Greene to formally present their petition to Principal Bucher. Greene stated to reporters, “We didn’t walk this far because we didn’t mean it. If they don’t [respond], we’ll have to take the next step. The only thing we want are some things we’ve been asking for for years.”<sup>302</sup> After delivering the petition, the Lawnside students calmly turned and marched home. Due to a lack of communication amongst students across these racially divided municipalities, few, if any, white students knew about this march and none participated in solidarity.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 14, 2016.

<sup>301</sup> Anonymous Woman, Aug. 2, 2016.

<sup>302</sup> Campbell, 27.

<sup>303</sup> Both the interviews I conducted and social media statements indicate that students from Barrington and Haddon Heights were not aware of this protest effort.



**Figure 7** Denise Greene presenting Principal Gordon Bucher with a petition after the 1971 Lawnside student protest march to Haddon Heights High School.

Gary L. Shivers, *Courier Post*, May 19, 1971, 27.

The school administration elected to discipline several students for their role and actions during the melee. While African American students bore the brunt of the punishment, in contrast to the 1969 incident, white students were also punished. Administrators disciplined forty-six students. The only student expelled for the remainder of the school year was the young woman from Lawnside who initiated the conflict that day. Officials insisted she complete psychological therapy before being reinstated. In contrast, the male student from Lawnside who allegedly initiated the April 1969 racial fight did not have any psychotherapy stipulation attached to his reinstatement. Thus, we see a gender bias in the interpretation of violence by these school officials. Perhaps administrators interpreted violent behaviour by male students as normal and by female students as abnormal. This could also imply that administrators interpreted the

highly aggressive behaviours of this student as symptoms of a gendered psychological disorder and not the result of systemic inequality and mistreatment. School administrators also suspended two other students, whose race is unknown, for three days. They charged another student with four offences, one of which was “sitting-in,” and placed a detailed letter of probation in this student’s permanent record. The inclusion of ‘sitting-in’ as a punishable offence reveals the antipathy of some school administrators toward non-violent political acts by the African American student body. Administrators also sent letters of probation to twelve other students, wrote letters of warning to thirty more, and placed all the correspondence in their school records.<sup>304</sup>

When students finally returned to school, those who had previously established friendships across the racial divide often discovered that those bonds were now severed. In a 2016 interview, a white member of a varsity team in 1971, expressed great sadness and contemplation when he related that his teammate from Lawnside stopped sitting with him in the school cafeteria after the incident.<sup>305</sup> An interracial school club named Students Organized for Togetherness (SOFT) that worked to improve race-relations at 3HS issued a solemn statement in the 1971 yearbook entitled “Racial Harmony. Is it Possible at 3HS?” It stated:

S.O.F.T. as this book goes to press, is in the midst of a re-evaluation of its aims and methods. Racial tension has been an unfortunate problem at Haddon Heights High School for a number of years, and it shows no signs of waning in the near future. S.O.F.T., totally a student group, has in the past directed its efforts towards promoting and understanding through student discussions and community presentations. These methods being ineffective, and an understanding that a school group cannot deal with racist attitudes formed outside the school, were the reasons for the self appraisal of the group. Possibly S.O.F.T. will arrive at a formula for dealing with the racial problem in the three communities. If not, 3HS will have more problems to deal with in the future.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Haddon Heights School District, “Board of Education Minutes,” May 16, 1971.

<sup>305</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 28, 2016.

<sup>306</sup> “The Garnetteer,” Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1971.

This statement reveals how apathetic some students were about the state of race-relations in the wake of this latest incident and several years of fights and severe tensions.<sup>307</sup> In this atmosphere, 3HS like much of America was seemingly on the brink of anarchy, revolution, and a very uncertain future.

The June 16, 1971, edition of *The Scribe* became a forum about the incident and included the demands made by Lawnside students as well as commentary by Linda Shockley who wrote:

When the black student body is no longer feared as a destructive monster and is understood as the potentially constructive body of concerned students that it is, better relations between the different races of the student population and better relations with the faculty and administration will begin to materialize.<sup>308</sup>

The demands by Lawnside students were the following:

**WE DEMAND:**

1. We want a black advisor and more Black teachers with the Black Student Union able to view the qualifications with the right to except or reject the proposal.
2. We want our own student organization entitled the Black Student Union.
3. We want a Black Studies Program initiated at Haddon Heights High School that would consist of courses in Black History, Black Literature, Black Arts and any courses relevant to our needs.
4. We want certain days off to observe black holidays such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's birthday. On these days the school will be officially closed.
5. We want to hold Black activities such as dances and meeting in the school.

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<sup>307</sup> It is also noteworthy that blame is partially ascribed to the influence of racist parenting. In a 1969 *Courier Post* investigation about the racial tensions at 3HS, racist parenting was also explored. One white 3HS student, "Charley," was instructed by his father to "not bother coming home if [he] ever br[ought] a nigger [home]." *Home Course in Hate*, 13.

<sup>308</sup> Linda Waller, "Right On!," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971, 2.

6. We want the history of Lawnside in the library. This will give us a sense of freedom and pride.
7. We want an information table, not only Black, which will offer literature from Black organizations regardless of their political viewpoints.
8. We want the right to invite speakers from any black organization into the school.
9. We want Black or interracial assemblies.
10. We want full library use without certain books being denied us. Also, when using the library facilities, we want ample time to work without being told to hurry up.
11. We demand that the faculty refrain from using profane language to any student in class
12. We demand to be allowed to survey the book list in the library and classes. The Black Students Union wants the right to make additions or subtractions to this list.
13. We want amnesty for everyone involved in the melee.<sup>309</sup>

These demands represent cultural and educational concerns as well as community control over decision making. They are consistent with the demands issued in the case studies examined from Maywood, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. This demonstrates that African American youth throughout America in cities, suburbs, and small towns had significant grievances with the inequality and curriculum content present in their high schools.

The incredible activist response and organizational efforts by Lawnside students in the aftermath of the racial violence occurred without significant involvement by Lawnside parents and community leaders. Unlike their reaction to the 1969 racial violence, there was no petition from Lawnside parents and no pronouncements by Lawnside's political leaders. The 1969 episode of racial violence elicited a response because initially the only students who were suspended were African American. In 1971, 3HS school officials suspended a significant number of white students which negated a key motivation for action that was present in 1969. The longstanding grievances that

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<sup>309</sup> "We Demand," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971.

students from Lawnside expressed were not championed by parents and community leaders. Perhaps this is due to the conservative nature of Lawnside community leaders who did not wish to see its young people engage in the violence and upheaval experienced in so many other communities. Lawnside was a community on the rise with exciting new corporate investments and housing developments. Angry youth interfering in community politics and starting fights in school cafeterias were unnecessary distractions from community development. This was reflected by Morris Smith's refusal to engage with the Young Blacks' efforts to challenge policy decisions at Board of Education meetings. Thus, the conservative nature of Lawnside community leaders provided an opportunity where youth were free to demonstrate acts of agency not seen in other case studies of African American high school student activism.

The Lawnside Board of Education was concerned about the disciplinary powers wielded by the Haddon Heights Board of Education and unsuccessfully appealed to the State to gain disciplinary control over 3HS students from Lawnside. The State ruled, "The students in the system are responsible only to Haddon Heights and subject to the Haddon Heights administration and must act in accordance with their rules and regulations."<sup>310</sup> New Jersey's culture of strong municipal control was once again upheld by the state's powerbrokers.

Haddon Heights school authorities reacted to the events by implementing measures to address some of the students' demands in the hopes of preventing future racial incidents at 3HS. Efforts continued by the administration to hire African American teachers and add African American studies courses to the school curriculum. The school also heeded a primary demand from the student activists and approved the establishment of the Afro-American Cultural Society.<sup>311</sup> The administration also listened to the State Task Force members' warning that residential segregation prior to the ninth grade created unfamiliarity between the students from the different feeder communities. To provide the future students of 3HS with opportunities to build trust and community, incoming freshmen from the three towns of Haddon Heights, Barrington, and Lawnside began

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<sup>310</sup> Kovalevich, 1.

<sup>311</sup> "Cultural Society Plans Activities," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 23, 1972, 1

attending a summer camp together to build trust and understanding.<sup>312</sup> These actions did not placate some Lawnside students who graduated in 1972. One Lawnside graduate wrote as her last will and testament in *The Scribe*, “I DO HEREBY BEQUETH to all revolutionary brothers and sisters: pride, power, and unity.” Another wrote, “I DO HEREBY BEQUETH to the Black Student body the strength and determination to endure any arrogance or ignorance you may encounter. The courage and capability to alter it.”<sup>313</sup>

To conclude, African American student activism by Lawnside youth at 3HS demonstrates that their grievances and methods of both non-violent and violent collective action were consistent with those expressed by other African American youth in a variety of locations. For example, African American students from Lawnside participated in acts of collective violence, sit-ins, a protest march, and issued suggestions and demands to school administrators. Like other African American students, they wanted more instructional emphasis on African American studies, more African American teachers, and the celebration of African American holidays. Furthermore, in contrast to young activists in Los Angeles, Maywood, Plainfield, and Philadelphia, Lawnside youth attended high school outside of their community and across an alienated racial borderline. This reality coupled with the conservative attitude of Lawnside’s civic leadership gave them the space to organize and engage in significant acts of agency with little direction from parents, community activists, and African American organizations. These acts included sit-ins, a boycott, a protest march, and the formulation and presentation of demands. Elementary school segregation also contributed to the racial tensions at 3HS as there was no familiarity between white and African American students until the ninth grade; this at a time of tremendous ignorance, racism, and stereotyping in mainstream American culture and society.

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<sup>312</sup> “Advisory Committee Discusses Policy Changes,” *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Nov. 24, 1971, 1. Former 3HS Principal Ronald Corn, explained in a 2016 interview, that this is a practice that continues to the present day. Ronald Corn, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 24, 2016. At a 2017 lecture at Rutgers University that I delivered about this thesis, several current 3HS students from Lawnside expressed that the pre-high school activities suffer from lack of participation and did little to create a sense of community between the students from the different eighth grade cohorts.

<sup>313</sup> “Last Will and Testament,” *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 12, 1972, 3.

The leadership efforts demonstrated by Marie Young, Denise Greene, and Linda Whittington, in conjunction with Linda Shockley's contributions to *The Scribe* also reveal that young women were instrumental to African American student activism at 3HS. Not only did young women serve as spokespersons to the press and to 3HS administrators, they also participated in movement activism within the Young Blacks. Higgs explains that older members of the Young Blacks did not interfere with the organizational efforts of its student members at 3HS. One reason was that Higgs described the student leaders as extremely intelligent, capable, and not in need of any help or advice. As examples to illustrate his point, Higgs specifically named Marie Young and Linda Shockley. Another significant factor mentioned by Higgs was that the leadership of the Young Blacks risked arrest if they crossed into Haddon Heights.<sup>314</sup> Thus, the space afforded for independent student activism by Lawnside youth resulted in female African American students prospering as leaders of significant collective political efforts and demonstrations.

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<sup>314</sup> Higgs, Aug, 12, 2016

## Chapter 4. Conclusion

Race-relations at Haddon Heights High School have gradually improved from its nadir on May 12, 1971, to the present. This reflects the national trend in America as African Americans continue making strides in the long march toward racial equality. Like the rest of the nation, 3HS has also experienced difficulties and setbacks along the way.

Shortly after the 1971 racial incident, the 3HS school population began to decrease as some white parents chose to send their children elsewhere for their education. Several Haddon Heights residents expressed in social media posts that after the 1971 school closure they remembered several friends who were removed from the public school system in Haddon Heights and presumably moved to private or parochial schools.<sup>315</sup> In the 2000 census, 24.6 percent of Haddon Heights school age children were enrolled in private or parochial schools.<sup>316</sup> This statistic is skewed because it does not differentiate between elementary and secondary schools. The population of 3HS including the seventh and eighth graders from Haddon Heights was approximately 1500 students in 1971 and is significantly lower than that today.<sup>317</sup> I suspect that a significant number of Haddon Heights parents send their children to public elementary schools and then switch to private or parochial schools in high school to avoid an integrated 3HS. Furthermore, neighbouring Haddonfield which is a more affluent community than Haddon Heights had a 12.8 percent private and parochial school attendance rate in the 2000 census.<sup>318</sup> I submit the low rate in Haddonfield is because this community does not have a send/receive relationship with any other towns and is a majority white community.

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<sup>315</sup> “You Might Remember if You Grew Up in Haddon Heights,” Public Facebook Group, Jul. 2016.

<sup>316</sup> *New Jersey Summary of Social Economic and Housing Characteristics*. 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing. Rutgers University State Data Center, Camden, N.J.

<sup>317</sup> Bradley, 6.

<sup>318</sup> *New Jersey Summary of Social Economic and Housing Characteristics*.

There were at least three noteworthy incidents of racial tensions at 3HS in the decades following the 1971 school closure. In 1991, the *Courier Post* ran a series of articles addressing the state of race-relations at 3HS. I.R. Bryant was the Lawnside School District President at the time. Six decades after he attended the 3HS senior class trip to Washington and Mt. Vernon, Bryant declared that, “Racism is rampant as usual at Haddon Heights High School.”<sup>319</sup> In the *Courier Post* exposé, students from Lawnside were interviewed and expressed concerns while Haddon Heights school officials investigated and claimed they found no evidence of systemic racism.<sup>320</sup> Tensions also emerged around the O.J. Simpson case. One former 3HS student from Haddon Heights related in a 2016 interview that the school was polarized on the Simpson issue with African American students supporting the innocent verdict with white students opposed. She also explained that fights broke out between African American and white students over this tension.<sup>321</sup> Finally, in 2003, a group of students from Lawnside sought legal counsel to protest issues of inequality and unfair treatment at 3HS.<sup>322</sup>

These episodes reveal that the ongoing existence of residential segregation in Lawnside, Barrington, and Haddon Heights continues to foster racial misunderstanding. The reality of the divide was graphically illustrated in a 2001 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article which discussed a joint activity between eighth grade students at the Lawnside Elementary School and middle school students from Haddon Heights.<sup>323</sup> The students were working on a project on the underground railroad. In the article’s illustration, students from Lawnside are in the foreground and are all African American and engaging with them on video screen are the white students from Haddon Heights (See Figure 7). An activity like this is a tremendous learning experience that builds understanding and connection between students across the racial borderline between the communities.

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<sup>319</sup> Judith Thomas, “Racism Charged at Haddon Heights High,” *Courier Post*, Nov. 20, 1991, 14.

<sup>320</sup> Lee Moore, “Charges of Racism Unfounded, Haddon Hts. Superintendent Says,” *Courier Post*, Nov. 22, 1991, 1.

<sup>321</sup> Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 27, 2016.

<sup>322</sup> Linda Shockley, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 20, 2016.

<sup>323</sup> Maureen Fitzgerald, “Students Bridging a Racial Divide: Studying the Escape of Slaves Joins Schools in Lawnside and Haddon Heights,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Fri. May 18, 2001, 29.



**Figure 8** This is a joint project between students at Lawnside Elementary School and Haddon Heights Middle School in 2001. This demonstrates the ongoing nature of elementary school segregation in these communities.

Rose Howerten, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 18, 2001, 28

Since 1991, Lawnside elders Morris Smith and Dr. Ted Johnson have run a successful mentoring program for African American students at 3HS. This program involves Smith and Johnson periodically meeting on an informal basis with students at the high school. At the meetings, one on one mentoring takes place as well as Smith and Johnson bringing in third parties with experience or expertise that can be of assistance. Since 2010, the program has responded to the issue of grade nine male students having a more difficult time than their female counterparts in transitioning to high school. The goal as stated by Smith is for students from Lawnside to “participate in a meaningful way” and not engage in distracting behaviour. Smith, Johnson, and Lawnside School Superintendent Dr. Ronn Johnson, who became involved in the mentoring program in 2002, make a concerted effort to attend 3HS school events that the students in their program participate in. To emphasize a common religious bond between the communities, Lawnside’s Mt. Zion church presents all graduating students from 3HS

with a bible. For Smith, the Lawnside mentoring program represents significant growth and progress in the educational relationship between Haddon Heights, Barrington, and Lawnside.<sup>324</sup>

In December of 2017, I delivered a public lecture for Rutgers University's Center for Urban Research in Education at the university's Camden campus. The question period was a fruitful discussion where community members from Lawnside and Haddon Heights exchanged thoughts and ideas about their shared history and the present state of American race-relations. Of key importance was the attendance of several current 3HS students. The students who were all from Lawnside and all African American shared their appreciation for the history lesson about their school and also voiced their contemporary concerns. The students related that 3HS continues to lack diversity on the teaching staff, and some did not feel motivated by their school to strive for academic excellence. African American students continue to primarily take general level courses and the lack of student diversity in college preparatory classes was cited as a deterrent in pursuing this academic track. The students generally felt empowered and inspired by the knowledge they had gained and spoke as a group about campaigning to rename their school athletic field because of Coach Baker's alleged mistreatment of African American athletes. Soon thereafter, I received emails from 3HS teachers and administrators asking for evidence about Coach Baker which demonstrates that African American youth activism is alive and well at Haddon Heights High School.

An analysis of the black freedom struggle in the self-governing African American community of Lawnside has several key historiographic contributions. The young people of Lawnside resisted pressures to radicalize their activist efforts despite the impact of black power ideology. This demonstrates that African American community governance negated much of the revolutionary drive seen in other African American population centers and organizations. Furthermore, Lawnside's political status allowed the Young Blacks the ability to organize independently from outside organizational influence. The result was a youth directed organization during the black power era that practiced non-violent activism in search of educational advancement for its member's professional

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<sup>324</sup> Smith, Jul. 26, 2016.

growth and development. In contrast to many other radicalized African American organizations, The Young Blacks worked with white corporate interests and sought accommodation with the American system. The Young Blacks also add to our gendered understandings of African American organizations during the civil rights/black power era because of their openness to female executive members and political spokespersons.

African American student activism at 3HS also contributes significant historiographic insights. Lawnside's reliance on Haddon Heights for the education of its high school age children created a dependency that exposed its youth to issues of racism and inequality that African American students throughout the country also experienced. It is not surprising then, that the suggestions and demands made by Lawnside youth reflect the influence of black power ideology and were similar to the demands expressed in other African American school protest movements. The conservative viewpoints of Lawnside community leaders in conjunction with the alienated municipal and cultural borderline which separates Lawnside from Haddon Heights deterred the leadership of the Young Blacks, Lawnside parents, and African American organizations from engaging with 3HS administrators and the school community both prior to and in the aftermath of the 1971 racial fighting. This is a reality not seen in other school case studies where African American parents and organizational leaders coopted and led protests. In this space, African American students demonstrated a significant degree of agency and activism. It is also historically significant that female students took on several key leadership roles in the relative absence of adult intervention. This adds to the ongoing work of recovering female agency and leadership in African American organizational and student movements.

During the research for this thesis, I discovered that several South Jersey high schools also experienced significant racial tensions during the civil rights/black power era. For example, on May 12, 1971, Sterling Regional High School in Somerdale, N.J. also erupted in racial violence.<sup>325</sup> Other South Jersey communities which experienced

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<sup>325</sup> On May 12, 1971, Sterling Regional High School also erupted in racial violence that resulted in the closure of the school. This incident and the similar events at 3HS were unrelated despite the close proximity of the two schools. In the aftermath of the violence in Haddon Heights, Barrington, and Lawnside, there were no curfews issued to youth, no violent white backlash, and African American

race-related violence in its schools include: Woodbury, Franklin, Clayton, Vineland, Glassboro, Bridgeton, Willingboro, Trenton, and Camden. Thus, historians of the black freedom struggle must expand their research focus to include the rich narratives and complex processes which occurred in high schools across America.

In 2016, I conducted research at 3HS the week before school was starting in September. The school was a busy place with teachers catching up with each other and prepping their classrooms and materials for the new school year. In the library, there were two students - an African American male and white female assisting the library secretary with preparations for the upcoming school year. The conversations between the two students were quite friendly and convivial. This scene of unity and togetherness is a microcosm of what America can be if racial divisiveness can be further ameliorated.

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students demonstrated significant activist efforts. In contrast, Sterling Regional High School services several towns including the integrated boroughs of Somerdale and Magnolia. These communities enacted curfews, experienced vigilante behaviour by white youth, and had African American community members request police protection. In response to these events, a group called The Concerned Black Parents of Sterling High School issued five demands. These included: black history courses, the hiring of African American teachers, the formation of a Black Student Union, the creation of a Watchdog Committee made up of both African American and white parents that would counsel students and provide guidance and academic support, and finally a review system to oversee participation in extra-curricular activities. Comegno, and Lang, 1; Carol Comegno and John Standring, "2 Schools Still Shut in Crisis," *Courier Post*, May 14, 1971, 1; and Sterling High School District, Board of Education Minutes, May 20, 1971.

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