

Student Work

---

8-1-2006

## Then the burning began: Omaha, riots, and the growth of black radicalism, 1966-1969

Ashley M. Howard  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork>  
Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

---

### Recommended Citation

Howard, Ashley M., "Then the burning began: Omaha, riots, and the growth of black radicalism, 1966-1969" (2006). *Student Work*. 552.  
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/552>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Work by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).

THEN THE BURNING BEGAN: OMAHA, RIOTS, AND THE GROWTH OF  
BLACK RADICALISM, 1966-1969

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

And the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Ashley M. Howard

August 2006

UMI Number: EP73190

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP73190

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate  
College, University of Nebraska, in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of  
Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

*Mary Lyons-Barrett*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Lyons- Barrett

*Richard M. Breaux*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Richard M. Breaux

*Jerold Simmons*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jerold Simmons, Chairperson

Date *August 7, 2006*

THEN THE BURNING BEGAN: OMAHA, RIOTS, AND THE GROWTH OF  
BLACK RADICALISM, 1966-1969

Ashley M. Howard, MA

University of Nebraska, 2006

Advisor: Dr. Jerold Simmons

Throughout the 1960s, America witnessed one metropolis after another suffer from major civil disturbances. The first of these incidents occurred in Selma, Alabama, but it was not until Watts, California exploded that the nation began to take notice. As America was throttling towards a major race war, nobody anticipated the Midwestern town of Omaha, Nebraska to experience the same disturbances larger cities had. Although the life of average Omaha blacks was better than that of many of their urban counterparts, black Omahans still faced frequent job discrimination, lack of adequate educational facilities, and general disenchantment with Northern ghetto life.

Between July 1966 and August 1969, these feelings were manifested physically in the streets. In this three-year-period, three riots occurred, increasing in violence each time, further alienating both white and black communities. By the final riot in 1969, the motives of Omaha's disturbances had become completely rage-driven and no longer grievance-oriented. The city's reaction to these riots was fairly typical. After the first occurrence, Mayor A.V. Sorensen's administration created numerous programs to help re-establish the black community and to directly address the rioters' complaints. After the final disturbance, local white merchants were leaving the area en masse, and the municipal government was reticent to coax anyone back into the neighborhood. Ultimately, any blighted community improvement plans were laid aside.

Although the Omaha riots in the late 1960s destroyed the once vibrant Near North Side community, the disturbances served as an important expression of black grievances and rage. As demonstrated in the 1966 disturbance, the riots were an effective tactic to accomplish change in the community, but once injustices were no longer articulated, the efficacy of this tactic diminished. To many young black Americans, rioting allowed

them to temporarily take back power, thus asserting themselves.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost I would like to thank my parents, Hilary and Jeanne Howard, who many years ago encouraged my love of books and history. But most importantly I thank them for suggesting this topic to research, long before it was a thesis and a passion. I also thank my sister, Gianna, and numerous friends, who have been willing to listen to my research, pretend they are interested, and most importantly drag me from the decade I often become mired in.

I am very fortunate to study an area in history which many of the participants are still very willing to talk about their experiences. Thank you kindly for all those who were willing to speak with me both on and off the record, but none more so than Dan Goodwin, Marvin McClarty, Fr. Jack McCaslin, and Senator Ernie Chambers. Your recollections have enabled me to tell your stories with the details that I hope readers will find as vivid as I did.

I offer my most sincere thanks to the History Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Without significant funding through the Charles and Mary Caldwell Martin Research grant and the George and Virginia Dare Shuflata Master's Thesis fellowship, I would have not been



able to complete this work. This generous financial support allowed me to focus primarily on my research and travel the United States to share ideas with other scholars. It is such an honor to work in an environment where talented, professional scholars, not directly involved in my project, forwarded materials that they thought may be of use to me. I would especially like to extend thanks to Bill Pratt, who though not on my committee, always provided a wealth of information to me.

Finally, I thank the members of my committee, Dr. Mary Lyons-Barrett, Dr. Richard Breaux, and chairperson, Dr. Jerold Simmons. Words alone do not express my absolute gratitude for their encouragement, dedication, and patience throughout this process.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. THE STATE OF OMAHA BLACKS	4
2. THE RIOT OF 1966	32
3. THE 'CALM' BEFORE THE STORM	55
4. THE RIOT OF 1969	80
CONCLUSION	103
APPENDIX I	109
APPENDIX II	136
BIBILIOGRAPHY	138

## Introduction

"A riot is a complex organism. Although there is often a single spark that ignites a riotous situation, it is never an isolated specific that creates the major force behind the riot. Riots, be they racial, social or political, are not created over one long incident. Conditions for a riot have to build over a period of time. Anger grows until one incident sends the people into the streets."

-Phillip Abbott Luce<sup>1</sup>

This is the story of a complex organism. One that bubbled, boiled, and festered longer than anyone can remember. This story did not occur in the usual places. It did not come to bear in a mega-metropolis or in the oppressive backwoods. This is the tale of protest and rage that many did not anticipate. Across the country, America witnessed one metropolis after another, suffer from major civil disturbances in the 1960s. Taking place in predominately African-American areas, these riots were not isolated events as many authorities speculated, but related directly to racial strife. As the decade progressed, common themes of discontent among America's black population began to become more glaringly apparent. As America throttled towards a major race war, the Midwestern city of Omaha, Nebraska began to experience the same rioting found in

---

<sup>1</sup> Julian E. Williams, *Burn, Baby, Burn!: Is your city next?* (Tulsa: Christian Crusade, May 1968), 1.

larger cities. Although Midwesterners, Omaha blacks were not exempt from feeling the same hopelessness, dissatisfaction, and desperation that blacks had felt for decades. Over one long, hot weekend in July 1966 these feelings became manifest, and in turn ushered in an era where a new tactic, violence, was used to voice the needs of the community.

1966 was once referred to as the "the year the Negro became black" It was in this year that Stokely Carmichael screamed "Black Power" at a steamy Greenwood, Mississippi rally. Floyd McKissick became head of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) directing the organization's focus to the black ghetto, and Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, in their ten-point Black Panther Party for Self-Defense platform, declared that "We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities."<sup>2</sup> Many conservative leaders, such as Roy Wilkins, saw Black Power as the "father of hatred and the mother of violence."<sup>3</sup> However for many young African-

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibram Rogers, "Celebrating Forty Years of Activism," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, Vol. 23 (2006): 18-22.

<sup>3</sup>Robert H. Brisbane, *Black Activism: Racial Revolution in the United States: 1954-1970* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974), 149.

Americans, Black Power armed them with a "political vocabulary" used to affect change in their world.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Rusty L. Monhollon, *This Is America?: The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 85.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE STATE OF OMAHA BLACKS

*"The Negro in the Midwest feels injustice and discrimination no less painfully because he is a thousand miles from Harlem."*<sup>1</sup> David L. Lawrence

Historically the Near North Side served as home for new immigrants.<sup>2</sup> As they began to accrue financial wealth and lost more of their ethnic identity, many moved from the area and made room for newly arriving ethnic minorities. Over the course of one hundred years, each ethnic group transformed this region into their own. Irish, Scandinavian, and German immigrants settled along the Near North Side during the mid-nineteenth century; mainland Italians and Eastern Europeans followed in the early 1900s.<sup>3</sup> However it was not until 1910 that this area's demographic drastically changed.

Southern African-American migrants created the first black settlement in Omaha in 1898 on the south side along

---

<sup>1</sup>"Bias Felt Anywhere" *Omaha Star*, December 10, 1965

<sup>2</sup>The Near North Side, also called the Second Ward, was bordered by Cuming Street to the South, Ames Street to the North, Thirtieth Street to the West and Sixteenth Street to the East. It was first outlined by Edward Sayre in a map drawn in 1854. James R. Wead, "An Ecological Study of the Second Ward" (master's thesis, Omaha University, 1953), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, *Patterns on the Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha* (Omaha: Klopp Printing Company, 1984), 3.

Twenty-Fourth Street. As the years passed, the boundaries of this black community expanded from Dodge Street to the southernmost border of Omaha. Eventually this area became the hub of violence and vice in the city. Trying to escape these negative influences, local African-Americans created a second black neighborhood, again on Twenty-Fourth Street but this time on the north side of Dodge Street. The first movement to the second black enclave began in 1910. As the European population moved out, professional and upwardly mobile blacks moved in. The Near North Side soon became the main business area for blacks, and they continued to come to Omaha to improve their financial circumstances. As one early student of the neighborhood noted: "the economic motive was the chief reason for the movement to Omaha...The ravages of the boll weevils in the summer of 1915 and 1916 greatly diminished the crops over most of the densely populated sections of the black belt and served as another incentive for the migration."<sup>4</sup> Other reasons for this "Great Migration" to the North included the dissatisfaction with conditions in the South and the labor shortages in the

---

<sup>4</sup>Wead, "Ecological Study,"21.

North due to diminished immigration and the growth of war-related industry.<sup>5</sup>

Surprisingly, until the late 1800s, black Omahans could purchase houses wherever they could afford them. Beginning in 1902 real estate advertisements specifying racial qualifications appeared in local newspapers. These red-lining practices eventually caused the index of dissimilarity, which social scientists use to measure the degree of racial segregation, to increase from 36% to 47% in the ten years between 1910 and 1920.<sup>6</sup> However distasteful, this racial segregation encouraged a distinct and flourishing black culture on Omaha's Near North Side.

Blacks began arriving in large numbers to Omaha seeking employment with the Union Pacific railroad, first as construction laborers, then relocating their families at this Eastern terminus as they continued to travel the line as porters and cooks. "The Negro was not only encouraged to come to Omaha but agents were dispatched to the South soliciting them and in many instances, transportation was

---

<sup>5</sup>David R. McMahon, "The Origins of the NAACP in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska 1913-1926" (master's thesis, Creighton University, 1993), 23-24.

<sup>6</sup>Delpaneaux Walakafra-Wills, *A Short Historical Analysis of the Urbanization of the African-American in Nebraska* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska at Omaha Library, January 1976), 11.



provided.”<sup>7</sup> Prior to 1910 most Omaha blacks were employed in the service sector, but between 1914 and 1920 meat packing houses began to register increases of up to fifty percent in their black personnel.<sup>8</sup>

As the black population grew, its members created their own thriving community complete with grocery stores, professional offices, and social halls.<sup>9</sup> The neighborhood’s strategic location along a streetcar route made North Twenty-Fourth Street a main business thoroughfare. These family-owned businesses provided a variety of services to the local community including barber shops, dime stores, and restaurants.<sup>10</sup> Though a relatively small Midwestern city, Omaha attracted numerous jazz musicians because of its strategic location on the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad. As a result the Near North Side drew both big bands and white patrons to the Dreamland and Carnation Ballrooms. There concert goers could hear nationally acclaimed recording artists including Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and native son

---

<sup>7</sup>James Harvey Kerns, “Industrial and Business Life of Negroes in Omaha” (master’s thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1932), 5-7.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, *Patterns on the Landscape*, 3.

<sup>10</sup>Patrick S. Garland, “Black Economic Development in Omaha” (M.B.A. thesis, Creighton University, 1971), 21.

Preston Love. Love often referred to Omaha as "the Triple A of baseball for black music. The next stop was the big leagues."<sup>11</sup>

Blacks in Omaha created their own social structure which at times paralleled the white community's. Since white Nebraskans excluded African-Americans from events such as the Aksarben ball, black Omahans created their own gala and elected a King Borealis and a Queen Aurora each year. Middle class black women joined the National Federation of Afro American Women, headed nationally by the wife of Booker T. Washington. Adults often belonged to various social clubs including fraternities, sororities, and other groups such as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Eastern Star, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Dining Car Waiter's Union. Other North Side fixtures included the Colored Old Folks Home and the North Side YWCA, which provided women's club activities.<sup>12</sup>

Though African Americans in Omaha shared many of the same aspirations as their white counterparts, the greater Omaha community did not perceive them as equals. The year

---

<sup>11</sup>Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo N. Smith, *Vision of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company, 1998), 106, 115.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 60-66.

1919 proved to be one of the bloodiest years in America for racial violence and Omaha was no exception. On September 28, 1919, a group of white Omahans, in the pattern of other lynch mobs throughout the Red Summer, went to the courthouse. There they demanded the release to their custody of Will Brown, a black man who had been accused of raping a white woman. An estimated 4,000 to 5,000 stormed the courthouse at 1701 Farnam Street, intent on vigilante violence. Police officers used hoses to deter the crowd but that further angered the masses. Rioters broke into local stores gathering guns, ammunition, axes, and gas which they used to make fire bombs to hurl at the courthouse. Firefighters arrived at the scene and were greeted with howls as the rioters cut their water hoses and stole ladders to scale the building. Fire Battalion Chief Patrick Cogan was even assaulted by the crowd.<sup>13</sup>

Mayor Edward P. Smith attempted to intervene stating "I will not give up the Negro! I will give my life protecting the law!" and he nearly did.<sup>14</sup> The mob seized him and hung him from a traffic signal pole on Sixteenth and Harney streets. Police Officers Ben Danbaum and Charles

---

<sup>13</sup> Larry M Scalise, Donald L. Nichols, Jr., and Charles W. Wesson, *The History of the Omaha Fire Department 1860-1993* (Omaha: Professional Fire Fighters Association of Omaha, 1995), 33-34.

<sup>14</sup> Calloway and Smith, *Vision*, 67.

Van Deusu cut him down before he suffocated. Brown, however, was not so lucky. The mob snatched him from the courthouse and hung him from a telephone pole on Eighteenth and Harney Streets. They riddled him with bullets, and using a car, dragged him to Seventeenth and Dodge Streets.<sup>15</sup> Then in classic early twentieth century style, the group burned his body and posed for a picture as smoke rose from Brown's corpse. The mob, not satisfied with the blood already spilt that night, marched toward the Near North Side. As the mob arrived they encountered a surprise. Local black residents waited for the mob perched on their rooftops with guns ready to protect their homes and businesses. The United States Army quickly intervened and the majority of rioters fled the scene.<sup>16</sup>

With the new influx of black migrants into the city, a strained antagonism began to simmer between the black and

---

<sup>15</sup>Scalise, and others, *History of the Omaha Fire Department*, 33-34. It is important to note that although the lynching was a racially motivated act, politically motivated factors must also be considered. Political boss Tom "Old Man" Dennison sought to convince the public that Omaha was in a state of deep turmoil. With the help of the *Omaha Bee*, Dennison promoted a vision of the city in which the police were inept and his political opponent, Mayor Edward Smith, let chaos rule. In the end, local black newspaper, the *Omaha Monitor* best summarized Dennison's role in the lynching, reporting that at work was the "hidden, but not wholly concealed hand, of those who would go to any extreme to place themselves in power." The *Omaha Monitor* as cited in Orville D. Menard, *Political Bossism in Mid-America: Tom Dennison's Omaha, 1900-1933* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 88.

<sup>16</sup> Calloway and Smith, *Vision of Freedom*, 64-68. Earlier that year, on March 22, 1919, at a NAACP meeting Reverend W. F. Botts stated that Police Chief Ebersteing should protect the black community if riots occurred. Someone in the audience replied that instead blacks should be prepared to defend themselves, and Botts replied, "That's the right spirit." At the meeting 120 people joined the NAACP on the spot. McMahon, "Origins of the NAACP," 62.

white communities. The 1920s brought greater race consciousness to Omaha as Marcus Garvey's "New Negro" mentality began to permeate the black community.<sup>17</sup> After the dramatic increase in population between 1910 and 1920 residential segregation began to increase creating a surge in organized community activity. Black businesses and professionals began to rely primarily on black clientele as fewer whites patronized their businesses.<sup>18</sup> Reverend John Albert Williams, founder of the *Omaha Monitor* newspaper and a vocal supporter of the emerging business strip, saw North Twenty Fourth Street as a symbol of black pride and achievement.<sup>19</sup> Blacks were on the move in Omaha.

In 1910, blacks comprised less than one percent of the population on the Near North Side but by 1950 they were fifty-one percent. Omaha's black population on the Near North Side exploded from a mere 110 residents to 10,192 in just forty years.<sup>20</sup> Between 1940 and 1950 alone, Nebraska's urban black population grew from 14,171 to 18,453 due to the war time industrial boom.<sup>21</sup> During the Second World

---

<sup>17</sup>Calloway and Smith, *Visions of Freedom*, 99.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup>Wead, *Ecological Study*, 21.

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Race by Sex, for the State, Urban and Rural, 1950, and for the State 1880 to 1940*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1952.

War, Omaha truly had a vibrant, bustling, and cosmopolitan black community. Outside of the confines of this haven, however, they faced the harsh realities of being black in America. Evoking the idea of a "Double V", victory over fascism abroad and racism at home, Omaha blacks went to work for equality but still remained a marginalized population.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1960s Omaha's 25,000 black citizens comprised an increasing percentage of Omaha's total population climbing from 8.3% in 1960 to just under 10% in 1970.<sup>23</sup> The *Omaha Star* estimated that their readership alone pumped \$600,000 a day into the local economy.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the turbulent sixties, no fewer than 34,000 black citizens made Omaha their home.<sup>25</sup> Although their numbers and purchasing power grew, their second class status remained.

In 1966, the black community was not totally without representation. While no black members sat on the Omaha City Council, one of the forty-nine members of the state's unicameral legislature was an African-American. The Omaha Board of Education included one black board member, but

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>23</sup>"Percentage of Black Population in Midwest Cities," *Omaha World-Herald*, September 20, 1986. Harl Dalstrom, A. V. Sorensen and the *New Omaha* (Omaha: Lamplighter Press, 1988), 200.

<sup>24</sup>"Visit the New Woolworth," *Omaha Star*, October 19, 1962.

<sup>25</sup>Dalstrom, A. V. Sorensen, 200.

there was no black representation on the Douglas County Board of Health, Board of Commissioners, Metropolitan Utilities District, Omaha Airport Authority, Sarpy County Board of Commissioners, Omaha Public Power District, or the Omaha County Planning Board.<sup>26</sup>

Racial covenants severely restricted black Omahans' ability to leave the immediate area of the Near North Side. The Omaha Real Estate Board refused to end racial discrimination in the housing market. The Human Relations Board reached a compromise with the Real Estate Board by asking agents to expand a 1959 policy against religious discrimination in housing. Real Estate Board President Norman Keegan stated that he would ask home owners to follow the provisions in the 1959 policy but ultimately would respect their wishes and would allow them to alter and initial the disclaimer to allow for racial

---

<sup>26</sup>“Blacks Serving on Elected and Appointed Governing Boards: 1966 and 1986,” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 19, 1986. Though Omaha African-Americans were severely underrepresented, there were still people who kept their interests in mind. None contributed more than Senator Edward Danner who pressed five civil rights measures within the first two weeks of 1963 including a repeal on the ban of inter-racial marriages (LB 179), establishing employment without discrimination as a civil right (LB 347), the prohibition of discrimination in public places (LB 364), a fair housing act (LB 596) and outlawing the poll tax as a requirement to vote (LB 49). “Fifth Civil Right Measure Offered,” *Omaha Star*, January 13, 1963. Danner was a black Omahan who labored as a butcher in the South Omaha packinghouses before beginning his tenure in politics. Danner also served as vice-president for the United Packingworkers of America, Local 47. Calloway and Smith, *Visions of Freedom*, 61. Website for the Warner Institute for Education in Democracy, sponsored by the Nebraska State Legislature. Accessed July 18, 2006. [http://www.unicam.state.ne.us/institute/former\\_legislators/danner.htm](http://www.unicam.state.ne.us/institute/former_legislators/danner.htm).

discrimination.<sup>27</sup> In 1963 of all the new houses available on the market, 25,000 were allotted for whites and only fifty for blacks.<sup>28</sup> In 1964, Central Surveys Incorporated of Shenandoah, Iowa conducted a survey which showed that if racial covenants did not exist, 29% of Near North Side residents would move out of the ghetto immediately, and 48% desired to move but could not because of insufficient funds.<sup>29</sup> Although Omaha never had formal legal segregation, the denial of rights took subtle, yet devastating forms.<sup>30</sup> By 1965, surveys showed that Omaha had as great a level of residential segregation as Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>31</sup> These factors left the Near North Side with a disproportional saturation of black citizens and with all the problems a forgotten populace faces.<sup>32</sup>

As their numbers grew larger the standard of living for black Omahans continued to decline. A visit from Julius Williams, director of the regional NAACP chapter in

---

<sup>27</sup>Dalstrom, A. V. *Sorensen*, 200.

<sup>28</sup>"Omaha Real Estate Board Head Dedicated to Maintain Ghetto," *Omaha Star*, February 22, 1963.

<sup>29</sup>"Housing Attitudes Survey Reveals Different Views," *Omaha Star*, June 19, 1964.

<sup>30</sup>Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha*, Enlarged Ed. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 272.

<sup>31</sup>"Omaha and Birmingham Run Neck-And-Neck in Housing Segregation," *Omaha Star*, February 5, 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Though the Near North Side served as a business location for small time entrepreneurs to build their stores, in 1965, fifty percent of all buildings located along a ten block strip from Ames to Cuming Streets along North Twenty-Fourth remained vacant. *Omaha City Directory* (Kansas City, MO: R.L. Polk & Co., 1965), 75-77.



Kansas City, declared black housing in Omaha to be "lousy."<sup>33</sup> Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison called the Near North Side "an environment unfit for human habilitation in many areas."<sup>34</sup> Statistically speaking the Near North Side was an undesirable area in which to live. Over thirty-four percent of the deteriorating houses and twelve percent of the dilapidated homes in Omaha were found on the Near North Side. In 1960 the median house in Omaha was assessed at \$11,700. In two of the census tracts that comprised the Near North Side, the average house was valued at \$7,600 and \$7,100. The remaining two tracts had even lower values.<sup>35</sup>

In July of 1966, the city of Omaha published, through the Community Renewal Project, a report outlining the areas in the city that the commission considered to be "blighted" and prescribing various methods for improvement. The city defined "blighted" as an area in which conditions were "below community standards of suitability for living or doing business." The survey, conducted between January and February of 1964, found that the entire Near North Side qualified as a "blighted" area. No neighborhoods west of

---

<sup>33</sup> "Problems Behind, Trouble Remains," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 7, 1966.

<sup>34</sup> Larsen and Cottrell, *Gate City*, 274.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Year Moved into Unit, Automobiles Available, and Value of Rent of Occupied Housing Units, by Census Tracts, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division in Cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1962.

Forty-Second Street, with a predominately white populace, were considered in need of help.

In this report planners portioned the Near North Side into five distinct areas: Kellom Heights, the Near North Distribution Center, Conestoga, Horace Mann, and Saratoga. The Conestoga area, the worst of all of these zones, had almost all of the residences in this area valued under \$10,000 with over 50% assessed at under \$5,000.<sup>36</sup> In Tract fifteen, the Kellom Heights neighborhood, the commission found that 45% of the housing was either deteriorating or dilapidated. 41% of the housing in the Conestoga area was deteriorating or dilapidated, 21% in the Horace Mann zone, and 7% in the Saratoga division. The city average was 13%.<sup>37</sup>

The predominately residential area of Horace Mann or Area 5B, consisted of 579 square acres. The survey concluded that "the area is suffering from general decay." Although the commission located many adequate structures, the largest concentration of blight was found in the northeast quarter of the area.<sup>38</sup> Two public schools,

---

<sup>36</sup> Community Renewal Program, July 1966 Report Neighborhood Analysis (Omaha, NE: GPO, 1966), 1-7. Hereafter referred to as Community Renewal Program followed by neighborhood and page number.

<sup>37</sup> United States Bureau of Census, *Occupancy and Structural Characteristics of Housing Units by Census Tracts*, 1960. Prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1962.

<sup>38</sup> Community Renewal Program, Horace Mann, 1-6.

Lothrop Grade School and Horace Mann Junior High, serviced the area and between them Kountze Park provided some green space.<sup>39</sup> In the Near North Distribution Area, Kellom Park included a swimming pool immediately adjacent to the school compound, serving as the only swimming facility in the Near North Side.<sup>40</sup>

In a blighted community problems compound. Landlords often preyed on residents of the Near North Side by maintaining high rents but avoiding necessary improvements on their properties. In an attempt to maximize profits, landlords would convert single family homes into inadequate apartments. This contributed to over one-fifth of the available housing units on the Near North Side being termed as overcrowded, with more than one person to a room. In addition, many home-owners, although willing, found themselves unable to improve their properties because of the lack of capital, contributing further to the blight in the community.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Ironically, this park also was the site of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition which Omaha hosted in 1898. The exposition featured an "old plantation" which ultimately became the most popular exhibition on the midway, in which paying customers could witness first hand "the old black aunty and the little pickaninny...the voodoo and the hoodoo." At this huge exhibit fair goers could see twelve genuine log cabins occupied by "genuine darkies." Calloway and Smith, *Vision of Freedom on the Great Plains*, 55.

<sup>40</sup>Community Renewal Program, Near North Distribution Center, 1-6.

<sup>41</sup>Garland, "Black Economic Development," 11-12.

Throughout the 1960s, studies showed drastic segregation in Omaha's public schools. Of the 7,667 minority students enrolled in the district in 1962, 5,113 were enrolled in predominately (80% or more) minority schools. Only 25% of minority students attended white majority schools.<sup>42</sup> African-American instructors largely taught at majority black schools. At the beginning of the 1963-1964 school year, there were only seventy-six black teachers employed by the district, less than 5% of the total professional staff. In 1964 the Omaha School board hired a handful of new black teachers but assigned them mostly to predominately African-American grade schools.<sup>43</sup>

While the school board showed no inclination to address the problem of segregation, in November 1962, Superintendent Harry S. Burke did commission a study of school facilities that demonstrated a desperate need for improvement on the Near North Side. Burke then pressed for approval of a \$25 million bond issue that led to the construction of the new Conestoga School complete with

---

<sup>42</sup>Preliminary Analysis of Department of Justice, July 16, 1973, School Bussing Vertical File at Florence Public Library. Surprisingly, ninety-three percent of Omaha's school age blacks were enrolled in high school compared to only eighty-three percent of whites. Yet few went to college. The 1960 census reported only 469 black college students enrolled in institutions in Omaha and Lincoln. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *School Enrollment by Level and Type of School, by Color, for the State, Urban and Rural, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1961.

<sup>43</sup>"Number of Negro Teachers Upped," *Omaha Star*, September 4, 1964.

twenty-nine classrooms, a library, health unit, teachers lounge, guidance and counseling suite, and an Operation Head Start program.<sup>44</sup>

Omaha was reaping the benefits of the booming post-war economy. In the 1960s Omaha operated as the world's largest livestock market and meat-packing center and functioned as the hub of eight principal train lines making the Gate City the fourth largest railroad center in the country. Omaha also served as the home office for thirty-six insurance companies, and several federal agencies, yet Omaha blacks did not receive their fair share of the wealth. Of the 5,427 black males over the age of fourteen who were employed in Omaha, 1,814 worked in manufacturing, 1,525 worked in meat packing, and 563 worked in transportation and public utilities. Although blacks held jobs in these major industries, they were often in menial roles.<sup>45</sup>

A report looking at the hiring practices of the federal government in Omaha found that 522 blacks in Omaha were employed by federal agencies, but only 5% of these

---

<sup>44</sup>Construction costs totaled \$935,000 with an additional \$400,000 set aside for the acquisition of a ten acre site. "Conestoga School Dedication Set for Sunday, March 27." *Omaha Star*, March 25, 1966. "Northside School Among First To Be Planned," *Omaha Star*, February 8, 1963.

<sup>45</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Industry of the Employed by Race and Class of Worker, and of the Experienced Civilian Labor Force by Color, by Sex, For the State and for Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas of 250,000 or More: 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census Washington, D.C., 1963.

employees held supervisory roles. The black employees' pay directly related to their positions. Fifty-five percent of black workers earned less than \$5,000 a year, and less than three percent earned over \$7,000, compared to twenty-seven percent of white workers.<sup>46</sup> Among the general population, Omaha's white families earned a median wage of \$4,925, while black families earned only \$3,418 in 1960.<sup>47</sup> The average national income for urban families was \$6,166.<sup>48</sup>

Job opportunities had not improved measurably for black laborers since the depression.<sup>49</sup> One of the largest employers in Omaha, Cudahy Meat Packing, laid off 470 employees; more devastatingly ninety percent of the black males laid off and fifty percent of the black females acted as head of household.<sup>50</sup> In an article written for the *Omaha Star*, Ernie Chambers, later state senator from North Omaha, noted that "'Negro' jobs miraculously [become] 'White' jobs when they get cleaned up and become less heavy and risky."<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>"17 of 27 Federal Agencies Hire Negroes in Omaha, Survey Reports Reviewed," *Omaha Star*, January 31, 1964.

<sup>47</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Income in 1959 of Families and Unrelated Individuals, by Color for the State Urban and Rural, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1963.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>Larsen and Cottrell, *Gate City*, 272.

<sup>50</sup>The majority of Cudahy workers were African-Americans. Dalstrom, *A. V. Sorensen*, 133.

<sup>51</sup>Ernest W. Chambers, "A Militant Look at Black Poverty," *Omaha Star*, December 30, 1966. The *Omaha Star* offers one of the most comprehensive accounts of the civil rights struggle in Omaha, their

Such was the case as the packing houses became mechanized. Unfortunately with skills only to work in blue collar positions, many of the black families fell on hard times.<sup>52</sup> Packinghouse positions were considered one of the better jobs an African-American male could hold. An unskilled or common laborer in a big four meat packing company could earn \$2.42 an hour.<sup>53</sup>

Mayor A.V. Sorensen stated that the processing centers had declined because of the out-moded multi-story packing plants, the competition from smaller plants with modern equipment and lower labor costs, and the fact livestock buyers were purchasing directly from stock-raisers not central markets.<sup>54</sup> To combat the negative repercussions of the loss of a major industry, Mayor Sorensen created Project 470 to help workers laid off by Cudahy. Through the aid of this program, 85% of the workers found new jobs at a lower pay, but it was a start.<sup>55</sup> In 1964 the Fort Worth Armour plant also had major lay-offs. It can be assumed that what happened to workers there happened to

---

motto being "dedicated to the service of the people that no good cause shall lack a champion and that evil not go unopposed." *Omaha Star*, May 6, 1960.

<sup>52</sup> "Seventy Percent of Uncalled Workers Are Negroes; Sen. Edward Danner Meeting Triggers Widespread Action," *Omaha Star*, November 5, 1965.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence A. Danton, "The Omaha Experiment, A Study of A Community Effort to Cope with Unemployment Resulting From Plant Mechanization" (PhD dis., University of Nebraska, 1964), 66.

<sup>54</sup> Dalström, *A.V. Sorensen*, 190-191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

packing plant workers in Omaha. In the case of Fort Worth, of the employees who were laid off and re-trained, 80% of the whites found jobs either directly or indirectly related to their skills and training, compared to only 60% of Latinos and 40% of black employees.<sup>56</sup> Further adding to the plight of black laborers, between 1968 and 1969 Cudahy, Armour and Swift, all major employers, closed their Omaha plants.<sup>57</sup>

Job prospects for young black males were equally poor in Omaha. In 1960 only 27% of black American males ages fourteen to seventeen were actively in the workforce and barely 79% of males ages eighteen to twenty-four held jobs.<sup>58</sup> Nebraska employment opportunities for black males over the age of fourteen were scarce. Fewer than 3% of white males over the age of fourteen were jobless while 8% of black males found themselves in the same predicament.<sup>59</sup>

Omaha lawmakers often ignored or underestimated the Near North Side's recreational needs.<sup>60</sup> As early as 1937

---

<sup>56</sup>George P. Shultz and Arnold R. Weber, *Strategies for the Displaced Worker: Confronting Economic Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 164.

<sup>57</sup>Garland, "Black Economic Development," 9.

<sup>58</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Labor Force, by Age and Sex, for States, Urban and Rural, 1960 and for the United States, 1950 and 1940*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1963.

<sup>59</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Employment Status, by Color and Sex, for the State: 1940 to 1960*, Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1961.

<sup>60</sup>"Center YMCA Launches Its Fall Programs," *Omaha Star*, September 3, 1965.



one study observed that "The Negro boy in Omaha is handicapped by not having a sufficient number of activities that are properly guided. His leisure time is mostly spent on street corners, in pool halls and other places that encourage a low standard of behavior."<sup>61</sup> Generally speaking the Near North Side could be divided into two distinct neighborhoods, east of Twenty-Fourth Street and West of that point. According to Louis B. Olsen "there are no recreational facilities in the western half of this part of the ghetto--absolutely nothing."<sup>62</sup>

In 1960 the Parks and Recreation Department of Omaha planned to increase and better Omaha's recreational facilities. Overcrowding at the city's golf courses prompted the building of a new one costing \$300,000 located in Benson Park. The committee also proposed to build five swimming pools at the cost \$700,000 in Upland Park, Spring Lake Park, and Gallagher Park, none of which would be located on the Near North Side. The city additionally submitted for approval a plan to spend \$200,000 for one boat marina. Finally, authorities allocated only \$5,000 for

---

<sup>61</sup>Glenn Sullenger, "A Study of Opportunities of Boys in Omaha" (thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1937), 66.

<sup>62</sup>Tommy Perry, "City Opening New Teenage Center On Near North Side," *Omaha World-Herald* July 8, 1966.

landscaping, equipping and improving new or existing parks.<sup>63</sup> Considering the disregard for the needs of the black community, concerned Omaha blacks did not stand idly by.

Activism in Omaha began nearly fifteen years earlier in the immediate post-World War II era when the De Porres club implemented the type of non-violent direct action tactics which would later characterize the struggle in the South. The De Porres Club, founded by Fr. John Markoe and Denny Holland, honored the ideas of its namesake, Saint Martin De Porres, a sixteenth century mixed heritage friar who served the disadvantaged in Peru. The group was bold, brave, innovative, and integrated. Their first victory came by boycotting a dry cleaner. The business, fearing a loss of income, decided to include blacks as employees. The club quickly moved on to fighting other injustices with pickets and petitions, pamphlets and boycotts. They picketed the Coca-Cola bottling plant and boycotted Reed's Ice Cream Company, both for discriminatory hiring practices. Despite these successes, the group faced hardships too. Creighton University officials restricted

---

<sup>63</sup> Capital Improvement Schedule, report ordered by Omaha Mayor John Rosenblatt, November 1960, Omaha City Planning Board. Parks and Recreation-Vertical File at Florence Public Library.

their use of meeting space on campus in 1947, forcing members to find new meeting facilities where they could along North Twenty-Fourth Street. They ultimately found a permanent location at Mildred Brown's *Omaha Star* offices.<sup>64</sup>

Their boycotting tactics remained simple yet effective. First Holland and Markoe would appeal to the person in charge at the business, either face to face or in a letter. If this did not persuade the owner to change his or her ways, the group went public. Members and supporters demonstrated and distributed handbills to decrease the flow of patrons into the business. The group staged a "sit-in" twelve years before the A & T students used the tactic at a Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina. Four years before the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott made Rosa Parks into a national icon and launched the career of Martin Luther King Jr., the De Porres Club successfully boycotted Omaha's street car system.<sup>65</sup> They called for a complete boycott of the system, and if supporters could not avoid using the system, they asked patrons to pay the fare with eighteen pennies. Their 1960 motto was to "Do Something" and they did exactly that, petitioning Governor Ralph Brook to end

---

<sup>64</sup>Leo Adam Biga, "Killing Jim Crow," *Omaha Reader*, January 20, 2005, 10-13.

<sup>65</sup>Bob Reilly, "It Has Been the Few Who Have Acted, Who Have Saved Us From Unspeakable Scandal," *Window*, Winter Issue 1995-1996, 6.

teacher placement based on race.<sup>66</sup> In its fourteen years the De Porres Club won many battles and made many enemies, enough to garner their own file in the records of the FBI.<sup>67</sup>

Through arduous and hard-won fights, the De Porres Club and other Nebraska civil rights organizations such as the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the NAACP and the Urban League made some headway. In 1960 the NAACP boycotted five major stores in Omaha because of their discriminatory hiring practices.<sup>68</sup> The following year its leaders launched a new campaign encouraging "self help through selective buying."<sup>69</sup> Despite this activism, the NAACP in Omaha faced pressures from above. In 1963 the National Office charged them with lagging membership and a failure to "participate constructively" in the NAACP Freedom Fund project. Critics claimed that too many in Omaha wanted to be in charge and too few wanted to take orders. Others cited the lack of activity in the legal redress committee and noted the failure of the sympathy

---

<sup>66</sup>"De Porres Presents Petitions to Governor Bröök," *Omaha Star*, February 19, 1960.

<sup>67</sup> Biga, "Killing Jim Crow," 12.

<sup>68</sup>"Omaha NAACP Votes Unanimously to Boycott Five Omaha Chain Stores," *Omaha Star*, March 31, 1960.

<sup>69</sup>"Omaha N.A.A.C.P. Launches Selective Buying Campaign," *Omaha Star*, July 28, 1961.

picket for those in Birmingham and the unwillingness to work with other groups.<sup>70</sup>

An *Ebony* article reported that the "Negro leaders who lack the skills of mobilization are being pushed aside by younger, bolder men."<sup>71</sup> Other groups such as the Citizens Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties (4CL) took heed. This group formed by the Omaha Negro Ministers Association trained their foot soldiers at Mount Zion Church.<sup>72</sup> In June 1963 the new group issued its mission statement. The organization claimed that they were "born out of the realization for the need for united action and along with the awareness that the existing structures have been ineffective and had begun to exist without any appreciable number of citizens in support of their respective movements."<sup>73</sup> Using the ideology of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), Martin Luther King, and Gandhi, they set out to make changes in Omaha. In their five paragraph, 364 word statement, they informed local blacks that "no longer should we spend our money where we cannot

---

<sup>70</sup>"NAACP Meeting Information Still Leaks Out," *Omaha Star*, May 10, 1963.

<sup>71</sup>"Ebony Article Declares: "Negro Has New Mood," *Omaha Star*, June 28, 1963.

<sup>72</sup>Nick Kotz, "More Jobs in Omaha Firms for Negroes," *Des Moines Sun Register*, reprinted in *Omaha Star*, August 30, 1963.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

work. . . We have waited too long for the things which are rightfully ours to be handed us on a 'piece-meal' basis."<sup>74</sup>

4CL's list of demands was similar to the persistent demands of other organizations and included fair employment, better housing, and access to public accommodations. They also asked for equal police protection, distribution of black teachers throughout the city, particularly in high schools, and a black head "OF OUR CHOOSING" on the Human Relations Board.<sup>75</sup> Mayor James J. Dworak maintained a less than favorable opinion of 4CL: "As far as I am concerned the 4CL is non-existent. I haven't even heard of them. They are not recognized by me or my office."<sup>76</sup>

The lack of municipal recognition did not deter the organization; the 4CL trained their "storm troopers" in simple procedures for testing accommodations. After being refused service for a second time, 4CL members were instructed to call the police. If a black person was forced to pay a cover charge, they were to determine whether a cover was required from all patrons. If not, they were to contact the police. If the owner of a club stated that you

---

<sup>74</sup>"4CL Schedules Meeting; Issues Purpose Statement," *Omaha Star*, June 21, 1963.

<sup>75</sup>"At Noon Friday 4CL Has No Contact with Dworak," *Omaha Star*, June 28, 1963.

<sup>76</sup>"Dworak: Will Not Keep 4CL Pledge," *Omaha Star*, August 30, 1963.

were too drunk to enter, call the police and have them determine whether or not you were drunk. Finally if the police department did not cooperate, 4CL activists were instructed to call Reverend McNair or Reverend Jones.<sup>77</sup>

The organization had outstanding success. They marched silently outside four Safeway stores with placards reading "We Want Jobs Now." The company gave in allowing the leaders to make an agreement with Safeway to add thirty-five jobs within forty-five days and an additional thirty-five jobs within ninety days. S.S. Kresge Company hired eight black workers after a two-day demonstration by 4CL. Hinky Dinky pledged to hire thirty more blacks in sixty days and Schimmel's Indian Hills Inn workers received a wage increase. What 4CL is best known for is its picketing of the popular Peony Park. In their first attempt, the owner of the amusement park closed the door. After the second attempt the owner turned the park into a private club. Finally on 4CL's third attempt to integrate Peony Park, the owner stopped fighting and allowed the protesters to enter.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup>"Procedures Listing for Testing Accommodation Laws," *Omaha Star*, September 4, 1964.

<sup>78</sup>Nick Kotz, "More Jobs in Omaha Firms for Negroes," *Des Moines Sun Register*, reprinted in *Omaha Star*, August 30, 1963.

4CL had a wide appeal. They were able to gather a large number of protesters at City Hall to show support for an open occupancy housing ordinance. In front of city hall, 4CL staged a silent demonstration devoid of chants, songs, and slogans. In attendance were between four and five hundred school-age children. Also present were two to four thousand adults including members of the NAACP, the Urban League, the Urban League Guild, the Catholic Interracial Council, the Anti-Defamation league, the Black Muslims, the Mayor's Bi-Racial Council, as well as Elks, Masons, Eastern Stars, African Methodist Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, and Catholics.<sup>79</sup>

In spite of moderate success in integrating stores and places of recreation, groups such as 4CL, the Urban League and the NAACP had difficulty convincing the municipal government of the need for more significant changes in the average black Omahan's life. Omaha in the 1960s, then, becomes the story not of the success of non-violent direct action but of the anger and disenfranchisement that

---

<sup>79</sup>"2,000 Show Negro Power in Quiet City Hall Protest," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 30, 1963. There is some discrepancy in reporting between the *Omaha World-Herald* and the *Omaha Star*. The *Omaha Star* reported that "four thousand freedom loving Negroes and 150 sympathetic whites" were present. "Four Thousand Stand-in for Open Occupancy Laws," *Omaha Star*, October 31, 1963.



remained. These frustrations ushered in the age of urban violence in Omaha.

•

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RIOT OF 1966

In 1966, three years after the peaceful March on Washington and one year before the Summer of Love, the United States witnessed forty-three riots. These disturbances spanned coast to coast, in Watts and Chicago, Cleveland and Baltimore, most often incited by an incident between a police officer and a black citizen.<sup>1</sup> That July, in the midst of a local heat wave, Omahans tasted the racial chaos sweeping the nation.<sup>2</sup>

The first manifestation of these explosive events occurred over the Fourth of July weekend in 1966. Late Saturday evening on July 2, a large group of from 100 to 200 black youths, lacking recreational activities, loitered in a parking lot. This property belonged to the Safeway Grocery and Skaggs Drugstore.<sup>3</sup> It lay in the heart of the black community, and in the minds of many black Omahans, at

---

<sup>1</sup>National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, Executive Order 11365, March, 1968, 21. Hereafter referred to as the Kerner Commission.

<sup>2</sup>"10 Cities Report 100-Degree Highs," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>3</sup>This was the scene of all of Omaha's riots in the 1960s. In 1963 Safeway's rezoning request was honored which allowed the rezoning of twenty-three parcels of land stretching from Lake to Ohio streets along Twenty-Fourth Street. The building of this store was met with "unanimous opinion that this is a good thing." The new building would become the biggest Safeway in Omaha and would increase employment, stimulate the economy and most importantly, provide a twenty-thousand square foot parking lot with room for 125 cars which would allow for "the availability of off-street parking in the store's lots after hours." "Safeway Rezone Request Held," *Omaha Star*, February 8, 1963.

the heart of their problems.<sup>4</sup> Long criticized for price gouging and unfair hiring practices, Safeway and Skaggs, stood in the middle of the Near North Side, a constant reminder of racial oppression.<sup>5</sup>

At 12:49 a.m. on July 3 a neighborhood woman called the police because a group of teenagers was lighting fireworks in the parking lot.<sup>6</sup> Two policemen driving in patrol cruiser #33 arrived at the scene to investigate, and the bored and probably frustrated teenagers threw rocks at the patrol car breaking the rear window. The youths then proceeded to hurl cherry bombs at the officers.<sup>7</sup> Feeling threatened, the officers left the scene returning later with reinforcements. Violence began at 1:00 a.m. as reports of police brutality began to circulate among the crowd.<sup>8</sup> The youths became angrier and more confrontational towards the officers. At any other time such actions might have been attributed to teenagers letting off steam, but in the

---

<sup>4</sup> This parking lot was known not only as a hangout but also as place for drug deals and gambling. The police had known of this for quite some time and "either turn[ed] a deaf ear or accept[ed] payoffs" until somebody higher up wanted a stop put to it. David Rice, interview by Alonzo Smith, September 23, 1982, transcript, Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE. Hereafter referred to as David Rice interview.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin McClarty of Omaha, interview by author, November 15, 2005. Hereafter referred to as Marvin McClarty interview.

<sup>6</sup> "Extra Police on Duty in Wake of Near Riot," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 4, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Dalstrom, A.V. Sorensen, 204; "Extra Police on Duty in Wake of Near Riot," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 4, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> "Violence Erupts Third Straight Night," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966. There is no evidence to support the claim of police brutality.

sixties, perceptions were skewed by the growing violence throughout the nation.<sup>9</sup>

The group began to disperse from the parking lot and poured onto the main business strip of the Near North Side. Their pent up anger, frustration, and helplessness manifested itself in fires and shattered glass along North Twenty-Fourth. Police gathered at a make-shift response post housed at a fire station located on Twenty-Second and Lake Streets. One hundred police and state troopers reported to the Safeway parking lot, and the youth began throwing rocks, bottles and stones "in the general direction of officers" according to Police Captain Monroe Coleman.<sup>10</sup> Only minor injuries occurred save one fifteen year old, Aaron Hall, who was shot in the leg by the police while fleeing the scene.<sup>11</sup> This general lawlessness and vandalism continued throughout the weekend and crowds continued to threaten police entering the Near North Side.

At 12:30 a.m. on July 5, 100 police officers and state troopers moved to the Twenty-Fourth and Lake Street area to

---

<sup>9</sup> Larsen and Cottrell, *The Gate City*, 273. Over this same weekend between 200 and 400 youth threw rocks at police officers in a predominately black neighborhood in Des Moines. "Crowd Throws Rocks at Police, None Injured," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> "Violence Erupts" *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> "Guards Used After 3<sup>rd</sup> Night of Violence," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966; "4 Policemen and Unknown Number of Civilians Injured," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

disperse yet another crowd that had gathered. Recognizing they were undermanned, the police immediately requested National Guard assistance.<sup>12</sup> Under the command of Brigadier General William Bachman, the First battalion, 134<sup>th</sup> infantry, and the 867<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, had been assembled at the armory at Sixty-Ninth and Mercy Streets.<sup>13</sup> These Nebraskan men, many not much older than the rioters, were armed with rifles, billy clubs and gas masks and were prepared for action. Four additional companies of the National Guard, totaling five hundred men, remained on stand-by at the armory.

Bachman's forty-four troops left the armory at 1:10 a.m., arriving at Twenty-Fourth and Maple Streets at 1:40 a.m.<sup>14</sup> The crowd teased the Guard with cat calls of "whitey" and encouraged them to "come and get us you white bitches."<sup>15</sup> However there was no physical confrontation because most of the troublemakers had dispersed by then.<sup>16</sup> For the rioting youth, it was one thing to taunt the police and another to face the National Guard with bayonets and

---

<sup>12</sup>"Mob Tosses Bottles but Few Injured," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>13</sup>"Police Arrest 78 Adults, 44 Juveniles on North Side," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966;  
"HQ, Engineering Guards 1<sup>st</sup> to Get Call for Duty," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966

<sup>14</sup>"Violence Erupts," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>15</sup>"Guard Finds Streets Quiet but Tense," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>16</sup>At the height of the disturbance there were four thousand people at the intersection of Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets. "Violence Erupts," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

guns.<sup>17</sup> Mayor Sorensen decided to keep the police and 128 Nebraskan National guardsmen on alert to break up any groups congregating on the corner of Twenty-Fourth and Lake until Thursday.<sup>18</sup>

Bringing in the National Guard seemed to help control the problem of riots, but the Urban League and NAACP, expressed their wish that the mayor would have consulted them prior to calling in the troops.<sup>19</sup> An afternoon shower washed away some of the oppressive heat of the previous days and helped cool tempers on Tuesday, but the rains could not wash away the memory of what happened.<sup>20</sup> Both Mayor A.V. Sorensen and Governor Frank Morrison agreed that the "conditions in Negro residential areas [led] to lawlessness and tension."<sup>21</sup> Generally speaking, the consensus that the riot was not racially motivated initially led those in power to neglect the deeper sociological problems.<sup>22</sup> Francis Lynch, Public Safety Director for Omaha, and a former FBI agent, stated that the feelings behind the riot followed this mentality: "The

---

<sup>17</sup> Larsen and Contrell, 273.

<sup>18</sup> "Police Arrest 78 Adults, 44 Juveniles on North Side," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.  
"Flew Home to Help End Disturbances," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1966.

<sup>19</sup> Dalstrom, A.V. Sorensen, 205.

<sup>20</sup> "Officers Get Guard Help in Disorder," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July, 5 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Larsen and Coltrell, *Gate City*, 273.

first night it was just the cops. The second night it was the damn white cops and the third night it was all the white S.O.B.'s."<sup>23</sup> No longer was the enemy discrimination; it was the white man.

At the invitation of YMCA Director, Sam Cornelius, Mayor Sorensen, Public Safety Director Lynch, Coordinator of Public/Community Relations L.K. Smith, and one hundred young black men met at the North Side YMCA.<sup>24</sup> This upset the NAACP who charged that Sorensen and Governor Morrison were listening too much to the youngsters and not enough to the established leadership in the black community.<sup>25</sup> Moreover twelve moderate leaders were also greatly incensed over information which was later published in the *Omaha Star*. The newspaper reported that while the older leaders were kept waiting for a scheduled meeting with Sorensen, the Mayor was in fact "hammering out recreation and job providing plans with a committee of the youngsters at a secret meeting in the Sheraton-Fontenelle Hotel."<sup>26</sup>

The young blacks aired grievances about police brutality, joblessness, and the lack of recreational

---

<sup>23</sup> Dalstrom, A.V. *Sorensen*, 205.

<sup>24</sup> Prior to the riots, A.V. Sorensen stated that blacks would make more rapid progress if they got together and decided what they wanted. Larsen and Coltrell, *Gate City*, 272.

<sup>25</sup> "Labor Dept. Open North Omaha Office Today," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 9, 1966.

<sup>26</sup> "More Apps. Than Placement Orders," *Omaha Star*, July 15, 1966.

activities, and the municipal leaders listened intently.<sup>27</sup> The meeting was deemed a success and Sorensen was eager to meet again with the youth at anytime, day or night.<sup>28</sup> Mayor Sorensen felt that there were two ways to deal with riots. The first was "as some cities have done with tear gas and machine guns" which creates "an atmosphere of antagonism and hatred" or by dealing with the people involved. Additionally, he agreed that Omaha's civil rights problems could be solved "if every citizen, Negro and white, will accept his personal responsibility."<sup>29</sup>

By the next day, the young leaders had developed a list of demands. They requested more educational training facilities, more recreational outlets, the immediate end to police brutality and abuses, more jobs, and the release of youths jailed in the disturbance.<sup>30</sup> Police had taken 122

---

<sup>27</sup>For these young politically conscious activists, police brutality meant more than just being roughed up by a uniformed cop. It meant the constant agitation and disrespect of white police officers. "We Demand Rights Now," *Dundee-West Omaha Sun*, March 3, 1966; "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>28</sup>"Youth Tell Grievances," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966. There was some speculation on the intent of A.V. Sorensen's actions earlier in his career. Prior to becoming mayor he helped build the Gene Eppley Boys' Club in North Omaha in 1962 with a personal donation of \$25,000. Many black citizens felt the establishment of the organization on the Near North Side was merely a campaign ploy. Sorensen responded that those comments hurt him deeply and that he could have been elected without the black vote. Proving his devotion to the Boys' Club, during his time in office from 1965 until 1969, Sorensen donated his mayoral salary of \$17,500 to the Near North Side organization. As a testament to the importance of this organization throughout all of the disturbances the Omaha Boys' Club was never damaged. Dalstrom, *A.V. Sorensen*, 119-127.

<sup>29</sup>"Mayor D\_\_\_\_\_ling of Riots; Calls for More Action, Less Meetings," *Omaha Star*, July 22, 1966. Title partially obscured on microfilm.

<sup>30</sup>"New demands after Tuesday Meeting," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1966.



persons in connection with the north side incidents; of that number, six were women. Charges for those arrested ranged from disturbing the peace to disobeying a police officer, and also included unlawful assembly, malicious destruction of property, fireworks violations, and vagrancy.<sup>31</sup> A number of charges were dropped due to the belief that many of the accused may have simply been in the area of the disturbance while not actually violating the law.<sup>32</sup>

The "fixes" that the municipal government established to address the rioters demands could be divided into three categories: police relations, recreational activities, and job training. The first program addressed the problem of both recreation and police familiarity. A Blue-Ribbon Committee, appointed by Mayor Sorensen, focused on the notion of creating better youth-police relations. One dramatic initiative funded by both the city and private organizations was a camping program held at the YMCA camp in Columbus, Nebraska, located eighty-two miles northeast of Omaha, where officers and Near North Side teens could interact.

---

<sup>31</sup> "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald* July 5, 1966.

<sup>32</sup> Dalstrom, *A.V. Sorensen*, 206

In each cabin eight teens and two officers enjoyed what the outdoors and positive interactions had to offer. Beat cops and youth fished, rode horses, and watched movies together for eight weeks. This helped the youth see the police in roles other than authoritarian figures, and gave the police eyes and ears in the community. Many participants described this experience as one of the best in their lives. The bond created in Columbus facilitated officers in performing their duties on the street and gave teenagers an adult they could trust. These excursions were not a complete success however. Although A.V. Sorensen believed strongly in this program, the police department held a different perspective. This top-down initiative did not impress Chief of Police Richard R. Anderson, and officers who went on the trips often came back to find that their beats had been reassigned. This unique and short-lived program was perceived by some members of the police force as "cuddling criminals" instead of the "community policing" it was intended to be.<sup>33</sup>

There was also a joint effort between the city Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property and the Omaha Public Schools to create a Police Athletic League. It

---

<sup>33</sup> Marvin McClarty interview.

was offered at the inner-city, predominately African-American schools of Horace Mann, Conestoga, Mason, and Indian Hills.<sup>34</sup> Through this venue youth intermingled with the police in a competitive, but non-threatening manner. St. Louis Cardinal pitcher and Omaha native, Bob Gibson, helped in the baseball league. Operation Summertime also sponsored basketball clinics in the Near North Side in July for junior high and older boys. They were to be instructed by Bob Boozer, another local Omahan, professional basketball player, and two-time all American.<sup>35</sup>

In total, Operation Summertime sponsored five additional new programs, including dances every night except Mondays and Wednesdays at the Elks Hall, the basketball clinics at the Near North YMCA with an outdoor basketball league to follow. A teenage hire out service also operated out of the Y; a teen lounge and an information center were based at the North Christ Child Center.<sup>36</sup>

The fifty member "blue-ribbon" committee offered both short and long-term fixes to improve recreation problems. The panel recommended that within two months there should

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>"Basketball Clinics Start Monday," *Omaha Star*, July 15, 1966.

<sup>36</sup>"Announce 5 New Summertime Youth Projects," *Omaha Star*, July 22, 1966.

be an increase in playground equipment and a better recruitment drive for the Boys' Club. Within two years a swimming pool and tennis courts were to be built in the immediate area. Finally the committee suggested that by the end of 1971 the Near North Side should have one major park and twenty smaller recreational areas. The total renovation would cost in excess of six million dollars.<sup>37</sup> Other suggestions included more "vest-pocket" playgrounds in vacant lots, converting the Safeway parking lot for community uses, and increasing the frequency in which play mobiles visited the area.<sup>38</sup> Community input ranged from expanding the operational hours of the Boys' Club, developing Adams Park into an area with picnic spaces, a playground, a golf putting range, a swimming pool and re-opening recreation facilities in the federal housing projects.<sup>39</sup> Bertha Calloway's observation was probably shared by many in both the black and white communities: "It

---

<sup>37</sup> Dalstrom, A.V. Sorensen, 210

<sup>38</sup> Woodson Howe, "21 at Initial Hearing on Near North Side," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 19, 1966.

<sup>39</sup> "Mayor D\_\_\_\_\_ling of Riots," *Omaha Star*, July 22, 1966. When the Logan-Fontenelle Housing Project was first built, the large recreation rooms were complete with kitchens, sinks, utensils, refrigerators and ranges. There was also a coatroom, toilet, office, and small storeroom available. The room was also provided with 100 folding chairs, twenty-five card tables, a piano, adult and children's games, and two full-time activity directors. In the late 1930s Tuesday and Fridays were reserved as adult nights in which a tenant would host a party. Laura M. Heacock, "Social Significance of Public Housing with Special Emphasis on North Side Project" (master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1938), 49.

is too bad the ridiculous had to happen before the obvious was made known."<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, five neighborhood teens were hired to inform other teenagers about activities occurring between 4:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. Sorensen also created the Mayor's Patrol. This group, comprised of young black men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine, maintained order in the Safeway parking lot. The group's name was somewhat misleading in that local Near North business men paid the salaries.<sup>41</sup>

Student municipal workers cleaned the Kountze Park area, and later an outdoor league sponsored games on the basketball courts.<sup>42</sup> The city also decided to open a play lot with a \$500 grant secured by Charles Washington and Norman Hahn from an "unnamed industry." Created by the newly founded People's Recreational Council, the park was located at Twenty-Eighth and Grant Streets and featured a slide, teeter-totters, swings, and merry-go-rounds.<sup>43</sup>

Charles M. Christiansen, Director of Parks and Recreation and Public Property, requested that the 1967

---

<sup>40</sup> Howe, "21 at Initial Hearing on Near North Side."

<sup>41</sup> Dalstrom, *A.V. Sorensen*, 206.

<sup>42</sup> "City Must Keep Commitment, Says Cornelius," *Omaha Star*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> "Announce 5 New Summertime Youth Projects," *Omaha Star*, July 22, 1966.

budget be \$2,070,468, an increase of \$139,796. His request included \$293,148 for recreation compared to the \$31,530 allocated in 1966 and \$222,942 for other needs compared to the \$38,444 available in 1966. These funds would be used to create a second summer day camp at Fontenelle Forest. In 1966 the Hummel Day Camp was filled to capacity with 2,500 campers an hour after applications were accepted.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to these programs the city opened a teenage center on the Near North Side located at the Blackburn building at 4514 North Twenty-Fourth Street. After the Blackburn center re-opened on July 9, it attracted an average of 524 patrons per night.<sup>45</sup> The Boys' Club extended its hours until 10:30 p.m. and now remained open six days a week.<sup>46</sup>

Of the people arrested during the riots, twenty-four of seventy-eight were unemployed.<sup>47</sup> More employment opportunities meant less restlessness and a greater feeling of social satisfaction; training programs were needed to obtain employment.<sup>48</sup> Riots in Chicago, Cleveland, and Philadelphia brought immediate federal money to the

---

<sup>44</sup>"Recreation is Forgotten," *Omaha World-Herald* July 27, 1966.

<sup>45</sup>"City Opening New Teenage Center on the North Side," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 9, 1966.

<sup>46</sup>"Basketball Clinics Start Monday," *Omaha Star*, July 15, 1966.

<sup>47</sup>"Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>48</sup>"Programming Needs for Average Negro John Doe," *Omaha Star*, October 25, 1965.

stricken area. Omaha had to lobby in order to obtain the same funds. Sorensen convinced the federal Office of Economic Opportunity to double the yearly Job Corps Allocation in Omaha.<sup>49</sup> He then used this money to establish programs to offer job skills to the "average negro John Doe."<sup>50</sup> Government and community officials also encouraged all unemployed blacks to register with Sam Cornelius so, as Sorensen stated, that the city can "use our energies to put the man and the job together." Phillip C. Sorensen, Lieutenant Governor, headed a six man committee to set up a state employment office to take inventory of human resources.<sup>51</sup> Committee members included Mayor Sorensen, Donald Peterman, Lambert Eitel, Senator Edward Danner, and Paul Miller.<sup>52</sup>

Cornelius, who also served as chairman of United Community Service project (UCS), oversaw Operation Sunshine, a job training organization which enabled several youth to receive jobs at the South Omaha Sewage Treatment Plant. Thirteen others worked for the Omaha Public Schools. On average the teenagers' wages ranged between

---

<sup>49</sup> Dalstrom, *A. V. Sorensen*, 211.

<sup>50</sup> Woodson Howe, "Rec. Groups Hears Needs," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 21, 1966.

<sup>51</sup> Lieutenant Governor Sorensen is no relation to Mayor Sorensen.

<sup>52</sup> "Officers Get Guard Help in Disorder," *Omaha World-Herald*, July, 6, 1966.

\$1.07 and \$1.42 an hour, considered good pay for the time.<sup>53</sup>

The city also hired over 200 blacks in municipal jobs.<sup>54</sup>

The Paxton Hotel was opened as the downtown site of the over eighty-five job training centers throughout the city.<sup>55</sup> The job training center at the Paxton was a mixed success, however, because the presence of so many young black males and females frightened area shoppers and led to complaints from the business community.<sup>56</sup> The Job Corps site expanded and the Office of Economic Opportunity awarded the Burroughs Corporation a partially funded contract for \$2,110,977 to expand the Omaha Women's Job Corps Center. This allowed the Paxton Hotel to accommodate 465 more Job Corps women. At the Regis Hotel, a training center in operation since June 29, 1965, served 335 women. The Omaha center was the first women's Job Corps Center to expand. The Paxton site was picked because it was cost efficient and was in close proximity to the first site.<sup>57</sup> The Labor Department of Nebraska also established a North Omaha office on July 7 that was open seven days a week.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> "July 4 Disturbances Leaders Sum It Up," *North Omaha Sun*, July 14, 1966.

<sup>54</sup> "City Signs 200 Negro Applicants," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>55</sup> "Job Corps Center to Expand," *Omaha Star*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>56</sup> Larsen and Coltrell, *Gate City*, 255.

<sup>57</sup> "Job Corps Center to Expand," *Omaha Star*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>58</sup> Larsen and Coltrell, *Gate City*, 274.



Unfortunately these job measures were not as effective as they could have been. Only one out of every three applicants was placed in a position.<sup>59</sup>

As money was flowing to meet the demands of the rioters, it was also moving to arm the police department in the event of another riot. The Wednesday following the first disturbance, the police ordered 250 white fiberglass helmets at four dollars each, increasing their stock to 350. The new helmets could withstand being hit with projectiles but were not as sturdy as motorcycle helmets. Additionally, 200 military gas masks were ordered to replace 108 World War II canister style masks.<sup>60</sup>

The landscape of North Twenty-Fourth Street had changed dramatically. Over the course of the weekend twenty businesses in the Near North Side reported broken windows, eleven of which involved burglaries.<sup>61</sup> The following week the area of Twenty-Fourth and Lake looked like a ghost town due to all of the boarded up store windows.<sup>62</sup> Before the riot, white people felt comfortable going to the Near North Side; now they avoided the area.

---

<sup>59</sup> "More Apps. Than Placement Orders," *Omaha Star*, July 15, 1966.

<sup>60</sup> "Police Ordering Helmets, Mask," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1966.

<sup>61</sup> "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>62</sup> "Discouraged North Side Business Man: Had Enough I Quit," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 2, 1966.

The owner of a printing company lost 80% of his white clientele over the next month and planned to move out of the area. A Near North Side café lost 50% of its business. Jazz at Allen's showcase saw a 30% drop in attendance. Almost every business had to let go staff, and insurance rates skyrocketed, increasing between 40% and 60%, so that many owners needed federal insurance to supplement their policies. Other insurance companies said they were no longer able to write policies for the area, while some agents cancelled their clients' policies. Over the next year property values decreased between 20% and 40% and the landscape became marred with metal grills on the windows of once lively storefronts.<sup>63</sup> Skaggs management, in Salt Lake City, decided to close their drugstore located on Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets causing twenty-five blacks to lose their jobs.<sup>64</sup> During the disturbance Wilson Schollman sat in front of his hardware store at 4112 North Twenty-Fourth Street with a rifle. Following the riots he decided to brick over his store front and become a wholesaler.<sup>65</sup> One

---

<sup>63</sup> "Board Fronts Show Sickness in Near North," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 30, 1967.

<sup>64</sup> Dalstrom, A. V. Sorensen, 210.

<sup>65</sup> "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

banker told a *World-Herald* reporter that "You're crazy as hell to start business down there!"<sup>66</sup>

At 2:00 a.m. on one of the destructive nights during the July 1966 riots, a black man sought out a *World-Herald* reporter to ensure his voice was heard: "I want to tell everyone that it isn't the whole Negro community causing the trouble."<sup>67</sup> Most of the rioters were troublemakers, wayward youngsters with nothing to do. Of the nearly 30,000 African-Americans living in Omaha at the time, only 200 participated in the riots, less than one percent of the population. Sorensen acknowledged the "literally hundreds of residents" that did not participate and "continue[d] this fine expression of responsibility."<sup>68</sup> Regardless of who or how many perpetrators there were, these destructive actions became a reflection on the entire community.<sup>69</sup> Before the riots, Omaha whites thought that blacks were reasonable people who could find peaceful compromises, but the riots deepened the racial divide.<sup>70</sup>

In the years prior to the first riot of 1966, many Omahans thought the Urban League and NAACP spoke for blacks

---

<sup>66</sup> "Board Fronts Show Sickness in Near North," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 30, 1967.

<sup>67</sup> "Not Whole Community," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>68</sup> "Police Arrest," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>69</sup> "Not Whole Community," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>70</sup> Larsen and Coltrell, *The Gate City*, 272.

at large, but in fact they represented a more middle class, conservative constituency. The 1964 Civil Rights Act which so many had fought and died for had little local effect except to end overt discrimination. As the idea of integration began to lose popularity among black youth, so did these more conservative groups. 4CL invited Malcolm X to speak in June 1964 on "A Warning to White America."<sup>71</sup> He told the crowd of over four hundred, "it's time to start swinging. The only thing that stops a man with a shotgun is another man with a shotgun."<sup>72</sup>

Although this change in mentality and strategy caught many, both black and white, by surprise, the sentiment had long been festering. The *Omaha Star* reported that an article in *Ebony* magazine stated that the "Negro has [a] new mood," that the growing militancy is because of the slow pace of desegregation and a newly discovered "negro pride."<sup>73</sup> As early as 1964, Mayor James J. Dworak speculated riots in Omaha were possible because the City Council "waved a red cape" in front of militant civil rights groups

---

<sup>71</sup>"4CL Explains Malcolm X," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 21, 1964.

<sup>72</sup>"Malcolm X Declares Anything Whites Do Blacks Can Do Better," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 1, 1964. There is some discrepancy as to Malcolm X's exact quote. The *Omaha Star* newspaper reported it as "A man with a rifle or club can only be stopped by a person who defends himself with a rifle or club." "Negro Must Prepare to Defend Himself or Continue at the Mercy of Racist Mobs," *Omaha Star*, July 3, 1964.

<sup>73</sup>"Ebony Article Declared 'Negro Has New Mood,'" *Omaha Star*, June 28, 1963.

over the open housing issue.<sup>74</sup> Dworak noted that riots had occurred in Rochester, New York, a community similar in size and racial composition to Omaha.<sup>75</sup> Whitney Young, who headed the Omaha Urban League from 1950 until 1954, urged in a 1963 speech to the Omaha Chamber of Commerce that the city's power structure needed to "deal with" Reverends Kelsey Jones and R.E. McNair of 4CL. He felt that failure to do so would result in the coming to the forefront "of some waiting in the wings whose methods are more radical than those who are now calling attention to the ills and evils of discrimination currently hurting the entire community."<sup>76</sup> By December 1965, Norman L. Hahn of the Human Relations Board stated, "Omaha has a very explosive situation. I think any form of self-delusion is dangerous as hell."<sup>77</sup>

A March 1966 article in the *Dundee-West Omaha Sun* by "local militant" leader Ernie Chambers, said "a bomb is the only answer. Someone will have to blow up downtown Omaha to convince the white power structure that we mean business, that we are damn' sick of imprisonment in this

---

<sup>74</sup> Woodson Howe, "Extremists Might Turn to Disorders," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 30, 1964.

<sup>75</sup> "No Harlem Wanted Here," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 29, 1964.

<sup>76</sup> "Those Waiting in the Wings Came," *Omaha Star*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>77</sup> Dalstrom, A. V. *Sorensen*, 200.

stinking ghetto." When asked if a Martin Luther King, Jr. style protest would be effective in Omaha, he replied "no, there is not enough non-violen[ce] left in Omaha Negroes to support such an effort."<sup>78</sup> How had Omaha become a city where non-violent direct action in the style of King had been rendered ineffective? Why were increasing numbers of black leaders drawn to more militant and confrontational tactics?

The answer for many was quite simple. While the traditional outlets for change had made little headway, the riot of 1966 brought drastic and rapid changes. The most glaring example of this occurred in the implementation of the state employment office on the Near North Side. The office established as a satellite, was originally requested by the Urban League in 1964. What had taken "respectable" entities two years of unsuccessful lobbying, took a group of teenage hoodlums a mere weekend to achieve. Within the week the Near North Side had their new employment office.

The Governor's Commission on Human Rights said that the local government should have acted before the riots. Pete Lakers from Columbus, the chairman of the commission, stated that:

---

<sup>78</sup>"We Demand Rights Now," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, March 3, 1966.

We can only conclude that Omaha and Nebraska are following the patterns that have been established in other cities and states: those persons in responsible positions will only listen to irresponsible leadership and that social reform is only possible through the use of violence. We deplore that such a conclusion must be reached and request all elected officials to bring about necessary reform so that irresponsibility and violence are not the proper tools for needed change.<sup>79</sup>

The difference between the changing of the new and old guard was also made apparent in the statements that each group released. Fourteen ministers from the Baptist Ministerial Alliance, Cleaves Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Christ Temple Church released the following statement: "We deplore the recent acts of vandalism and looting and we feel further that the acts are unfounded . . . such uprisings only lead to the total destruction of our community."<sup>80</sup> Conversely, the young rioters saw the more established organizational leaders as ". . . acting like the old drum major, standing on the corner as the parade came by saying: 'This can't be the parade; I'm not leading it.'"<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup>"Negro Need was Ignored," *Omaha World-Herald* July 25, 1966. In 1963, Governor Morrison, when asked about the protest at Peony Park, said: "I can see no useful purpose to be served by demonstration of any kind, because demonstrations only inflame people and prey upon their passion rather than the orderly process of the law." "Demonstrations Can Lead to No Good, Says Morrison," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 16, 1963.

<sup>80</sup>"Fourteen Ministers Issue Appeal," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>81</sup>"More Apps. Than Placement Orders," *Omaha Star*, July 15, 1966.

In summing up the conflict, the editor of the *Omaha Star* acknowledged both viewpoints:

"We cannot commend the methods they [the rioters] used to draw attention to the fact that they were frustrated and despaired because they could not feel or see any appreciable betterment of their lot. Likewise, we cannot commend those who have failed over the past three years to listen to the traditional methods of calling attention to the fact that in Omaha there is discrimination in housing, education, employment, and health and welfare services. . . . We think that less attention should be paid to the methods they used in calling attention to their plight and more to finding some solutions to the causes which brought their actions about."<sup>82</sup>

Omaha blacks were expressing their needs, grief and frustrations in a new violent way. As Ernie Chambers predicted in a December 1965 article in the *Omaha Star*: "If black men are Frankensteins, white men made them such. And as with the original 'monster' the mechanism for controlling us is rapidly failing."<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup>"Those Waiting in the Wings Came," *Omaha Star*, July 8, 1966.

<sup>83</sup>"A Militant Look At Black Poverty," *Omaha Star*, December 30, 1966.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE 'CALM' BEFORE THE STORM

*"Sandwiched between the white man's winter and the black man's summer is the restless interlude of spring."*

*--Jack Todd<sup>1</sup>*

Whereas the summer of 1967 was relatively calm in Omaha, the same could not be said for the rest of the United States. Over 150 cities reported disturbances, most often in black neighborhoods. The two worst came in July of that year with both Detroit and Newark becoming victims of violent and deadly riots. On July 28, 1967, while the streets of Detroit's black enclave still glowed red from the fires, Lyndon Baines Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to answer three basic questions: "What happened?" "Why did it happen?" and "What can be done to prevent it from happening again?"<sup>2</sup>

The Commission findings although groundbreaking, for many black citizens reiterated what they already knew. A disturbance usually occurred in conjunction with long-

---

<sup>1</sup>Jack Todd, "Omaha, 1968-The Watched Pot Begins to Boil," *Daily Nebraskan* reprinted in the *Omaha Star*, April 11, 1968. The *Daily Nebraskan* is the University of Nebraska at Lincoln student newspaper.

<sup>2</sup>National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, Executive Order 11365, March, 1968, 21. Hereafter referred to as the Kerner Commission.

standing injustices followed by a precipitating event. The violence almost always flared up at night only to wane during the daylight hours. The long-standing injustices were numerous and present in every community: pervasive discrimination and segregation, black ghettos, frustrated hopes, and the new militant mood of young blacks.<sup>3</sup> Despite the reality that all of these factors were present in Omaha, the summers of 1967 and 1968 remained reasonably quiet.

A lengthy article appeared in the *Omaha World-Herald* highlighting interviews with various members of the community. A reporter asked each person why they thought in the "long, hot summer" of 1968, Omaha did not experience the burnings that it did in 1966. Some thought prompt law enforcement reactions contributed to a quiet summer; others cited the positive influence of black leaders. Mayor Sorensen felt that black people's awareness of improvements and white people's changing attitudes helped the situation. However Sergeant Pitman Foxall of the Omaha Police Department Police-Community relations staff and a Near North Side resident was probably closest to the truth:

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1-5.

"Basically, it has been a lot of luck."<sup>4</sup> Omahans teetered on the verge of their luck running out, and the events that occurred in the spring of 1968 should have indicated that a major change was looming.

The temperature in Omaha on March 3 was an unseasonably high sixty degrees. That Sunday former Alabama governor George C. Wallace arrived at Eppley Airfield in a chartered four-engine DC-6 at 2:30 p.m.<sup>5</sup> Outside the terminal, orderly demonstrators chanted "Sock it to me, Black Power!" The Omaha Police Department guessed that over 1,500 people had gathered to either welcome or denounce Wallace. Both groups vigorously pumped signs in the air ranging from "Wallace Go Home" to "Welcome to Nebraska," from "Anarchy in the Streets is from Racism in the States" to "We Conservatives Must Stick Together."<sup>6</sup> Clearly Omaha had two very distinct opinions of Wallace.

Richard Marvel, a professor of political science at the University of Omaha, invited Wallace to speak to his class the following day.<sup>7</sup> Marvel instructed his class, "be prepared to discuss chapter one of Rossiter. If you have

---

<sup>4</sup> "Hot Summer' Over, And the City Looks Ahead," *Omaha World-Herald*, September 9, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> John Taylor, "Predicts He'll Gain Support for 3d Party," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 3, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> "Fans and Foes Greet Wallace in Nebraska," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 4, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> "Weather, Racial Woes Both Heat Up," *Dundee West-Omaha Sun*, March 7, 1968.

not gone over your reference material, I suggest you do so."<sup>8</sup> With those simple words of introduction Wallace took the stage and addressed the class; no questions were allowed. By 1:30 p.m. five hundred students and other protestors stood in the university's parking lot voicing their opinion of Wallace with cries of "Ungowah, Black Power!" filling the air.<sup>9</sup> Signs of protest were raised high in the air decrying, "Burn Bigot Burn," "Let Me Go to Jail and Wallace Go to Hell," and "When will the Civil War End?"<sup>10</sup> Wallace informed the class of his feelings toward the "pseudo-intellectuals" protesting outside: "If I get to be president and one of these anarchists lays down in front of my car, it will be the last one he lays under."<sup>11</sup> A boisterous applause followed.

That night Nebraska voters helped Wallace form a third political party in Nebraska. At 6:30, an hour before his scheduled speech began, protestors marched in front of Omaha's Civic Auditorium with signs. As youths and Catholic nuns chanted, "We want Freedom-Send Wallace Home," signs bobbed up and down in the picket line proclaiming,

---

<sup>8</sup>"Wallace Claims Victory," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 5, 1968.

<sup>9</sup>"A Day of Stupidity," *Gateway* (Omaha), March 8, 1968. This is the University of Omaha's student newspaper.

<sup>10</sup>"Turmoil Marks Wallace Party Meeting," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 5, 1968.

<sup>11</sup>"Candidate Wallace at Omaha University," *Gateway* (Omaha), March 8, 1968.

"Wallace is A Putz," "Racism is UnChristian," "What Color is God, Governor?" "White Fascism," "LSW-Lord Save me from Wallace," "Pseudo Intellectuals of the World Unite," "Racists Go Home," "Wallaceness is Lawlessness" and "Black is Back."<sup>12</sup>

Organized by the leaders of Near North Side neighborhood associations and several Omaha priests including Fr. Jack McCaslin, the protest included black Creighton students, Holy Family parishioners, and high school kids who "latched on it."<sup>13</sup> What happened next was described by Fr. McCaslin as a "police-induced riot." Officers dressed in black shirts led the high school protesters who were marching outside into the auditorium to a reserved section immediately adjacent to the stage where Wallace was set to speak. When the adult marchers came up to the entrance, the police told the chaperones that the reserved section was full. The officers directed them to sit in the balcony. After staying there only a few minutes before Wallace spoke, McCaslin looked over at fellow priest John Krejci and stated, "Do you want to hear that fool speak? Let's go home." As the two priests left, they

---

<sup>12</sup>"Turmoil Marks Wallace Party Meeting," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 5, 1968.

<sup>13</sup>John (Jack) McCaslin of Omaha, interview by author, Omaha, NE, December 14, 2005. Hereafter referred to as Fr. Jack McCaslin interview.

passed what McCaslin described as the most scared man, a police officer, he had ever seen.<sup>14</sup>

Inside, the convention went on. Forty-two roster clerks sat taking names of people registering for the American Party. The new party supporters were white and most were well-dressed, patient and mature. Henry Bucklew, mayor of Laurel, Mississippi strode up to the podium and declared: "In seven and a half minutes Nebraska has placed the name of George Wallace on the ballot!"<sup>15</sup> Both pro and anti-Wallace factions joined in the pledge of allegiance and national anthem, but the demonstrators roared "with liberty and justice for all" and "land of the free." Then an unknown person released stink bombs, filling the auditorium with a vomit smell.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Civic Auditorium had only 1,400 seats, over 5,400 people had crammed inside.<sup>17</sup> The auditorium was stiflingly hot; some thought that the thermostat had been

---

<sup>14</sup>Fr. McCaslin in his interview implied that this officer had some knowledge that a melee would occur later in the night. Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Only 750 signatures were needed to put Wallace on the ballot. In Omaha the American Party received over 2,100. "Predicts He'll Gain Support for 3d Party," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 3, 1968; Larry Wilson, "Wallace Party Claims Victory," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 4, 1968.

<sup>16</sup>Dick Herman, "Melee Erupts as 2,236 Sign Petition Supporting Wallace," *Lincoln Journal-Star*, March 5, 1968.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

intentionally set high.<sup>18</sup> The students sitting in front began tearing apart their protest signs and threw them onstage. The students, sandwiched between the pro-Wallace crowd and Wallace's "goon squad" including plainclothes Omaha police officers, were like sitting ducks.<sup>19</sup> When Wallace gave the signal, "it is people like you" and pointed down at the youth, the melee began.<sup>20</sup> Police officer Duane Pavel sprayed young David Rice with mace.<sup>21</sup> Five or six fellow protestors rushed Rice out of the auditorium hall to rinse his eyes. Other students had to run a gauntlet as they were "beaten out of the auditorium" with steel folding chairs.<sup>22</sup> The police forced the protesters to run from the front of the auditorium down

---

<sup>18</sup>David Rice, interview by Alonzo N. Smith, September 23, 1982. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE. Jack McCaslin interview.

<sup>19</sup>Fr. Jack McCaslin interview.

<sup>20</sup>Marvin McClarty of Omaha, interview by author, Omaha, NE, November 15, 2005. Hereafter referred to as Martin McClarty interview. Nebraska Senator Ernest Chambers of Omaha, interview by author, Omaha, NE, February 20, 2006. Hereafter referred to as Sen. Ernie Chambers interview. The *Omaha World-Herald* describes the incident somewhat differently. Reporter Larry Wilson wrote that the "twenty-five young Negroes took a strategic position" in front of Wallace. Wallace continued to speak and told the audience, "These are the free speech folks, you know, and these are the kind of folks the people of this country are sick and tired of." Police Captain Elvin Stokes then asked Palmer Anderson, age nineteen, to move to aside. Anderson took a swing at the officer and the "police quickly ran a flying wedge...like a Notre Dame football rush swept the dissenters the length of the Arena floor and out the door." Larry Wilson, "Wallace Party Claims Victory," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 4, 1968.

<sup>21</sup>In the black community Pavel was often seen as the stereotypical white racist police officer. Marvin McClarty interview.

<sup>22</sup>Quote from David Rice interview; Fr. Jack McCaslin interview. Two white sociology students from the University of Nebraska told their version to the *Omaha Star*: "After Wallace's initial attempt to address the audience failed, one of his aides started to deliver what appeared to be an ultimatum to the protestors to disperse. He was visibly stopped by Wallace. One cannot help but speculate why Wallace would want the situation to intensify." Henry Camp and David Sallee, "The Impact and Aftermath of Wallace," *Omaha Star*, March 14, 1968.

the center aisle and across the back to a rear side exit. The spectators witnessed a black girl being kicked by two white males, a black boy on his hands and knees being hit with a chair by an older man, and a Wallace supporter holding a young black man while a police officer struck him. Two student observers felt that the incident "was precipitated by a lack of rational and perceptive forethought on the part of the Omaha police."<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after 10:00 p.m. the first reports of groups gathering near Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets began. Police Chief Richard R. Anderson, sensing danger, held the night shift on duty and had the early morning shift report early.<sup>24</sup> At 10:28 p.m. a large group of cars began arriving at the Safeway parking lot. By 10:32 p.m. broken windows were reported at the Varsity Press, located on Nineteenth Street. A minute later the crowd on Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets was estimated to be close to 200 people.<sup>25</sup>

James Abbot, a twenty-three-year old off-duty officer who had worked at the Civic Auditorium earlier that night, checked in with Central Station to see if any help was needed. His commanding officer assigned him to the Near

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> "Disorder Reported After Wallace Rally," *Omaha World-Herald* March 5, 1968.

<sup>25</sup> "Window-Breaking Started Vandalism Near 24th, Lake," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 5, 1968.



North Side with three other policemen. Shortly thereafter he received a radio call to report to the Crosstown Loan and Pawn shop. Owners Jack and John Belmont requested that somebody watch their store after a group of youths had broken the front store windows and had attempted to tear off the security bars.<sup>26</sup>

While Officer Abbott sat inside with his riot gun protecting the store, Howard Stevenson crawled through a broken window and started to open a sliding glass door granting others access to the shop. The police officer shouted "stop" and then shot.<sup>27</sup> The victim was torn nearly in half. Abbott fired from a distance of thirty-three feet.<sup>28</sup>

Elsewhere the chaos escalated as firebombs were thrown at the Crosstown Loan Company, a barbershop, drugstore, wholesale company, and a private home. Six black youths were arrested at 11:45 p.m. at Nineteenth and Sprague

---

<sup>26</sup>"Why Policeman had Shotgun Explained," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 7, 1968.

<sup>27</sup>"Fire Bombs are Thrown, Six Arrested," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 6, 1968. Father McCaslin recalled years later that the other boy with Stevenson never heard the officer give any direction. Fr. Jack McCaslin interview. The police chief stated that he would "discuss with Officer Abbot the violation of our policy regarding police equipment." It was illegal for Abbott to be in possession of a riot gun while off duty, but he was never arraigned on formal charges. Douglas County Attorney Donald L. Knowles explained: "We feel the shooting was tragic but justifiable." "Fire Bombs are Thrown, Six Arrested," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 6, 1968.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. The tragic irony of the entire situation is that these young men's paths had crossed before in 1966. Both Stevenson and Abbott were participants in the city's youth-police camping experience in Columbus. Jack Todd, "Omaha, 1968-The Watched Pot Begins to Boil," *Daily Nebraskan*, reprinted in the *Omaha Star*, April 11, 1968.

Streets for suspicion of using firebombs. Over sixty community volunteers, twenty of whom were clergy, patrolled the Near North Side in small groups of four or five riding in six separate cars. Others were in touch with the home base at 2802 North Twenty-Fourth Street via walkie-talkie. They walked the streets instructing the rioting protestors to "cool it," but there was no way that the students would forget what had happened.<sup>29</sup>

As night became day the disturbances did not end, rather they took a new form at the predominately African-American schools in Omaha. The next morning, one thousand students walked out of Horace Mann Junior High School. By March 8, over 3,500 of the 5,700 total student population at Central, Tech, and North High Schools were absent.<sup>30</sup> White parents and moderate black parents, fearing violence, kept their children home.<sup>31</sup> Those that remained in school wreaked havoc there.

On March 6 the chaos initiated as a Molotov cocktail exploded in North High School.<sup>32</sup> Trouble at Horace Mann

---

<sup>29</sup>"20 Clergymen, Others Spend Night Trying to Ease Tension," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 6, 1968.

<sup>30</sup>"*Omaha World-Herald Centennial Series: Summer of 1966 was 'Long, Hot' as the Riots Reached Omaha*," *Omaha World Herald*, June 16, 1985; "Official Says 3,500 Miss Class Friday," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 3, 1968.

<sup>31</sup>"Only Third of Students Present at North High," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>32</sup>"School Day Runs a Bit Smoother," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 7, 1968.

began at 10:04 a.m. as the bell rang for students to go to third hour. One-half of the one thousand students stayed outside of class after the bell rang. The students went from classroom to classroom saying "Third Hour-Riot." At 10:30 a.m. Sacred Heart's windows were broken out by female students from Horace Mann. The Sacred Heart students were hustled to the interior hallways to prevent injuries. At 10:45 a.m. firemen were called to extinguish bushes that had been lit outside of the school. They were later called back out to extinguish a grass fire at North High School.<sup>33</sup>

At Technical High School a student protestor set a wastebasket on fire in the restroom. Simultaneously at 12:25 p.m. Tech High students allegedly threw rocks at passing traffic, and Mann students tried to gain admittance into Lothrop and Saratoga schools.<sup>34</sup> Ernie Chambers, who since the 1966 disturbance increasingly became a spokesperson for the disaffected youth, stood on the front lines trying to calm the youth, informing the Mann Junior High students that the media was going to make them out to be hoodlums. Later that day when he, Dan Goodwin, and

---

<sup>33</sup> Sister Mary Danielle O.P. stated, "Our students were irate at this [breaking of the windows]." Perhaps this shows the dichotomy between rich and poor in the growth of black radicalism, as the Kerner Commission months earlier reported.

<sup>34</sup>"Chambers Quiets Milling Pupils," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 9, 1968.

Marvin McClarty went to Tech High School, the young students awaited Chambers arrival expecting to receive his approval. But Chambers condemned their actions by saying, "Why did you destroy the library? The one place you need!"<sup>35</sup> Officers remained at the schools until March 25, to prevent additional problems.<sup>36</sup>

The riot left white Omahans frightened.<sup>37</sup> B.D. Super, the manager of the Hansen's Sporting Good store at 7529 Dodge Street, stated that "I've never had such a week in the gun business." He reported handgun sales at more than three times the volume in the same period the year before. J.C. Penney also showed a twenty-five percent increase in the sale of rifles and handguns.<sup>38</sup> Police registration records in Omaha showed that four times as many owners registered pistols in the two weeks after Wallace spoke than had in a comparable period before March 4. The

---

<sup>35</sup>Marvin McClarty interview.

<sup>36</sup>"School Guard is Called Off at 4 Sites," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 25, 1968. The schools on the Near North Side were plagued with many problems including high teacher turn-over rates. On average North High School had a seventeen percent turnover, Central High School, fourteen percent, Tech High School thirty-one percent, Tech Junior High forty-four percent, and Horace Mann Junior High forty-seven percent. In 1968 half of the teachers were new to Mann. The percentage of blacks at the four main junior and high schools that served the Near North Side were as follows: North High School seventeen percent, Central High School, eighteen percent, Tech High School, sixty-two percent, and Horace Mann Junior High School, ninety-seven percent. "Only Third of Students Present at North High," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>37</sup>Jack Todd, "Omaha, 1968—Watched Pot Begins to Boil," *Daily Nebraskan* reprinted in *Omaha Star*, April 11, 1968.

<sup>38</sup>"Gun Dealers Report Sales On Increase," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

average daily registration before March 4 was thirteen; on March 4 it hit a high of fifty in one day.<sup>39</sup>

As in 1966, in addition to the emotional damage, a great deal of physical damage was also inflicted on the city of Omaha. Following the disturbance sponsors decided that they needed to move the state basketball tournament from the Civic Auditorium in Omaha to Lincoln, resulting in a major loss of revenue for local businesses.<sup>40</sup> At Horace Mann Junior High, it cost \$3,300 to repair the fifty-four windows knocked out by the students. Myrton K. Hall, administrative assistant for the Omaha Board of Education, stated that the total bill for the damage done to the school was \$4,200. The Omaha Police Department said that the list for claimed damages included forty-four cars and thirty-two buildings, nine of which were burglarized or looted. It cost approximately \$100 for each front windshield and \$50 for rear windshields to be replaced. City auditorium Manager Charles Mancuso estimated between \$600 and \$800 in damages there, and the Omaha Transit Corporation claimed over \$500. The extra school security

---

<sup>39</sup>“Dangerous Folly,” *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1968.

<sup>40</sup>“Tourney Move Will Darken Arena,” *Omaha World-Herald*, March 7, 1968.

guards, including four patrolmen and one sergeant, cost \$500 a day.<sup>41</sup>

Business owners continued to be wary. Marvin Belzer of Belzer's market located on North Twenty-Fourth Street stated that in having a business in that area, "you don't make a fortune and it's not worth losing your life." Police offered Mr. Belzer an escort to see his business, but he refused telling the officers he was "afraid to go down there." In total Belzer's market suffered \$600 worth of merchandise stolen and a greater loss in terms of fire damage. Edward Rubach of Rubach's market stated: "I'm not sure when I'll re-open. Life is too short." He had operated in that location for seventeen years and recently without insurance, which "was cancelled a couple of years ago." He lost over \$2,000 worth of merchandise in beer, cigarettes, and food and, like Belzer, suffered major fire damage.<sup>42</sup>

Wallace's appearance and the riot that followed marked a shift in the attitudes and the level of involvement of many young black Omahans to a more militant and racially motivated commitment. Within the space of a few days, they

---

<sup>41</sup>"Bills Coming for a Week of Disorders," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>42</sup>"Owners of Looted Stores Not Sure They Will Re-Open," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 29, 1968.

seemed to move from the passive and peaceful philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the more militant, confrontational and race-conscious style of Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers.<sup>43</sup>

After Wallace came to Omaha friends of different races had a difficult time maintaining their friendships. A series of interviews with students at North High School revealed the new level of race tensions. LaWanda Mitchell, a senior and seventeen-year-old honors student, observed that "since Tuesday, if Negroes were seen with whites, they were called Uncle Toms." Leonard Starnes, a seventeen-year-old senior and Red Cross Chapter president, speculated that "the Negro kids might have walked out to prove Black Power and the white kids in retaliating, were trying to show White Power."<sup>44</sup>

These interracial tensions spilled into the streets. Shortly after 2:30 p.m. on March 7, forty white youths

---

<sup>43</sup>In *Black Power*, Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton state that, "The concept of Black Power...is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations." The first exhibit of Black Power was seen a year earlier at the University of Omaha's 1967 homecoming game. Black students protested not directly at the white audience but firmly rejected the term Negro. After waiting patiently for the national anthem to conclude, the group of students clad in black and wearing dark sunglasses rose to sing the "Afro-American National Anthem." Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 44; "OU Blacks Students Rally for Unity," *Gateway* (Omaha), October 20, 1967.

<sup>44</sup>"North High Students: Prejudice is Showing," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

marched towards thirty black youths near Thirty-Sixth and Boyd Streets. Before the police arrived to disperse them, a fifteen-year-old white girl brandishing a shotgun ran toward the group of black students. She was apprehended by the police and returned to the care of her family.<sup>45</sup> Whites walking through the Near North Side also began to be targeted. One young white man, a Near North Side resident, was hit with a brick suffering a concussion, extensive bruises, and a stolen wallet. Unlike many he refused to blame the assault on race-hatred. When interviewed he spoke of his black friends who had never thrown a brick. Instead he blamed the incident on hot-heads and observed: "I guess we have them on both sides of the fence."<sup>46</sup> But how many young Omaha blacks were moving to join the hot-heads on the other side of the fence?

The assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, triggered violence in over 120 American cities. In total forty-six people, mostly black

---

<sup>45</sup>"Only Third of Students Present at North High," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>46</sup>Bill Billotte, "Bricks Flew; Then Mind Went Blank," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 7, 1968. The random targeting of white pedestrians continued even in the absence of a disturbance. A July 27 article in the *Omaha World-Herald* showed that three whites had rocks thrown at their cars in North Omaha and received minor injuries. "Whites' Cars Stoned on Twenty-Fourth St.," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 27, 1968.



were killed, 3,000 were injured, and 20,000 were arrested.<sup>47</sup> King's death and the riots elsewhere might have been expected to set off a new series of confrontations in Omaha, but the Near North Side stayed eerily calm.

Why had the Omaha blacks not taken to the streets as they had a month earlier when Wallace arrived? A twenty-three-year-old University of Nebraska student thought that blacks, out of respect for Martin Luther King's ways, had remained non-violent. Robert K. Hill, president of the Mid-City Business and Professional Association suggested that some blacks were "shocked and wanted to restrain themselves until after the funeral."<sup>48</sup> Others were still waiting to see if white attitudes were going to change. One black woman noted that "whites are sympathizing with us this week" but she wondered "what will happen next week or next year?"<sup>49</sup> A.V. Sorensen optimistically attributed the quiet to the fact that "whites are doing some sober thinking and the Negro leaders are speaking against violence. If these two lines of thought collided, a big

---

<sup>47</sup>Clayborne Carson, ed. *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African-American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincolnwood, IL: Legacy, 2003), 344.

<sup>48</sup>Titus Fisher, "Most Rioters 'Cool It', Omaha Quiet for King," *Omaha World-Herald*, April, 10, 1968.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

step would be taken to solve Omaha's racial problems."<sup>50</sup>

However Ernie Chambers stated that the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., "could very well be the first shot of a civil war."<sup>51</sup>

Although the city did not violently mourn the death of Martin Luther King, the arrival of Wallace cemented the idea in many young black minds that the police were not on their side and were only the henchman of racist institutions. Events at the end of April seemed to confirm their perceptions.

On April 27, Officers Duane Pavel, Richard Gillian, and Charles Payne pulled alongside a group of people playing dice. This was the second time that the officers had broken up this particular gathering on Twenty-Fourth and Franklin Streets.<sup>52</sup> In the blink of an eye, the police had Carl Edward Rucker handcuffed and on the ground. They continued to spray him with mace while firing their riot

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>"Rights Activist," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 5, 1968. Years later Chambers reflected that perhaps Omahans did not have the same affinity for Martin Luther King because they had local leaders to help carry the torch: Sen. Ernie Chambers interview. On April 9, the day of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral, seventy-five percent of the businesses on North Twenty-Fourth Street were closed. One can only wonder was this on account of business owner's fear of rioting or reverence for the deceased civil rights leader. "Omahans Pause," *Omaha World-Herald* April 9, 1968.

<sup>52</sup>"Mayor Vows Laws to Rule, Without Ifs," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 29, 1968.

guns over the head of spectators.<sup>53</sup> Two witnesses, John Beasley and John Anders, stated that the police officers, after having forced Rucker to the ground, taunted the crowd to do something about it.<sup>54</sup>

Word of police brutality spread throughout the Near North Side and many took to the street. Jack Kupfel of Jack's Grocery closed his store at 6 p.m. sensing what was going to happen. Two and half hours later, looters set fire to his building. The rioting and looting continued for five hours. By 10:20 p.m., the situation according to L.K. Smith was under control.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to torching white-owned stores, rioters also targeted white people. The white men that were injured include Dennis Toeller, a gas station attendant beaten during a robbery and Richard O'Brien Hays who was beaten when a group of thugs tried to rob him and he had no money.<sup>56</sup> The following night, police dispersed seventy-five teenagers outside of Technical High School who had congregated after a school function. Upset by being forced

---

<sup>53</sup>Pavel and Gillian had changed parties to Wallace's American Party. "Was Week-end Rebellion Triggered by 'Appropriate' Police Action?" *Omaha Star*, Clippings File Douglas County Historical Society.

<sup>54</sup>"2 Say Police Used Excessive Force," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 30, 1968; "Police Weigh Handbill Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 24, 1968.

<sup>55</sup>"Looters on N. 24<sup>th</sup> Cause Heavy Damage," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 28, 1968. Carl Edward Rucker was booked on suspicion of gambling and resisting arrest and given a \$150 bond. *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>"Omaha Police Arrest 16 in Disturbances," *Lincoln Star-Journal*, April 29, 1968.

to move, the students broke numerous windows along Cuming Street from Thirty-Second to Twenty-Fourth Street.<sup>57</sup>

Police records showed that the charges for those arrested during the riot included three burglaries, three counts of bus vandalism, eleven cars struck by projectiles, four assaults, and one officer shot at. Fifteen police cruisers had also been damaged and minor fires were set at four burglary sites. In total, nine people were injured including four police officers, but only one was hospitalized. The worst damage occurred between Franklin and Clark along North Twenty Fourth Street. The National Guard was alerted but not called in because the disturbance was deemed "not serious enough." State troopers were called in.<sup>58</sup>

Police Chief Anderson issued an order on Sunday that two of the officers involved in the dice game break up no longer be assigned to the Near North Side. He declined to name the officers but everyone assumed it was Gillian and Pavel.<sup>59</sup> The two officers had a long history of conflict with Near North Side residents. During the Wallace meeting

---

<sup>57</sup>"Mayor Vows Laws to Rule, Without Ifs," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 29, 1968.

<sup>58</sup>John Taylor, "Glass, Food Litter Disorder Area," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 28, 1968.

<sup>59</sup>The five officers involved were Duane Pavel, Richard Gillian, Larry Anthony, John Grieger and Donald Stepanek. "2 Policemen Off North Side Duty," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 30, 1968.

they had prominently signed the Wallace petition, and just days before the April 27 incident, they had been the target of handbills calling them racists. Eighteen black Tech students were arrested for distributing the handbills which charged that the two officers were "armed and extremely dangerous to black people."<sup>60</sup> The disturbances in April ended with no lives lost but summer was fast approaching.<sup>61</sup>

On July 8, nearly two years after the first violent outburst in Omaha, two police cruisers were damaged at Twenty-Fourth and Lake Streets by sniper fire. This took many Omahans by surprise. Sniping was thought too radical to be a home grown tactic; rather it smacked of Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles.<sup>62</sup> The incident began as police had been called to investigate a knifing and a large crowd gathered. Sniper fire began to whiz pass the officers twelve minutes after they arrived on the scene. They ceased their search of the only suspect arrested and the only person to be injured, Ike Seals, and sought protection behind their patrol cars. Ambulance workers refused to enter without a police escort so while the police ducked

---

<sup>60</sup> "Was Week-end Rebellion Triggered by 'Appropriate' Police Action?" *Omaha Star*, Clippings File Douglas County Historical Society; "Police Weigh Handbill Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 24, 1968.

<sup>61</sup> John Taylor, "Glass, Food Litter Disorder Area," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 28, 1968.

<sup>62</sup> "Coping With Snipers," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 9, 1968.

for cover, Seals ran home so that he could be transported to County Hospital. The sporadic firing began at 2:33 a.m. and lasted for twenty-five minutes. Four or five snipers using automatic rifles shot a total of thirty to forty rounds, although some of the shots may have been firecrackers. Eight people were arrested including one who claimed he was a Black Panther, Eddie Eugene Bolden. Bolden informed the officers he had been instructed by the Black Panther Party to come to Omaha to start a chapter.<sup>63</sup>

Following this resurgence of black militant violence, Safeway officials became more wary of their location within the neighborhood.<sup>64</sup> Sources estimated that Safeway was losing \$10,000 a month. A.V. Sorensen met with Paul Hendrix, general manager for Safeway Stores, Inc., and Elmer Harder, Safeway Public Relations director, regarding their concerns, and Safeway decided to put up a fence around the parking lot.<sup>65</sup> The requested permit showed that the fence would extend from the front of the store, 277 feet to the property line on Twenty-Fourth Street, and that a gate would be placed at the entrances and exits. An eleven-foot high chain link fence topped with one foot of

---

<sup>63</sup>“Mayor Says Shoot Sniper, Stop Murder,” *Omaha World-Herald*, July 8, 1968.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>“Store at Twenty-Fourth and Lake May Close,” *Omaha World-Herald*, July 8, 1968.

barbed wire would enclose the Safeway store parking lot.<sup>66</sup> Many expressed discontent over the Safeway fence; some calling it a "detention camp."<sup>67</sup> Even A.V. Sorensen was "very unhappy" about the construction of the fence.<sup>68</sup>

Sorensen may have protested the fence, but both he and state officials were preparing for the worst. The Omaha police had honed their tactics through conferences such as the one that Chief Anderson and twenty-five other police chiefs attended on riot prevention and control in Warrenton, Virginia. The conference was sponsored by the Justice Department and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.<sup>69</sup> A.V. Sorensen and other Omaha officials met with Governor Norbert Tiemann and state representatives to discuss preparation for any civil disturbances. Tiemann and Sorensen decided that in the event of a riot, the police department would be in charge until the situation was declared a "dire emergency." If that occurred, a newly created state law LB 74 would come into effect, giving the

---

<sup>66</sup>"Safeway's Fence is Up; Gates Will Close Lot," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, 1968. In 1967 the city leased the lot from Safeway for \$10 a year, allowing the police department to have jurisdiction over the lot to prevent the infringement on property rights. "2 Borrowed Copters Returned to Guard," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 9, 1968.

<sup>67</sup>"Store In Omaha," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 9, 1968.

<sup>68</sup>"Mayor Says Store Fence Only Answer," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 22, 1968. When Safeway originally tried to encircle the store with a fence in 1966, Reverend General Woods stated that "Negroes hate chains, whether they are around a black man's legs, on a Georgia chain gang or around a white man's supermarket in Omaha." "We Demand Rights Now," *Dundee-West Omaha Sun*, March 3, 1966.

<sup>69</sup>"Two Will Attend Riot Conference," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 27, 1968.

governor responsibility to put local authorities under state control.<sup>70</sup>

Major General Lyle A. Welch, the state adjunct general, Major John H. Ayers, head of the State Patrol, and Police Inspector Monroe Coleman all visited similarly sized cities to look at their riot controls. From their experience in Columbus, Trenton, Baltimore, and Milwaukee, a new ordinance was passed which would limit the number of people allowed to gather on public streets.<sup>71</sup> The provision also allowed the Mayor to suspend airport operations in the event of a riot and stop traffic in and out of the city. He could also halt the movement of trains and boats into, within, or from the city and prohibit the sale of alcohol. The mayor was also given the ability to restrict or completely prohibit the sale of gas and flammable liquids and prohibit the carrying of weapons ranging from sling shots to firearms. The measure was enacted as Mayor Sorensen stated to "preserve the health, safety, and property of the citizens of this community."<sup>72</sup>

The Nebraska National Guard also prepared for the inevitable. In an effort to test their riot control

---

<sup>70</sup>"City Reviews Riot Control," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 4, 1968.

<sup>71</sup>"3 To Study Riot Controls," *Omaha World-Herald*, February 16, 1968.

<sup>72</sup>David Tisehendorf, "Mayor Asks Riot Power," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 19, 1968.



reflexes, 264 guardsmen were put through a sixteen-hour exercise. Major changes had been implemented since 1966, and the group was now using techniques learned at the Army Military Police Headquarters at Camp Gordon in Georgia. The changes implemented increased the number of guardsmen available and provided tighter control over fire power. The new rules also allowed guardsmen to carry live ammunition and added 175 snipers to take care of enemy snipers. Colonel George Talmadge sought to anticipate criticism of the new level of force implied in these changes by noting "Our job isn't to hurt people. Our job is to dissuade them, to restore order."<sup>73</sup>

Like the men and women in power, black youth predicted a long hot summer. JoAnn Donaldson then a junior at Central High School screamed at Governor Wallace in March: "You're going to get it, baby. Just you wait. You're going to get it this summer. Heat, baby, heat... Nebraska's going to be a ball of fire this summer. It's going to be the hottest state there is."<sup>74</sup> Although Omaha did not turn into a raging inferno that summer, it was just a matter of time.

---

<sup>73</sup> Al Darr, "State Guard Test Reaction to Riots," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 2, 1968.

<sup>74</sup> Howard Sibles, "Sobbing Negro Girl Screams Why? Why?," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 5, 1968.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RIOT OF 1969

On February 4, 1969, the police department under executive authority signed a contract with the University of Nebraska at Omaha for the services of Dr. John K. Brillhart for "sensitivity training programs" at the cost of \$3,746.25.<sup>1</sup> During the course of these lessons, fifteen officers at a time would spend five two-hour sessions with Dr. Brillhart and then an additional forty hours of in-service training.<sup>2</sup> Though progressive and innovative, these sensitivity training programs could not stop the tide of diminishing positive police interactions with the Near North community.

On a Tuesday night, February 25, 1969, police cruiser # 104 sped down the road in front of Horace Mann Junior High, at 11:05 p.m. Outside, junior high students were being dropped off by a chartered bus coming from a skating party. The officer, John Loder, leapt from his car, pointed a pistol at the charter and threatened the children

---

<sup>1</sup>1969-1970 City Council Budget Ledger. Municipal Records, City of Omaha. Located at the Douglas County Courthouse, 1819 Farnam Street.

<sup>2</sup>Mick Road, "Adviser to Urge Deeper Training," *Dundee West-Omaha Sun*, July 2, 1969.

without reason.<sup>3</sup> Although Dan Goodwin brought this incident to the attention of the police department, no disciplinary action was taken.

Before becoming an Omaha Police officer, Loder served in the Air Force for eight and a half years at the rank of Airmen Second Class. He was honorably discharged in 1966 and then moved to Omaha and joined the force. Loder graduated from high school in Lomita, California in 1957 and attended a junior college in Harbor City, California for one semester.<sup>4</sup> A thirty-year-old father of three children, who lived at 3203 South 122<sup>nd</sup> Street, Loder attended Brillhart's sensitivity training.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the incident which occurred that late night in February would not be the last in which Loder was involved. The next incident would throw Omaha into chaos.

On Tuesday night, June 24, Loder and his black partner, James W. Smith, responded to a break-in at 10:25 p.m. at 1701 North Twenty-First Street. There they caught a youth coming out of the apartment and arrested him. A small group of youngsters gathered around and then

---

<sup>3</sup>Typewritten report presented to the Police Community-Relations Office in North Omaha by Daniel M. Goodwin, February 28, 1969. Author obtained a copy from Mr. Goodwin in November 2005.

<sup>4</sup>"Loder Once in Air Force," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; "Policeman Will Face Manslaughter Charge," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969; "Adviser to Urge Deeper Training," *Dundee-West Omaha Sun*, July 2, 1969.

scattered when they saw the officers.<sup>6</sup> As the children ran from the officers, Loder raised his service revolver and fired one shot, hitting fourteen-year-old Vivian Strong at the base of her skull.<sup>7</sup> A rescue squad was called, and Vivian Strong, dressed in green shorts and a white blouse, was pronounced dead on arrival at County Hospital.<sup>8</sup>

An eyewitness, Lenford Vaughan, who was standing behind Loder when the officer shot, described the incident: "He raised his arm, aimed and shot. He just fired one shot and Vivian fell. The cop didn't yell 'halt' or nothing. He just stood there and shot."<sup>9</sup> Carl, Vaughan's younger brother, stated that "I hollered, 'Don't shoot, Don't shoot! Don't shoot!', but he did." There is some discrepancy as to what happened. One witness, Carrie Lee Liggins, a Central High School freshman, said that Vivian was in the house where the break-in took place and that Carol, Vivian's little sister, was serving as a lookout,

---

<sup>6</sup>"Policeman Will Face Manslaughter Charge," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Strong suffered from rheumatic fever in 1964 which left her with a leaky aortic valve. She was one of eight children and had attended Conestoga but recently transferred to Tech Junior High. Linda Bradley, age nineteen, who was babysitting Strong at the time, stated that the group was having a record party and "then we started to run. We were just running to see what the cops would do. Then that ----- shot her, right in the head. He didn't holler or shoot in the air or anything. There was only one shot." "Victim was Always on the Go," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 27, 1969; "Negro Girl Killed by a Police Bullet at Housing Project," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 25, 1969.

<sup>8</sup>"Policeman Will Face Manslaughter Charge," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969; "Policeman Enters A Plea of Innocent in Shooting of Girl," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> "Contradictory Line Marks Loder Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 11, 1969.

but even Liggins never heard the officer shout "stop." Loder, however, maintained in a written statement after the shooting that he said "Stop or I'll shoot!" three times before he fired.<sup>10</sup> Loder thought the person he shot was a man who appeared to have escaped from the scene of the crime. He stopped, leveled his weapon, and shot from a distance of seventy-five yards. Loder remarked that "If I had known it was a female I would never have shot."<sup>11</sup> Carol Strong stated that after the shooting Loder pushed Vivian's head with his foot. Angrily she screamed at the officer, "Don't do that, that is my sister!" and Loder allegedly replied "I don't give a damn whose sister it is."<sup>12</sup> Rosemary McNeil claimed Loder kicked Vivian Strong in the head; Sandra Lockett, said that he had merely rolled Strong's head with his foot.<sup>13</sup> Both Carol and Officer Smith queried Loder, "Why did you shoot her?" He replied to neither.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. Vivian Strong marked the sixth person in three years to be killed by an Omaha police officer. Loder was the first to be indicted. Prior victims included three black males under twenty, Eugene Nesbitt, Howard L. Stevenson, and Percy P. Hare and two mid-twenties white victims, Gerald W. Mallinger and Robert Gustafson. The police officers who shot these young men were technically within their rights. Omaha law enforcement could shoot under three circumstances: 1. Purposes of self-defense by the officer. 2. Protecting the life of another. 3. Stopping a fleeing felony suspect after he has refused to heed a warning to stop. The final situation could also be deemed permissible when dealing with a perpetrator accused of a misdemeanor. "Six Killed by Police in Three Years," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>11</sup>"Loder Claims Shouting Warning; Prosecution Nearing End of Case," *Lincoln Star Journal*, September 11, 1969.

<sup>12</sup>"Contradictory Line Marks Loder Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 11, 1969.

<sup>13</sup>"Loder Claims Shouting Warning; Prosecution Nearing End of Case," *Lincoln Star Journal*, September 11, 1969.

<sup>14</sup>"Policeman Will Face Manslaughter Charge," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

Immediately following the incident two hundred people gathered outside where the shooting had occurred.<sup>15</sup> The first reports of vandalism occurred as the crowd moved from the Logan-Fontenelle Homes to the E-Zee Liquor Store at 1709 North Twenty-Fourth Street around 11:45 p.m.<sup>16</sup> Within the next five to six minutes, windows on four buses were broken by the mob. As a precautionary measure police began sealing the 1200 to the 1800 blocks of North Twenty-Fourth Street. Outside of this immediate area vandalism also occurred at Sixteenth and Wirt Streets and Twenty-Fifth and Spaulding Streets.<sup>17</sup> Seven whites were injured passing through the Near North Side, and police officers advised whites to bypass the area.<sup>18</sup> Governor Norbert Tiemann sensing the turmoil about to begin, implemented OPLAN 3/68 so as to provide temporary military assistance to local Omaha responders.<sup>19</sup>

On the next evening, a crowd began to gather on North Twenty-Fourth Street after, as one Fire Department official

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>"Negro Girl Killed by a Police Bullet at Housing Project," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 25, 1969

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>"Policeman Enters A Pleas of Innocent in Shooting of Girl," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969; "Violence Plagues Ghetto for 3<sup>rd</sup> Night," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 27, 1969

<sup>19</sup>"After Action Report (AAR)-#7/69," August 12, 1969, Nebraska Historical Society, Governor Norbert Tiemann: Box 104, Folder Adjutant General 1970, 93.

reported, the "fires of anger had been flamed."<sup>20</sup> Earlier that night one thousand people gathered on a baseball field adjacent to the Logan-Fontenelle homes.<sup>21</sup> Leaflets were passed out asking "How many black children have to be murdered by cops before something is done?"<sup>22</sup> The night that followed could only be described as "more of a hell than a ghetto."<sup>23</sup>

The Omaha police switched to emergency operation using 490 officers in two shifts. They also created a mobile force of approximately 180 officers to patrol the area nightly between 12:30 a.m. and 3:30 a.m. Aerial reconnaissance was also conducted nightly from 8:30 p.m. until midnight. The Douglas County Sheriff's office patrolled the perimeters of the city to ensure that no outside agitators entered the city and also provided

---

<sup>20</sup>Report prepared by George Giddings, District 1 Chief "B" Shift. Photocopied and given to the author by Donald Nichols, historian for the Omaha Fire Department, October 2005. Hereafter referred to as Omaha Fire Department (OFD) Report.

<sup>21</sup>More than a dozen people carried rifles at this meeting. "Buildings Are Burned As Violence Erupts," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 29, 1969. An "After Action Report" filed by the National Guard stated that 3,000 people gathered near the scene of Vivian's death and listened to two hours of speeches. "After Action Report (AAR)-#7/69," August 12, 1969, Nebraska Historical Society, Governor Norbert Tiemann: Box 104, Folder Adjutant General 1970, 93.

<sup>22</sup>"Ten Blocks on No. 24<sup>th</sup> Hit Hardest," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>23</sup>OFD Report, 1.

confinement facilities. Finally, the Nebraska National Guard was placed on a Code Yellow alert at 4p.m.<sup>24</sup>

At approximately 9:50 p.m., the Assistant Chief of the "A" Shift alerted the Acting Chief of Division, the Off-Duty Assistant Chief and all "B" Shift District Chiefs. The Acting Chief of Division established a command post, and the entire "B" Shift consisting of 120 men were also called back to duty.<sup>25</sup>

The first building fire occurred at 9:52 p.m. at Twenty-Fourth and Decatur Streets. According to the fire report, fire trucks were unable to enter the area due to a milling crowd and sporadic sniper fire, so they requested police protection.<sup>26</sup> At this time the Fire Department's task force procedure was placed in operation. A task force consisted of two pumpers, an aerial truck, and a District Chief. By utilizing all extra apparatus, the fire department was able to place eight task forces in service and decided to put extra man power on each truck. This

---

<sup>24</sup>"After Action Report (AAR)-#7/69," August 12, 1969, Nebraska Historical Society, Governor Norbert Tiemann: Box 104 Folder Adjutant General 1970, 94-95. Omaha's first usage of aerial reconnaissance came in July 1968 with borrowed helicopters from the national guard. "2 Borrowed Copters Returned to Guard," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 9, 1968.

<sup>25</sup>OFD Report, 1.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.* Much of the reported sniper fire was actually fireworks. Gary Johnson, "One Reporters Diary," *Dundee West-Omaha Sun*, July 2, 1969. Captain Alfred Pattavina said he had received no reports of sniping at the either the Omaha Fire or Police Departments. "North Side Business Hit by Firebombs," *Omaha World-Herald* June 26, 1969.



greatly added to the efficiency and the speed of the task force at each fire. Additionally, these task forces worked as a single unit, responding to the fire together, working together at the scene, and leaving the area together. The study also found that the fire department could not operate without police protection.<sup>27</sup>

In the first night of intense fires and rioting, many types of businesses and dwellings were destroyed including a barber shop, liquor store, grocery store, delivery stand, shoe shop, laundromat, pawn shop, apartment building and a diesel repair garage. The fires that occurred on the evening of June 25 damaged or destroyed thirteen businesses, three apartment houses, and two private dwellings at an estimated cost of \$750,000. During the course of the evening, firemen were subjected to both verbal and physical abuse. In one case a firefighter was hit in the head with a brick, and "were it not for his fire helmet, he would have been severely injured."<sup>28</sup> Later that night at 11:15 p.m. national guard troops were mobilized at their home station and moved to a Code Orange.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>OFD Report, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>"After Action Report (AAR)-#7/69," August 12, 1969, Nebraska Historical Society, Governor Norbert Tiemann: Box 104, Folder Adjutant General 1970, 94-95.

The difficulty and the uncertainty of the night's situation could easily be seen in the 911 transcripts. A female caller telephoned the fire operator to let him know that the fire was spreading to the residential areas.

Operator: I see, ma'am. Officials advise that we can't get into that area.

Female: Oh, my God, my God, what are we going to do!

Operator: That remains to be seen, ma'am, but we can not get in there at this time.

Female: Oh my goodness. Well, what kinds of precautions can we take—the people in housing? What should we do?

Operator: We're advised to evacuate that area, ma'am.

Female: Oh, my goodness. If you can't get in, how can we get out?<sup>30</sup>

Mayor Gene Leahy kept watch of the situation from his home. Police walked the streets fifteen abreast to protect the area. Although Coordinator Alfred Pattavina of Police-Community Relations confirmed that he was unaware of any sniper attacks, many police officers still received minor injuries.<sup>31</sup> In the early morning hours of June 26, the Superior 400 Station at 3462 Emmett Street was ordered shut down by Sergeant Paul E. Duff because he observed eight or nine carloads of people filling up gas in containers. The youths continued to jeer "You can't get us all, man, you

---

<sup>30</sup>Fire Alarm Headquarters Transcripts from June 25, 1969, 4. The author received photocopies from Donald Nichols in October 2005. Hereafter referred to as Transcripts.

<sup>31</sup>"Buildings are Burned as Violence Erupts," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

can't get us all."<sup>32</sup> However as night became day, rioters' tempers began to cool once deprived of the cover of night.

Most of the fires burned throughout the night. Therefore, the fire department returned the following morning, June 26, to extinguish "deep seated hidden fires." As these fires were "small but hard to get at, they added to the work load of the men, who, at this time were expecting a long night," knowing that the angry feelings and restless violence of the previous night could reoccur.<sup>33</sup> As of early morning on June 26 the "B" shift had worked thirty-three straight hours.

Leahy visited the Near North Side and saw the destruction that had taken place. The Reverend John Killoren, S.J., announced proudly to Mayor Leahy: "You won't believe this, but we had over 200 kids in here [Bryant Center] playing basketball with the smoke drifting across the court the other night." Although some of Sorensen's recreational initiatives were helping, angry feelings remained.<sup>34</sup> In total, between 9:00 p.m. on

---

<sup>32</sup>"North Side Business Hit by Firebombs," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>33</sup>OFD Report, 2-3.

<sup>34</sup>"Leahy Inspects Damaged Area Talk to People," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

Wednesday and 1:00 a.m. on Thursday, twenty-three arrests were made.<sup>35</sup>

At an operational meeting that day, the fire department decided to begin by dividing all the members of a working shift into task forces and rotate the groups throughout the city. This enabled firefighters to have some rest and to maintain proper fire protection for the remainder of the city. Re-call men would not be called to fight riot fires but rather would be stationed at unrelated outposts since they would be on duty the next day.<sup>36</sup> In addition to these changes officers were to review "Fire Fighting Procedures during Rioting Conditions" with their men. Such procedures included no lights or sirens, stay together, no salvage work, carry and use portable radios at all times, no ladder work unless a life is involved, fight only one fire at a time, and use heavy hand lines. Firefighters were told not to tie up the apparatus by setting the pump at a hydrant or raising an aerial ladder.

The assessment also found that a few small things were needed for more efficient operations including a bigger blackboard at the main station so as to document the exact

---

<sup>35</sup>"Buildings are Burned as Violence Erupts," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>36</sup>OFD Report, 3.

location of each task force. Additionally the Red Cross sent one hundred extra cots due to the shortage of sleeping places for the re-called men. The Salvation Army supplied the Fire Department with coffee and sandwiches, as had been their policy at all major fires for years.<sup>37</sup> The company also decided at this time it was of no use to call allied, local departments or Mutual Aid Fire Companies, because the Omaha Fire Department had been able to handle the situation.<sup>38</sup>

That night the fires started at 8:58 p.m. and burned until morning. Seven businesses and two residences were either damaged or destroyed. These fires raised the total estimated loss to \$925,000. Rioters also fire-bombed a building at Thirtieth and Erskine Streets indicating that rioters had left the immediate area of the Near North Side and were moving west. Gus' Dry Goods was also the victim of firebombing. Investigators found no evidence to support contentions that these two firebombings had been a combined or coordinated effort.<sup>39</sup>

Attempting to fight the fires proved difficult. Fire rigs were waiting at Twenty-Fourth and Michigan Streets for

---

<sup>37</sup>OFD Report, 3.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>39</sup>"North Side Violence Continues a 3<sup>rd</sup> Night," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 27, 1969.

crowds to disperse so that they could move further in.<sup>40</sup> The 500 to 600 people refused to move and the large fire engines could not maneuver around them. In addition to this difficulty, many firemen, once they were able to penetrate into the Near North Side, were forced to fight the blazes while being threatened, both verbally and physically.<sup>41</sup> The violence that occurred that night was not just confined to property. A carload of whites shot at and wounded a black man, and a group of blacks beat-up a white man with a baseball bat.<sup>42</sup>

The next day the "A" Shift sought out hidden fires. A summary statement from the fire department echoed what many in the community felt: "As the day and night of the 27<sup>th</sup> passed without incident our Fire Department, as a man, heaved a sigh of relief, possibly this would come to an end." For the most part it did. On June 28 only scattered arson fires were reported.<sup>43</sup>

Although the major violence of the riot was brief, the frustrations and fear that pervaded both the white and black Near North Sides communities was evident in the 911

---

<sup>40</sup>Transcripts, 13.

<sup>41</sup>"Firemen Bitter: 'Near North Considers Us White Trash,'" *Omaha World-Herald*, June 27, 1969.

<sup>42</sup>"12 Persons, White and Black, Hurt in Night of Disorders," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 27, 1969.

<sup>43</sup>OFD Report, 4.

transcripts. Most people who were stranded in the Near North seemed to accept the operator's answer that rescue vehicles could simply not get in.<sup>44</sup> Some handled the crisis almost stoically.

Female; Yes, I was wondering if you could get some fire trucks out here to put out this fire at Twenty-Fourth and Seward. Cause we are not all alike out here, and this fire is liable to burn up some people's homes and they can't. . . .

Operator: Well, ma'am, they will not let the Fire Department in. The people will not let them in. They have rifles and everything and the Fire Department can not get in.

Female: Oh. That's too bad. I hope they can clean it up because we are not all alike.<sup>45</sup>

Others voiced a powerful resentment of the rioters and the police.

Female: . . .we've lived down here. They don't own nothing, never did own nothing.

Operator: Well, . . . .

Female: What's the matter with the police, they don't bring them here.

Operator: They won't even let the police in there. They start throwing bricks and everything. And they are shooting, ma'am. And we can't. . . .

Female: Oh, my God, my God, my God, what are we going to do?

---

<sup>44</sup>Transcripts, 5.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 15.

Operator: I don't know, ma'am, but. . .

Female: Why do people who are not of this mess have to tolerate it?<sup>46</sup>

After being through this harassment and fear twice before, white businesses owners were exasperated. When a store owner requested that the Fire Department send rigs down to put out the fire in his store, the dispatcher replied that they could not go in.

Male: So all a man can do is sit there and have his place burn down, is that it?

Operator: I guess. . .

Male: That's the protection I get from the City of Omaha.

Operator: No, that's. . .

Male: I mean, where in hell is the Police Department to take these guns away from these people, and mow them down and drive the trucks right through, huh? You have your business burn to the ground and the people you pay to protect they don't protect you. So what's the hell the use of paying taxes, huh?

Operator: Well, I pay them, too. And I don't know what to say.<sup>47</sup>

Some called in just to offer help, usually to aid the rescue teams. A male volunteered that he and other

---

<sup>46</sup>Transcripts, 13.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 17.



residents "want[ed] to get some water and try to keep it from setting this side of the block on fire."<sup>48</sup> Another man at 1620 North Twenty-Fourth Street, reported that "just the whole building blowed [sic] up over here now. The whole building just blowed up." When the dispatcher asked for confirmation, he said: "Yeh. Man, I can see a blaze like mad. This is it. Another explosion. Everything going to burn up round here, if somebody don't help at all. If there is any way that we could be some help, to keep the guys away, I'm willing to do it. I got protection." The dispatcher responded "That's right. We appreciate that, but it's the others that are causing the trouble—they are throwing brickbats and shooting at Police now."<sup>49</sup> The operator reporting that "they" were shooting at the police was an example of the type of rumor dissemination common to urban riots. Transcript records clearly show there was no earlier indication police being fired upon.

Nonetheless, the rumors persisted. One female called to tell the dispatch operator that "they" had machine guns posted on the buildings.<sup>50</sup> Police officials sought to dispel the rumors, but on the very next call, even though

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 8.

the Police Chief had just told the operator that the reports of machine guns were false, the dispatcher repeated the rumor. He advised the caller that help was not coming because "they had machine guns and rocks and bricks."<sup>51</sup>

Often the subject of the rumors went unidentified, but the "they" in many of the dispatcher transcripts could have been the Black Panthers.<sup>52</sup> Despite the small number of Omaha Panthers, the militant rhetoric of the organization's national leaders and widespread fear, certainly contributed to the runaway rumors in 1969. In truth, the Panthers were armed, but there is no evidence to show that they were interfering with fire-fighting missions or actively pursuing officers.<sup>53</sup> David Rice, then a Panther and an employee of the Greater Omaha Community Action (GOCA) program, kept the office open until 4:00 a.m. in case people were injured and needed medical assistance. He also listened to the police radio in order to warn people of the officers' movements. In one instance some rioters were planning to "tak[e] off" the Bali Hi bar, but Rice heard over the police radio that an officer with a Thompson

---

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>52</sup>On the rise and fall of the Omaha Chapter of the Black Panther Party, see Appendix I.

<sup>53</sup>David Rice, interview by Alonzo N. Smith, September 23, 1982. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE. Hereafter referred to as David Rice interview.

submachine gun was based there, so he placed a blackboard on the sidewalk which said, "Stay away from Bali-Hi." Rice felt that the actions he took were necessary because, "You know I didn't want to see anybody get killed."<sup>54</sup> Panthers also stood outside of the Mothers for Adequate Welfare office located at 2307 North Twenty-Fourth Street, further indicating that the Panthers were not actively involved in the rioting and sought to protect community stalwarts from the rioters.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the week, twenty business or homes had been damaged or destroyed. Twenty others had been looted or vandalized. In recalling the Vivian Strong riots, Frank Peak stated: "I remember (inaud.) one lady in particular, an older lady. She was just smilin'. She'd got some new clothes out of there, and it was a real neat thing to see her so happy."<sup>56</sup> However this woman was not the norm. The average rioter was twenty-one, worked as a laborer and was currently employed. Most often they were high school dropouts and had been booked on suspicion of a crime but had no recent felony convictions. Statistically, of the

---

<sup>54</sup>David Rice interview.

<sup>55</sup>"Panthers Defend Black Business," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>56</sup>Frank Peak, interview by Alonzo Smith, April 27, 1982, Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE. Hereafter referred to as Frank Peak interview.

eighty-eight people arrested from June 24 through June 29, 72% had dropped out of high school. Nine of the rioters were current high school students. Two were in full-time job training programs through the Manpower Training and Development Center(OSD). Twenty-six of the thirty-eight dropouts had gone to Technical Junior or Senior High School, and most had faced disciplinary actions while there. Of the seventy-six non-students only 20% were unemployed. Only four out of the twelve students had summer jobs. In all, one-third of the eighty-eight arrested were teenagers, and outside of one twelve-year-old and one sixty-one year-old, all of those arrested were between sixteen and forty five. Oddly, only 43% of those arrested were native Omahans.<sup>57</sup> Evident in these statistics is the fact that the early programs that A.V. Sorensen implemented at the request of the 1966 rioters either never reached these young men or were ineffective.

Black residents who did not take to the streets were still outraged over the death of Vivian Strong. Thirty black citizens, including Ernie Chambers, demanded that the city immediately condemn this "senseless and unnecessary

---

<sup>57</sup>Arnold Garson and James Bresette, "Disturbances Arrest Profile: Laborers and Dropout, Age 21," from the 1969 riots clipping file at the Douglas County Historical Society.

murder," that murder charges be filed against Loder, and that \$100,000 in compensation be paid to Vivian Strong's family.<sup>58</sup> A Vivian Strong Memorial Fund was also started, and as the announcement in the *Omaha Star* proclaimed: "Our money will not restore Vivian to life, nor will it bring the murderer to justice but it will show our great concern and help the family."<sup>59</sup> People wishing to make donations could do so at Greater Omaha Community Action, the Spencer Street Barber Shop, Omaha Opportunities Industrialization Center(OIC), Urban League, the Leap Program, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Center.

Some older members of the black community including, Sam Cornelius, Emmett J. Dennis (of OIC), Jack West, Hallie Smith, and Kenneth Shearer, Carney Rountree, and Michael Adams (the last three from GOCA) and assorted clergymen walked along Twenty-Fourth Street trying to ease tensions.<sup>60</sup> Often they told people walking around: "The police have guns and they can kill you. How about going home?"<sup>61</sup> While some of the young bloods thought that those who were telling people to "cool it" were "Toms," but even Vivian's

---

<sup>58</sup>"Black Outrages Citizens List Ten Demands Following Death of 14 Year Old Girl," *Omaha Star*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>59</sup> Vivian Strong Memorial Fund Started," *Omaha Star*, July 3, 1969.

<sup>60</sup>"Several Negroes Try to Ease the Tensions," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 27, 1969.

<sup>61</sup>Stuart From, "They Worked to Cool," *Dundee-West Omaha Sun*, July 2, 1969.

father, James Strong, stated that "trying to get revenge isn't going to do any good."<sup>62</sup>

The riots surely did not do anyone any good either in the Near North Side or in Omaha. City Finance Director Edwin J. Hewit stated that \$40,000 would be needed to pay the overtime for Omaha Police officers from June 16 until June 30.<sup>63</sup> The city council, after processing the list of condemned buildings, did not think that the rubble would be all cleaned up before September. As late as August 9, the Fire Department estimated that eight of the twelve severely damaged buildings had not been cleaned up. The eight owners refused to clean the mess. One of them said he was leaving the rubble as "a monument to what the rioters did to him."<sup>64</sup> Police Patrolmen David Heese observed that the Near North Side "look[ed] like a bombed out area."<sup>65</sup>

In the week that followed the initial disturbance, Postmaster John Munnelly resumed mail delivery to all parts of the Near North Side except for the area along Twenty-

---

<sup>62</sup>Gary Johnson, "One Reporter's Diary," *Dundee-West Omaha Sun*, July 2, 1969; "Girl's Father Wants End to Violence," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 28, 1969.

<sup>63</sup>"Pay for Riot Cost \$40,000," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 3, 1969.

<sup>64</sup>"City May Clean Up the Rubble," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 9, 1969. The businesses that did not bother to clean after the riots were the Northside Laundromat, Rubeck Grocery, E-Zee Drive Thru, Ben Blatt Grocery, Crosstown Delivery, Crosstown Loan, Monico Diesel Truck Repair, and Thrifty Package Liquor. *Ibid.* The majority of businesses set on fire were white owned. "17 of 20 Torch Targets White-Owned Business," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 29, 1969.

<sup>65</sup>But Blazes, Unrest Seem Less Intense," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 29, 1969.

Fourth Street from Cuming to Locust street. Those who needed to pick-up their mail were able to do so at the downtown office at Seventeenth and Capitol Streets. The post office was vandalized on Wednesday and would remain closed until repairs could be made.<sup>66</sup>

As summer came to a close, the heat and anger of June began to fade, but Loder's story was far from over. When motions to dismiss the charges against Loder were rejected by Judge Simon A. Simon, those seeking justice saw some hope of retribution.<sup>67</sup> Loder's defense team, Joseph J. Vance and Paul Watts, began working on the case while Donald Knowles and Lawrence Corrigan prepared to prosecute. A bomb threat was called into the courthouse on the first day.<sup>68</sup> After that, the trial preceded with minimal disturbances. Two witnesses, Sarah Davis and Charlene Johnson, were dismissed because of excessive sobbing.<sup>69</sup> After a six day trial, Officer John Loder was found innocent of manslaughter.<sup>70</sup> Loder's jury, which deliberated

---

<sup>66</sup>"Partial Mail Delivery Resumed," *Omaha World-Herald* June 27, 1969.

<sup>67</sup>"Motions to Drop Count Against Loder Rejected," *Lincoln Star Journal*, November 12, 1969.

<sup>68</sup>Robert Hoig, "Loder Juror Released, Another Man Selected," *Omaha World-Herald* Vertical File at the W. Dale Clark Library Riots, Omaha 1969.

<sup>69</sup>"Contradictory Line Marks Loder Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 11, 1969.

<sup>70</sup>Robert Hoig, "Acquitted Loder Plans to Ask for his Old Job Back on Force," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1970. Many feared that an acquittal would bring about a resurgence of violence. Although no formal disturbances took place, four downtown retailers, J.C. Penney, Woolworth's, Brandeis, and Malashocks, were vandalized by between 100-200 black youths. Additionally a bomb threat was

for twelve hours, was all white with six men and six women.<sup>71</sup> Upon his acquittal, Loder extended his sympathies to the family. Vivian's mother, not at all surprised with the verdict, replied: "His sympathy won't bring Vivian back."<sup>72</sup> State Senator John DeCamp of Neligh noted: "Black people are extremely bitter." He also remarked that hints that the police department might put Loder on the Near North Side again was "frightening to me."<sup>73</sup> Loder was reassigned to West Omaha.<sup>74</sup> Most people both white and black did not want Loder to have cruiser duty in their neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup> Loder was fired again in November for multiple infractions.<sup>76</sup>

---

called into First National Bank. "Youth Crowd Disrupts Four Downtown Stores," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 19, 1970.

<sup>71</sup>"Loder's Jurors 'Slept on Verdict'," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1970; Robert Hoig, "Acquitted Loder Plans to Ask for his Old Job Back on Force," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1970.

<sup>72</sup>"Mrs. Strong: Loder Verdict No Surprise," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1970.

<sup>73</sup>"DeCamp: Don't Put Loder in North Side," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 22, 1971.

<sup>74</sup>"Chambers 'Warns'," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 26, 1971.

<sup>75</sup>"Leahy: Loder Cruiser Area Decision Soon," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 21, 1971.

<sup>76</sup>"Chief Fires James Loder Second Time," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 30, 1971.



## CONCLUSION

*A riot is at bottom the language of the unheard. It is the desperate, suicidal cry of one who is so fed up with powerlessness of his cave existence that he asserts that he would rather be dead than ignored.*

*—Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>1</sup>*

Until recently, the Black Freedom Movement has been written about in neat, convenient categories. Non-violent direct action, in the manner of King, ended with the Watts uprising; the term self-defense originated with the Black Panther Party in 1966, and rioting was only a Northern urban phenomenon. Books such as *Freedom North, This is America?*, and *Dissent in Wichita* have succeeded in challenging the way civil rights history has been told.<sup>2</sup> What emerges from these new studies and from the Omaha experience is that blacks in urban areas, regardless of how large or small their numbers, fought against oppression in a manner which they saw fit. Omaha was not a case of mimicry; rather the disturbances which occurred in 1966,

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Brisbane, *Black Activism: Racial Revolution in the United States, 1954-1970* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974), 159.

<sup>2</sup>Woodard and Theoharris' book is a collection of the direct action civil rights outside of the American south. Rusty Monhollon's book focuses on many radical movements through Lawrence, Kansas during the 1960's including women's liberation and Black Power. Finally, Gretchen Eick's monograph documents the triumphs and struggles of the civil rights movement in Wichita. The final two books are part of the growing literature of the Midwestern black freedom movement. Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Rusty L. Monhollon, *"This is America?": The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Gretchen Cassel Eick, *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001)

1968, and 1969, were authentic expressions of the desperation that blacks felt.

The reasons for urban rioting in the late 1960s are complex and often intertwined. Clearly many blacks felt disenchantment following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>3</sup> These laws transformed the South but had limited impact in the North. The problems of the northern ghettos could not be so easily addressed. On January 8, 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson announced that Congress would provide \$790 million in anti-poverty aid. But as Johnson later conceded following the riots, "As I see it, we've moved the Negro from D+ to C-. He's still nowhere. He knows it. And that's why he's out on the streets."<sup>4</sup>

One maxim seemed to hold true within the ghetto which was often not known to the outside world. Northern blacks had already achieved some of the social acceptance that Southern black leaders were striving for and it had accomplished nothing. This forced many Northern blacks to turn their backs on integration. As Robert Vernon penned

---

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth B. Clark, "The Wonder is There Have Been So Few Riots," in *Black Protest in the Sixties*, ed August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, and John Bracey, Jr., 106-115 (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Eick, *Dissent in Wichita*, 96.

in his book, *Black Ghetto*: "Integration is already here and it's still hell."<sup>5</sup> He continued: "Watts, Harlem, Philadelphia, Rochester show that throwing a few scraps and bone of civil rites [sic] to the Negro middle class does not solve the problems of class oppression."<sup>6</sup> The "few scraps" meant little to these young, Northern-born African-Americans. Their parents often understood through personal experience the horror of living in the South. But these youngsters had no such basis of comparison. Their expectations were higher.

If the 1966 riot in Omaha represents violence as protest, city officials did take action to that protest. Mayor Sorensen's administration met with the young men of the Near North Side and responded with a set of programs designed to address their frustrations, such as job training, recreational facilities, and a Police Athletic League.<sup>7</sup> These programs were sincerely implemented and

---

<sup>5</sup>Robert Vernon, *Black Ghetto* (New York: Merit Publishing, 1968) 10.

<sup>6</sup> Vernon, *Black Ghetto*, 29-30.

<sup>7</sup>In Lawrence Kansas the mere threat of a riot prompted the local government to make significant changes. Previously Lawrence voters had turned down bond proposals to build a municipal pool in 1956, 1961, and 1963. One evening young black students began to amass in downtown Lawrence. The situation was diffused and a community meeting was scheduled for the next day. The students complained of lack of recreational and job opportunities and police brutality. However, the meeting focused largely on the swimming pool issue, and the city commission voted unanimously to lease the Four Season pool until Labor Day. The Four Season pool became operational by August 11, a mere three days after the youngsters met with the Lawrence Human Relations Commission (LHRC). Later that year, on November 28, 1967, the bond passed. Monhollon, *This is America?*, 85-89.

helped to ease tensions for over a year, but they did not eliminate long-held frustrations. The arrival of George Wallace and the incident at the Civic Auditorium led to a new series of disturbances in March and April of 1968 that should have alerted city officials to the fact that all was not well in the Near North Side.

In the case of Omaha like many other metropolitan areas the initial riots of the 1960s truly represented violence as a form of protest. These early protestors were not arbitrarily destroying; rather their "riots were an attempt to alert America, not overturn it, to denounce its practices, not renounce its principles. . . .For the great majority of blacks, the American dream, tarnished though it ha[d] been for centuries, was still the ultimate aspiration."<sup>8</sup> In Omaha as elsewhere, most rioters hit stores that charged exorbitant prices but left schools alone.<sup>9</sup> Robert Fogelson noted why such stores were targets of the rioters: "Most whites and white institutions act at their worst in the ghetto, and thus it is at their worst that most black perceive them."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Robert M. Fogelson, *Violence As Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 12-13.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., xv.

If the riot in 1966 was built on frustrations with specific goals to be achieved, by 1969 only rage remained. The reasons for young black Omahans rioting had changed from obtaining opportunities and equality, to destroying every vestige of the oppressive system which controlled them. Even the civil authorities responded differently. In 1966 Mayor Sorensen attempted to accommodate the rioters. By 1969 Mayor Leahy's primary concern was damage control, and because of the rage element, no programs could satisfy the rioters. White Omahans generally were shocked by the riot of 1966. At that time rioting was a big city phenomenon that many assumed could not happen locally. By 1969 Omahans had become desensitized after three years of "long hot summers," countless disturbances throughout the United States had diminished the shock value of the riots.

During riots blacks spontaneously took control of their ghettos, and "the ordinary patterns of authority and property relationship were set aside."<sup>11</sup> In essence this is what rioting, be it in Omaha, Newark, Watts, or anywhere else, came to mean. A taking back of power, an assertion

---

<sup>11</sup>Peter H. Rossi, ed., *Ghetto Revolts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1973), 2.

of self, black rioting in the 1960s became the ultimate cry for autonomy.

## APPENDIX I

## THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

As in other urban locales, "people who would have ordinarily been, in a way, outcasts in a community" comprised Omaha's Black Panther Party.<sup>1</sup> Others, like Frank Peak, did not join until they reached their "breaking point," in his case after the murder of Vivian Strong.<sup>2</sup> During an interview taken over twenty years after his initial recruitment into the Black Panther Party, Peak was asked what the party offered him that other organizations had not. He replied: a "sense of belonging, sense of being, sense of being a person, a human being."<sup>3</sup> The Black Panther Party (BPP) gave disenfranchised young men an organized outlet to control their own lives.

Eddie Eugene Bolden was born in Columbus, Ohio but was raised in East St. Louis, Illinois. In 1966 he came to Omaha seeking employment. The twenty-four-year old, increasingly appalled at the "actions by politicians and police in the black community and by the whole system,"

---

<sup>1</sup>David Rice, interview by Alonzo N. Smith, September 23, 1982. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Poindexter had tried to recruit Peak for years but he refused until his "breaking point." Frank Peak, interview by Alonzo N. Smith, February 27, 1982. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

decided to take action.<sup>4</sup> By 1968 he had learned of the Panthers and attended several meetings in California. Impressed by his interest, the National Black Panther Party appointed Bolden to begin a branch in Omaha. He quickly recruited Veronza Bowers who served as his "number-two" man and James Grigsby who worked as the local Minister of Information.<sup>5</sup>

The average Omaha Black Panther Party member was a male in his late teens or twenties, recruited locally through word of mouth and literature.<sup>6</sup> By July 23, 1968 the Omaha chapter consisted of twenty-five members including seven females.<sup>7</sup> After August membership remained relatively stagnant with between twenty and twenty-five people calling themselves Panthers including four or five females.<sup>8</sup> The initiation process was relatively simple. As soon as an individual signed up at the local level, he or she was considered an Omaha Panther. Following the initial expression of interest, the member was required to attend an indoctrination class for three months before becoming a

---

<sup>4</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

<sup>5</sup>Correspondence with Giitter and FBI records confirm this but one seventeen-year-old was also listed a member. Black Panther Party, aka Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Omaha, Nebraska, 12 November 1968, Omaha FBI File 157-403-163. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 4-5.



full-ledged Panther, approved by the Black Panther Party in Oakland.<sup>9</sup>

At a July 26, 1968 meeting members decided that each new recruit would pay a five dollar initiation fee and an assessment fee of thirty dollars. These collected funds in turn were used to pay for renting a meeting hall, purchasing radio equipment and other expenses as needed. According to FBI informers, Omaha Party members were encouraged to steal and burglarize in order to obtain funds for the organization.<sup>10</sup> Though the Party was now able to secure funds for a permanent meeting space, the Panther's office changed frequently because failure to pay rent. When they could secure a space, the office was adorned with pictures of Chairman Mao, Huey Newton, and Eldridge Cleaver. Regular meetings were held at 3325 North Thirty-Eighth Street and then later at 3120 North Twenty-Fourth Street between July and mid-October, 1968.<sup>11</sup> According to *West Omaha-Dundee Sun* reporter Tom Giitter, who frequently wrote articles on the Black Panther Party, members were often anxious: "During one visit I saw mattresses against

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 5. A police department official advised the FBI on October 21, 1968 that he had been unable to determine that Omaha's BPP had been involved in any illegal activities. He was aware that most active members had been previously involved with the law. Ibid., 14.

<sup>11</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

the windows of their headquarters. They believed police were going to raid their headquarters."<sup>12</sup> Meetings changed from twice weekly to once a week after that October.<sup>13</sup>

The Omaha Party's objectives encompassed many initiatives which directly effected the youth of North Omaha. These included creating a free breakfast program, encouraging teachers who related to "brothers and sisters" to instruct in the Near North Side and working with the high school organization, Blacks Achieving Nationalism Through Unity (BANTU). The Party also set out to revolutionize the Omaha Public School system by establishing a new education program which would eliminate the problem of "blacks learning one thing in school, and going home to a different world" and would combat black parental apathy toward education.<sup>14</sup>

In the Black Panther Party average rank and file members often went to speaking engagements, community activities, rallies, and wrote articles for the newsletter.<sup>15</sup> Certain community activities like the free breakfast program served a dual purpose. In addition to

---

<sup>12</sup>Tom Gitter, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2005.

<sup>13</sup>Black Panther Party, aka Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Omaha, Nebraska, 12 November 1968, Omaha FBI File 157-403-163. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA.)

<sup>14</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

<sup>15</sup>Frank Peak interview.

providing students with a meal, in this ministry the Panthers strove to teach self-determination. Unfortunately, the free breakfast program also frequently changed locations because many schools did not want to house the project. At the time, public schools were only serving peanut butter sandwiches to students and did not provide a full hot breakfast. Thus, the Omaha Public School system may have felt some competition from the Black Panther Party. Later the school system created a hot breakfast program, and many Panthers felt that the change was made because the Omaha Public School system did not want the Black Panther Party to have an influence on the kids.<sup>16</sup>

The Panthers also engaged the community by distributing informational pamphlets. The following is an excerpt from a pamphlet handed-out by unknown individuals on June 28, 1968 and June 30, 1968, in the Near North Side.<sup>17</sup> In it, the author outlines the goal of the party and dispels misconceptions:

"We know what we want and need and must have: the power to determine the sanctity of our own black communities. And we know what we must do to possess that power: organize ourselves into an organization that we ourselves control, that is not controlled.

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Black Panther Party, aka Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Omaha, Nebraska, 12 November 1968, Omaha FBI File 157-403-163. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

either by outsiders or their lackeys. It was for this purpose, and this purpose alone, that the Black Panther Party was formed. It belongs to you, black people, join it and employ it as a tool to liberate our communities, to unite liberated communities into a nation-wide force, and in the process of doing that we will have won many victories, we will be a powerful and upright people."<sup>18</sup>

On April 30, 1969, the Black Panthers sponsored a "Free Huey" rally at Kountze Park. Between sixty and seventy-five people gathered to listen to speeches advocating the reform of Omaha's schools, calling for black unity, and speaking of the conditions of Omaha's Near North Side. Speakers included, Raleigh House, Gary House, Robert Cecil, Gene Rose, and Bolden, all local chapter members.<sup>19</sup>

According to one FBI informant, after the summer of 1968 the Black Panther Party was fairly well-organized, but due to the poor leadership of Eddie Bolden, the organization began to disintegrate leaving the Omaha chapter inactive during the winter months. Bolden explained that the local chapter had expelled members, "Who were using our political party as a front for illegal

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>On October 28, 1967, Black Panther Party Co-founder, Huey P. Newton was involved in a gun battle with the Oakland Police Department which left Officer John Frey dead and Officer Herbert Heanes severely wounded. Newton was arrested on felony charges for murder, assault, and kidnapping. His imprisonment and subsequent trial created a windfall of publicity for the Black Panther Party. "Free Huey" rallies were held by sympathizers around the United States to show solidarity with imprisoned Black Panther leader. The one held in Omaha was to bring attention to Newton's appeal. Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 6 June 1969, FBI File 157-403-518; Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1968), 188.

[activities]. We are smaller but stronger."<sup>20</sup> In March and April of 1969 Bolden tried to invigorate the program with the recruitment of younger, mostly high-school members. The Party still remained disorganized, and according to the FBI source, affiliated with BANTU only for publicity purposes.<sup>21</sup>

Student activism in Central High School began in the fall of 1968. Black students made six demands of the administration. First was to remove from the library Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* because of its racist themes. Second was to allow more black students on the student council. Third was to lower the qualifications for senior class officers. Fourth was to have Central involved in more civil rights activities. Fifth was to add more Afro-American history to the curriculum. Finally the requestors wanted an assembly of all Central High Students to hear Ernest Chambers speak.<sup>22</sup>

Central began to accommodate some of these requests by incorporating African-American history when possible, including three special lectures on African-American

---

<sup>20</sup>"Student Club Is Organized by Panthers," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 5, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>22</sup> Larry Parrot, "Negro Students Ask 6 Changes at Central," *Omaha World-Herald*, December 14, 1968.

history. The administration also made tentative plans to teach African-American history after school the next semester. Finally they scheduled a meeting on discrimination at the YMCA.<sup>23</sup> Two days after these plans had been made, more problems began to occur at Central High School. Twenty students accused the administration of "over-supervision" and discouraging black students from eating in the North or predominately white cafeteria.<sup>24</sup>

In a two hour meeting in Principal Gaylord Moeller's office, Ernest Chambers and the Reverend Emmett T. Streeters talked about the issues that Central High School students had identified. In total, there were now thirteen problems that students wished addressed including that African-American history be part of the required history curriculum taught by a "qualified black teacher." This demand was especially important after students complained that a black student received a lower grade because he reported on a topic in African-American history. Other demands included the outlawing of racially degrading signs including cartoon caricatures. All blacks who still

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>"Reconciliation Tried at Central High School," *Omaha World-Herald*, December 16, 1968.

disagreed fundamentally with the administration would be invited to transfer.<sup>25</sup>

Militancy increased at Central in December after two black students were suspended following a dispute with a teacher in study hall. Fights broke out frequently in the hall, and thus, all ninety-four teachers were required to stand in the hall during passing period. Despite some improvements, participants on both sides of the fight were still aggravated. One teacher who wished to remain anonymous observed: "Take [for example] Afro-American history. A few weeks ago students were demanding it. Now we have it and they won't attend class." The teacher neglected to mention that the class was a non-credit course which met once a week at 4 p.m. Assistant Principal William Pierson was convinced that outsiders were responsible: "If we did not have outside influences we would not have a race problem. . . I think most of the tension here is among black students themselves. Between militants and non-militants." Moeller agreed, stating that the racial unrest at Central was because "black student leaders were at the behest of black militants in the city."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>"Central High Negroes List Thirteen Problems," *Omaha World-Herald*, December 17, 1968.

<sup>26</sup>"Central's Racial Problem May Be Easing," *Omaha World-Herald* February 16, 1969.

One such group that was "at the behest" of black militants was BANTU. Blacks Achieving Nationalism Through Unity (BANTU) started at Tech High School in April 1969. The group met each Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Black Panther Party headquarters on 3120 North Twenty-Fourth Street. Gary House, Robert Cecil, and Robert Griffio, all Tech High School students, and Lew Davis from Central High School comprised the main cohort of officers.<sup>27</sup> The students petitioned Superintendent Owen A. Knutzen to meet with them, and he promptly rejected the request. Instead, he submitted a letter to BANTU officers stating "Parents of students, the School-Community Advisory Committee, the NAACP, the Urban League, and all residents of the affected community should have an opportunity to reflect, analyze and react to these demands."<sup>28</sup>

A total of twenty-three points, "these demands" stressed the improvement of Omaha's school system ranging from the seemingly harmless "serve soul food cooked by black cooks and force all black students to attend" to more serious charges of removing "all Toms and white racist

---

<sup>27</sup>Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539 Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).; "Student Club Is Organized by Panthers," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 5, 1969.

<sup>28</sup>"No Meeting is Scheduled with BANTU," *Omaha World-Herald* May 14, 1969.



faculty members" in order to liberate Tech from the "racist board of Education." The students also declared that Malcolm X's birthday should be a national holiday.<sup>29</sup>

Denied the opportunity of a formal meeting to verbally address their desires, BANTU continued with many of their stated objectives. One-third of Tech students did not attend classes so as to honor of Malcolm X's birthday in May 1969. That day over 400 Tech students were absent from school, far greater than the average rate of ten percent. Both black and white students played hooky but Tech High School principal, Carl Palmquist, suspected that white students were absent because of fear of racially based reprisals. Assistant principal Pierson stated that at Central High School 240 students were absent from the normal attendance of 2,000. At North High School, Principal Harold Reeves stated that absenteeism was at ten percent compared to the usual five to seven percent of the 2,200 students. Other Omaha Public schools showed less absenteeism. Clarence Barbee, principal of Horace Mann, stated that the day was normal and uneventful.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>30</sup>"Absenteeism Takes Jump for 'X' day," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 19, 1969.

The absenteeism was originally construed and advertised as an expression of honor for Malcolm X. In the end the organized programs to pay tribute to this man's life were poorly attended. The Omaha Opportunities Industrialization Center, Inc. (OIC) had an open house for students to discuss black culture and race relations, but by 10:30 a.m., no one had arrived. Omaha Black Panther Party leader Eddie Bolden suggested that everyone go to Kountze Park to attend a rally, thirteen blocks from the corner of Thirty-Second and Pickney Streets, where the house that Malcolm lived in once stood.<sup>31</sup> However this event also had poor turnout in part caused by the poor weather. In all, the official Malcolm X Truancy day held on May 19, 1969, was a failure.<sup>32</sup>

The relationship between Omaha's Black Panther Party and BANTU was for mutual benefit. BANTU needed support and guidance and the Party needed an infusion of fresh blood. Unfortunately, because of COINTELPRO and leadership issues, the Panther chapter in Omaha was never a major force, and

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

this could have been why BANTU's impact on the community was limited.<sup>33</sup>

Other Black Panther Party associations were more successful. The Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) formed locally on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus in the Fall Semester of 1968.<sup>34</sup> With a total of thirty-eight students, the campus group, which did not share a formal connection with the Black Panther Party, did share similar policies and goals. The group's first project was to fundraise for Chambers to seek election on Omaha's school board.<sup>35</sup> The group held an organizing convention on August 24, 1968 in Fontenelle Park. Over 300 people attended, including James Grigsby, the minister of information for Omaha Black Panthers.<sup>36</sup>

Following the positive response, the Peace and Freedom Party sponsored the Midwest Conference on Movement

---

<sup>33</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt first initiated Counter Intelligence Programs (COINTELPRO) in the mid-1940s to combat such internal dissidents such as the Socialists Workers' Party and Communist Party-USA (CPUSA). In the 1960s the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) greatly expanded the groups and individuals which they investigated to include civil rights leaders, new leftists, and other activists. Regarding black nationalist groups, the FBI used bad-jacketing, infiltration, and other questionable means to achieve the "neutralization of black extremist groups, the prevention of violence by these groups, and the prevention of coalitions between black extremists organizations." Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), 37-40.

<sup>34</sup> "Peace and Freedom Group Is Formed on NU Campus," *Lincoln Star*, September 17, 1968. The founding convention for the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) was held on March 16, 1968 in Richmond, California; House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1970, 59;

<sup>35</sup> "Peace and Freedom Group is Formed on NU Campus," *Lincoln Star*, September 17, 1968; *Daily Nebraskan*, March 20, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> "New Party Focus Aims at Alienated," *Daily Nebraskan*, September 13, 1968.

Politics, held September 27-29 in Lincoln. The weekend was endorsed and sponsored by a number of organizations, including: Allies of Black Liberation, the Black Panther Party of Omaha, the Nebraska Draft Resistance Union, the Student Committee on Political Education, and Students for a Democratic Society. Friday, September 27 was set aside so that participants could make informal contacts. The following day was scheduled exclusively for workshops, including a closed session on black unity. Other sessions presented topics ranging from black liberation and white radicalism to student power and the nature of economic imperialism.<sup>37</sup> At 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, in conjunction with the Midwest Convention, the regional convention of the Peace and Freedom Party met concerning the Midwestern campaign of presidential candidate Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>38</sup>

Although an Omaha FBI informer stated that 350 individuals were in attendance on the first night of the conference, he speculated that most came to see Ernie Chambers speak and assumed they were "mainly students who were curious in what Chambers had to say and were not followers of Chambers." Despite the large showing to hear

---

<sup>37</sup>"New Left Schedules Movement Workshop," *Daily Nebraskan*, September 24, 1968.

<sup>38</sup>Students for a Democratic Society/Nebraska Peace and Freedom Party, 2 October 1968, Omaha FBI File 100-6890F-20. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Chambers, only thirty students attended the remainder of the conference. Of those thirty, twenty attended the additional Nebraska Peace and Freedom Party session supporting the presidential campaign of Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>39</sup>

In the fall of 1968 Eldridge Cleaver came to Omaha. Earlier that year Bolden shared a platform with Cleaver when he spoke at the National Convention of the Peace and Freedom party on August 24.<sup>40</sup> Cleaver, in his typical manner, cursed and used inflammatory rhetoric. The fairly large audience began "grumbling as people were kind of turned off" and began to leave.<sup>41</sup> Most egregious to the spectators was Cleaver's frequent use of the term "pussy." Cleaver spoke about "pussy power" and "that our women, have a very strong influence on our men and the influence comes often times in terms of sexual attraction." But Rice, present at the speech that day, felt that Cleaver simply did not articulate his ideas well.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps additional reasons for the diminishing audience was that the

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>41</sup> David Rice interview. Another source stated that over five hundred people attended, half black and half white, but by the time Cleaver spoke the crowds had already begun to dwindle. "Peace Party Signature," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 25, 1968.

<sup>42</sup> David Rice interview.

convention, scheduled to start at 3:05 p.m., began an hour later due to sound problems.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Panthers gathered enough signatures, there was not enough interest to place Cleaver on the Nebraska ballot that November. Nonetheless, many in the community felt that "the Black Panther presence in Omaha represents a positive new response to a negative old way."<sup>44</sup> According to Eddie Bolden in a 1968 news release, "If the Black Panthers are bad news, they are only bad news for a racist society. . . They are the answer to the present society which has promulgated all of the ills which the Black [Panther Party] is attempting to correct."<sup>45</sup> One of the first wrongs the group attempted to correct began with police-community relations.

As was demonstrated in prior chapters, the Omaha police and the Near North community had an antagonistic relationship at best. Bolden felt that many Omaha police, "value[d] property life above human life."<sup>46</sup> The Omaha Black Panther Chapter established a "pig patrol" and sought to

---

<sup>43</sup>"Peace Party Signature," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 25, 1968.

<sup>44</sup>"Panthers Say," *Omaha Star*, July 11, 1968.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

decentralize the Omaha Police Department.<sup>47</sup> Bolden also stated that "there was no [violent] activity until the police force began to demonstrate their military prowess intending to intimidate Black residents."<sup>48</sup> According to Bolden, "Now that the Black Panthers are in Omaha, the white police force will no longer be able to ride roughshod over the Blacks in this community without paying a heavy price."<sup>49</sup> Bolden further encouraged Omaha African-Americans to, "Save your guns, black brothers, because this nation is moving towards a police state."<sup>50</sup>

FBI informants reported that there was general talk in August 1968 of creating a racial incident in Omaha and of purchasing fifteen Remington twelve gauge shotguns. But "no definite plans were made on either matter."<sup>51</sup> The Black Panthers, although frequently using a violent rhetoric, opposed spontaneous riots and window breaking. As Bolden remarked, "It's not revolutionary and not strategic because police will corral people and a lot of us will wind up getting killed, and shot, and in jail. This is a useless

---

<sup>47</sup>Tom Giitter, "Inside the 'Liberation School'," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun* December 18, 1969.

<sup>48</sup>"Panthers Say," *Omaha Star*, July 11, 1968.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

<sup>51</sup>Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 12 June 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA.)

waste; the money can be put to other uses."<sup>52</sup> Eddie Bolden made similar comments in a speech at Midwestern College in Denison, Iowa on February 26, 1969. A student recorded the speech and gave it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In the taped recording Bolden offered the normal Panther rhetoric and reiterated the Black Panther Party's commitment to the ten-point party platform. Again he expressed his opinion on rioting:

"And we say black people, black people in this country, don't sit around and say nothing is going to happen because it's happening. And, we say don't sit down and let our spontaneous riots happen in the streets. For we get shot up, corralled, unorganized. We got to organize. We must organize and we must respect the kind of fashion that it is the man being the gun who's dangerous."<sup>53</sup>

Following the shooting of Vivian Strong, one informant reported that at the meeting on Logan-Fontenelle Field on June 25 at Twenty-Second and Charles Streets, Bolden did not advocate violence as a result of the incident. Rather he asked those present how they would react if a black police officer had been accused.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, a source advised the FBI that the informer did not feel that members

---

<sup>52</sup>"Panthers Seeking," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, May 20, 1969.

<sup>53</sup>Black Panther Party, aka Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Omaha Nebraska, 12 November 1968, Omaha FBI File 157-403-163. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



of the Black Panther Party in Omaha were responsible for any of the fire bombing following the death of Vivian Strong. Members of the group, however, were spotted patrolling the area with weapons.<sup>55</sup>

One of the more positive outcomes to materialize following the riot of 1969 was the Vivian Strong Liberation School. The June 25, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther* outlined the ideal schedule at any liberation school. Monday was revolutionary history day, Tuesday revolutionary culture day, Wednesday current events, Thursday a movie, and on Friday the group should take a field trip.<sup>56</sup> The Omaha liberation school actively taught anti-capitalism.<sup>57</sup> Located at 2616 Parker Street, classes were held from 5:30 p.m. until 8 p.m., Monday through Friday. These sessions included discussions and a hot meal for all students.<sup>58</sup>

At the school David Rice taught that "the use of the gun is bad and evil, but when you're dealing with survival it's necessary."<sup>59</sup> He also stated that "The symbol of a black

---

<sup>55</sup> Black Panther Party Omaha Division, 18 September 1969, Omaha FBI File 157-403-779. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

<sup>56</sup> House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1970, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Peak interview.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Giitter, "Inside the 'Liberation School'," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, December 18, 1969. In e-mail correspondence over thirty years later, Giitter mused, "I remember eating a bowl of chili with the kids at the Vivian Strong Memorial Liberation School while I was there – it was great chili." Tom Giitter, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Giitter, "Inside the 'Liberation School'," *West Omaha-Dundee Sun*, December 18, 1969.

man holding a gun is not only in reference to the revolutionary struggle, but to the survival of poor people." The estimated operational cost of the school was between \$125 and \$150 per week, including meals. Money was raised by selling the Black Panther newsletter, buttons, posters and donations from church leaders. Grocery stores also were solicited for the donation of goods. The Omaha chapter also provided adult education programs.<sup>60</sup> The Vivian Strong Liberation school was deemed so threatening that its leaders were federally subpoenaed. When called to testify before the grand jury Edward Poindexter, Bolden, Rice, House, and Edward S. Brightman Jr., all Omaha Panthers, pled the fifth.<sup>61</sup>

From the beginning, the national Black Panther headquarters did not like how the Midwestern chapters operated, so Kansas City, Des Moines, and Omaha often supported one another through "Midwest solidarity."<sup>62</sup> The difference in viewpoints came down to a point which Frank Peak described in an interview: "Well, in the way people viewed things, I mean people here were Midwest people with Midwest ideas, ah, you just couldn't approach them the same

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>"Five Black Militants Take 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment," *Omaha World-Herald*, December 12, 1969.

<sup>62</sup>Frank Peak interview.

way as you approach people out of the West Coast."<sup>63</sup> Also during this time there was an East versus West rivalry, and the Midwestern chapters were often ignored. "Numerous Midwestern Chapters were having a great deal of difficulty getting coverage in the paper—getting our articles printed, etc. . . So there was a lot of dissatisfaction among the Midwestern chapter about its relationship with national headquarters."<sup>64</sup> In Omaha, members gave the *Black Panther* away causing conflict with national headquarters which wanted them to sell the newspaper and make a profit.<sup>65</sup>

In the January 4, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther*, the central committee expressed concern about "provocateur agents, kooks and avaricious fools who found their way into the membership."<sup>66</sup> By March 1969 the first round of party expulsions took place. The Black Panther Party published the names of approximately 250 members who had been expelled from the organization for charges ranging from "no reason" to "reactionary" or "informer", "jive nigger" or "sexual fascist." The majority were expelled between March

---

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>David Rice interview.

<sup>65</sup>Frank Peak interview.

<sup>66</sup>U.S. Congress, House Committee on Internal Security. *The Black Panther Party, Its Origin and Development as Reflected in its Official Weekly Newspaper: The Black Panther*. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. House Report No. 482-4.

and August 1969 with the largest number of expellees hailing from East Oakland, Vallejo, Boston, Jersey City, and New York City.<sup>67</sup> By June 1969, realizing a potentially difficult situation, the Omaha branch made the following affirmation taken from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* or the "little red book":

- WE must affirm anew the discipline of the Party,
1. The individual is subordinate to the organization.
  2. The minority is subordinate to the majority.
  3. The lower level is subordinate to the higher level; and
  4. The entire membership is subordinate to the Central committee

Whoever violates these articles of discipline disrupts Party unity."<sup>68</sup>

Nearly a year later the *Black Panther* announced that the "National Headquarters of the Black Panther Party would like to inform the people that the National Committee to Combat Fascism in Omaha, NE is no longer functioning as an organizing bureau of the Black Panther Party, or from therefore connected with the Black Panther Party in any way."<sup>69</sup>

The National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF) was a Panther offshoot group which gained popularity after those initial purges in 1969. The organization, whose national

---

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 100.

headquarters was located in Berkeley, California, served as the "organizing bureau" for the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party felt that "the purpose of the community worker is to arm themselves with the ideology of the Black Panther Party and to arm themselves politically and militarily."<sup>70</sup> The NCCF's specific task was "to raise the political level of the people, to educate them to the facts of how decadent, racist, exploitative this system really is and what must be done in order to change it."<sup>71</sup> The local NCCF bureaus were referred to as community centers, and specific tasks or programs were to emanate from these locales.

David Hilliard confirmed that the Omaha chapter was no longer recognized and responded in only vague terms as to why the expulsion had happened.<sup>72</sup> Representatives from the Kansas City and Des Moines chapters came to Omaha to hold a press conference informing the Omaha chapter could be reinstated but that it "had to get to work."<sup>73</sup> Within days the Nebraska Chapter decided to renamed themselves the United Front Against Fascism (UFAF) and sent monthly

---

<sup>70</sup>House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1970, 4.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 3

<sup>72</sup>David Rice interview.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

reports to headquarters via Kansas City in an attempt to regain its status. In April of 1970, they were reinstated and were called the Nebraska Chapter of NCCF. Then, in just a matter of months, in late spring or early summer of 1970 they were disbanded again.<sup>74</sup> By 1970 the Des Moines group had also quit. The Kansas City group disbanded and reformed as a group called Sons of Malcolm.<sup>75</sup> Although the Omaha chapter was officially disbanded, Poindexter pointed out, "that does not mean that we are going to stop serving the people. We are going to intensify our efforts if anything."<sup>76</sup>

In an interview in 1982, Rice summed up the problems of the Omaha Panthers: "Part of the problem with the Black Panther Party was that it was so romantic—that its major appeal was to young African people in this country, and younger whites—and in most Panther rallies that I have seen, for example, films or photographs. . . the majority of the people—they were white. Not black people."<sup>77</sup> Rice also believed that the Black Panther party in Omaha did not

---

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>"Panthers Cut Omaha Link," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 14, 1970.

<sup>77</sup>David Rice interview.

have widespread appeal because there was "too much talk about guns. Too much rhetoric."<sup>78</sup> He continued:

"There was a lot of that attitude. And then also the Panther party did not have, I guess what I would call a real down to earth program. Well not the breakfast with the school children and that kind of thing it's okay, but and it does help to endear you to a community somewhat but the problem, that kind of program really does not gain you, I guess, credibility with some of the things you're saying, it's not enough."<sup>79</sup>

He also claimed that two other problems hurt the Panthers: "communism scares African people in this country." And "the community was beginning to see confrontations between Panthers and the police. And that scared them."<sup>80</sup>

In sum:

Part of the problem with the Panther Party was it swallowed too much without chewing it. Often times, the rank and file of the Party were brothers and sisters who, though they may very well have been dedicated, and a lot of times for real, really did not have an ideology that they could call their own because they had been taught to parrot.<sup>81</sup>

Things like "the fascist pig", "the oppression of the power structure," he proclaimed, "ordinary folks don't want to

---

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

hear that shit. They want to hear the common ordinary language."<sup>82</sup>

Ultimately many things contributed to the downfall of Omaha's Black Panther Party. The least of these was the conflict between their revolutionary rhetoric and the average Midwesterner's political sensibilities. Additionally, many established leaders, even the more radical such as Ernie Chambers, felt that the Panthers were mostly talk and little action.<sup>83</sup> The final incident which ultimately brought about the demise of the Black Panther Party occurred on August 17, 1970.

At 2 a.m. police officers were summoned to 2867 Ohio Street by a caller who had heard a woman screaming in the vacant house. Two of the eight responding officers entered the house and moments later a suitcase bomb exploded killing Officer Larry Minard and seriously injuring Officer John Tess.<sup>84</sup> On April 17, 1977, a jury found David Rice and Edward Poindexter guilty of first degree murder and the judge sentenced them to life imprisonment.<sup>85</sup> Rice remarked,

---

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Sen. Ernie Chambers interview; Marvin McClarty interview.

<sup>84</sup>Police injury report, August 17, 1970. Obtained from Omaha Police Headquarters, 505 South Fifteenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

<sup>85</sup>"David L. Rice Case," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1976. The trial and subsequent convictions is still a hotly contested and emotional issue in Nebraska. Both men are listed as political prisoners by Amnesty International, USA. Thirty-five years later a grass-roots movement, Nebraskans for Justice, is



"Of a half dozen people implicated, only two, Ed Poindexter and myself, were prosecuted. That's because we were political figures."<sup>86</sup> As before, without strong leadership, the Black Panther Party withered and died, but for a brief time young black nationalist men in Omaha had an organization to call their own.

---

actively seeking an appeal. Much of the call for an appeal is based on the testimony of then fifteen-year-old Duane Peak. Peak claimed he was the voice on the 911 call, but the tape was never admitted to trial. In court, Peak was noncommittal in testifying against Poindexter and Rice until after a short recess when Peak returned wearing dark sunglasses. When defense lawyer David Herzog asked him to remove the glasses, an audible gasp was heard from the jury when they saw the teen's swollen eyes. Many thought Peak had been assaulted by the police so as to intimidate him into giving false testimony. In 2003 Poindexter filed his first appeal since 1976 and was granted the right to have the tape analyzed by voice experts. Frances Mendenhall, "Maybe No 'Criminal'," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 19, 1997; Todd Cooper, "After 35 years, Witness Still Says He Was 911 Caller," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 14, 2006; Amnesty International-USA, "Long-Term Political Prisoners in the U.S." Resolution 8, 1999, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/members/agmdecisions/detail.do?personid=100>

<sup>86</sup>"Rice: Ruling Moves Nation Away From Democracy," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 6, 1971.

**APPENDIX II****BLACK PANTHER PARTY RULES**

In the January 4, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther* the "eight points of attention" and "three main rules of discipline" first appeared, which instructed members to be genteel, fair, and just.<sup>1</sup> In order to be an official Party member each individual was require by headquarters to abide by the following:

1. Three, two hour political orientation classes a week.
2. Read two hours a day.
3. Sell at least seventy-five *Black Panther* newspapers.
4. Own and be proficient with two guns.
5. Obey all Party rules.
6. Engage in constant political work among the masses.

**Eight Points of Attention**

1. Speak Politely.
2. Pay fairly for what you buy.
3. Return everything you borrow.
4. Pay for anything you damage.

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress. House Committee on Internal Security, *The Black Panther Party, Its Origin and Development as Reflected in its Official Weekly Newspaper: The Black Panther*, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. House Report No. 482-4, 85.

5. Do not hit or swear at people.
6. Do not damage property or crops of the poor oppressed masses.
7. Do not take liberties with women.
8. If we ever have to take captives, do no ill treat them.

Three main points of discipline

1. Obey orders in all your action.
2. Do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the "poor and oppressed" masses.
3. Turn in everything captured from the attacking enemy.

If the members did not fulfill the requirements they were expelled from the party.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Douglas County Historical Society, Omaha, NE.

- Ernie Chambers Clipping File
- Gaylord Moeller Clipping File
- Negro Riots 1966 File
- Negro Riots 1968 File
- Negro Riots 1969 File
- Black Panther Party File
- BANTU File
- NCCF/UFAF File
- Near North File

Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

- Governor Frank B. Morrison Collection
- Governor Norbert T. Tiemann Collection
- Civil Liberties Collection

Omaha City Council Archives, Omaha, NE.

- Budget Ledger, 1966-1970
- City Council Meeting Minutes, 1966-1970

Omaha Public Library, Omaha, NE.

- Black Panther File
- Riots 1966 File
- Riots 1969 File
- Community Development File
- School Bussing File
- Parks and Recreation File

Schomburg Center for Research in African-American Studies,  
New York Public Library, New York, NY.

- Larry Neal Collection

### PUBLIC RECORDS

Injury reports from August 17, 1970 bombing. Omaha Police  
Department, Omaha, NE.

*Omaha City Directory*. Kansas City, MO: R.L. Polk & Co.,  
1964-1972 editions.

Property Valuation Database. Douglas County Assessor's

Office, Omaha, NE.

Yearbooks, 1960-1974. North High School, Omaha, NE.

Yearbooks, 1960-1974. Technical High School, Omaha, NE.

### **PERSONAL COLLECTIONS**

Goodwin, Daniel. Typewritten report presented to the Police Community-Relations Office in North Omaha by Daniel M. Goodwin, February 28, 1969 relating to alleged police misconduct in Omaha, Nebraska, February 28, 1969 (copy in author's possession), Omaha, NE. Author obtained a copy from Mr. Goodwin in November 2005.

Lyons-Barrett, Mary. Assorted clippings and personal correspondence relating to Omaha Black Panther Party and David Rice (Mondo we Langa) Omaha, NE (in Mary Lyons-Barrett's possession), Omaha, NE.

McCaslin, John (Jack). Personal scrapbook and other materials related to his role in the Civil Rights struggle in Omaha, Nebraska, (in Jack McCaslin's possession), Omaha, NE.

Nichols, Donald. Fire Transcripts related to the Civil Disturbances in July 1969 and Report of the Action and Operations of the Omaha Fire Division First Major Civil Disturbance June 25-26, 1969. Prepared by George Giddings District 1 Chief "B" Shift copy in author's possession, Omaha, NE. Photocopied and given to the author by Donald Nichols, historian for the Omaha Fire Department, October 2005.

### **INTERVIEWS AND TRANSCRIPTS**

Chambers, Senator Ernest. Interview with author, February 20 2006, Omaha. Digital recording in author's possession.

Goodwin, Daniel. Interview with author, November 30, 2006, Omaha. Digital recording in author's possession.

McCaslin, Fr. John (Jack). Interview with author, December

14, 2005, Omaha. Digital recording. In author's possession.

McClarty, Sr., Marvin. Interview with author, November 15, 2005, Omaha. Digital recording in author's possession.

### **Other Interviews**

Peak, Frank. Interview by Alonzo Smith, April 27, 1982. Interview transcript. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

Rice, David. Interview by Alonzo Smith, September 23, 1982. Interview transcript. Nebraska Black Oral History Project, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

Assorted letters to author from Mondo we Langa (formerly David Rice) to author.

E-mail to author from Tom Giitter.

### **GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS**

Capital Improvement Schedule, report ordered by Omaha Mayor John Rosenblatt, November 1960.

Community Renewal Program. *July 1966 Report Neighborhood Analysis*. Omaha, NE: GPO, 1966.

Department of Labor. *The Detroit riot: A Profile of 500 Prisoners*. Detroit: GPO, 1967.

McCone, John A. *Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots. Transcripts, Depositions, Consultants Reports, and Selected Documents of the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*. Los Angeles: GPO, 1965.

Kerner, Otto. *Report on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968.

U.S. Congress. House Committee on Internal Security. *Gun-*

*Barrel Politics: The Black Panther Party, 1966-1971.*  
92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971. House Report No. 92-470.

- U.S. Congress. House Committee on Internal Security.  
Investigation of Kansas City chapter; National  
Organization Data. 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1970.
- U. S. Congress. House Committee of Internal Security.  
National Office Operations and Investigation of  
Activities in Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebr. 91<sup>st</sup>  
Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess, 1970.
- U.S. Congress. House Committee on Internal Security. *The  
Black Panther Party, Its Origin and Development as  
Reflected in its Official Weekly Newspaper: The Black  
Panther.* 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. House Report No.  
482-4.

#### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA) DOCUMENTS**

- Black Panther Party aka Black Panther Party for Self-  
Defense, Omaha, Nebraska, November 12, 1968. Omaha  
FBI File, 157-403-163. Obtained through the Freedom of  
Information Act (FOIA).
- Black Panther Party, Omaha Division, June 6, 1969. Omaha  
FBI File, 157-403-518. Obtained through the Freedom of  
Information Act (FOIA).
- Black Panther Party, Omaha Division, June 12, 1969. Omaha  
FBI File, 157-403-539. Obtained through the Freedom of  
Information Act (FOIA).
- Black Panther Party, Omaha Division, September 18, 1969.  
Omaha FBI File, 157-403-779. Obtained through the  
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- Black Panther Party, Omaha Division, April 20, 1970. Omaha  
FBI File. 2-157-385. Obtained through the Freedom of  
Information Act (FOIA).
- Black Panther Party, Omaha Division, September 8, 1970.  
Omaha FBI File. 157-403-1416. Obtained through the  
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Students for A Democratic Society/Nebraska Peace and Freedom Party, October 2, 1968. Omaha FBI File, 100-6890F-20. Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

### **CENSUS RECORDS**

- U.S. Bureau of Census. *Characteristics of Housing Units by Tracts, 1960*, 1960. Prepared by the United States Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1963.
- U.S. Bureau of Census. *Characteristics of Housing Units by Tracts, 1970*, 1970. Prepared by the United States Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Employment Status, by Color and Sex, for the State: 1940 to 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1961.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Income in 1959 of Families and Unrelated Individuals, by Color for the State Urban and Rural, 1960* Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1963.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Industry of the Employed by Race and Class of Worker, and of the Experienced Civilian Labor Force by Color, by Sex, For the State and for Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas of 250,000 or More: 1960* Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census Washington, D.C., 1963.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Labor Force, by Age and Sex, for States, Urban and Rural, 1960 and for the Untied States, 1950 and 1940*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1963.
- U. S. Bureau of Census, *Occupancy and Structural Characteristics of Housing Units by Census Tracts, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division in



cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1962.

U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Race by Sex, for the State, Urban and Rural, 1950, and for the State 1880 to 1940*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1952.

U. S. Bureau of the Census, *School Enrollment by Level and Type of School, by Color, for the State, Urban and Rural, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1961.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Year Moved into Unit, Automobiles Available, and Value of Rent of Occupied Housing Units, by Census Tracts, 1960*. Prepared by the Geography Division in Cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1962.

#### **NEWSPAPERS**

*The Black Panther*  
*Benson Sun*  
*Creightonian*  
*Daily Nebraskan*  
*Detroit Free Press*  
*Dundee-West Omaha Sun*  
*The Gateway*  
*Lincoln Journal-Star*  
*New York Post*  
*Omaha Reader*  
*Omaha Star*  
*Omaha World-Herald*

#### **PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES**

Carmichael, Stokely (Kwame Ture), and Charles V. Hamilton.  
*Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York:  
 Random House, 1967.

Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. New York: Random House,  
 1968.

Hayden, Tom. *Rebellion in Newark*. City: Vintage Press, 1967.

Scheer, ed. Robert. *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*. New York: Random House, 1969.

Stalvey, Lois Mark. *The Education of a WASP*. New York: Morrow Press, 1970.

Tse-Tung, Mao. *Quotations from Chair Mao Tse-Tung*. New York: Praeger Press, 1967.

Williams, Robert F. *Negroes With Guns*. City: Wayne State University Press, 1998.

X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Random House, 1999.

#### **SECONDARY SOURCES**

Anthony, Earl. *Spitting in the Wind: The True Story of the Violent Legacy of the Black Panther Party*. Santa Monica: Roundtable Publishers, 1990.

Baruch, Ruth-Marion. *The Vanguard: A Photographic Essay on the Black Panthers*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.

Belknap, Michael R. *Urban Race Riots*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1991.

Bouma, Donald H. *Kids and Cops: A Study in Mutual Hostility*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969.

Breitman, George. *How a Minority Can Change Society: The Real Potential of the Afro-American Struggle*. New York: Merit Publishing, 1969.

Brink, William and Louis Harris. *The Negro Revolution in America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964.

Brisbane, Robert H. *Black Activism: Racial Revolution in the United States, 1951-1970*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974

Brockriede, Wayne and Robert Lee Smith. *The Rhetoric of*

- Black Power*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.
- Bullock, Paul. *Watts: The Aftermath, An Inside View of the Ghetto*. New York: Grove Press, 1969.
- Button, James W. *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Calloway, Bertha W. and Alonzo N. Smith. *Vision of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska*. Virginia Beach: Donning Publishers, 1998.
- Carson, Clayborne. *Civil Rights Chronicle*. Lincolnwood, IL: Legacy Press, 2003.
- Chevigny, Paul. *Cops and Rebels: A Study of Provocation*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
- Churchill, Ward and Jim Vander Wall. *Agents of repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Boston: South End Press, 1988.
- Churchill, Ward. *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissidents*. Boston: South End Press, 1990.
- Cleaver, Kathleen and George N. Katsiaficas. *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Cross, Theodore L. *The Black Power Imperative: Racial Inequality and the Politics of Nonviolence*. New York: Faulkner Press, 1984.
- Dalstrom, Harl A. *A.V. Sorensen and the New Omaha*. Omaha: Lamplighter Press, 1998.
- Demaris, Ovid. *America the Violent*. New York: Cowles Book Company, 1970.
- Dougherty, Jack. *More Than One Struggle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

- Eick, Gretchen Cassel. *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-72*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Flowers, Sandra Hollin. *African-American Nationalists Literature of the 1960s: Pens of Fire*. New York: Garland Press, 1996.
- Fogelson, Robert M. *The Los Angeles Riots*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Violence As Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos*. New York: Doubleday, 1971.
- Foner, Phillip S. and Clayborne Carson. *The Black Panthers Speak*. New York: DeCapo Press, 2002.
- George, John and Laird M. Wilcox. *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen and Others on the Fringes: Political Extremism in America*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992.
- Glasrud, Bruce A. ed. *African Americans in the West: A Bibliography of Secondary Sources*. Alpine, TX: Sul Ross State University Center for Big Bend Studies, 1998.
- Grant, Joanne. *Confrontation on Campus: The Columbia Pattern for the New Protest*. New York: New American Library, 1969.
- Guevara, Ernesto (Che). *Guerilla Warfare*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
- Haines, Herbert H. *Black Radicalism and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988.
- Heaps, Willard Allison. *Riots, U.S.A., 1765-1970*. New York:

Seabury Press, 1970.

Heath, G. Louis, ed., *Off the Pigs!: The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976.

Horne, Gerald. *Fire this Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

Isenberg, Irwin. *The City in Crisis*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1968.

Jones, Charles E., ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998.

Knoph, Terry Ann. *Rumors, Race, and Riots*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1975.

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, *Patterns on the Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha*. Omaha: Klopp Printing Company, 1984.

Larsen, Lawrence and Barbara Cottrell. *The Gate City: A History of Omaha*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Lester, Julius. *Look Out, Whitey*. New York: Grove, 1969.

Locke, Hubert G. *The Detroit Riot of 1967*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969.

Masotti, Louis H. and Don R. Bowen. *Riots and rebellion: Civil violence in the Urban Community*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publication, 1968.

Masotti, Louis H. and Jerome R. Corsi. *Shootout in Cleveland: Black Militants and the Police, July 23, 1968*. New York: Prager, 1969.

McEvoy, James and Abraham H. Miller. *Black Power and Student Rebellion*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1969.

Meier, August, Elliot Rudwick and John Bracey, Jr., eds.

- Black Protest in the Sixties: Articles from the New York Times.* New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1991.
- Menard, Orville D., *Political Bossism in Mid-America: Tom Dennison's Omaha, 1900-1933* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989.
- Monhollan, Rusty L. *This is America?: The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas.* New York: Palgrave, 2004.
- Muse, Benjamin. *The American Negro Revolution: From Non-violence to Black Power 1963-1967.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968.
- Nebraska Writers Project, *The Negroes of Nebraska.* Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940.
- Ogbar, Jeffrey O.G. *Black power: Radical politics and African American Identity.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Polk, Donna Mays. *Black Men and Women of Nebraska.* Lincoln: Nebraska Black Historical Preservation Society, 1981.
- Ritchie, Barbara. *The Riot Report.* New York: Viking Press, 1969.
- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.* London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972.
- Rossa, Della. *Why Watts Wxploded: How the Ghetto Fought Back.* New York: Merit Publishers, 1969.
- Rossi, Peter H., ed. *Ghetto Revolts.* 2 ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973.
- Scalise, Larry M., Donald L. Nichols, Jr., and Charles W. Wesson. *The History of the Omaha Fire Department 1860-1993.* Omaha: Professional Fire Fighters Association of Omaha, 1995.
- Shulltz, George P. and Arnold R. Weber, *Strategies for the Displaced Worker: Confronting Economic Change.* New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

- Scott, Robert Lee. *The Rhetoric of Black Power*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Seale, Bobby. *Seize the time: The Story of the Black Panther Party*. New York: Random, 1970.
- Sears, David O. and John B. McConohay. *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Riot*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.
- Shapiro, Fred C. and James W. Sullivan. *Race riots, New York, 1964*. New York: Crowell, 1964.
- Siberman, Charles E. *Crisis in Black and White*. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Singer, Benjamin D., Richard W. Osborn and James A. Geschwender. *Black rioters: A Study of Social Factors and Communication*. Lexington, MA: Heath Lexington Books, 1970.
- Sugrue, Thomas J. *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Equality in Post-War Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Smith, Jennifer B. *An International History of the Black Panther Party*. New York: Garland, 1999.
- Swan, L. Alex. *The Politics of Riot Behavior*. Washington, D.C.: College and University Press, 1975.
- Theoharris, Jeanne and Komozoi Woodard, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South 1940-1980*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.
- Tyson, Timothy B. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Vernon, Robert. *The Black Ghetto*. New York: Merit Publishers, 1968.
- Wagstaff, Thomas. *Black Power: The Radical Response to White America*. Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1969.

- Walakafra-Wills, Delpaneaux. *A Short Historical Analysis of the Urbanization of the African-American in Nebraska*. Pamphlet, January 1976.
- Walton, Jr., Hanes. *Black Politics: A Theoretical and Structural Analysis*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972.
- Wilkins, Roy, and Ramsey Clark, *Search and Destroy: Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and Police*. New York: Metropolitan Applied Resource Center, 1973.
- Williams, Lea Esther. *Servants of the People: The 1960s Legacy of African-American Leadership*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Williams, Julian E. "Burn, Baby, Burn!" *Is your City Next?* Tulsa: Christian Crusade Press, 1968.
- Williamson, Joy Ann. *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Winters, Stanley B. *From Riot to Recovery: Newark after Ten Years*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979.
- Witcover, Jules. *The Year the Dreamed Died: Revisiting 1968 in America*. New York: Warner Books, 1997.
- Wright, Nathan. *Black Power and Urban Unrest*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ready to Riot*. New York: Holt, Rienhart, & Winston, 1968.
- Wright, Richard. *The Color Curtain*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *White Man, Listen*. New York: Perennial, 1995.

#### **DISSERTATIONS AND THESES**

- Anderson, Reynaldo. "See you in Dar-es-Salaam: The Rhetoric



- of the Heartland Black Panther Party and the Repression of the Black Revolution." PhD. diss., University of Nebraska, 2005.
- Berk, Richard Alan. "The Role of Ghetto Retail Merchants in Civil Disorders." PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 1970.
- Bish, James D. "The Black Experience in Selected Nebraska Counties, 1854-1920" Master's thesis., University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1989.
- Boesel, David. The Ghetto Riots, 1964-1968. Phd.diss., Cornell University, 1972.
- Bryan, Marguerite. "The Social Psychology of Riot Participation." PhD. diss., John Hopkins University, 1975.
- Danton, Lawrence A. "The Omaha Experiment, A Study of A Community Effort to Cope with Unemployment Resulting From Plant Mechanization." PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 1964.
- Garland, Patrick S. "Black Economic Development in Omaha." M.B.A. thesis, Creighton University, 1971.
- Grimshaw, Allen D. "A Study in Social Violence: Urban Race Riots in the United States." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1959.
- Heacock, Laura M. "Social Significance of Public Housing with Special Emphasis on North Side Project." Master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1938.
- Johnson, Tekla (Agbala) Ali. " An Intellectual and Political Biography of Nebraska State Senator Ernest Chambers: Activist, Statesman, and Humanist, Part I, 1937-1988." PhD. diss., University of Nebraska, 2005.
- Justice, Blair. "An Inquiry into Negro Identity and a Methodology for Investigating Potential Racial Violence." PhD. Diss., Rice University, 1966.
- Kerns, James Harvey. "Industrial and Business Life of

Negroes in Omaha." Master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1932.

McMahon, David R. "The Origins of the NAACP in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska 1913-1926." Master's thesis, Creighton University, 1993.

Sullenger, Glenn. "A Study of Opportunities of Boys in Omaha." Master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1937.

Walrath, Christine. "The Impact of Racial Rioting on Crime in the United States: 1960-1991." PhD. diss. University of Maryland, 1993.

Wead, James R. "An Ecological Study of the Second Ward." Master's thesis, Omaha University, 1953.

#### **ARTICLES**

Blauner, Robert. "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt." *Social Problems* 16, no.4. (Spring, 1969): 393-408.

Boskin, Joseph. "The Revolt of the Urban Ghettos, 1964-1967." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 382 (Mar, 1969):1-14.

Carter, Gregg Lee. "In the Narrows of the 1960s U.S. Black Rioting." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30, no. 1 (Mar. 1986): 115-127.

Columbia Law Review. "Compensation for Victims of Urban Riots." *Columbia Law Review* 68, no.1 (Jan., 1968):57-84.

Feagin, J.R. "Social Sources of Support for Violence and Nonviolence in a Negro Ghetto." *Social Problems* 15, no. 4. (Spring, 1968): 432-441.

Harris, Daryl B. "The Logic of Black Urban Rebellions." *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 3 (1998): 368-385.

Hahn, Harlan. "Black Separatist's Attitudes and Objectives in a Riot Torn-Ghetto." *Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 1(1970):35-53.

- Joseph, Peniel E. "Black Power's Powerful Legacy." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* July 21 (2006): B6-B8.
- Levine, Daniel U., Norman S. Fiddmont, Robert S. Stephenson, et.al "Differences Between Black Youth Support the Black Panthers and the NAACP." *Journal of Negro Education* 42, no. 1 (Winter, 1973): 19-32.
- Lieberson, Stanley and Arnold R. Silverman. "The Precipitants and Underlying Conditions of Race Riots." *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (Dec. 1965):887-898.
- Mazur, Allan. "The Causes of Black Riots." *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 4 (Aug. 1972):490-493.
- Myers, Daniel J. "Racial Rioting in the 1960s: An Event History Analysis of Local Conditions." *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 1 (Feb. 1997): 94-112.
- Pitcher, Brian L., Robert L. Hamblin, and Jerry L.L. Miller. "The Diffusion of Collective Violence." *American Sociological Review* 43, no. 1 (Feb., 1978):23-35.
- Reilly, Bob. "It has Been the Few Who Have Acted, Who Have Saved Us From Unspeakable Scandal," *Window*, Winter Issue 1995-1996, 6.
- Reynolds, Jr., Harry W., "Black Power, Community Power and Jobs." In *Riots and Rebellion*, edited by Don R. Bouer and Louis H. Massotti, 237-259. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1968.
- Rogers, Ibram. "Celebrating Forty Years of Activism," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* 23 (2006): 18-22.
- Schuman, Howard and Jean M. Converse. "The Effects of Black and White Interviewers on Black Responses in 1968." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 35, no. 1. (Spring, 1971): 44-68.
- Spilerman, Seymour. "Structural Characteristics of Cities

and the Severity of Racial Disorders." *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 5 (Oct. 1976): 771-793.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Causes of Racial Disturbances: A Comparison of Alternative Explanations." *American Sociological Review* August (1970): 627-649.

### **Websites**

Amnesty International-USA, "Long-Term Political Prisoners in the U.S." Resolution 8, 1999:  
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/members/agmdecisions/detail.do?personid=100>.

Warner Institute for Education in Democracy, sponsored by the Nebraska State Legislature:  
<http://www.unicam.state.ne.us/institute/former-legislators/danner.html/>