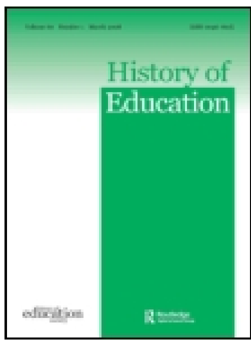

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An end of innocence: African-American high school protest in the 1960s and 1970s

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This paper considers African-American student protests in secondary schools during the 1960s and early 1970s. Taking a national perspective, it charts a growing sense of independence and militancy among black students as they made the schools a focal point of activism. Activist students challenged established civil rights organisations on a variety of questions. They also engaged in an escalating series of protest activities to make schools change. Much of this focused on curricular change, particularly adding black history courses and hiring African-American teachers and principals. Generally, these protests proved quite successful. Black students also protested against conditions encountered in integrated schools, where they often met hostility from whites. Distinct regional patterns characterised such activities, with more protest over school issues in the North and greater conflict regarding desegregation in the South. By the mid-1970s the era of black secondary student protest concluded, although its legacy continues to live.

Keywords: history; race; secondary education; student; educational reform

Black students in the United States were familiar participants in the national Civil Rights Movement from its early years, often drawn into social protests activities and marches by organisations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Youth placed in the path of white opposition frequently highlighted the violence of racial animosity toward black aspirations.[1] This helped to galvanise public opinion in favour of civil rights, but it also provided a context that raised students' awareness of racial injustice and fostered a sense of efficacy in their ability to demand change. Youth brought a new urgency to the struggle for equality in education and in time became more radical and independent in their protest activities, often challenging the ideas of mainstream civil rights organisations. In doing this, they shed the image of innocent victims in non-violent demonstrations to become inspired architects of rebellious protest and confrontation. And the principal focus of their activism was education.

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[1]On black youth in Southern non-violent protest, see Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If we could change the world: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) Chs. 3–5. She points out that youth occasionally took the lead in protests as well, although typically under adult supervision.

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Black student protests held immediate relevance, as they were determined to change the organisation and content of a critical aspect of their lives – public high schools and colleges. They fought for equity in educational resources and facilities, and greater inclusiveness in the school curriculum and staffing. In these demands, they strived to create a space for themselves within these institutions, both in curricular terms and with regard to demanding a staff sympathetic to their concerns and helpful as potential role models. In research on these struggles, however, college students have received much greater attention. The relatively small number of studies of African-American high school student protest by scholars such as Vincent P. Franklin, Dionne Danns, Barry Franklin and others has examined activism in particular times and places.[2] This article builds on this body of research in two ways. First, we focus on the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when black high school student activism reached its peak, and examine national trends to highlight regional patterns of student protest. Social and political conditions differed in the North and South and it is important to acknowledge these distinctions. The South had larger numbers of blacks and a long history of de jure segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement developed there first. On the other hand, the activities of black youth everywhere shared many goals and tactics and drew from common sources of inspiration, regardless of the particular schools they attended or their immediate circumstances. Our goal is to capture the big picture, drawing on evidence from across the country. Second, we specifically emphasise high school student activism as it pertained to changing their schools, and the growing sense of efficacy and independence that inspired their activism. Finally, we assess the effectiveness of their efforts. We argue that these students helped dramatically reshape the curricula and hiring practices of high schools and created a black youth culture infused with pride; however, they were less effective in improving the quality of education for black students or achieving racial equality in education.

The black student struggle to change the schools was a reflection of the times, but it has generally received less attention than youth involvement in desegregation struggles.[3] We would like to suggest that the two themes in student activism were linked historically. Both represented efforts on the part of students to make secondary institutions more responsive to their needs and interests. The eventual achievement of integration thrust thousands of black students into formerly white institutions, where they often met a hostile reception. In these instances they also fought for a place in their new schools, often literally, and for a measure of respect from their new classmates. This too entailed a loss of innocence. Integrating high schools turned out to be a protracted, difficult battle, especially in the South. Given this, there can be little doubt that at least some of the disenchantment they felt about integration as an educational goal, and their increased militancy and

[2]V.P. Franklin, 'Black High School Student Activism in the 1960s: An Urban Phenomenon?', *Journal of Research in Education* 10 (Fall 2000): 3–8; Barry Franklin, 'Community, Race and Curriculum in Detroit', *History of Education* 33, no. 2 (March 2004): 137–56; Dionne Danns, 'Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966–1971', *The Journal of African-American History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 138–50; Dwayne C. Wright, 'Black Pride Day, 1968: High School Student Activism in York, Pennsylvania', Idem, 151–62. For an overview of research on Black college students in this era, see V.P. Franklin, 'Patterns of Student Activism at Historically Black Universities in the United States and South Africa, 1960–1977', Idem, 204–17.

[3]Danns, 'Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education', 138–9.

engagement in violence, was derived from their experiences with white peers both in and out of school settings. Our analysis of their growing radicalism and independence concludes with a look at their success in changing high schools and their own identities, and the limited accomplishments of such protests in ultimately equalising education.

Introduction: early youth activism

African-American youth have a long history of participation in popular protests, extending at least back to the 1930s and 1940s.[4] Things picked up, however, after the *Brown* decision and the advent of the mobilisation phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Much of the early activism of youth was organised by the NAACP, which operated 'youth councils' in many communities, with more than sixty thousand members nationally. Other, more radical organisations also worked closely with black youth, especially the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Youth were involved in a wide range of additional civil rights groups as well, under conditions dictated by local circumstances and struggles. As Rebecca de Schweinitz has demonstrated, they were hardly strangers to protest. [5]

As suggested above, however, the largest group of youth in the movement was affiliated with the NAACP, which organised them into chapters. These local groups were closely monitored by adult chapter leaders, however, who often discouraged militant or confrontational tactics of the sort advocated by more radical students. Historically, the youth councils had functioned as auxiliary organisations to local NAACP chapters, participating in events and helping to recruit new members. Youth council memberships also were a source of income for the national organisation, and field workers were routinely urged to increase recruiting numbers. It seems that membership was continually turning over, as black student members entered and eventually left high school. Recruitment, in that case, was a constant concern, and a major preoccupation of the regional field representative that the NAACP employed to coordinate and oversee youth council activities.[6] This became even more difficult as youth grew impatient with the tactics and slow pace of change associated with the NAACP.

Young activists were influenced by the dissent and conflict that spread as the national Civil Rights Movement drew worldwide attention, and demonstrated that significant changes could be achieved by using a variety of tactics. Many had witnessed initial school desegregation initiatives, where black students confronted angry crowds of whites who were determined to block integration. This was especially true in the South, where civil rights struggles often focused on schools in

[4]On one of the first student demonstrations demanding better school conditions, in Lumberton, North Carolina in 1946, see Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 203. Regarding the famous black student strike in 1951 at Moton High School in Prince Edward County, Virginia, see Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), Ch. 19.

[5]For an extended discussion of youth involvement in earlier stages of the Civil Rights Movement, see de Schweinitz, *If we could change the world*, passim, and John L. Rury and Shirley A. Hill, *The African-American Struggle for Secondary Schooling, 1940–1980: Closing the Graduation Gap* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012), Chs. 1 and 3.

[6]For an overview of the history of the NAACP Youth Division, see de Schweinitz, *If we could change the world*, Ch. 4.

the postwar era. As a number of scholars have shown, high school youth were often quite willing to become participants in these efforts, and their activism increased in the later 1950s and early 1960s.[7] This was the case in 1960, when members of a local NAACP youth council from segregated Burke High School in Charleston, South Carolina staged a sit-in at a lunch counter at the H.S. Kress store downtown, participating in a wave of similar demonstrations principally staged by college students.[8] Rarely, however, did secondary students take the lead in organising such protests or other forms of public dissent. That is, not until the latter years of the decade, when students became more active in struggles to change high schools, especially regarding issues they felt affected them directly.

Previous studies have noted tensions within the Civil Rights Movement between the more traditionalist NAACP, which fought for integration mostly through litigation and lobbying, and those who increasingly favoured direct action, including civil disobedience.[9] We focus on that divide as it affected high school students, ultimately allowing them to emerge as critical and independent actors who challenged the more conservative and integrationist organisations such as the NAACP. As we note below, many of the most militant activities occurred in the North, but changes were evident nationwide. While incidents of confrontation in the early years of integration were more often precipitated by adults than students, this began to change after 1960.[10]

Foot soldiers in the fight for equality

In the opening years of the 1960s African-American students were often called on to participate in demonstrations and other protest activities planned by adults or college students, especially in the South, where the organised Civil Rights Movement focused much of its attention. This was famously the case in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, when hundreds of students were called upon to march into the teeth of police dogs and fire hoses, responding with fervour and courage.[11] These demonstrations were part and parcel of organised resistance to Southern segregation that began decades earlier and, after *Brown*, made schools a focal point for protest. The determination to integrate Southern schools has been widely memorialised in accounts such as that of the Little Rock Nine, who in 1957 courageously endured verbal and physical assaults to integrate Central High School. Black students had braved the animosity of white protestors in scores of such episodes throughout the South and Border States. In enduring this abuse, they contributed to a longstanding movement strategy of contrasting the innocent, budding potential of black youth against the violent hatred of racist whites, young and old alike. It was a theme calculated to elicit a sympathetic response from the larger public, both black and white, and to advance the political cause of civil rights on a range of fronts. With

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[7]Ibid., Ch. 5.

[8]Kelechi Ajunwa, 'It's Our School Too: Youth Activism As Educational Reform, 1951–1979' (unpublished dissertation, Temple University, 2011), 30.

[9]Simon Hall, 'Civil Rights Activism in 1960s Virginia', *Journal of Black Studies* 38, No. 2 (November 2007): 251–67.

[10]On white resistance to change, see Patterson, *Brown* v *Board of Education*, Ch. 5.

[11]Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), Ch. 10.

regard to schools, it was a powerful tactic in the struggle to break the grip of segregationist state and local policies.[12]

Yet the salience of these events often masks that fact that many black students were historically neither passive nor innocent when it came to asserting their rights; indeed, racial conflict among students was widespread and varied regionally. Black and white students had fought in and around schools for decades, especially at sporting events and other occasions without extensive adult supervision. These conflicts were more likely to occur outside the South, where black schools competed with white institutions athletically, and groups could encounter one another in school. A different type of clash emerged after *Brown*, as African-Americans and whites started attending school together in greater numbers and the demand for equal or integrated education took centre stage.[13]

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the black population of large northern cities grew, which often led to clashes as ghettos encroached on historically white neighbourhoods.[14] In the 1960s, patterns of racial conflict in American high schools continued much as during previous decades, if at a somewhat higher level of fervour. Fights between black and white students were monitored closely by the African-American press, and reports of outbreaks appeared regularly, especially in northern cities.[15] Gang warfare in 'slum' areas of the big cities sometimes spilled into the schools, leading to calls for more security and a police presence.[16] Athletic events also were flashpoints, especially when black and white teams competed, as occurred in a 1965 'melee' after a basketball game.[17] The year 1966 was particularly troublesome, with outbursts reported in Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark, and Manhattan and Brooklyn in New York. Some were 'scuffles' involving relatively small numbers and others 'pitched battles' between larger groups, but all reflected mounting racial tensions as blacks and whites came into contact.[18] As it turns out, these were portents of even more widespread conflicts to come.

[12]On the use of such tactics, and the general frame of youthful innocence, see de Schweinitz, *If we could change the world*, Chapter 3.

[13]Rury and Hill, *The African-American Struggle for Secondary Schooling*, Ch. 4.

[14]Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 44 and 67.

[15]See, for instance, *Chicago Defender* articles on Toledo, Ohio and Jackson, Michigan: 'Ban on Prep Games', *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 21, 1963, A 22; and '10 Arrested In Teen Race Riot At Jackson, Mich. High School', *Chicago Defender*, September 21, 1963, 18.

[16]'Manual Arts High Prepares for a Fall of Study', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 26, 1963, A2; 'Teen War Flashes; One Dead, Seize 20', *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1964, 31; 'School Issue', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 26, 1964, A6; 'Westside, Englewood Report Gang Fights', *Chicago Daily Defender*, December 1, 1964, 3.

[17]'600 Rumble at Basketball Game', *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 5, 1965, 3; 'Hoods Threaten School Sports: High School Games "Battle Arenas"', *Chicago Defender*, January 12, 1966, 28.

[18]'Avert Riot at High School of Music and Art', *New York Amsterdam News*, January 15, 1966; 'Student Violence Grows: Race Riot Flares at Gage Park School', *Chicago Defender*, February 5, 1966, 1; 'Negroes in Park Slope Attacked by Whites', *New York Amsterdam News*, March 12, 1966, 19; 'Negroes Walk Off Duarte High Campus', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 5, 1966, A1; 'A Cool Prevails at Lafayette High', *New York Amsterdam News*, November 5, 1966, 27.

Black students in the North organised against segregated schools, faulty integration plans and persistent inequities in educational resources. In 1963, for example, nearly 100 slipped through back and side entrances of three predominantly white Englewood, New Jersey schools to conduct sit-ins and demand registration, despite the district's limited desegregation plan.[19] Students also were mobilised for school boycotts and mass demonstrations by local groups in Boston, Chicago and other cities to protest overcrowded and segregated schools. In June 1963, several thousand African-American youth in Boston skipped school to protest segregation, many of them attending 'freedom centres' in local churches and community centres for lessons on black history.[20] The following fall an estimated 300,000 Chicago students boycotted school in a similar protest, organised by a coalition of community organisations.[21] Parallel incidents occurred in New York, Cleveland and other cities in the following year.[22] Altogether, tens of thousands of high school youth participated in these events in Northern cities, demonstrating their potential for mass mobilisation around educational issues, a point recognised by civil rights leaders.[23]

In the South circumstances were somewhat different; black students were called upon to assist with community organising and to participate in demonstrations organised by civil rights groups, particularly the Students' Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which organised 'school stayouts' across the country.[24] In January 1964, for instance, more than a hundred Atlanta youth heeded SNCC leader John Lewis's call to 'play hooky for freedom', staging a noisy demonstration in the Mayor's office to demand improvements at local high schools. Afterwards they conducted impromptu sit-ins at local restaurants, prompting district officials to call upon the police to prevent organising near schools.[25] In another demonstration organised by SNCC, students from the all-black Lincoln High School in Forest City, Arkansas marched to an integrated school near the school board offices, demanding free meals and free books.[26] A year later, students in Birmingham joined demonstrations to support voter registration, running through the schools calling on peers to participate.[27] In Mississippi, black students walked out of segregated high schools in Jackson and other cities in support of community civil rights campaigns.[28] As historian Jon Hale has suggested, the Freedom School movement in Mississippi was a potent force for increasing student involvement in all sorts of

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[19]'Pickets Seek Integration in 3 States', *Chicago Tribune*, September 5, 1963, 2.

[20]'3,000 Skip Classes in Boston Bias Protest', *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 19, 1963, 4.

[21]Rury and Hill, *The African-American Struggle for Secondary Schooling*, Ch. 4.

[22]'N.Y. Boycott Huge Success', *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 4, 1964, A3; '60,000 Boycott Cleveland Schools', *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 22, 1964, 5; 'Over 2000 Students Take Part in Chester Protests', *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 22, 1964, 19.

[23]Martin Luther King, Jr, 'The School Boycott Concept', *New York Amsterdam News*, April 11, 1964, 10.

[24]J. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 70.

[25]'Efforts Being Made to Keep High Schoolers In Classes', *Atlanta Daily World*, January 9, 1964, 1; 'Youth Leaders Plead: "Learn Civics in Streets" In Atlanta Protest Move', *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 18, 1964, 5.

[26]'March on Integrated School', *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1965, S5.

[27]'B'ham High Pupils Stage Rights Trek', *Chicago Defender*, January 15, 1965, 2.

[28]Jon Hale, 'A History of Student Activism in the Mississippi Freedom Movement, 1940–1971', paper presented at the annual meeting of the History of Education Society, November, 2011.

movement activity.[29] Since much national protest action was televised, other black youth were also first-hand witnesses to history, as they observed the struggles that defined the decade.

Signs of change: contention over black history courses

Learning African-American history became a critical issue in the Civil Rights Movement, both North and South. It was a central element of the Freedom Schools, and became a focal point of student protests in the schools. For many black students, the inclusion of this subject was symbolic of the quest to gain greater respect for their communities and their culture, long subject to omission in the official curricula of public schools. It also was a point of racial pride and the development of a distinctive identity as African-Americans, a group that had struggled to make many contributions to the nation's development.

Black history had been taught for decades in predominantly African-American schools, dating at least to Carter Woodson's 1926 suggestion that a 'Negro History Week' be celebrated in February each year, an event widely observed by mid-century (and later expanded to a month). Predominantly African-American schools offered courses in black (Negro) history for decades prior to the 1960s, principally focusing on the struggle for freedom and noteworthy black leaders and other figures.[30] For many African-American students, this facet of the curriculum became a focal point for struggle when they began attending predominantly white schools that historically had not offered such classes. At schools in all parts of the country, the demand for a history curriculum that acknowledged black contributions to American history was a cause that exerted wide appeal. It quickly became a telling point of shared interest, an issue that virtually all the various groups within the larger movement could agree was important.[31]

This is not to say, however, that there were not disagreements on *how* black history ought to be treated; on this point, there was considerable debate. For instance, a pivotal matter of contention was the presentation and use of black history, which had been featured as a key element in freedom schools organised to train activists in the South in the mid-1960s.[32] In the North a topic that sometimes highlighted tensions in the NAACP between the old guard and younger activists was how to implement changes in the secondary curriculum, focusing principally

[29]Jon Hale, '"The Student as a Force for Social Change": The Mississippi Freedom Schools and Student Engagement', *Journal of African-American History* 96, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 325–53; also see John Hale, 'The Struggle Begins Early: Head Start and the Mississippi Freedom Movement', *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (November 2012): 506–34.

[30]'About Black History Month', Library of Congress, electronic resource: http://www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov/about.html; also see Zoe Burkholder, 'Education for Citizenship in a Bi-racial Civilization: Black Teachers and the Social Construction of Race, 1929–1954', *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (2012): 335–63, and Peniel E. Joseph, 'Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement', *Journal of African-American History* 88, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 182–203.

[31]On this point, see Gary Orfield, 'How to Make Desegregation Work: The Adaptation of Schools to Their Newly-Integrated Student Bodies', *Law and Contemporary Problems* 39, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 331.

[32]Jon Hale, '"The Student as a Force for Social Change": The Mississippi Freedom Schools and Student Engagement', *Journal of African-American History* 96, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 325–47.

on the introduction of black history courses. This was an early point of emphasis, with the issue being brought to local school boards as early as 1966. In May of that year the Bristol, Connecticut Youth Council issued a press release stating to the Bridgeport board and the state that 'as future tax payers, and as American citizens, the time has come for all children in the Public School System to learn more about the role of the Negro in the history of the United States'. Tellingly, the statement emphasised that inclusion of such topics should occur within a regular US history course, to 'correct the faulty image of the American Negro'. The tone was decidedly non-confrontational, with the petitioners issuing an appeal featuring their status as citizens and 'future taxpayers'.

Adults, on the other hand, were not always ready for even a modicum of controversy. In Bridgeport, this statement became a source of disagreement within the larger organisation, as local and state NAACP leaders complained to the national office that they had not been notified of the action. One claimed to have been 'embarrassed' when called by the school superintendent, and complained that national office personnel were quoted in the press regarding the issue rather than local leaders, giving the impression of a national campaign.[33] While the incident pointed to a need for greater coordination of activities within local NAACP chapters, it also revealed the unsupportive adult response that actions by youth councils sometimes prompted, regardless of the positions they took.

Integrated textbooks, however, formed an emerging focal point for the NAACP nationally, and would help to give the youth councils a curricular emphasis throughout the latter 1960s.[34] As in the Bridgeport incident, however, the goal was supposed to be one of 'integrating' blacks into existing history courses, and not the creation of freestanding or separate courses on black history. This was specified in a resolution passed at the organisation's 1967 Annual Convention, a point consistent with Roy Wilkins's denunciation of Black Power at the meeting a year earlier. In this respect, the NAACP anticipated debates that would emerge later, when black history and other curricular issues would become points of conflict. In the meantime, however, the 1967 convention also recommended increasing 'militant direct action' as a tactic, and building membership in youth councils. If the object was to include black people in textbooks, pickets and demands were sanctioned as a way to do it. At the same time that the NAACP maintained a decidedly integrationist stance regarding curricular questions, many within the organisation believed that engaging in these types of actions would appeal to high school students.[35]

Local youth chapters actively pursued the question of including black history in the high school curriculum, but ideas about how best to accomplish this eventually diverged. In 1967 reports from Easton, Pennsylvania, Sacramento, California,

[33]'Press Release of May 24, 1966', NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 1, Bristol, Conn. Folder. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[34]'Integrated Textbooks are Pushed by NAACP Youths', *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 5, 1966, 1. Clipping in NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 12, William Hardy Correspondence Folder.

[35]'Printed Matter Annual Convention 58th Boston, Mass. 1967', Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box J 1, NAACP 58th Annual Convention Resolutions, July 10–15, 1967, 22; Box E 9, Annual Convention General Folder, February 14, 1967, press release on resolution for direct action in 1966. On Wilkins and Black Power, see '…Sail Our NAACP Ship, "Steady as She Goes"', Printed Matter 57th Annual Convention, Los Angeles Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box J 1. As de Schweinitz notes, this was a longstanding tradition within the Youth Division; see *If we could change the world*, Ch. 1.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Springfield, Illinois, among other places, indicated that local fights to get 'Negro History' included in high school curricula were succeeding, principally by suggesting the adoption of relevant texts, including Langston Hughes's history of the NAACP, *Fight for Freedom*.[36] But by 1969 the tone was changing, evident in a report from Springfield, Massachusetts concerning the local youth council's success in getting 'Black Studies into the curriculum', and the council in Texas City, Texas was pushing for a similar course.[37] Some chapters reported other groups organising in the high schools, eschewing association with the NAACP, or attempting to identify with its goals in order to gain legitimacy and support.[38] In 1970 Gary, Indiana Youth Council members went to the school superintendent to discuss including blacks in American history classes only to discover another group of black students demanding 'separate Black Studies in their own Black room'.[39] It was clear that the integrationist ideals of the larger organisation were gradually losing appeal among a significant fraction of high school students, particularly in the nation's larger cities where students were more likely to attend predominantly black schools.

Similar debates were taking place on college campuses, revealing differences that affected high school students as well. In the spring of 1969 NAACP Director Roy Wilkins decried separate Black Studies units on college campuses, describing them as a form of 'Jim Crow education'. In other instances he was forced to address accusations of being 'old fashioned' and out of touch. Speaking to students in North Carolina, he declared that 'when someone mentions separation of cultures, I have to part company with them'.[40] The issue persisted, however. In response to charges from students in Bakersfield, California that the organisation was too 'middle class' and 'only concerns itself with the aspirations and problems of the middle class', national youth council coordinator James Brown suggested that the local youth council get involved 'in some meaningful grass roots activity'. This was a theme taken up by others, such as national youth board member Jahue Nash, who called for greater attention to 'nation-building, community control, unity, self-determination and self-sufficiency' in NAACP programmes.[41] This, of course, was inconsistent with the history and ideological ethos of the organisation.

[36]These reports, along with others, can be found in the General Department File, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 9.

[37]Annual Convention Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 9; Box E 5, Springfield, Massachusetts Folder.

[38]A small group of Black students called 'Cobra' reportedly used the NAACP name to hold fundraisers and open a clothing store, but appeared to be affiliated with the Black Panthers. Letter from Willie Thomas, President of the Burlington County Branch, to the National Office, New Jersey Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 5.

[39]Gary Indiana Youth Council Report, 1970, Annual Convention Awards Folder 1971, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 9.

[40]'Wilkins Blasts Autonomous Black Studies Centers', *NAACP Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (March 1969): 1; quote from February 15, 1971 article from Daily Tar Heel, University of North Carolina Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 7. Wilkins is also quoted as saying with regard to Black radicals in prison, 'who came to their rescue when they needed help? It wasn't the radicals or the militants; it was the good old Uncle Tom NAACP.' It was a comment as revealing of differences within the movement as the NAACP position. On Wilkins's critique of Black Nationalism more broadly, see Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 314.

[41]'Minutes of NAACP Youth Planning Meeting', California General Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 1; 'A Plan of Action for Youth Councils and College Chapters', by Jahue Nash, California General File, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 1.

Signs of dissention began to appear elsewhere within the NAACP Youth Division. The Maywood, Illinois Chapter had been a hotbed of separatist sentiments under the leadership of Fred Hampton, who eventually left the organisation to join the Black Panthers, but controversy erupted elsewhere too.[42] In Saginaw, Michigan the local youth council President, Carol Beverly, was arrested following a sit-in at a local junior high school demanding 'relevant education', respect from police and an end to suspensions of black students. She was subsequently 'suspended' from her leadership role by the local adult chapter, which was promptly reprimanded by the national office for overstepping its authority. The matter was quickly resolved, but revealed tensions between the larger organisation and youth councils attempting to address black students' concerns.[43] A local youth council adviser in Greenwich, Connecticut wrote that black students there wanted to organise a separate group because they felt there was too much 'white influence' in the NAACP, an issue reported in other chapters as well. National youth coordinator James Brown replied by noting 'sadly enough, the same situation is very prevalent in many other towns and villages across the country' and his advice was to 'work for what we all know to be right'.[44] The Greenwich incident demonstrated the extent of the problem; these issues could arise even among a relatively small group of African-American students in an affluent community. The NAACP leadership was well aware of the fissures developing between the nation's principal mainstream civil rights organisation and black students across the country; it was another question altogether whether much could be done about it.

In the end, it proved very difficult to reconcile the two sides of this debate. In certain respects, the issue's difficulty was captured by Lucille Wright, who wrote to the national office in 1971 to resign her position as campus adviser to the NAACP student chapter at Ferris State College in western Michigan following a strike by black students. Complaining that most of them did not seem familiar with the organisation's positions on social and educational issues, she declared that they 'seem to want to use the NAACP (and its official recognition) as an umbrella under which they may do whatever they pleased'.[45] For better or worse, students fighting for change viewed the national organisation in largely instrumental terms, a way of achieving goals that may or may not have been consistent with the NAACP outlook on education and related questions of integration and assimilation. In short, the larger national organisation was out of touch with activist student priorities.

Wright relinquished her role as adviser to the principal black student group at her school out of concern for her future career. This, of course, is just what many

[42]At a 1968 Youth Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Hampton's followers damaged more than $1700 (over $10,000 today) in hotel property after being thwarted in an attempt to disrupt the meeting's plenary session. Maywood was referred to as 'our Black Power Council' in internal National Office correspondence. Hampton left the organisation shortly thereafter. Regional Training Conference 1968 Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 13.

[43]Saginaw, Michigan Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Folder E 5; in particular, see the letter from Carol Beverly, June 18, 1969. Tensions between adult and youth sides of local chapters also had a long history; see de Schweinitz, *If we could change the world*, Ch. 1.

[44]Greenwich, Connecticut Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 1; Letter from Rosalind Twine, August 27, 1969 and reply from James Brown, October 15, 1969.

[45]Letter from Lucille L. Wright, November 11, 1971, Big Rapids, Michigan Folder, NAACP Papers, Part IV, Box E 5. For a similar dispute at Oregon State, see the Oregon Folder, Box E7, letter from Calvin O.L. Henry, president of the Corvalis Chapter, to Robert Satchen, who had accused the NAACP of not supporting student strikers appropriately.

students objected to with regard to the 'middle class' orientation of the NAACP and similar civil rights organisations. For black students concerned with making institutions more responsive to their demands for better education, the career prospects of particular professionals hardly comprised the most important issue. Many were disenchanted with the integrationist stance of the NAACP, and found the Black Power perspective of more radical organisations and individuals more appealing. This left little ground for traditional civil rights groups to address the concerns of protests in schools across the country. For leadership and direction, they had to look closer to home, and to themselves.

A turn toward radicalism and independence

African-American secondary students became considerably more active as the decade wore on, and less accepting of the traditional goals of established civil rights organisations such as the NAACP. Northern youth seemed especially to reject non-violent protest, as Martin Luther King, Jr. learned during his 1965 Chicago campaign. Commenting on the difficulty encountered in transforming northern gang members into non-violent activists, King concluded that they were just not as 'church-oriented' as their southern counterparts.[46] While the national movement floundered in the wake of King's death and a failure to make headway on economic equity, African-American students across the country began to demand recognition of their concerns, and to protest about the state of their schools.[47] Borrowing tactics and strategies from mainstream organisations, they employed a range of methods. Walkouts and strikes were popular tactics, as the idea of leaving school, particularly in warm weather, often proved appealing to a wide spectrum of potential participants. In Gary, Indiana, where 16,000 students boycotted classes in 1968 to protest against segregation, authorities claimed that the student had been sent to school by their parents, but had 'milled around the school yard and refused to enter classes'.[48] Sit-ins and other types of direct confrontation with authorities were less widely employed, as they entailed the possibility of hostility or arrest, and perhaps additional repercussions. Given the temper of the times, however, and the widespread familiarity of youth with protest tactics, a relatively small group of instigators could wield considerable influence, particularly if grievances could be clearly articulated.[49]

Perhaps the earliest signs of an independent black student movement appeared in the South, where the Mississippi Student Union led school boycotts to protest about segregation and unequal resources in the schools in 1964. Inspired by the larger movement and reflecting the influence of the Freedom Schools, this 'nascent organisation' was a portent of student protest activity that would flower in the years to follow. It also was symptomatic of desegregation agitation by black high school

[46]James Ralph, *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 92–3.

[47]Franklin, 'Black High School Student Activism in the 1960s', 3–8; Wright, 'Black Pride Day, 1968', 151–62. On the decline of the national movement at this time, see Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, Ch. 15; and Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Ch. 8.

[48]'16,000 Gary Students Absent in Boycott', *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1968, 17.

[49]Bo Wirmark, 'Non-Violent Methods and the American Civil Rights Movement', *Journal of Peace Research* 11, no. 2 (1974): 115–32.

students throughout the region at the time.[50] Such activism foreshadowed struggles to come when desegregation became a more widespread phenomenon, especially in the South.

Early signs of student protest regarding education in the North appeared in the middle of the decade. At Chicago's Farragut High, students walked out in February 1966 to protest against overcrowding and dilapidated facilities, along with lunchroom food. The principal declared they were merely copying a nearby university boycott, labelling them 'just a bunch of kids showing off'.[51] A more telling incident occurred in the spring, as students at Detroit's Northern High School declared a strike in protest at low academic standards, and a decision to suppress an editorial about it in the school newspaper. Historians have documented how the Northern walkout led to a confrontation with administrators that polarised the city. Regardless of their eventual impact, however, such actions by students, encouraged and supported by local civil rights groups, demonstrated their power to challenge adult authority.[52] In years to come it would prove much harder for those in positions of control to dismiss the demands of black students.

The latter 1960s also witnessed the emergence of Black Power as a popular political perspective, particularly among African-American youth. Given voice by college student leader Stokley Carmichael, as well as such charismatic figures as Malcolm X and Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton, among many others, it was an ideological outlook that proved very appealing to a generation of teens who had grown up watching brutal white responses to non-violent black protest.[53] As Manning Marable noted, Malcolm X had explicitly sought to appeal to the younger generation, seeing them as 'chief change agents', and students attending freedom schools were often required to read his speeches and autobiography.[54] Moreover, as other scholars have pointed out, it was a time when the national movement was fragmenting in the face of white resistance to demands for equity in jobs, housing and the criminal justice system. Earlier, seemingly symbolic gains around civil rights, voter registration and segregated schooling did little to change the immediate circumstances of many African-Americans, who still lived in poor, segregated communities in most parts of the country.[55] Violent urban rebellions, termed 'race riots' by the press, gave voice to their dissatisfaction. Hundreds of these outbursts occurred between 1964 and 1968, especially in the vast ghettos of the North and West, galvanising national attention and signalling a new militant outlook regarding racial equality and social justice.[56] Historian Christina Collins has documented the

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[50]Hale, '"The Student as a Force for Change"', 338–40.

[51]'Farragut Protest Expands', *Chicago Defender*, February 19, 1966, 1.

[52]Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Rise and Fall of an Urban School System, Detroit, 1907–1980* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993): 301–3; Franklin, 'Community, Race and Curriculum in Detroit', passim.

[53]On Black Power, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), passim; on its influence on college campuses, see Peniel E. Joseph, 'Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement', *Journal of African-American History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 182–203.

[54]Ibram H. Rogers, '"People All Over the World are Supporting You": Malcolm X, Ideological Formations, and Black Student Activism', *Journal of African-American History* 96, no. 1 (2011): 17, 24.

[55]McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, Chapter 8.

[56]Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, Chs. 12 and 13.

impact that the Newark rebellion in 1967 had on youth in that city, leading many to look beyond the integrationist goals of traditional movement organisation.[57] The effect was similar elsewhere. As one high school student in the South pointed out, 'We were mad at the system. We wanted people to listen, to find out what was going on with us.'[58] The generation of students who grew up observing these events had a perspective quite different from those who had witnessed the earlier years of the Civil Rights Movement.

Given this, it is little wonder that many African-American students in the latter 1960s and beyond found the Black Power perspective appealing. It was an ascendant viewpoint within black communities, particularly in the larger cities where most African-Americans lived by this time. It also provided students with a clear identity and mode of response in resisting the inhospitable environments and deficient conditions they often encountered in the schools. The appearance of a radical separatist movement proved a challenge to established Civil Rights organisations that historically had relied upon black youth for support. What emerged, as a consequence, was a time of competing ideologies among African-American students, as they began to address the deplorable conditions in their schools, the racial composition of the teaching and administrative staff, the content of the curriculum and the quality of education they received.

From all accounts, it appears that a national wave of black youth protests focusing on the schools was organised more or less spontaneously, with little systematic adult influence, at least at the national level. Major civil rights organisations had a relatively minor role in launching or coordinating these student protests and providing its leaders with advice, but its rapid rise proved challenging to their ideas. As indicated earlier, this was especially true of the NAACP, which had the movement's largest youth division, and conflict over changes in the schools revealed the ideological currents then shaping the ideas of black youth. Beyond that, the protest activities of black students were shaped by the circumstances they encountered in the schools, including hostile receptions from white students in newly integrated institutions. In an incident typical of the time, black students at Kansas City's Northeast High School stormed district offices in 1971 demanding better protection after their bus was pelted with rocks by white students. The district's director of human relations, growing accustomed to such protests, explained that black students were 'no longer conditioned to accepting anything other than self-pride and equality', and opined that educational institutions were just not changing fast enough.[59] The days of politely asking for change, or even calling for integration, were gone; a new impatience and budding militancy now predominated.

The involvement of African-American high school students in social protest must be seen within the broader social context, as the pace and scale of student protest was increasing across the nation, and not just among African-Americans. The year 1968 was a notable one as college students embraced the anti-war movement in ever larger numbers, and high school youth achieved an important victory in *Tinker* v *Des Moines*, allowing greater freedom of expression and

[57]Christina Collins, '"These Children of Despair?" Urban Youth and the 1967 Newark Riot', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the History of Education Society, Chicago, November, 2011.

[58]Ralph Naples (Pseudonym), interviewed by the Southern Oral History Project, K556.

[59]Susan White, 'Can the Kansas City Schools Be Saved?', *Kansas City Town Squire*, June 1970: 12–20 and 69–73.

independence from adult supervision.[60] It was also the year of anti-war protests in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention, a spectacle followed by the entire nation on television and in newspapers. Elsewhere in the world, student strikers made headlines from Mexico to France to Yugoslavia and other countries. It was a time of upheaval and confrontation, with young people demanding a voice in policies affecting their futures.[61]

Black student protests unfolded amidst much of this activity and doubtless were influenced by it. Their growing sense of self-pride was at odds with educational materials that ignored or demeaned their historic experiences, such as references in New York City textbooks that described slaves as living happy lives and minimised the cruelty they had endured.[62] In the spring of 1968 'a rash' of school boycotts spread across metropolitan New York City. Just north of Manhattan, a district-wide group called 'Concerned Black Students of Yonkers' issued a series of demands targeting racial prejudice in schools, requiring teachers to study black history, and gaining greater choice in what to study. The group also called for more black teachers and administrators, better representation in student government, and a community governing board. When asked about missing school, one described feeling 'very strongly that the educational process stopped years ago for Black students'.[63] In the following fall African-American students in Chicago also staged walkouts, ultimately involving more than 20 high schools, as historian Dionne Danns has documented.[64] This series of events was clearly planned on a city-wide basis, as was true in other cities. An organising group, 'Black Students for Defense', issued demands to Superintendent James Redmond for more black teachers, courses in black history, holidays to commemorate black heroes, and greater influence over school policies. In a statement to the press, an 'articulate Black militant spokesman' charged the board of education with 'educational genocide'.[65] Another declared 'we're getting third and fourth rate educations now', and 'we might as well stay out of school and educate ourselves in the library'.[66]

In a number of cases student protesters were influenced by black teachers, 'nationalist' community organisations such as the Black Panthers, or college groups like SNCC. Nearly one in five teachers at Chicago's Forestville High School joined 1500 students in a boycott to protest about the school's facilities.[67] In addition, the Panthers were influential in Chicago, where they provided advice and support to

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[60]Richard Arum, *Judging School Discipline: The Crisis of Moral Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), passim.

[61]See David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), passim; Ronald Fischer, ed., *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt: An Oral History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), passim. On the role of students papers and related organisations, see Ajunwa, 'It's Our School Too', Ch. 4.

[62]Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 245.

[63]'School Boycott Spreads to Yonkers', *New York Amsterdam News*, May 25, 1968, 2.

[64]Dionee Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963–1971* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Ch. 4.

[65]'Black Students Plan Big Walkout Today: Fifth Week of School Turmoil Here', *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 14, 1968, 3.

[66]'35,000 Stage Peaceful School Walkout: Student Protestors Seek More Black Influence Here', *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 15, 1968, 3.

[67]'Forrestville Area Kept Calm as 100 Police Stay in Reserve', *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 1967, A2.

high school students organising demonstrations, as they did in certain other northern and western cities.[68] SNCC was credited with organising a protest rally in Forest City, Arkansas where students demanded free meals and books, resulting in nearly 200 arrests.[69] In Lawrence, Kansas student protestors drew inspiration from black student strikes at the University of Kansas, and college students were helpful in organising sit-ins at the local high school.[70]

Such direct influence and support from college students was not commonplace, however, as most high school protests appear to have been inspired by more remote influences. Black students at integrated Fortier High in New Orleans walked out in 1969, demanding greater recognition and support from teachers and administrators, a separate course on black history and the right to form a Black Student Union. Walter C. Stern has suggested that they were aware of protests in other cities, particularly in the North, but overall there is no evidence of national coordination of such student activities.[71] Instead, local circumstances and an affinity to militancy appear to have dictated tactics and goals, sometimes over objections from more established civil rights organisations, as suggested earlier. There is also considerable evidence that parents and teachers influenced them as well. Indeed, historians have documented extensive support by teachers and community organisations for student activists in Chicago, and in other places.[72] African-American parent groups across the country supported efforts to include black history and similar courses in the schools.[73] But there can be little doubt that the students were in control of their own activism. While it was a movement clearly inspired by advocates of 'Black Power' both locally and on the national stage, it was conditions in the schools that moved this generation of student dissenters to action.[74]

Bold, locally coordinated actions became more commonplace, often involving teachers and other adults, particularly in northern settings. In Philadelphia, black students and faculty members were arrested in 1968, following an overnight sit-in at Benjamin Franklin High, as 'racial unrest spread throughout public secondary schools throughout the city'.[75] At the same time, in New York demonstrations were staged against 'alleged racism in public schools in minority group communities'.[76] Teachers joined students in a boycott at Chicago's Hyde Park High School,

[68]On the influence of the Panthers, see Joy Ann Williamson, 'Community Control with a Black Nationalist Twist: The Black Panther Party's Educational Programs', in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, ed. William H. Watkins (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 137–58.

[69]'March on Integrated School', *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1965, S5.

[70]Beryl Ann New, 'A Fire in the Sky: Student Activism in Topeka, Kansas and Lawrence, Kansas High Schools in 1969 and 1970' (upublished EdD dissertation, University of Kansas, 2007), 17–19.

[71]Walter C. Stern, '"I Can't Imagine What the Issues Were": High School Student Activism, White Universalism, and Black Power at a New Orleans High School', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the History of Education Society, Chicago, November, 2011, passim.

[72]Danns, 'Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education', 138–50.

[73]On this point, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 472–6.

[74]On shifts in the larger movement, see Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, Chs. 14 and 15; and McAdams, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, Ch. 8.

[75]United Press International, 'Students Sit In at Philadelphia High School', *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 24, 1968, 12.

[76]'NYC's School Picture: It's "In" to be Out! ', *New York Amsterdam News*, December 7, 1968, 1.

demanding the ousting of a principal who they saw as being 'unresponsive' to the needs of students, parents and the community.[77] Protest over the 1970 arrest of black students in Baltimore spread across the city by means of a local High School Student Union newspaper, and was sustained for more than two weeks.[78] In Los Angeles black students launched a number of protest and walkouts between 1967 and 1969, starting with a controversy over the white principal of predominantly black Manual Arts High and eventually extending across the vast South Central area. Black power sentiments were evident there as well, as in complaints about militant students labelling black educators who wore shirts and ties and spoke 'English instead of slang' as 'sell-outs'.[79] Similar conflicts occurred at schools with fewer black students. For example, black and Mexican students at Pasadena High, although barely 10% of the student body, demanded more minority faculty members and greater say in school policies.[80]

Protest also hit the suburbs. In Mount Vernon, NY, black students marched to demand courses in Afro-American history, better bus service and guidance and career counselling.[81] And students were quite clear about who should be teaching such subjects. At Chicago's Harrison High School, students protested about white teachers offering courses in black history, arguing that they could not 'teach the subject properly'.[82] Altogether, curricular change was a common theme of high school protest, with black history being the most prominent focal point. Calls for more instruction in this and such related subjects as black literature swept through Chicago and other districts.[83]

It did not take long for this trend to be identified as national in scale. In 1969 a Chicago firm specialising in public opinion and social trends reported a 'growing number of racial disruptions' in high schools across the country, referring to protests and clashes between students and authorities. The report noted that demands focused on curricular matters, the composition of the faculty and disciplinary policies, and that the boycott was practically a universal tactic. Even though the survey addressed the behaviour of both whites and blacks, it was an especially apt characterisation of protest activities by African-American students.[84] In predominantly black institutions, students were clearly unhappy with the quality of their education and often lashed out in anger, especially in the North and West, as the

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[77]Edith May Herman, 'Thousand in Boycott at Hyde Park High', *Chicago Tribune*, May 21, 1971, A1.

[78]Ajunwa, 'It's Our School Too', 67–70.

[79]Judith Kafka, 'From Discipline to Punishment: Race, Bureaucracy and School Discipline Policy in Los Angeles, 1954–1975' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2004), Ch. 4; 'Jefferson High in Crisis', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 23, 1969, A7. Also see Jeanne Theoharis, '"W-.A-.L-.K-.O-.U-.T!": High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A. ', in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107–30.

[80]'3 Pasadena Schools Face Student Ban', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 20, 1969, A1.

[81]'Marching Students Prompt Conferences', *New York Amsterdam News*, February 24, 1968, 30.

[82]'Blast Whites Teaching Black History', *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 17, 1968, 3.

[83]See, for instance, 'Student Sit-Ins Hit South Shore High', *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 7, 1968, 3; 'Black History to be Required at Dunbar', *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 10, 1968, 2.

[84]'High School Disorders', *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 2, 1969, 13. Also see 'Teachers Poll Shows Growing Student Unrest', *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1970, 9.

examples above suggest.[85] Advocacy of black pride and racial self-esteem became a hallmark of the time, and a way to explore alternatives to the antipathy many felt toward the deficiencies of conventional schooling.

Racial conflict and the decline of protest

The latter half of the 1960s had been a time of upheaval and turmoil for African-Americans, calling traditional movement values of non-violence and tactful demonstration into doubt. A culmination of sorts was reached following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968, when protesters staged angry demonstrations in many cities, burning stores and other businesses. Racial tensions ran high in the wake of these upheavals, which received extensive media coverage.[86] These events inevitably affected the atmosphere in schools, particularly urban secondary institutions. Educators were aware of this, and worried about the examples that 'rioters' offered to black youth, but had few answers to the potential for interracial conflict between students.[87] Many schools eventually became battleground sites as black and white teenagers vented their frustration over desegregation and a range of related issues.

Between 1968 and the early 1970s racial conflict in high schools appears to have reached a peak. In the fall of 1970, a survey conducted by United Press International (UPI) found that more than 650 'racially motivated disturbances' had occurred in high schools across the country over the previous 15 months. The *Wall Street Journal* in the following spring counted additional cases. Black and white students were involved in most such incidents, although other ethnic conflicts also were reported. New York was the scene of regular clashes, with 'scarcely a week (going) by without at least a couple of schools being closed to racial disorders'. Violence also occurred in suburban areas with desegregation. Athletics continued to be a point of conflict, especially with 'intense emotions aroused' between black and white schools.[88] Whenever large numbers of students came together in an atmosphere of contention, the results could be volatile.[89]

These disruptions occurred in a variety of localities and were provoked by a range of circumstances. Reports from Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles described violent confrontations between black and white students, as well as such smaller cities as Dayton, OH, Hamden, CT, Linden, NJ, Ashville, NC, Panama City, FL and Harrisburg, PA, among other places. Incidents occurred in lunchrooms, outside on school grounds, at school assemblies and at other public events.[90] As this pattern of conflict unfolded, incidents appear to have become more

[85]'Nation's Schools Still in the Grip of Disturbances', *Chicago Daily Defender*, March 20, 1969, 5.

[86]Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, Ch. 15.

[87]'Opening Schools After Riots Termed Wise Move', *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 9, 1968, 5

[88]Louis Cassels, UPI, 'High School Tensions Reflect Parents' Viewpoints', *Atlanta Daily World*, November 29, 1970, 1; Jeffrey A. Tannenbaum, 'Student Mayhem', *Wall Street Journal,* May 11, 1971, 1; 'Melee Disrupts PL Cage Opener', *Chicago Defender*, January 8, 1969, 24.

[89]Charles T. Clotfelter, *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 56.

[90]Rury and Hill, *The African American Struggle for Secondary Schooling*, 141–43, 169–71.

severe in many respects, with reports principally in the North but occurring elsewhere too. A 'rock throwing melee' occurred between more than a thousand students in Manatee, Florida following a lunch room incident.[91] On New York's Long Island, dozens of police officers responded to a 'large scale riot' following an incident involving three individuals.[92] In Greenville, South Carolina students fought over black demands that 'Dixie' no longer be played at athletic events, a sore point across the region.[93] Similar outbreaks occurred in Charlotte, North Carolina, Savannah, Georgia,[94] and Boca Raton, FL, where black and white students 'fought with knives and fists, rocks and razors' over 'white power' slogans.[95] As the extent of inter-racial conflict in high schools widened, passions seemed to escalate.

Educators struggled to contain such clashes, and African-American students bore the brunt of their reactions. Inequities in suspensions and expulsions were sometimes glaring. In two Florida cases 'almost all of those disciplined were Black'. The experiences of black students in other districts were similar, and the courts and other authorities did little to address the imbalance.[96] There were serious risks for black students who engaged in protest or responded to racist attacks in the schools. This was especially true in the South, as Joy Ann Williamson has pointed out in her examination of college students in Mississippi. Often defending themselves, African-American students were more likely to face punishment when adults intervened.[97] Whether this had any effect on the incidence of such clashes is unclear, but it did not make integration a pleasant or appealing process for many of them.[98]

Regional differences distinguished student conflicts across the country. Protest activity appears to have escalated sharply in the North, where most blacks lived in larger cities and school segregation was highest by 1972. This followed a more general pattern in the larger Civil Rights Movement, as conflict over a range of issues appears to have shifted decisively to the North, beginning in the latter 1960s.[99] In the South and West there seem to have been considerably fewer such conflicts initiated by students, and a smaller proportion of them attended predominantly black schools. In the opening years of the 1970s black student protests remained regular occurrences in the urban North. Demands for black administrators and teachers were a consistent feature of these outbursts, along with frustration about poor facilities and the attitudes of white educators.[100] Strikes and boycotts also

[91]'68 White Teachers Refuse to Transfer to All Black School in Washington', *Atlanta Daily World*, February 6, 1970, 1.

[92]'Brawls Close L.I. High School', *New York Amsterdam News*, June 12, 1971, 30.

[93]'Parents Join Violence in School', *Atlanta Daily World*, November 8, 1970, 1. Also see 'Tensions Erupt at Ala. School', *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 14, 1970, 3.

[94]'Savannah Students' Third Racial Battle', *Atlanta Daily World*, December 5, 1971, 2.

[95]'School Racial Brawl Injures 18 Students', *Atlanta Daily World*, February 18, 1973, 1.

[96]Ralph Naples (pseudonym), Southern Oral History Project, K556.

[97]Yudoff, 'Suspension and Expulsion of Black Students from the Public Schools', 397–8; also see Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), Ch. 4.

[98]For a compelling treatment of these issues in a case study of a single secondary school, see Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chs. 2 and 6.

[99]McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency*, Ch. 8. Also see Jeanne Theoharis, '"We Saved the City": Black Freedom Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960–1976', *Radical History Review* 81 (Fall 2001): 72.

[100]'100 Students Mob School Bd.', *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 7, 1970, 3.

occurred for other reasons, including dismissal of popular staff members and policies that students found onerous.[101] One newspaper noted that 'black students have had sensational success' in spurring such changes, but these accomplishments eventually meant there were fewer complaints to protest.[102] With time, the curricular and staffing issues gave way to longstanding concerns about deteriorating schools and overcrowding. The recruitment of African-American educators, along with widespread addition of courses in black history, literature and related subjects, meant that these questions eventually ceased to spark much controversy.

As school budgets declined due to eroding property values and middle-class flight to suburbs, the physical state of schools remained a source of turmoil. In 1972 students at Chicago's DuSable High, a particularly old facility, staged a boycott to protest its 'unsanitary' and 'overcrowded' building.[103] A year later students made similar complaints at Westinghouse High on the west side, focusing on its 'deplorable' condition.[104] Within a month, hundreds protested at the cancellation of summer classes because of budget cuts, mainly on the city's largely African-American Southside.[105] In short, in just a few years, student concerns regarding racial identity and pride and the curriculum had given way to issues of facility maintenance and the availability of summer courses.

By the start of the 1970s, African-American high school students had come a long way. They had started the 1960s as seemingly innocent participants in demonstrations and other protest activities organised by adults, serving in campaigns for social justice and equal rights. As the larger Civil Rights Movement began to wind down, however, black students began to organise their own struggles. In doing so, they turned away from the assimilationist ideas of the traditional Civil Rights organisations, and embraced certain tenets of the emerging Black Power perspective, particularly black pride and community self-control. One aspect of this was greater scepticism about white leaders; as one high school student of the era said, by the 1970s 'we were not listening to any white people, at the time, unless they had shown some solidarity with our cause'.[106] The pace at which student protests unfolded was a sign of the times; theirs was a generation that had witnessed protest and organised resistance to inequity from a young age, and student protest was in the air at the time, emanating from the college campuses. But black student protest was primarily a response to conditions in the schools, including the reception African-Americans received when entering previously white institutions in the wake of desegregation.

The changing high school

The protest years brought telling changes to the schools. Courses in black history and culture became far more commonplace, at least for a time, reflecting a surge of

[101]'School Strife Growing? Arrest 9 Waller Students; Hyde Park Remains Closed', *Chicago Defender*, April 8, 1971, 1; 'Students Call off Strike at Lindbloom', *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1971, 1; 'Gage Park Peace on Trial Today', *Chicago Defender*, November 20, 1972, 1.
[102]'Is Black Power Ebbing?', *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 3, 1969, 14.
[103]'At DuSable High: Hint Boycott 'til Christmas', *Chicago Defender*, December 14, 1972, 4.
[104]'Step Up Westinghouse Protest', *Chicago Defender*, May 19, 1973, 1.
[105]'600 Students Protest', *Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1973, 3.
[106]Janice Peters (pseudonym), interviewed by the Southern Oral History Project, 4007, K557.

interest in those topics on college campuses as well. Jonathan Zimmerman has estimated that these classes became commonplace in 'dozens' of districts, an approximation that seems modest given the scope of protests in these years. In appraising its impact, Zimmerman declared 'in less than five years, Black students effected one of the most remarkable transformations of the public school curriculum in the twentieth century'.[107] As he notes, however, it is another question whether the introduction of these courses improved academic achievement as much as their proponents had hoped or predicted. Indeed, a review of high school yearbooks found the increased emphasis on black studies, black history clubs and courses on race relations coincided with a decline in science and literary clubs, although whether one replaced the other is an open question.[108]

Other changes were perhaps even more telling. The number of black administrators and teachers increased too, although the problem of faculty turnover in large urban secondary institutions continued to be evident. Black teenage clothing and hairstyle fashions reflected the new 'black pride' sensibility of times, as 'Afro' haircuts and contemporary urban dress found their way into schools. These trends were readily evident in yearbooks, as well as other visual sources from across the country.[109] Indeed, a distinctive black youth culture, forged in the struggles of the time, was emerging and was quickly embraced by African-American high school students.[110] The emergence of a historically unique black youth identity, with its own sense of fashion, music, magazines and media figures, was a national phenomenon. Partly a product of the battles waged in schools across the country, it was a step in the development of a distinctive Black American identity. In was the dawning of a new awareness for thousands of black high school students, as suggested in a poem published in the 1970 edition of the John Marshal Harlan High School Yearbook, *The Falcon*. The author, Anthony Blackwell, wrote: 'Like clouds of dust shaped by the wind, in Black people a new sense of awareness begins. Aware of a once hidden culture, a hidden identity, and a need to recover our stolen treasure of life.'[111]

By the latter 1970s many black communities were making local institutions into schools they could call their own, focusing improvement efforts on dropouts, drug

[107]Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 119–24.

[108]We reviewed scores of high school yearbooks from this period held at the Kansas City Public Library (Central High, Lincoln High, Paseo High, Southwestern High and Westport High), the Archives of the Chicago Public Schools, and the Carter Woodson Branch of the Chicago Public Library (Austin High, DuSable High, Farragut High, Fenger High, Simeon High and Hyde Park High).

[109]Evident in examination of yearbooks for 1960 to 1975, Central, Lincoln and Paseo high schools in Kansas City, MO; DuSable, Crane and Austin high schools in Chicago. For discussion of this in a celebrated predominantly black school, see Aaron Tyler Rife, 'Sumner High School: A History' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2008), Chapter 5.

[110]Margaret Beale Spencer and Carol Markstrom-Adams, 'Identity Processes among Racial and Ethnic Minority Children in America', *Child Development* 61, no. 2, Special Issue on Minority Children (April 1990): 290–310.

[111]John Marshall Harlan High Yearbook, *The Falcon*, 1970, 1.

use, gang activity and other dangers to urban youth.[112] The new sources of oppression were in the suburbs and state capitols, too distant to mount or sustain the type of action-oriented movement that had characterised the latter 1960s and 1970s. With this, the challenge was one of getting more funding for the schools, and combating growing problems of drugs, teenage pregnancy and crime in urban black neighbourhoods. These were issues without a clear focal point, and they were adult concerns as well, and as such did not lend themselves to mobilising student protest. As a consequence, black student activism had dropped off significantly by the latter 1970s, marking an end to a long tradition of student protest around educational issues. In this respect, it marked the end of an era.

Conclusion

In this article we have focused on the high school as a site of protest and struggle, and the increased militancy and independence of black secondary students as they fought for changes in their schools. We argue that these students were radicalised by the slow pace of change wrought by conservative civil rights organisations such as the NAACP, their own growing sense of pride and efficacy, and their often violence confrontations with whites during integration. The surge in African-American student protests during the latter 1960s and early 1970s can be interpreted as an adjunct to the larger Civil Rights Movement, an echo that refracted through the experiences of students as they encountered racial hostility from whites and deplorable conditions in the schools, particularly in larger cities but elsewhere too. It can also be seen as a time of greater awareness among high school students regarding racial injustice, especially as it affected their own lives, and a willingness to confront injustice directly and forcefully. Thus, while many were drawn into social protest by mainstream organisations such as the NAACP, they emerged as independent actors, often critical of old guard civil rights activism and the dominance of middle-class ideologies. In this awakening they were clearly influenced by the Black Power movement, calls for black pride and community self-determination, and demands for control of vital public resources such as schools. The troubles that NAACP youth councils witnessed were a vivid reflection of the changing ideological orientation of black youth in these years. They were not content to have black history included in the larger study of American history, and many did not want to learn it from white teachers. This was a direct challenge to the assimilationist orientation of the traditional civil rights organisations, and one they were largely unable to resolve.

African-American high school students took on the task of changing their high schools to meet the needs they felt were being ignored. This was the crux of their end of innocence; no longer symbols of denied opportunity, they became potent actors in the national struggle for equality and self-determination. They fought for the curricular changes discussed above, and the hiring of black teachers and administrators to deliver these courses and provide guidance to growing numbers of African-American secondary students. Patterns of protest differed somewhat

[112]See, for instance, the struggle regarding North Division High School in Jack Dougherty, *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Ch. 7.

regionally; students in the South started earlier, stirred by local civil rights struggles, while their counterparts in the North followed later but may have been more militant and confrontational in tone. Whatever the setting, however, these efforts met with considerable success. Strikes and sit-ins, tactics proven effective during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, turned out to be very effective when employed in school settings, particularly in larger cities where such activism garnered attention in the press. Although hard numbers are difficult to determine, by the mid-1970s these courses had become quite commonplace, and growing numbers of schools had hired black teachers. African-American administrators and school board members became more numerous, making the question of deteriorating facilities and out-of date materials less obviously a matter of racial discrimination, at least with regard to local school policies. Black student union 'clubs' also had become commonplace, judging from school yearbooks from the era, reflecting an abiding interest in 'Black Pride' and changing cultural and political aspects of African-American identity. These were palpable signs of this somewhat inchoate movement's success.

In addition to struggling for more black teachers and administrators and black studies, this generation of students also were involved in a great deal of conflict, particularly as they encountered white students in newly integrated secondary institutions. When they felt it necessary, black students also were willing to fight for their rights, and to defend themselves vigorously from attacks by whites, principally students. Such experiences likely did little to persuade them of the desirability of integration as a social and educational goal of schooling. Thousands found themselves subject to ridicule and attack, and when responding in kind they suffered the brunt of official sanctions, including expulsion and suspension rates more than twice the rate of whites. There can be little question that protest and conflict entailed serious risks for them. These circumstances doubtless helped to make Black Power an especially appealing ideological perspective, well suited to the difficult circumstances in which many found themselves.

In the end, however, the protest and conflict phase of black high school student experience was relatively short lived. By the latter 1970s, as a generation of students entered the high schools after attending integrated elementary schools, the degree of inter-racial conflict in the schools appears to have dropped off considerably.[113] As the push for integration slowed, all or predominantly black institutions began to multiply, especially in the North, where most black students lived in large cities. With the curricular and staffing battles largely won, and cash-strapped school districts unable to address many of the problems of the schools, the political impetus of black student protest faded.

The longer legacy of the high school protest movement, as spontaneous as it may have been, is difficult to gauge, but it certainly contributed doubts about the long-term prospects of integration as a goal. Thousands of young African-Americans appeared to conclude that the assimilationist purposes of the traditional Civil Rights Movement were fundamentally flawed, or at least open to question. They fought hard and long for a black perspective in the official school curriculum, and

[113]On this point, see Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Anita Tijerina Revilla and Awo Korantemaa Atanda, *Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation's Graduates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), Ch. 1.

to have black representation in the teaching profession. The sometimes brutal reality of integration with hostile whites only hardened their scepticism about assimilation. This too was an end of innocence, and a generation of educated African-Americans moved on in life with fewer illusions about the possibilities of an integrated future. It is a legacy that continues to be evident today.