

THE EPISCOPAL AWAKENING:  
BLACK POWER AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL INCLUSION

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## ABSTRACT

### The Episcopal Awakening: Black Power and the Struggle for Racial Inclusion

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As shouts for “Black Power” rang through the air in 1966, the disenfranchisement of black Americans was no longer a nuanced reality. Black Power became a national movement focused on the self-development and self-sufficiency of all black Americans. This thesis looks at how the Black Power Movement evolved within the Episcopal Church from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s. Through the use of primary texts and archival materials, this research provides insights into the creative use of Black Power ideology and the philosophies of Black Power advocates in the Church, most notably, the Rev. Nathan Wright. Wright was an Episcopal priest, an architect of the Black Power Movement, and chair of the National Conference on Black Power in 1967. His work is crucial in analyzing how the Church viewed its role in the larger American society and how it answered the calls for Black Power. With a focus on the Episcopal Diocese of Newark in the aftermath of the deadly black rebellion in 1967, this thesis provides a history of the evolution of Black Power within the larger Episcopal Church as it grappled with the question of the Church’s role in social issues and the black freedom struggle. These tensions proved contentious through what one bishop called the decade of “Episcopal Awakening.”

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

As a new day began on May 19, 2018, millions of Americans awoke and tuned their televisions to the much-anticipated marriage of Prince Harry and American television actress Meghan Markle. Amid the pomp and circumstance that accompanied the royal wedding at St. George’s Chapel in Windsor that day, an impassioned sermon about love caught the attention of the world. “There is power in love,” the Most Rev. Michael Curry preached, “we were made by a power of love and our lives were meant to be lived with that love.” Curry, the first African-American Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the American branch of Anglicanism, “blew the [church] open” with his sermon about the need for love at the center of our spiritual and political lives.<sup>1</sup> Instantly, the Black Bishop from Chicago, as he was known in the media, became one of the most recognizable bishops in the world, was spoofed on *Saturday Night Live*, and became a point of pride for Anglicans and Episcopalians around the globe.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Woods, “Justin Welby: Curry’s Royal wedding sermon ‘blew the place open,’” *Christianity Today*, May 20, 2018. <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/justin-welby-currys-royal-wedding-sermon-blew-the-place-open/129272.htm>.

The same morning, nearly 3500 miles across the Atlantic Ocean, the Episcopal Diocese of Newark gathered to elect its eleventh bishop at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Morristown, New Jersey. In prayerful deliberation, the delegates from nearly one hundred churches around the diocese cast their ballots for their next spiritual leader. As the results were placed on the large projection screen in the church's nave, an audible gasp followed by applause and jubilation filled the church. On the first ballot, the Episcopal Diocese of Newark elected the Rev. Carlye J. Hughes as its new bishop. Hughes, a priest from Fort Worth, Texas, would become the first African-American and the first woman to lead the diocese in its nearly 140-year history.<sup>2</sup>

In the weeks leading up to her consecration as bishop, Rev. Hughes' image was placed alongside the ten white-male diocesan bishops that came before her. It was a powerful statement and testament to the progress made toward full-inclusion and diversity in the Episcopal Church over the past fifty years. On September 22, 2018 Hughes became the fourth black woman to be consecrated bishop in the Episcopal Church. In another powerful showing of "the power of love" at the center of the collective spiritual life of the diocese was a monumental gathering to consecrate Hughes as spiritual head of the Diocese of Newark. Bishop Curry presided over this monumental gathering, held at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in downtown Newark. Hughes' consecration was a day to reflect on the radical changes that have taken place in the Episcopal Church since the fight for black<sup>3</sup> equality at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement.

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<sup>2</sup> Nina Nicholson, "Carlye J. Hughes elected Diocese of Newark's 11<sup>th</sup> Bishop: first woman, first African-American to lead the diocese," *Episcopal News Service*, May 21, 2018. <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/05/21/carlye-j-hughes-elected-diocese-of-newarks-11th-bishop/>

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis I use "black" instead of "African American" in most situations. Thanks to Stokely Carmichael and others, "Black Power" became a symbol of hope and strength at the end of the 1960s. The term "black" became a more inclusive representation for everyone in

I was asked to process into the consecration liturgy with a delegation of youth who had traveled to the Episcopal Church's 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention in Austin, Texas the summer prior. As we took our seats four rows from the stage, I found myself in awe of the living history that was happening right in front of me – the “power of love” being revealed by the presence of so many who were present that day. Down the aisles of NJPAC came one bishop after another who have each helped pave the way for Bishop Hughes' consecration: The Rt. Rev. Eugene Sutton, first black bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland; The Rt. Rev. Jenifer Baskerville-Burrows, first black female diocesan bishop in the Episcopal Church from the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis; The Rt. Rev. DeDe Duncan-Probe, the first woman to serve as bishop of the Diocese of Central New York; The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris, the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion; The Most Rev. Michael Curry, the first black Presiding Bishop in the Episcopal Church; and more.

The Episcopal Church's full inclusion of blacks, women, and other minorities made the most critical strides toward advancement during the Civil Rights Movements in the United States. Religious institutions were undeniably entrenched in the racial and political tensions of the 1960s and like many predominantly white denominations, the 1960s were a time of racial awakening for Episcopalians. As the American branch of Anglicanism, formed after the American Revolution, the Episcopal Church is an institution deeply connected to the political and cultural consciousness of the United States. (The Episcopal Church shares a model of governance with the United States and eleven U.S. Presidents have identified as “Episcopalian.”)<sup>4</sup> Issues of race and Civil Rights have been both a cause for tension and triumph in the denomination.

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a community, whether they were from Africa, the Caribbean, or South America. Additionally, “negro/es” is used only if in a direct quote.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Lipka, “5 Facts about Episcopalians,” *Pew Research Center*, July 2, 2018.

After deadly and destructive black rebellions in Watts, Detroit, and Newark in the 1960s, it became evident that racial tensions were at a critical breaking point in the United States. The Episcopal Church found itself at the center of American cultural affairs, personal faith, and public religion. Should the Episcopal Church be involved in social issues and the Black Freedom Struggle? Or, should the church remain silent on matters unrelated to “saving souls”? These questions became imbedded into the history of the denomination, and they have and continue to challenge how Episcopalians live out their faith as Christians. The political turbulence of the 1960s was divisive and the Episcopal Church was forced to examine its role within the larger political and cultural movements of the day. As calls for “Black Power” began in 1966, the Church was once again faced with a dilemma of how to respond. Some leaders in the Episcopal Church viewed Black Power as a creative and redemptive concept while others in the Church viewed it as a racist, separatist ideology against the foundation of the Christian faith.

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr., an Episcopal priest and the Executive Director of the Department of Urban Work for the Episcopal Diocese of Newark believed that Black Power would help renew the church. He wrote:

There are no institutions which have more to gain from the current focus of Black Power than the churches of America, both black and white. The churches, in both conscious and unconscious ways, have contributed toward the resurgence of racial self-awareness and the assertion of dignity and self-respect which Black Power represents. In return, the churches may receive their greatest boost and challenge for their cleansing, regeneration, and fulfillment.<sup>5</sup>

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/02/5-facts-about-episcopalians/>.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., *Black Power and Urban Unrest* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1968), 135.

Wright was an emerging leader within the Black Power Movement as it provoked the American consciousness in June 1966. He believed that if the church could harness the redemptive message of Black Power, it could bring about real change in the Episcopal Church and society at large. Individual self-awareness and awakening, for blacks and whites, would lead to a change in the very foundation of how power and leadership are shared inside the church and out.

As scholarship on the Black Power Movement continues to evolve, this research often neglects the critical involvement of religious institutions, especially the vital role of some within the Episcopal Church. This thesis provides a foundational understanding of how the Black Power Movement evolved within the Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark but failed to establish the long-term impact of black empowerment the movement strived to produce. This research relies heavily on the use of archival research and primary sources to demonstrate how the Black Power Movement influenced the Episcopal Diocese of Newark and the city of Newark. By highlighting the successes and failures of the movement and how tensions within the movement were transformed into action, Newark and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark became a backdrop for some of the most radical and concrete work of the Black Power Movement. From the election of the first black dean to lead an Episcopal cathedral in 1969, The Very Rev. Dillard Robinson, to the first black mayor of a major city in 1970, Kenneth Gibson, Newark led the way for the Episcopal Church and the nation as “Black Power” rang out.

The Black Power Movement became the basis of the Episcopal Church’s direct social action programs in the late 1960s, however, the Episcopal Church failed to allow its own black leadership and membership to establish their identity and equitable power within the denomination. This becomes apparent as my work examines the writings of The Rev.

Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr. Wright, in addition to his work in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, became one of the architects of the Black Power Movement when he chaired the National Conference on Black Power in July 1967. His unique role as priest, educator, and Black Power advocate helped transform the Episcopal Church and its awareness of issues of race, power, and inclusion. Finally, this thesis explores how the racial tensions nationwide informed the Church's response through social action and empowerment programs from the mid-1960s through early 1970.

### **Historiography of the Black Power Movement**

It has been over 50 years since the battle cry of Stokely Carmichael rang through the air in Greenwood, Mississippi on June 16, 1966: "We been saying freedom for six years and we ain't got nothin. What we got to start saying now is Black Power! We want Black Power."<sup>6</sup> Carmichael, the recently appointed chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), jolted the American consciousness with a revolution aimed at black empowerment in the American political, economic, and social systems. The Black Power Movement shifted the black freedom struggle away from the integration models of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and toward a model demanding more radical solutions to racism in America. In the months following, the Black Power Movement had evolved within the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) to become a national strategy aimed at black unity.

On July 20, 1967, the "Black Power Movement" became formalized as it convened The National Conference on Black Power in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>7</sup> The conference

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<sup>6</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 209-10.

<sup>7</sup> Floyd B. Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays* (Boston, MA:

included leaders from across the black political and religious spectrum, including Jesse Jackson, Ron Karenga, of the US Organization in Los Angeles, Floyd McKissick, of CORE, H. Rap Brown, Chairman of SNCC, and Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones). Over 1000 people from 26 states, 126 cities, and 286 organizations attended the four-day conference focused on the unification of Black Power leaders from around the country.<sup>8</sup>

The culmination of the National Conference on Black Power led to an abundance of literature on the subject as leaders of the movement sought to define the political, economic, historical, and theological meaning of Black Power while outlining a way forward. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1967), by Stokely Carmichael and political scientist Charles V. Hamilton became a revolutionary text in defining the Black Power Movement. The authors lay out the need for blacks in America to unify and establish a united front against racism. In explaining the then-current political environs in the United States, Carmichael and Hamilton identified racism's two forms: overt individual racism (white individual to black individual) and covert institutional racism (white community to black community). They go on to write:

When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of the society. But when in that same city – Birmingham, Alabama – five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism.<sup>9</sup>

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Extending Horizons Books, 1968), 190.

<sup>8</sup> Barbour, *The Black Power Revolt*, 190.

<sup>9</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967), 4.

Covert, institutional racism is what Carmichael and Hamilton hoped to combat with their calls for Black Power by creating an equal playing field for blacks and whites. In *Black Power*, they develop a political strategy for black communities to fight for radical change, and to obtain equal opportunities for economic and social advancement in all aspects of society through individual self-determination. They believed a collective and militant Black Power effort could create a movement that would eliminate the social and racial constructs built by western civilizations. This text became a foundational text defining Black Power at the end of the 1960s.

Published shortly after the National Conference on Black Power, *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays* (1968) edited by Floyd B. Barbour, surveyed the newly organized Black Power Movement through a historical analysis of black thinkers, defining the concept of Black Power, and constructing a creative path to the future for the unity of all black people. With essays from Ron Karenga, Floyd McKissick, Charles V. Hamilton, Stokely Carmichael, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Leroi Jones, Nathan Wright, and other prominent Black Power voices, *The Black Power Revolt* becomes a theoretical and introductory text for understanding the movement.

An often-overlooked element of Black Power is the way black religious leaders helped the movement evolve as it confronted the white power structure of most Protestant Christian religious denominations. As in American society, many white denominations lived into the institutional racism described by Carmichael and Hamilton. It was nearly impossible for black clergy to establish themselves as leaders and equals to their white peers and hold power within their respective denominations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 168.

Nathan Wright, an Episcopal priest and an emerging leader in the Black Power Movement, wrote *Black Power and Urban Unrest: Creative Possibilities* (1967) to bridge the divide between Carmichael and SNCC's secular Black Power Movement and the role of religious institutions. As a preview to his book *Ready to Riot* (1968) – a text synthesizing and interpreting why a black rebellion happened in Newark in 1967 – *Black Power and Urban Unrest* provides an eloquent defense of Black Power and applies positive implications to a divisive subject. *Black Power and Urban Unrest* rationalizes the Black Power Movement as one that is essential to the growth, development, and well-being of the entire nation. In this justification of the movement, Wright brings the goals of Black Power – the fulfillment of each person's real potential – in line with the goals of American society and its institutions.

Wright, in addition to being an Episcopal priest, was a sociologist and educator. His analysis of Black Power was read by both whites and blacks as a way to understand the intricacies of what Black Power meant for religious people. *Black Power and Urban Unrest* and his 1968 Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *Let's Work Together*, became integral parts of the early Black Power canon and helped expand Black Power into the religious landscape of American life.

James H. Cone helped expand Wright's philosophy into a mainstream black religious consciousness in *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969). This book was the first in a series of texts by Cone, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, to lay the historical foundation for black liberation theology. Writing at the end of one of the most turbulent decades in history, Cone argued that blacks could no longer accept the traditional oppressive theology of white Christianity. He believed that the “white theology” that liberates blacks from this world in heaven – and not on earth – is a wrong

way of living a Christian life. Instead, he suggested a shift in the theological paradigm that tackles the evils of institutions that discriminate against blacks while privileging whites. Cone believed that God resides with those dismantling oppressive institutions and systematic inequality in the world. Cone articulates the theology of liberation further in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975).

As Black Power thought evolved through the end of the 1960s, disagreements between scholars, historians, and movement leaders began to develop around the best strategies for blacks to make gains in the American social hierarchy. Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), highlights the disagreements by criticizing both the integration model<sup>11</sup> favored by white and black liberals and the black nationalist / segregationist model<sup>12</sup> sought by some Black Power leaders. Cruse, a social critic and later professor of African American Studies at the University of Michigan, provides an historical analysis of race throughout American history. He also critiques how prominent black intellectuals like W.E.B. DuBois and James Baldwin struggled to understand the distinctly American form of racism because of their place within the society they observe. Cruse ultimately believed that for black Americans to establish a just place in American life they must develop their own cultural and economic influence by rejecting the status quo of what

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<sup>11</sup> The integrationist model believed that blacks and whites should live, work, and study together. Government policies designed to accomplish these goals include school busing, affirmative action in public schools and in the workplace, forced integration of public housing, and laws barring discrimination in housing and employment.

Franklin Foer, "Racial Integration," *Slate*, November 23, 1997. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/1997/11/racial-integration.html>.

<sup>12</sup> The black nationalist / segregationist model sought control over black communities, black schools, black businesses, and the self-development of the black community through black-led efforts. In the 1960s, more radical calls for black nationalism suggested a separate black nation-state in the American South.

Franklin Foer, "Racial Integration," *Slate*, November 23, 1997. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/1997/11/racial-integration.html>.

he considered the false vision of “Americanness.” The tensions highlighted by Cruse between the integrationist model and the black nationalist model of Civil Rights and Black Power continued to enlighten and stultify movement leaders as they struggled for the advancement of blacks throughout the country.

In the five decades since Carmichael’s impassioned Black Power speech, the movement, overall, has remained an understudied segment of the larger Civil Rights Movement. Peniel Joseph, a professor of urban affairs at the University of Texas in Austin, blames this on the widely-believed traditional notion that Black Power undermined the nonviolent era of Civil Rights.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, Joseph has been pivotal in defining the significance of “Black Power Studies” as a way to understand and study the movement in collaboration with – not exclusive from – other movements in the black freedom struggle. Research on the Black Power Movement will continue to demonstrate that collaboration and its lasting impact on the culture.

As the relevance of the Black Power Movement began to diminish in the mid-1970s, Joseph believed many historians wrote off the movement as one with little influence in broader society. Black Power advocates became easy targets for dismissal and demonization, because of their militaristic rhetoric, misogyny, and radical messaging.<sup>14</sup> It was not until Clayborne Carson’s *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (1981) that historians began to unpack the student movements of the 1960s, the lasting impact they had on society, and the evolution of Black Power.

*In Struggle* dissects the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and its revolutionary influence on the Civil Rights Era. Clayborne Carson, a history professor

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<sup>13</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, “The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, No.3 (Dec 2009): 751.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

at Stanford University, was deeply influenced by SNCC and the movement it transformed. This influence compelled Carson to write both sympathetically, intellectually, and critically of the organization. Written through a series of interviews with SNCC leaders and the examination of primary sources from the era, this book provides the first comprehensive history of SNCC from 1960 through its disbanding in the early 1970s. Throughout *In Struggle*, Carson breaks down SNCC's student-led movement into three stages: the birth of SNCC and the fundamental shift, the inward struggle for a cohesive vision, and finally, the radical message of Black Power.

*In Struggle* leads the way for other comprehensive analysis of the evolving Black Power Movement. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (1998) by Gayraud S. Wilmore seamlessly integrates the religious history of African Americans and the black struggle for freedom and justice. Wilmore, a historian of the African American church and an ordained Presbyterian minister, demonstrates how the history for black equality in religious institutions – from the emancipation of slaves to the rise of the Black Power Movement – is inseparable from the traditional account of those movements. Wilmore's research in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* contributes immensely in examining the role of the Black Power Movement in both traditionally black and white Christian denominations, while also exploring the black Jewish and Islamic traditions.

Looking more granularly at the history of race within the Episcopal Church, Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr.'s *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (2001) provides an unparalleled account of the black struggle within the denomination. The Episcopal Church, a fairly conservative denomination active during the Civil Rights Movement, found itself at the center of the Black Power struggle in the 1960s as it

determined whether their focus was to “save souls” or speak out against injustice in society. This overarching question lingered within the denomination throughout what The Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark in the 1960s, called the “decade of Episcopal Awakening.”<sup>15</sup>

*Episcopalians and Race* surveys the predominantly white Episcopal Church and race relations from the mid-nineteenth century through the end of the Civil Rights Era. Shattuck, an Episcopal priest with a Ph.D. from Harvard University, outlines a history of the failures, successes, and ambitious goals set forth by Episcopal leadership to combat – and arguably intensify – racial tensions in the United States. While Shattuck lays out a timeline of race in the Episcopal Church, his narrowly focused research concentrates on the 1960s. This focus provides a framework for the evolution of race relations in the denomination that led to the cries for Black Power within the larger Church.

Peniel Joseph’s *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, titled after the 1965 hit song by Wilson Pickett, has changed the way historians study the Black Power Movement. Joseph offers a vision of Black Power that differs from the historical misconception of a racist movement. Rather, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour* shifts the narrative toward an aggressive pursuit of economic and political power for blacks in America. Joseph views the Black Power Movements struggle for black equality as a complement to the traditional conciliatory Civil Rights Movement of King and the SCLC. Focusing throughout on Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, this text develops the outside influences that incubated the Black Power Movement into existence. *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*

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<sup>15</sup> Leland Stark, “A Bishops’ Pastoral Letter,” *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), October 1969, 2.

reimagines the progress in the Black Power Movement with the nuance and complexity of understanding required to further Black Power studies.

Gary Dorrien's *Breaking White Supremacy* – the sequel to *The New Abolition: W.E.B. DuBois and the Black Social Gospel* (2015) – contributes immensely to the study of Black Power, especially as it lends itself to the historical lineage and rise of black liberation theology. As a contemporary of James Cone at Union Theological Seminary, Dorrien provides intimate highlights into the theologian's upbringing and his struggle for acceptance of black liberation theology in academia. Dorrien, a professor of religion at Columbia University and an Episcopal priest, articulates with tremendous detail the inner-workings of church history as it relates to the broader Civil Rights Movement by knitting together the lives of prominent religious leaders and educators, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin Elijah Mays, Howard Thurman, and Pauli Murray. Murray was a Civil Rights activist whose writing helped defend the 1954 Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Murray would later benefit from the work of Black Power advocates like Episcopalian Nathan Wright as she became the first African American female ordained in the Episcopal Church in 1977.

*Breaking White Supremacy*, like *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, offers a narrative emphasizing the complicated and overlapping relationships between and among SCLC, CORE, SNCC, and other secular and religious leaders. These relationships are crucial in understanding the how the movements evolved simultaneously. One of many takeaways from Dorrien's book, especially as it relates to Black Power, is his humanization of the larger-than-life Black Power advocate Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Powell, a representative for Harlem's congressional district and senior minister at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, was integral in vocalizing black self-

determination, black consciousness, and black pride. On the floor of Congress in 1966, Powell presented a 17-point Black Power position paper that demanded equal opportunity and equal treatment for black Americans under the law.<sup>16</sup> Dorrien weaves Powell's contributions and the contributions of the above-mentioned Civil Rights leaders together flawlessly.

As the Black Power Movement evolved through history, the Christian religious components of the movement were often overlooked or underrepresented in non-religious circles. Not surprisingly, Black Power literature in the two decades that followed the movement became dominated by the autobiographies of leaders like Malcolm X (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told by Alex Haley*), Stokely Carmichael (*Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael*), H. Rap Brown (*Die Nigger Die!*), Angela Davis (*Angela Davis: An Autobiography*), Huey P. Newton (*Revolutionary Suicide*), and Assata Shakur (*Assata: An Autobiography*) – leaders that garnered attention and influence in the Nation of Islam (NOI) or the Black Panther Party (BPP). These autobiographies provide an invaluable understanding of the Black Power struggle as a movement fighting for social, cultural, political, and economic transformation in a racist and oppressive society. Recent scholarship has expanded this base of literature with biographies of additional movement leaders. Two noteworthy examples include *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (2011) by Manning Marable and *Stokely: A Life* (2014) by Peniel Joseph. These biographies about the man that embodied Black Power, Malcolm X, and the man who amplified the movement, Stokely Carmichael, are sure to continue the conversation about the significant contributions of Black Power for years to come.

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<sup>16</sup> Barbour, *The Black Power Revolt*, 257-260.

The emerging historiography of the Black Power Movement will continue to transform historical understanding of postwar America. Future scholarship invites a reassessment of how the Black Power Movement restructured the notions of citizenship, identity, and democracy for black Americans. As historians and interdisciplinary scholars unravel the vast landscape of Black Power, its influence as one of the most important and controversial movements for social justice will continue to be revealed. This scholarship will reshape our understanding of the movements for Civil Rights in the United States. This thesis begins to uncover the role of the Episcopal Church in the movement toward Black Power.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **The Emergence of Black Power**

Black Power is the most creative social concept to be advanced in our present century, and is perhaps potentially one of the most productive theological concepts of all time. It raises the deeply practical and eternal questions of “Who are we?” and “To what purpose were we born?”<sup>17</sup>

– The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr.

On February 1, 1960, four black college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College ignited one of the most significant student movements of the Civil Rights era as they sat at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. This act of civil disobedience challenged the Jim Crow laws and sparked an inundation of student “sit-ins” throughout the South. College students mobilized in the black freedom struggle like never before. Within three months of the Greensboro sit-in, Ella Baker, the executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), convened the

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<sup>17</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “Black Power: Crisis or Challenge for the Churches?,” *Context: Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago* 1, No. 3 (Spring/Summer 1968): 3.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC, pronounced "SNICK") founding conference in April 1960. With the help of Baker and others, SNCC was born as a student-led movement to mobilize college students and institute major social reforms.<sup>18</sup>

After its founding, SNCC fought for a place within the larger Civil Rights Movement. Unsatisfied with the slow results of non-violent protests led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and SCLC, SNCC's core leadership worked as an independent organization with a group-centered leadership structure focused on direct action in disenfranchised communities. With no one person speaking for the organization, SNCC was able to work within communities, build trust with local families, raise-up black leaders, and revolutionize the Civil Rights Movement from the ground up.<sup>19</sup> Building a movement focused on direct action in black communities allowed SNCC to mobilize around causes like the Congress of Racial Equality's (CORE) Freedom Rides in 1961 and work to register black voters throughout the Mississippi Delta and the South. This direct action, grassroots organizing led to the formation of a southern black political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), in 1964. MFDP was the first political party designed to give a voice to blacks while also promoting political engagement in the democratic process. MFDP ultimately failed to get any of its congressional candidates elected in Mississippi in 1964. The MFDP did, however, change the political landscape by shifting the nation's focus to the economic conditions of black Americans and gave blacks in the South a sense of identity within the larger society.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, 9-18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-27.

<sup>20</sup> "Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party Founded," *SNCC Digital Gateway*.  
<https://snccdigital.org/events/mfdp-founded/>.

After the failures of the MFDP in 1964, SNCC leaders, both white and black, convened the Waveland Conference in Waveland, Mississippi to discuss the future direction of the organization. Since its founding in 1960, SNCC continued to grow in size and the movement's ideology expanded. Many within SNCC were beginning to believe a more radical approach was needed to serve the communities with which they worked. At the Waveland Conference, position papers presented by SNCC members began to question the viability of non-violence, the role education in its direct-action programs, and ultimately, the role of whites within the organization.

By the mid-1960s, SNCC had evolved from a loosely religious-centered movement to a secular one linked to the ideology of Karl Marx and Malcolm X.<sup>21</sup> At that time, SNCC began straying from the integration model of the Civil Rights Movement and sought to disrupt the status quo throughout the South. In 1965 its radical efforts evolved to include voter education efforts in Lowndes County, Georgia. When SNCC arrived in Lowndes, the county was eighty-percent black but only one black person was registered to vote.<sup>22</sup> SNCC was determined to give agency to the black community in Lowndes.

“Why complain about police brutality,” Courtland Cox, a SNCC worker in Lowndes County, asks, “when you can be the sheriff yourself?”<sup>23</sup> This question struck a chord with blacks in the county and helped to frame the work of SNCC within the community. Politics in Lowndes County was seen by blacks as a “white man's cause,” however, SNCC leaders like Stokely Carmichael sought to change that mentality through

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<sup>21</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, 215-228.

<sup>22</sup> “SNCC Makes Contact in Lowndes County,” *SNCC Digital Gateway*.  
<https://snccdigital.org/events/sncc-makes-contact-in-lowndes-county/>.

<sup>23</sup> “SNCC's Voter Education Efforts in Lowndes,” *SNCC Digital Gateway*.  
<https://snccdigital.org/events/snccs-voter-education-efforts-in-lowndes/>.

the creation of a political action party, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). LCFO used personal relationships with residents, community seminars and other mediums of sharing information, like comic books, which were all extremely effective especially because of the low rate of literacy in the county. It used the black panther as its symbol. This allowed SNCC to educate the black electorate about the democratic process and how to navigate the bureaucratic system of voter registration. Education programs empowered Lowndes County residents with the confidence needed to try and take back seats in the county elections. While LCFO failed to get black members elected to county positions in 1966, the 1966 election did eventually empower a number of black leaders like Sherriff John Hulett, to be elected in 1971.<sup>24</sup> The work done by SNCC in Lowndes was the beginning of a shift toward the idea of Black Power through the means of political engagement, education, and self-empowerment.

Although President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965, blacks still remained fundamentally disenfranchised in American society. Even after these two monumental pieces of legislation were passed, less than seven percent of voting-age blacks were registered to vote in Mississippi.<sup>25</sup> James Meredith, a Civil Rights activist and the first African American student admitted to the segregated University of Mississippi, sought to inspire other blacks in the South to register to vote by setting out on a 220-mile march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi in June 1966. Meredith's solo march was not coordinated with SCLC, SNCC, or any of the other Civil Rights organizations. Leaders of

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<sup>24</sup> "Lowndes County Freedom Party (LCFP)," *SNCC Digital Gateway*. <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/alliances-relationships/lcfp/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Race and Voting in the Segregated South," *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, accessed March 2, 2019. <http://www.crf-usa.org/brown-v-board-50th-anniversary/race-and-voting.html>.

SNCC and SCLC thought Meredith's march was irresponsible, and even considered it a suicide march. Meredith believed differently: "If I can walk through Mississippi without harm," he told reporters covering the march, "other negroes will see they can, too."<sup>26</sup>

On the second day of the march, however, Meredith was shot by a member of the Ku Klux Klan. In response to this violent act, Martin Luther King Jr. of SCLC, Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, and Floyd McKissick of CORE organized "The James Meredith March Against Fear."<sup>27</sup> In an interview with Carmichael by his side, King says methodically: "We are continuing this march started by James Meredith, and I am convinced that this March will have a great impact, probably a greater impact than the march from Selma to Montgomery." The march, however, did not have the same unity as the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965 that raised awareness and support for the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Instead, tensions were evident between King's non-violent civil integration model and the model Carmichael created that demanded equitable power for black Americans through any means necessary, including violence.<sup>28</sup>

After Carmichael's arrest during the Meredith March in June 1966, he spoke to a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, rejected the integration model of the Civil Rights Movement, and demanded "Black Power." Carmichael's use of the phrase was quickly adopted by SNCC and called on "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 define their own

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<sup>26</sup> *King in the Wilderness*, directed by Peter Kunhardt, (2018; United States: HBO, 2018), Documentary.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 165-166.

goals, to lead their own organizations.”<sup>29</sup> For blacks living in Newark, New Jersey in the mid-1960s, the need for a movement of Black Power could not have been more timely.

### **The Urban Crisis in Newark**

Like in the Southern United States, blacks in northern ghettos like Newark faced implicit segregation and bias in their daily lives through political disenfranchisement. Black Newark residents suffered at the hands of police and politicians placed to serve within their community. The racial inequity in the city were exemplified in a number of cases. A missing headlight and a noisy muffler got Lester Long pulled over by police officers in the summer of 1965. After a routine traffic stop, Long, an African American, was killed by the Newark officers. The initial report suggested that the officer slipped, and his gun accidentally discharged, killing Long. One week later the report was changed and stated that Long was detained in the police car and attacked the officer with a knife. After escaping the police car, the report continues, Long was shot in the back as he ran away. Eyewitness accounts conflicted with police reports.<sup>30</sup>

Inside a Newark prison later that summer, security guards murdered a black inmate, Bernard Rich. Police reports claim Rich was deranged and committed suicide by “banging his head against the wall of the cell.” The coroner’s report indicated severe bruising all over Rich’s body – in addition to the head trauma – that did not resemble self-inflicted wounds.<sup>31</sup>

In December 1965, Walter Mathis, a seventeen-year-old black boy, was shot in the back and killed by off duty Newark officers. A white resident claimed Mathis and his

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>30</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., *Ready to Riot* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 5.

friends mugged him and demanded that the officers take action. Police reports indicate the group of teens attacked the officers but the Newark coroner and other city officials determined the wounds could only have been afflicted with Mathis' hands above his head.<sup>32</sup>

By early 1967, tensions were severely strained between blacks and whites in the city of Newark. In addition to the repeated mishandling of blacks at the hands of law enforcement, the predominantly white power structure of the city was dismantling the very fabric of "home" for many of Newark's black residents. Mayor Addonizio proposed a plan to remove twenty-two thousand residents from the "black ghetto" housing projects in the Central Ward to make room for a 150-acre campus for a state medical and dental school, now part of Rutgers University. His plan was praised by those in power and moved through the bureaucratic process quickly. Many blacks living in the area cried foul because they were not properly consulted, properly reimbursed for their land, or properly prepared for relocation. The plan displaced twenty-two thousand residents. Newark leadership pushed for "urban renewal" by "negro removal."<sup>33</sup>

Quickly after controversy over the medical and dental school subsided, City Hall announced their choice for Secretary of the Board of Education. Two candidates were bidding for the position: James Callaghan, a white, politically-connected high school drop out with a GED, and Wilber Parker, a young, black academic with a Bachelor's and Master's degree from Cornell University in business administration as a certified public accountant. An activist in Newark deemed "the position of the Secretary of the Board of Education as the most crucial for the city's public schools" because the Secretary controlled

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas A. McCabe, *Miracle on High Street: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of St. Benedict's Prep in Newark, N.J.*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 163.

school budgets and the official work of the board. Mr. Parker was widely supported by religious leaders, businessmen, educators, and local newspaper editorials.

Mayor Addonizio and City Hall chose the white candidate, James Callaghan. Nathan Wright, a priest working in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark at the time, wrote: “The Mayor’s insistence on supporting the less-qualified man was said to have reinforced the notion that, however well-qualified, black men could not succeed.”<sup>34</sup> At the time of Callaghan’s appointment, the Newark public school system was eighty percent African American. Protests were focused around the mayor’s appointment for Board of Education and there were calls for Callaghan’s resignation. In a *Newark Evening News* article from May 29, 1967, Harry Wheeler, a Newark public school teacher, said that the decision would be “the catalyst for blood running in the streets of Newark like there has never been anywhere else in America.”<sup>35</sup> In late June, City Hall released a statement that “the Secretary of the Board would not resign and no vacancy would exist.”<sup>36</sup>

The mid-twentieth century was a time of rapid change for the city of Newark. As postwar suburbanization took hold in northern New Jersey, blacks began moving to Newark from the southern United States in what became known as the Second Great Migration. With many blacks coming from poor farming communities, Newark was an attractive destination because of its cheap, though substandard, housing options. The non-white population in Newark grew from eleven percent in 1940 to fifty-six percent in 1970, a 466 percent increase. As blacks moved into Newark, whites moved to the suburbs; from 1940 to 1970 the white population in the city decreased by fifty-six percent. Many whites

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, *Ready to Riot*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

left the city “because they feared living near blacks, whom they considered culturally different and in some vague way beacons of greater poverty and crime.”<sup>37</sup> These shifts were exacerbated by redlining<sup>38</sup> and the fear that “race mixing” would decrease property values in local neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> This massive urban shift yielded a change in social demographics but maintained the white power structure found in Newark economics and politics. Blacks in the city were tremendously underrepresented in the city’s political leadership at all levels.

### **Nathan Wright and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark**

The Episcopal Diocese of Newark, with headquarters in downtown Newark, was painfully aware of the inequality dividing blacks and whites in Newark. In an effort to address these issues, the diocese’s Executive Council established a new position: The Executive Director of the Department of Urban Work. The role was the first of its kind in the Episcopal Church to “assist in the development of long-range programs to meet new urban needs and opportunities in the diocese.”<sup>40</sup> During the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, the Episcopal Diocese of Newark was led by the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, the sixth bishop of Newark, and the Rt. Rev. George E. Rath, bishop suffragan.<sup>41</sup> Both believed in racial equality and the role of the Church in supporting minority struggles. The views

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<sup>37</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 212-213.

<sup>38</sup> Redlining was a practice that discriminated against black homebuyers by denying them access to G.I. Bill of Rights and FHA Loans (government backed loans) when purchasing homes. Redlining was also used as way to segregate neighborhoods by denying blacks entrance into certain white-only communities.

<sup>39</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, 212-213

<sup>40</sup> “News Release from The Episcopal Diocese of Newark,” October 5, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>41</sup> In the Episcopal and Anglican tradition, the bishop suffragan serves as the assistant to the diocesan bishop and can perform duties of the bishop in his or her absence.

held by the bishops, however, were not always widely shared among the clergy and lay leadership of the diocese. In an address to its annual diocesan convention, Bishop Stark called on fellow clergy and lay leaders of the diocese to support the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which “outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”<sup>42</sup> Standing firmly against some outspoken priests and laypeople in the diocese who believed the church should only focus on “saving souls,” Stark stated:

Not all church people are by any means in accord with the point-of-view, and indeed they regard the current involvement of the church in the Civil Rights issue as unwarranted political engagement from which they believe the Church should speedily disengage itself. Indeed, I have had not a few letters and phone calls, some of them irate, protesting the role of leadership that many of our clergy and laity have taken in the struggle against racial inequality, a struggle that I predict will not abate, and should not abate, until justice is done.<sup>43</sup>

While some within the Episcopal Diocese of Newark believed that the church should not be involved in the work of abating racial inequality, Stark strived to stand with those working toward justice. As a believer in the positive impact the church could leverage in wider society, he sought to support the marginalized within his community. Stark knew the church had a role to play in combating racial injustice, and, despite significant opposition and backlash, was determined to make a positive impact. Stark hired The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright as the director of the newly-formed Diocesan Department of Urban Work in September 1964:<sup>44</sup> “The problems and opportunities facing the Diocese as it comes to grips with metropolitan Newark are extensive and demanding. I believe that you

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<sup>42</sup> “The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,” *The National Archives*, accessed December 7, 2018. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act>.

<sup>43</sup> *1964 Journal of the Diocese of Newark: The Proceedings of the Ninetieth Annual Convention, May 16, 1964*, (Newark: Cathedral House, 1964), 43-44.

<sup>44</sup> Leland Stark, Letter to Nathan Wright, Jr., August 20, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

are the man of the kind of stature to give the Diocese real leadership in taking on the challenges.”<sup>45</sup> Over the next several years Wright’s leadership would prove crucial to the work of the diocese and the city.

Wright, the son of a middle-class family, was born in Louisiana and later moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where his father was the field secretary of the local Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter. His parents met during their time at the Tuskegee Institute.<sup>46</sup> In 1947, Wright joined the first freedom rides that sought to test and promote the 1945 U.S. Supreme Court decision to desegregate interstate travel around the country. As the youngest member of “The Journey of Reconciliation,” his efforts helped shape what would become the Congress of Racial Equality’s Freedom Rides in 1961.<sup>47</sup> He joined eight whites and seven blacks, including Bayard Rustin, the chair of The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, on a two-week journey through parts of the Deep South.<sup>48</sup>

Soon after his ordination in 1950, Wright served as a priest at Trinity Church, Copley Square in Boston before his installation as the Rector of St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. At St. Cyprian’s he immersed himself in the parish and the local community. During this time, he met Malcolm X and became close friends with Louis Walcott (later known as Louis Farrakhan) and his family. In Wright’s unpublished autobiography, he reveals an encounter in his church office that helped Farrakhan, a black nationalist and leader in the Nation of Islam, get his mosque started in Boston with a

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<sup>45</sup> Leland Stark, Letter to Nathan Wright, Jr., June 17, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>46</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 225.

<sup>47</sup> “Nathan Wright, Jr.,” *Rise Up Newark*. <http://riseupnewark.com/nathan-wright/>.

<sup>48</sup> *You Don’t Have to Ride Jim Crow: Public Television’s Documentary of the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation: America’s First Freedom Ride*, Film, produced by Robin Washington (1994; Durham, NH: New Hampshire Public Television), DVD.

donation of tables and chairs from St. Cyprian's. Even more profound, Wright provided Farrakhan with a list of thirty young black men who came to the Episcopal Church intermittently. Farrakhan was unsure what to do with the list, and Wright suggested that Farrakhan reach out to the young men because he thought Farrakhan would be better able to minister to them. Within the month, Farrakhan's congregation went from two to more than thirty, thanks to Wright's suggestion, with all but six coming from the list Wright provided. After that encounter, Farrakhan referred to Wright as his "pastor."<sup>49</sup>

Wright's transformation toward Black Power theorist became evident as he began a new mission in the early 1960s, focusing on the urban church and the "divine light" of each congregant.<sup>50</sup> His core theology formed around a "Theology of Transfiguration" which he contrasts with a "Theology of Identification." Wright's Theology of Identification emphasized the need for the church to focus on more than the service aspect of urban ministry. Rather, Wright sought to transition this urban work to a ministry that uplifted and inspired self-determination. This Christian sense of redemption would serve as "the ultimate [uplifting] of all life to the plane where God would have it be."<sup>51</sup> While this theology was not yet fleshed out as a direct action for the church, it provided a foundation for his later work in Newark and beyond.

In addition to his role as a priest, Wright was a sociologist and professor with six academic degrees, including two from Harvard.<sup>52</sup> He was equipped to assess and

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<sup>49</sup> Nathan Wright, *Patrician Poor: Reflections on a Black Upbringing* (Box 4, Folder 14, Nathan Wright Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library), 223-230.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 225.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-226

<sup>52</sup> The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright Jr. received an A.B. from the University of Cincinnati (1947), a B.D. from The Episcopal Divinity School (1950), a S.T.M. from Harvard (1951), an Ed.M. from State Teacher's College in Boston (1962), an Ed.D. from Harvard University (1964),

implement empowerment programs in Newark, eager to accept the challenge, and passionate about the commitment made of behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. Wright referred to the position in the diocese as presenting “one of the best opportunities in the nation for creative, forward looking, redemptive work.”<sup>53</sup> Upon Wright’s arrival in 1964, the Episcopal Diocese of Newark was the most urban<sup>54</sup> diocese within the Episcopal Church and was in need of a new plan for its urban population.<sup>55</sup> In an early letter to Bishop Stark, Wright states, “The black community in Newark is clearly disadvantaged... People with power tend not share it. Indeed, they tend to work actively to prevent the take-over of power... All societies strive more for order than for orderly and needed changes.”<sup>56</sup>

With an uphill battle to make real change in a majority-white diocese, Wright began working to reshape the “Christian Renewal” needed to live into a changing community. He believed that self-awareness and vulnerability were required for each individual to become who they were meant to be in the Body of Christ. In an address at the Episcopal Diocese of Newark’s 91<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Convention, Wright outlined ways in which parishes – large and small, rich and poor – could develop relationships with communities beyond their walls and establish plans to live into the transforming society around them. He sought to move past differences between blacks and whites and into a community that was focused around

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and a LL.D. from Upsala College (1969).

<sup>53</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., Letter to Bishop Leland Stark, June 19, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>54</sup> In letters to Nathan Wright, Leland Stark uses “urban” to represent the high population of non-whites in Newark. In 1964, Stark represents Newark as having the highest density of black residents outside of Washington, D.C. Additionally, in *Black Power and Urban Unrest: Creative Possibilities* by Nathan Wright, he uses “urban” as a cipher for the black population facing massive economic, educational, and political inequality throughout the United States.

<sup>55</sup> News Release from The Episcopal Diocese of Newark, October 5, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>56</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., Letter to Bishop Leland Stark, June 19, 1964, (Nathan Wright Papers, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

the sacrament of the Eucharist. “If the Church is to fulfill its high and divine vocation in bringing redemption to personal lives and order to our disordered world,” Wright states, “it must do so through the means the Lord appointed... the celebration of the sacrament.”<sup>57</sup> By gathering around the altar for the Eucharist, Wright thought that to be the beginning of the redemptive work needed to transform society. And, if the Episcopal Church could come together, they could be the image of the Transfiguration, for the well-being of all.

The Episcopal Diocese of Newark’s headquarters, the Cathedral House, as well as the seat of the diocese, Trinity Cathedral, were located in downtown Newark and were intertwined into the decline of the city. The urban crisis in Newark, a cause of the inequitable conditions for black residents, was manifest in a dramatic increase of crime, sexually transmitted diseases, and maternal mortality. Newark also had the highest proportionate urban tax rate, the highest population density, and the highest daily population turnover in the nation.<sup>58</sup> Newark and other large, majority-black metropolitan areas around the country demanded a shift in control in order to salvage their declining communities. The Civil Rights Movement made great progress for blacks in the United States; however, racial, political, and economic divides remained and deepened for the majority of blacks in the 1960’s. The Black Power Movement sought to change those inequities of black disenfranchisement.

### **A Riot: Newark and the Lighting of a Match**

... a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and

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<sup>57</sup> Nathan Wright, *One Bread, One Body* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1962), 134.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *Ready to Riot*, 8.

humanity... And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again.<sup>59</sup>

These were the forewarning words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's "The Other America" speech at Stanford University in April 1967. King was acutely aware of the injustice facing poor blacks in the United States and the worsening, substandard conditions they live with each day. While King's non-violent approach to the attainment of Civil Rights was contrary to the "language of rioting," he sought to understand and help others understand the unheard pain of black America. And, he warned, if America and its leaders continued to seek the status quo versus true equity, racial justice, and inclusion, the violence and riots would continue.

Later that year, in what became known as "the long, hot summer" because of the civil unrest around the country, a match was lit in the city of Newark. On the evening of July 13, an African American taxi driver by the name of John Smith was pulled over by police officers for a missing taillight. Smith was severely beaten by the police officers and arrested. By the time he arrived at the fourth precinct he was unable to walk and was dragged into the station by the arresting officers. Smith was perceived to be dead – killed by the Newark police officers who had sworn to protect their community. Word spread quickly about the "murder" of Smith and within hours protestors were gathering outside of Newark's fourth precinct.

Tensions began to mount quickly. Protesters began throwing rocks, breaking windows in nearby buildings, setting property on fire, and looting local shops. In the early morning hours of July 13th, the civil disturbance worsened and Mayor Addonizio ordered

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<sup>59</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Other America," (Speech, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, April 14, 1967).

five hundred additional officers into action to confront the conflict. The *Newark Evening News* reported that day that the civic disturbances from the night before were isolated incidents that had been well-controlled by Newark police.

Later that evening, the unrest erupted again into more protests and violent clashes. With looting and burning getting out of hand, the Mayor requested the help of 300 state troopers to assist in the rebellion. And, after speaking with Governor Richard Hughes, 3500 guardsmen arrived in the city with armored vehicles, tanks, riot gear, and guns. With this level of militarization, there was now a full-on war in the streets of Newark. Twenty-four blacks, one police officer, and one firefighter were killed in the days that followed. The National Guard, state troopers, and Newark police fired ten thousand rounds of ammunition between July 14 and July 17. Many blacks who were killed were not a part of the unrest, including 10-year-old, Eddie Moss,<sup>60</sup> and a mother of eleven kids, Eloise Spellman.<sup>61</sup> By the morning of July 18, twenty-six people were dead, 1500 were wounded, and 1600 people were arrested.<sup>62</sup>

Nathan Wright described the riots as “the logical result of our failure as a nation to come to terms with the depth and breadth of change in the life of our cities” because “many of our cities’ problems are not being solved.” Wright concluded, “No one can escape the daily frustration that comes from seeing no way out of the perplexities involved.”<sup>63</sup> The violence that struck Newark was an outcry intended to be heard by white Americans about the conditions faced by black Americans each day. The city and nation were in dire need

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<sup>60</sup> “Eddie Moss,” *Rise Up Newark*. <http://riseupnewark.com/eddie-moss/>.

<sup>61</sup> “Eloise Spellman,” *Rise Up Newark*. <http://riseupnewark.com/eloise-spellman/>.

<sup>62</sup> Kimberly Siegal, “Silent No Longer: Voices of the 1967 Newark Race Riots,” accessed September 30, 2018. <http://repository.upenn.edu/curej/31>.

<sup>63</sup> Wright, *Ready to Riot*, 8.

of a reckoning with the realities of American life. The movement toward Black Power in Newark and throughout the country was growing stronger as the riots that struck Newark in 1967 became the backdrop for the largest and most influential gathering of Black Power advocates to ever assemble. The National Conference on Black Power in 1967 sought to address the evolving Black Power movement and how to directly engage and empower disenfranchised communities throughout the nation.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **The Episcopal Diocese of Newark and the National Conference on Black Power**

The basic purpose of the National Conference on Black Power will be to forge unity, not unanimity. It will work to create a solidarity of power to add our ethnic power, as all ethnic groups have done as groups, to begin to move America and the world in terms of human development and moral purpose, forward rather than back<sup>64</sup>

– The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright

In the early days of the Black Power Movement, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. became a prominent voice advocating for change in the lives of black Americans. Powell was the flamboyant minister of Abyssinian Baptist Church and U.S. congressional representative of his Harlem district in New York City. This seat of power in Congress placed Powell at the very pinnacle of advocacy for the Black Power Movement. In 1966, on the floor of the house chamber, Powell laid out his “Black Position Paper” as “an outline for living and call to action for America’s Black People.” This

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<sup>64</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “Specific Expressions of Black Power,” (presentation to the Planning Committee of the National Conference on Black Power, Newark, NJ, February 24, 1967), 1.

position, as Powell stated, is a “passionate re-affirmation in what black people are today and what we can become tomorrow.”<sup>65</sup> The seventeen points he outlined became the overarching foundation of what unified the Black Power Movement because they resonated so closely to the needs of black communities. These goals include a sense of pride in being black, black organizations being black-led, financial freedom for black citizens, voting rights for all blacks, a revolution in the education of black children, and greater representation of black Americans at all levels of decision making.<sup>66</sup>

In July 1966, Stokely Carmichael, the young face of the Black Power Movement, met with Congressman Powell and requested that he convene a conference of “Negro leaders” from around the country to discuss the ideas of Black Power. Powell agreed, and over Labor Day weekend in 1966, the inaugural Conference on Black Power met in Washington D.C.<sup>67</sup> Nathan Wright, Executive Director of the Department of Urban Work in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, received an invitation. Wright attended the conference in Washington with 168 other delegates and leaders of the emerging Black Power Movement from around the United States. Embattled with legal troubles, Powell yielded his role as the convener after the inaugural gathering, and Nathan Wright was appointed as the new chair of the Black Power Conference to be held the following year.<sup>68</sup> Not everyone was in consensus with Wright’s appointment because they thought he might be too “bourgeois” to chair the movement’s first national gathering. After all, as one participant stated, he was the only Black Power advocate receiving a pay check from the Episcopal

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<sup>65</sup> Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., “My Black Position Paper,” in Floyd B. Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays* (Boston, MA: Extending Horizons Books, 1968), 257-260.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Peniel Joseph, *Stokely: A Life*, (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2016), 129.

<sup>68</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier*, 227-228.

Church every two weeks.<sup>69</sup> In the end, despite some concerns, Wright had access to resources and connections that were vital to pull off such a conference.

In late September of 1966, Wright approached the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark and the Rt. Rev. George Rath about hosting the National Conference on Black Power in Newark. Both bishops were concerned about the “term and concept” of Black Power, though Wright assured them that the intention of the conference was “to redeem the term” because it truly meant “the empowerment of black people for self-fulfillment for the good of all.”<sup>70</sup> Wright believed that Black Power would give black Americans encouragement needed to become the greatest version of themselves, without the adverse and hostile connotations placed on blacks by white society. With the cautious support of Bishop Stark and other leaders in the diocese, plans began for the conference to be held in Newark the following summer. Publications and planning for the event, to the dismay of some in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, listed the Cathedral House as the “official headquarters” of the Black Power Movement.<sup>71</sup>

In its original intent, the conference was expected to be a relatively small gathering “of between 150-200 Negroes from all segments of the colored community.” As of July 13 – one week before the gathering – the conference had received only 65 registrations. This

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>70</sup> Leland Stark, “A Letter from the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, Bishop of Newark, on the National Black Power Conference,” *Diocesan Press Service*, August 7, 1967.

<sup>71</sup> “Registration form for the National Conference on Black Power,” Spring 1967.

Internal letters between Bishop Stark, Nathan Wright, and others expressed concern about associating the Episcopal Diocese of Newark with the Black Power Conference. These concerns came from unknown members of the diocese. (Nathan Wright Folder, Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

number ballooned to more than one thousand over the next seven days as a renewed sense of urgency entered the city of Newark and the nation.<sup>72</sup>

Meeting just four days after Newark's rebellion left twenty-six dead and over one thousand injured, there were calls from state and local government to cancel or move the conference. With the graves of those killed in the violent clashes still fresh, Nathan Wright and his leadership team did not bow to pressure to move or postpone the conference. "To postpone or shift the Conference at this late date would... have been tantamount to a black knuckling under to the same white power structure whose oppressive policies had caused the black rebellion in the first place."<sup>73</sup> Wright and the other conveners thought continuing with "such a conference held amidst yesterday's ashes of Newark's scorched black community would represent a phoenix of tomorrow's black power for all black communities."<sup>74</sup>

Wright also maintained the support of Bishop Stark. On Friday before the conference was set to begin, Stark was urged by Richard Hughes, then governor of New Jersey, to cancel the meeting because of the "increased tensions" in the city of Newark. In an apparent standoff between Bishop Stark and Governor Hughes, neither man wanted to be responsible for canceling the National Conference on Black Power. In a letter clarifying his position to the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, Stark explained:

I had informed the Governor personally that efforts were being made to find a different site, and when it looked as though these efforts would prove fruitless, I

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<sup>72</sup> Leland Stark, "A Letter from the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, Bishop of Newark, on the National Black Power Conference."

<sup>73</sup> Chuck Stone, "The National Conference on Black Power," in Floyd B. Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays*, (Boston, MA: Extending Horizons Books, 1968), 190.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

reminded the Governor, through the Attorney General, that the Governor alone had the authority to demand the Conference be canceled. This he declined to do.<sup>75</sup>

Stark allowed the conference to continue at the Cathedral House. While this decision was met with backlash by clergy and laypeople within the diocese, Stark ultimately believed the National Conference on Black Power was needed for its creative and redemptive possibilities. In a letter by a trusted colleague that helped convince Stark to continue with the conference, the matter was laid out for him:

...it seems obvious to me that to cancel the forthcoming black power conference could very well be another indication which to the Negro community would represent repression and an attempt to stifle their opportunity to consider their own problems. There may be undesirable effects if the conference is held, but it seems much more important to me to consider the extremely negative reaction which would be inevitable if the conference were canceled as a result of recent events.<sup>76</sup>

Not wanting to stifle an opportunity for the black community to work together, Stark allowed the conference to move forward as planned. “We’re coming, baby!” shouted a black woman from New York City while talking with one of the organizers of the conference.<sup>77</sup> Despite the violence and uncertainty that preceded the National Conference on Black Power, not one registration was canceled. This was seen as a vote of confidence for Wright and the other organizers. Delegates began to arrive in Newark in droves “from the ‘little-old-ladies-in-tennis-shoes’ of the Civil Rights Movement—the Urban League—and its partner in conservatism, the NAACP, to the bearded militants of RAM (Revolutionary Action Movement) and the young firebrands of SNICK (‘man don’t call us ‘Non-Violent’ — call us SNICK’).”<sup>78</sup> Reflecting on the conference, one organizer recalled:

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<sup>75</sup> Leland Stark, “A Letter from the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, Bishop of Newark, on the National Black Power Conference,” 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Chuck Stone, “The National Conference on Black Power,” 190.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 190-91.

Wearing somber Ivy-leagued summer suits, flamboyant African robes, open-neck sport shirts, faded blue jeans, hippie beads and mini-skirts, black people sat together and swapped dreams. It was the most splendidly diversified “in-gathering” of black people ever assembled.<sup>79</sup>

The National Conference on Black Power attracted many notable figures, including Jesse Jackson, Ron Karenga, Floyd McKissick (CORE), H. Rap Brown (SNCC), and Amiri Baraka. Altogether, the conference gathered more than 1000 black people from twenty-six states, 126 cities, and 286 black or predominately black organizations “to write a glorious new chapter in black history.”<sup>80</sup> “Some colored folks gonna see some niggers,” said Dick Gregory during opening remarks on July 20, “and some niggers gonna see some Uncle Toms, and each one gonna find out he didn’t know how beautiful the other could be.”<sup>81</sup>

Meeting in a ballroom at the nearby Robert Treat Hotel, Chairman Nathan Wright opened the conference with a tone of hope, earnestness, and necessity:

We want everyone, both in this community, in the nation, and in the world to know that Black Power is not only a much-needed ingredient in the life of the black communities of the world but is good for the enrichment of the life of this nation and our world. The black community, as a result of its increasing desperation in American life, has begun to realize that the thing that it needs most is unity and self-development. And, this distinguished gathering of black Americans and black people from other nations of the world represents what will be a new stance, not only in the life of this nation but of our world.<sup>82</sup>

With his initial remarks, Wright sought to strike a chord of unity. He believed that if this gathering could come together to discuss the best methods for the self-development of the black community, the conference would change the face of the nation. Wright also

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier*, 234.

<sup>82</sup> “Black Power Conference,” interview by Eleanor Fisher, *New York Public Radio (WNYC)*, July 21, 1967. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/black-power-conference/>.

understood that each person approached Black Power through a different lens and means for obtaining his/her power. As the convener of the most diverse group of black voices to ever gather, he sought to create an environment of possibility and creativity. The National Conference on Black Power provided just that.

The conference brought forth “more than 150 resolutions calling for emphasis of Black power in political, economic, and cultural affairs.” These resolutions were wide-ranging and included a guaranteed basic income, a push to elect twelve more black members of Congress in 1968, the establishment of a National Black Board of Education, and others that encouraged opportunities for equal employment, economics, and education. While many resolutions were adopted “in spirit” by the convening conference, only one was officially approved: A Black Power Manifesto. “The Manifesto condemned “neo-colonialist control” of Black populations worldwide and called for the circulation of a “philosophy of Blackness” that would unite and direct the oppressed in common cause.”<sup>83</sup>

As the conference entered its third day, the *New York Times* editorial board took notice and praised the conference for uniting “the most diverse group of Negroes ever to meet in this country.”<sup>84</sup> “The words Black Power suggest chauvinism and militancy for some dark reason,” the column read, “They need not... The National Conference on Black Power now meeting in Newark could do much to bring a constructive meaning to the phrase.”<sup>85</sup> The final day of the conference, however, received the most significant coverage as violence broke out during the press conference. A group of conference-goers entered the first floor of the Cathedral House and expelled the white media from the room as they

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<sup>83</sup> Susan Altman, “Black Power Conference Comes to Newark,” *The African American Registry*. <https://aaregistry.org/story/black-power-conference-of-newark-held/>.

<sup>84</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier*, 234.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

destroyed a television camera. Reports vary about what happened next, but the disruption caused delegates and press to scatter and the police to intervene briefly.<sup>86</sup> A group led by Charles Kenyatta, founder of Harlem Mau Mau, was believed to have been responsible for the chaos as they denounced the “white racist press.” Nathan Wright was credited for restoring order as he “got the conference back on track of solving the problems of black people.”<sup>87</sup>

Unfortunately, the damage was already done by the group of young black militants and the media sensationalized the story as “a fist-swinging, chair-throwing melee” by a group of “angry Negro delegates.” The media’s scrutiny of the conference continued after the full list of resolutions were released to the press. One such resolution resolved that “a national dialogue be initiated of the feasibility of establishing a separate homeland in the United States for Black People.”<sup>88</sup> The following day, the *Newark Evening News* headline read, “Separate Negro State Asked by Black Power Conference.” This misleading article led to the undoing of much of the valuable work of the conference as the *Evening News* informed its readers “the nearly 1000 Negro delegates wound up the conference by approving resolutions with strong anti-white, anti-Christian and anti-draft tones.”<sup>89</sup> An editorial exacerbated these notions of separatism by claiming “the conference attempted to set Negroes against whites, to widen the gulf rather than narrow it.”<sup>90</sup>

Wright combated these misconceptions head-on in a follow-up letter to the convention delegates as he described the media’s “precipitous change in appraisal” as

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>87</sup> Chuck Stone, “The National Conference on Black Power,” 198.

<sup>88</sup> Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier*, 235.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 236

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

reflecting “a prevailing white nervousness about the unique closed door gathering of black people, coupled with several gross and misfortunate understandings.” Wright remained unphased because, after all, The National Conference on Black Power “fundamentally had nothing to say to white Americans. It was an introspective conference involving ongoing dialogue within the family of black Americans concerning our own needs, weaknesses, and opportunities.”

In the aftermath of this monumental gathering, Chuck Stone, an assistant to U.S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., wrote that the National Conference on Black Power “must be remembered as the day when one of the most representative cross-sections of black people... all came together... to write the boldest and most radical chapter in the black man's four-century old struggle to be a true equal among equals.” Stone continues, “July 20, 1967, infused a new legitimacy into the revolutionary era of black power, giving it both definition and direction.”<sup>91</sup>

As the conference ended, the work toward black empowerment continued. With renewed vigor, the Black Power Movement began to take off in all aspects of American society. New political action began around the country as leaders in the Black Power Movement sought to elect black members of Congress in St. Louis, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and other cities throughout the South. In Newark, the movement enabled the election of the first black mayor, Kenneth Gibson, in 1970. New black arts and education programs began sprouting up throughout the country. Some higher education institutions began establishing “Black / Africana – Studies” departments.

Wright and the Department of Urban Work in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark spearheaded a new “anti-urban renewal plan.” Unsatisfied with the “urban renewal” by the

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<sup>91</sup> Chuck Stone, “The National Conference on Black Power,” 198.

removal of blacks taking place in the Central Ward, Wright, with the help of other black leaders, established the Tri-City Citizen's Union for Progress (Tri-City) in Newark, Jersey City, and Paterson. In the initial phase of development, Wright helped Tri-City secure funding from the Episcopal Diocese of Newark to revitalize abandoned neighborhoods by purchasing and rehabilitating homes in declining communities. This was especially critical because of the lack of investment in Newark after the city's racial unrest in July 1967. Tri-City's mission did not stop there. It was designed for community organizing and development around five key areas: economic empowerment, education, racial and cultural improvement and pride, preparation for the world of work, and citizen development. Tri-City was set up to work like an engine of black empowerment with each component of the organization enabling the community to work better together.<sup>92</sup>

The initial phase of Tri-City gave disenfranchised blacks the ability to invest in their communities and take ownership of their own homes with affordable mortgages and subsidized rents. Between 1967 and 1970, Tri-City successfully refurbished hundreds of homes abandoned after the uprising in a twelve-square-block stretch of Newark's Central Ward, which became known as Amity Village. In 1972, Tri-City opened The People's Center which provided hands-on job training, childcare, and health programs designed to train individuals to work, spend, and build-up their communities. One of Tri-City's organizers described their work as a form of "Black Power capitalism" that provided "a viable plan for the unification and empowerment of [a] powerless people."<sup>93</sup>

The National Conference on Black Power also opened the doors for dialogue within the Episcopal Church but still remained a topic of deep division. This division was evident

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<sup>92</sup> William K. Fox, "Progress Report and Challenge," *Tri-City Citizens' Union For Progress, Inc.*, October 1968, (Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

in a letter sent out by Bishop Stark to the people of Episcopal Diocese of Newark in July 1967. Stark's letter, which reached the homes of more than 36,000 Episcopalians in northern New Jersey, sought to distance himself from the conference that was covered negatively in the news, while still providing adequate praise for the work Nathan Wright and the conference set out to accomplish:

It would have been a different conference altogether had not strident militants overwhelmed the Conference on Sunday afternoon and shouted through some resolutions that reveal the deep-seated frustration many Negroes feel... I am distressed with the separateness that seemed to gain emphasis, especially by the last day, and the constructive meaning of Black Power, in my opinion, was eclipsed. Yet there were positive results. It brought together Negroes from various groups that had never talked together. For the most part, they dealt seriously and critically with problems they face as black people. New and responsible leaders will continue to emerge.

What can you and I do? Work harder, under God, than ever for the alleviation of the conditions which make the Negro community the most submerged in America. May God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven!<sup>94</sup>

Stark believed deeply that the conference revealed a need for unity, not separatism, when talking about the basic needs of the black community. Unsatisfied with the emphasis the media put on the conference, Stark sought to once again change the narrative from a conference of "militants" to one that pursued the deep-seated desires of the black community around the nation: the need for self-sufficiency, self-direction, self-determination, self-development, and self-respect.<sup>95</sup> With a positive spin on the divisive conference, Stark encouraged the black community to continue the important and much-needed work of the Black Power Movement, and he invited his white colleagues in the Church to join the cause.

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<sup>94</sup> Leland Stark, "A Letter from the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, Bishop of Newark, on the National Black Power Conference," 1.

<sup>95</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., "What About Black Power?," *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), March-April, 1967, 10.

Because the conference garnered national attention, Stark's explanation justifying the conference was also shared throughout the national Episcopal Church by the *Episcopal News Service*. Stark's letter, however, only shared half the story. Behind the scenes, as Nathan Wright later revealed, Stark did everything in his power to ensure the National Conference on Black Power took place in the City of Newark. This was despite his seemingly apologetic letter. In a 1980 *Black Empowerment* column by Wright, he explains Bishop Stark's actual role as an unsung hero for the advancement of all African Americans and America as a whole.<sup>96</sup>

"One of the advantages of history," Wright begins, "is that it provides us with a larger and more detailed view of realities which surrounded our lives." Wright goes on to praise Stark for his stubborn refusal to withdraw the use of the Cathedral House for the conference, even with growing pressure from the governor and many of his clergy. As pressure mounted, Stark was anxious that the governor might declare a state of emergency to halt conference. To ensure its continuation, "Bishop Stark asked his stockbroker to place all of his lifetime assets at the disposal of the conference, in case the meeting might have to be moved – at the well-nigh impossible cost – to New York City. '...it is the very least I can do.'" <sup>97</sup>

Stark's strong leadership in the face of harsh criticism inspired an ad hoc group of black clergy from around the United States to declare the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark one of the most important white Americans confronting "the nation's most extensive racial unrest."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Nathan Wright, "Black Empowerment: An Appreciation," *Florida Photo News-Week*, Nov. 19-26, 1980, 5, (Box 3, Folder 29, Nathan Wright Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Stark's leadership and guidance became a foremost example of how the Episcopal Church confronted and awakened to the Black Power movement in the late 1960s.

**Chapter 4:**  
**Black Power in the Church: An Episcopal Awakening**

Just what is Black Power all about? The term is neither negative nor new. It has been used for some 300 years in this country. It has served as a rally cry by practically every Negro leader in the continuing struggle for black freedom... it is a forthright statement of the intention of the Negro people to add their potential to American Life.<sup>99</sup>

– The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright

As calls for Black Power reverberated around the country in 1966, an ad hoc group of approximately forty black clergy met at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Harlem. This July 1966 gathering of diverse ecumenical leadership – which became known as the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC) – was called to address the uneasiness of “Black Power” tensions throughout the church. While each of the forty clergy was conscious of the distress Black Power caused on American society, they unanimously recognized the need to rescue the positive implications Black Power possessed. “The fundamental theme” of the one-day meeting concluded, “that the current controversy over

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<sup>99</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “What About Black Power?,” *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), March-April, 1967, 10.

Black Power was a logical consequence of historical distortions of truth in American life.”<sup>100</sup> The culmination of this meeting led to a statement in the *New York Times* entitled “Black Power.” This full-page essay, signed by nine Episcopal clergy, including the Rev. Nathan Wright, sought equitable power through collective “Christian Consciousness;” and a self-awareness that each person is made in the image of God and has a role to play in the Kingdom of God.<sup>101</sup> In articulating the crux of their argument, the statement read:

The fundamental distortion facing us in the controversy about “Black Power” is rooted in a gross imbalance of power and conscience between Negroes and white Americans. It is this distortion, mainly, which is responsible for the widespread, though often inarticulate, assumption that white people are justified in getting what they want through the use of power, but the Negro Americans must, either by nature or by circumstances, make their appeal only through conscience. As a result, the power of white men and the conscience of black men have both been corrupted. The power of white men is corrupted because it meets little meaningful resistance from Negroes to temper it and keep white men from aping God.<sup>102</sup>

This powerful statement brought an awareness to the realities of black Americans. The religious leaders of the NCNC understood the implicit nature of power and how it corrupts those who have it and cripples those that do not. Believing that there had been an inhumane and disproportionate distribution of power in American society, they set out to encourage black and white Americans to understand their conscious and unconscious positions of influence. Speaking truth to power, the NCNC wanted black Americans to use their deep-seeded power to keep white men from imitating God and creating the rules by which society is run. It continues by recognizing the powerlessness of black Americans in

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<sup>100</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., *Black Power and Urban Unrest* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1967), 187-194.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> “Black Power: Statement by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 31, 1966.

a white run society will inevitably lead to “a race of beggars” relying on white men for their mere existence.<sup>103</sup>

“We are now faced with a situation,” the statement continues, “where conscienceless power meets powerless conscience, threatening the very foundation of our nation.”<sup>104</sup> Believing that a concerted effort was needed by both blacks and whites to make true progress in the nation, the NCNC sought to bring awareness to the power whites held in society and the lack of power held by blacks. Ultimately, they thought the work of Black Power was needed to address the power inequity in the nation’s leadership, media, and communities. Taking a firm but forward-looking stance, the NCNC statement systematically addressed the political leadership in the United States, white Christians, black citizens, and the mass media while focusing on the need for self-empowerment of the black community.

As Black Power ideology shifted the conversation from the collective rights of racial minorities to individual rights, the NCNC sought to empower blacks to use their individual power “in order to participate more effectively at all levels of the life of our nation.”<sup>105</sup> Likewise, they asked the media to report on the Black Power Movement fairly so that “limited controversies are not blown up into the final truth about [Negro communities].”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the statement addresses white church leaders that “integration” is meaningless without the capacity of black Americans to “participate with

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<sup>103</sup> “Black Power: Statement by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 31, 1966.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

power” in all aspects of society.<sup>107</sup> The NCNC believed that it was part of the churches’ moral call to speak out and to support the endeavors of the Black Power Movement. The Rev. Quinland Gordon, an Episcopal priest who signed the NCNC statement, wrote that “black power meant that African Americans were seeking a chance to gain control over their own lives” and ministry. And, he “hoped white Episcopalians would join with black church members in supporting such reasonable and attainable goals.”<sup>108</sup> Gordon, a staff member for the Episcopal Church’s Department of Christian Social Relations, with his support for Black Power, sought to move black clergy beyond their niche roles of serving black community programs. Instead, he wanted black clergy and lay leadership to use their God-given gifts throughout the life of the denomination.

It became an unfortunate reality for black clergy in the Episcopal Church that white clergy could serve in black parishes, but black clergy, regardless of how well qualified, were not hired to serve in white parishes. This double standard led to many African American leaders in the Church feeling "like aliens and strangers" in the denomination they serve. These concerns were laid out by black clergy at the 1965 Conference of Bishops.<sup>109</sup> To address the worries of black clergy, the bishops passed a resolution that committed the Church to recruit and hire “African Americans to serve in a number of capacities throughout the denomination – as rectors and parish assistants, as chaplains and teachers at all church-related schools, as staff members at cathedrals and diocesan offices, and as officers employed by the Executive Council.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 166.

<sup>109</sup> The Conference of Bishops is a biannual gathering comprised of all bishops in the Episcopal Church

<sup>110</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 168.

While the resolution was promising for black clergy in the Episcopal Church, white leadership in the denomination essentially ignored the resolution regarding employment practices. This stagnant progress led to a 1967 declaration signed by nearly half of all black clergy in the Episcopal Church entitled "A Declaration by Priests who are Negroes." The effort was led by the Rev. Quinton Primo, rector of St. Matthew's Church in Wilmington, Delaware who would later be consecrated as Bishop Suffragan in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago in 1972. This declaration, addressed to the white leadership of the church, demanded that black clergy were no longer to be treated as "second class" citizens, and insisted that black leadership should be included throughout the entire corporate structure of the Church.<sup>111</sup>

The Rev. Nathan Wright, one of the most prominent black priests in the Episcopal Church at the time, thought it crucial that black clergy be responsible for black parishes, because he felt it was the only way justice and progress would occur in the empowerment of black Americans. In a presentation to the New Jersey Council of Churches' Department of Research and Church Development, Wright, adamant that white leadership in black churches would only breed more oppression, stated:

In the economic development of our cities, more and more monies have come in, and the worse our cities have become. More money has gone into crime prevention and the worse the crime rate has become. This is not simply because of statistical improvement but because of the methodology and the mind-set of the oppressor. The churches have been a part of this mind-set... The more the churches have done with the white mind-set the worse things have tended to be in our inner cities.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> "A Declaration of Priests who are Negroes," *The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice*, 1967. <https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/specialgc/item/198>

<sup>112</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., "Developing Relationships Between Negro and White Clergy and Churches in our Inner Cities," (presentation, Department of Research and Church Development of the New Jersey Council of Churches, Newark, NJ, April 27, 1967).

Wright believed it was no longer the right move to throw money and white leadership into urban communities and expect the social ills of the community to subside. Instead, he urged the church leadership to move beyond the “white mind-set of the oppressor” and allow qualified black leaders, especially priests, to help raise up the communities they should be serving. With organizations like The Tri-City Union for Progress, organized by Wright and other black leaders in Newark in 1967, he thought that investment by blacks in their own communities would lead to a more stable future for those communities.

With 3.4 million members, seventy-five hundred churches, and more than ten thousand clergy, the Episcopal Church was at its historical peak for membership in the mid-1960s.<sup>113</sup> Blacks, however, only accounted for two percent of the Church’s membership and those sixty-eight thousand members only attended three hundred of the parishes – primarily in the South and in northeastern dioceses in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia.<sup>114</sup> Many of the parishes in the Diocese of Newark remained de facto segregated until October 1966, when Trinity Cathedral, an overwhelmingly white parish, merged with St. Philip’s Church, predominately black, after St. Philip’s devastating fire in 1964. Trinity Cathedral became one of the first fully desegregated Episcopal Churches in the diocese and one of the first in Newark.<sup>115</sup> Trinity Cathedral again made history in 1969 as it installed the Very Rev. Dillard Robinson as dean of the cathedral. Robinson, a graduate

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<sup>113</sup> J. Gordon Melton, “Episcopal Church Denominational Profile,” *The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)*. [http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D\\_849.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_849.asp).

<sup>114</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 167.

<sup>115</sup> Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier*, 226.

of Drew University and Stanford University, became the first black American to hold a post as cathedral dean in the Episcopal Church.<sup>116</sup>

In August of 1967, the Episcopal Church gathered for its triennial General Convention in Seattle, Washington.<sup>117</sup> Coming just months after civil unrest devastated Newark, Detroit, and other northern cities, racial tensions and black empowerment were at the forefront of the convention and demanded the attention of the Church. The Most Rev. John Hines, then Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, “was determined that the Episcopal Church would continue to have a positive impact on American society by helping to ease racial tensions.”<sup>118</sup> Before the convention, Hines made an unusual request of Leon Modeste, an employee working in the Division of Community Service for the Executive Council. He asked Modeste to take him through the ghetto of New York so he could see first-hand the urban crisis plaguing American cities. Reluctantly, Modeste escorted Hines, without his traditional attire of a clerical collar, around the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Hines described the trip as “depressing” and “searing” but those experiences motivated Hines to reorder his priorities before the 1967 General Convention.<sup>119</sup>

The Rt. Rev. William Scarlett, former bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri and the most prominent Episcopal social gospel advocate of the 1930s, profoundly

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<sup>116</sup> “The Very Rev. Dillard Robinson Installed as Seventh Dean,” *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), June-Summer, 1969, 3.

<sup>117</sup> “The General Convention is the governing body of The Episcopal Church that meets every three years. It is a bicameral legislature that includes the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, composed of deputies and bishops from each diocese.” <http://www.generalconvention.org/about-the-general-convention/>.

<sup>118</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 175.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

influenced Bishop Hines' view of the Church's role in society. The Social Gospel Movement used the Christian Ethics of Protestant denominations to help solve the social ills of society (i.e. racism, poverty, alcoholism, etc.). Scarlett was instrumental in advocating for the rights of African Americans in the Episcopal Church long before the Civil Rights Movement began. Hines believed it was the responsibility of the Episcopal Church to be "fully involved in solving the social ills" plaguing society, instead of worrying exclusively about "institutional survival."<sup>120</sup> In the lead-up to the General Convention, still grappling with his experiences in Brooklyn with Modeste, Hines gathered prominent black leaders together to discuss how the Church could address the needs of the urban communities. These conversations led to the creative programs that would help the Episcopal Church "take a stand in the streets" by allowing local leaders in the communities to have direct control over their economic destinies.

The 1967 General Convention followed the lead of Bishop Hines and established the General Convention Special Program (GCSP). The GCSP was established to fund programs working on economic development and political equity in urban areas throughout the country. Hines believed this fund showed the Episcopal Church's commitment to "stand with the dispossessed and the alienated, sharing their pain and their agony in the ghetto."<sup>121</sup> Three million dollars per year – two million dollars from the operating budget and one million dollars from the United Thank Offering – over the next three years would go to help black organizations "gain and exercise economic and political power."<sup>122</sup> While

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

many throughout the Episcopal Church supported the GCSP, it later became a point of tension as some congregations withheld funds to protest the GCSP's mission.<sup>123</sup>

One dissenter of Hines' strategy was J. L. Caldwell McFaddin, a white lawyer and a convention deputy from the Diocese of Texas. As former bishop of the Diocese of Texas, Hines was familiar with McFaddin's criticisms of his social gospel-oriented objectives. McFaddin "questioned the wisdom of the denomination's placing its whole missionary program at risk for the sake of pursuing what he regarded as essentially secular goals."<sup>124</sup> He said, "our offerings, made on our altars to God, should not be diverted to achieve economic and political power for any group, white or black."<sup>125</sup> McFaddin and other critics of Hines' social programs believed that the church should be focused on the spiritual empowerment of blacks and other minorities instead of focusing on social, economic, and political empowerment. In the end, Hines' social gospel-oriented strategy and vision for the Episcopal Church won out, and the GCSP was established.

During the process of setting up the GCSP, another voice of dissent came from Nathan Wright. Wright insisted that the Episcopal Church learn from its mistakes in previous urban programs it had run, mistakes that included a void in African American leadership in the Church and Race fund or the Joint Urban Program, which were both programs that funded ministry in urban areas. Wright believed Bishop Hines should "give knowledgeable African American clergy, the church's main link with the black community, positions of authority within the new empowerment program."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> "The Most Reverend John Hines, 1910-1997," *The Episcopal Archives*.  
<https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/leadership/clergy/hines/>.

<sup>124</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 179.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Wright conceded that black communities need assistance from “establishment groups like the Episcopal Church,” but black empowerment (and the Black Power Movement) was needed to make real change in urban communities. Wright argued that black Americans must gain their own economic and political freedom through self-development and by having an equitable stake in their own communities. He remained “weary of the paternalistic whites who expressed goodwill” who were yet still unwilling to let blacks achieve leadership positions because of their intrinsic “colonial mind-set.”<sup>127</sup> Attempting to move away from the dependency of African Americans on “a suburban, white elite of power,” Wright urged the presiding bishop to include the resources of “African Americans and their parishes,” fearing that the Church would otherwise continue to perpetuate “the insolence and paternalism” detrimental to urban renewal and race relations.<sup>128</sup> Wright wanted the leadership of the Episcopal Church to transition beyond the Civil Rights Movement and into a movement of Black Power:

The call on the part of black people for Black Power represents an unmistakable turnabout in both mood and direction in the area once appropriately described as civil rights... There is a clear difference between the civil rights movement and the impetus toward Black Power. The civil rights movement has asked for what is due to the Negro. The thrust toward Black Power asks not what the Black American is due. It seeks to add the power, the latent and preciously needed potential of black people for the enrichment of the life of the nation as a whole.<sup>129</sup>

Members of the Episcopal Church, both black and white, were actively engaged at all levels of the Civil Rights Movement throughout the 1960s. Wright, however, believed that the Civil Rights Movement was not the answer to actual change in the lives black

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<sup>127</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “The Colonial Mind and the Urban Conditions,” *Church and Metropolis*, No. 12 (Spring 1967): 19-23.

<sup>128</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 179-180.

<sup>129</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “The Necessary Crisis in Civil Right,” (Presentation, General Theological Seminary, New York, May 3, 1967).

Americans. Instead, Wright sought to shift the conversation, wanting to identify what blacks could contribute to society at large through their capabilities and gifts, rather than to simply seek human rights he felt blacks should naturally possess. By drawing a distinction between Civil Rights and Black Power, Wright hoped to raise awareness of the need for increased black leadership in American society and in the Church, especially advocating for more black priests in positions of power within the denomination (e.g. as rector of a parish).

Despite Wright's formidable concern over the careful formation of the GCSP, Bishop Hines disregarded his insight and hired Leon Modeste, a layperson, to direct program. Hines entrusted Modeste to "communicate effectively with both white church members and African Americans in the ghetto."<sup>130</sup> Modeste hired a team of assistants, mostly from outside of the denomination, to implement the church's urban renewal programs. The decisions by Hines, Modeste, and the Executive Council in forming the GCSP came under fire before the program even took off, as Nathan Wright had warned. The most significant outcry came from black parish priests who, though knowledgeable of on-the-ground issues in their communities, were entirely overlooked for leadership roles and as community resources.<sup>131</sup>

In response to the civil unrest in Newark, Detroit, and other cities around the country, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the formation of a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Led by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois, this commission – the Kerner Commission – was responsible for identifying the causes of the 1967 race riots and making recommendations to prevent such occurrences in the future. A principal

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<sup>130</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 180.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

finding of the Kerner report identified that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal.”<sup>132</sup>

After the release of the Kerner Report in February 1968, the Rt. Rev. George Rath, then bishop suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, highlighted the findings of the report during a keynote address at the diocese’s annual Diocesan Convention. In his address he made it clear that living into the status quo of white America would do nothing to benefit the marginalized and oppressed black minority. Quoting the Kerner Report, Rath stated: “What white Americans have never fully understood – but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” Rath used this portion of the Kerner Report to emphasize that those gathered at the convention, mostly white, male, suburban New Jersey Episcopalians, were just as implicit in the urban crisis in Newark as those that were involved in the rioting in July 1967. Rath stressed that the disenfranchisement of blacks and other minorities must be met with compassion and empathy, rather than judgement and condemnation. He went on to commend Nathan Wright’s recently published text, *Ready to Riot*, as a source for further understanding issues of race and how the Church could work together to combat this issue that was particularly plaguing urban communities.<sup>133</sup>

Rath’s convention address continued by examining what the “Christian responsibility for corrective action” was calling the Church to do and be in the world.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> “National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, Report,” *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/8073NCJRS.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> *1968 Journal of the Diocese of Newark: The Proceedings of the Ninety-Fourth Annual Convention, May 11, 1968*, (Newark: Cathedral House, 1968), 47-52.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

He identified some of the Church's shortcomings in regard to race issues: how it involved newcomers and how it failed in bringing the gospel into urban areas of society. In concluding, he challenged the diocese to make a change and work toward a more just society:

I cannot and will not believe that the Church is insusceptible to the kind of change and renewal that are required for her to continue her role in changing and renewing the lives of individuals and the life of her society... The Church that is an agent of change and renewal is always in need of change and renewal... I see the Church in this crisis in American life as both needing reform and reforming, as requiring change and initiating change, as standing her judgment and delivering God's judgment on society.<sup>135</sup>

"I see the Church," Rath continues, "as the sole agency that can hold society together, uniting rich and poor, wise and ignorant, old and young, black and white."<sup>136</sup> This conclusion by Rath served as a guiding principal for how he saw the Church's role in society. His powerful address sought to unite dueling factions in the diocese and the larger Episcopal Church. Anxieties remained high after the deadly riots broke out in Newark, and after the diocese hosted the National Conference on Black Power the year prior. Rath hoped to calm tensions in the diocese while making a call to action to bring about change in a community that was still reeling from pain.

In a 1968 interview with a writer for the Episcopal Church, Nathan Wright was asked if anything good came from the riots. "The riots were not designed to do anything," Wright admitted, "You do not plan for a riot... Riots are the oppressed people of a community yelling 'Ouch.'" Wright went on to explain that the riots opened the eyes of white Americans and exposed deep flaws in the American value system. He went on to

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

criticize his fellow white clergy because of their complacency with the current value system that “values property over human lives.” “Civilized clergymen,” Wright states, “should be speaking up against violence and asking the question ‘why were people driven to the violence we saw in Newark?’” Wright believed churches that did not stand for black empowerment and the value of human life are decadent and untrue to the basic tenets of the gospel, most notably, loving one’s neighbor as oneself.<sup>137</sup>

In Wright’s book, *Ready to Riot*,<sup>138</sup> he sought to separate the “causes from the symptoms” of racism and paint a truer and more relevant picture of the urban landscape in Newark. Through his sociological analysis of the city, he hoped to persuade clergy in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark to take action and rid them of the “us” versus “them” mentality regarding race relations and the challenges faced by minorities. Wright encouraged everyone to work together in the face inequality and think creatively about the future of the Church. He wrote:

Our present condition resembles the predicament of those confined in Plato’s cave. Not one among us knows precisely what lies ahead. But the restless and distraught in our cities... may be calling us toward a greater perception of the realities that promise fulfillment... [the] change of which we speak will not be easy; change is always dislocating... while we may not change the conflict, we may shift the scene of the battle to include more constructive choices... We may seek to grow with the times and survive; or we may continue to hold stubbornly to the past and perish.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., interviewer unknown, *The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice*, The Episcopal Church, April 18, 1968.

<sup>138</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., “The Executive Director’s Doings,” a report to The Clergy of the Diocese and the Lay Members of the Department of Urban Work, October 28, 1968, (Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

In an October 1968 progress report to the clergy of the Diocese of Newark, Wright offers copies of his books, *Ready to Riot* and *Let’s Work Together*, to any clergy that may benefit from reading them. Additionally, the report he reveals, “A book, to have general appeal, must have specific appeal and should always be written to a particular audience. I chose the clergy of this diocese, and especially its bishops, as the particular audience for *Ready to Riot*.”

<sup>139</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., *Ready to Riot*, 148.

Wright remained hopeful that with collective action and the empowerment of black Americans the Church and the larger society could move productively into the future. By maintaining the status quo, Wright believed the fulfillment of each American's full potential would never be realized. *Ready to Riot* demonstrated the unlevel playing field blacks faced in urban areas and highlighted the immense need of equality of opportunity in education, housing, and jobs.

Wright's analysis of the struggles of urban blacks and black churches became a reality in most Episcopal parishes in Newark by the late 1960s, as buildings crumbled, financial resources vanished, and attendance diminished in lead up to and in the aftermath of the racial unrest in the city. The white-flight of middle-class whites led to the demise of many Episcopal parishes in Newark. Between 1967 and 1970, these hardships forced two Episcopal parishes in Newark to close their doors permanently and two more to merge and consolidate assets. Of the parishes that remained beyond 1970, many struggled and received substantial financial contributions from the diocese to continue their ministry in their respective neighborhoods.<sup>140</sup>

The closing and consolidation of predominantly black Episcopal parishes in the midst of the urban crisis left a void in leadership roles for black clergy in the diocese. With very little happening after the 1965 Conference of Bishop's resolution, a group of seventeen black Episcopal priests gathered at St. Philip's Church in Harlem, "the strongest black parish in the denomination at the time."<sup>141</sup> Among those in attendance was the Rev. Nathan Wright, representing the Diocese of Newark. This group organized what later became the

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<sup>140</sup> In 1964, Newark was home to 14 Episcopal parishes; as of April 2019, four parishes remain in the city (Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral, House of Prayer, Grace, and St. Andrew's)

<sup>141</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 182.

Union of Black Clergy and Laymen (UBCL).<sup>142</sup> The UBCL sought to institute a black power paradigm within the Episcopal Church and to protest their treatment as “second-class” members of the denomination. The organization’s primary goal was to combat racism, “by any means necessary to achieve full participation on the basis of equality in policy making, decision making, program and staffing” in the Episcopal Church.<sup>143</sup> The UBCL hoped these systemic changes within the institution would help stimulate the growth of black membership in the denomination.

The UBCL believed it was living into the future of the Episcopal Church’s mission while “upholding a venerable legacy extending back to the ministries of Alexander Crummell and George Freeman Bragg,” two of the first African-American priests ordained in the Episcopal Church and abolitionists.<sup>144</sup> UBCL leaders were determined to achieve self-determination and reclaim their heritage in the denomination. The Rev. Austin R. Cooper, rector at St. Philip's Church in Jacksonville, Florida, emphasized "black priests had suffered many indignities in the past, especially from southern bishops who resented any aggressiveness on their part... the leadership of the UBCL vowed, whites would always take the interest of black Episcopalians into account before making decisions about them.... or [blacks] would leave the Episcopal Church.”<sup>145</sup>

In the summer of 1969, The Episcopal Church called a Special General Convention for only the second time in its nearly two-hundred-year history. This convention,

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<sup>142</sup> The Union of Black Clergy and Laymen (UBCL) became known as the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE) in 1971.

<sup>143</sup> “UBCL and UBE: Empowering the Laity,” *Episcopal Archives*.  
<https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/transitions/ubcl-ube/>.

<sup>144</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 182-183.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

represented by members of the UBCL, was the first General Convention in the history of the Church to include women, youth, blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans in official capacities – although most could not vote as deputies to the convention.<sup>146</sup> The Special Convention was called to confront the racial crisis in America and to complete the business of the 1967 General Convention.<sup>147</sup>

In the months leading up to this Special Convention, the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), headed by former SNCC leader, James Forman, released the “Black Manifesto.”<sup>148</sup> With echoes of the Black Power Manifesto adopted by 1967 National Conference on Black Power, the BEDC manifesto took a more radical stance as it condemned the racism of the “white-run religious institutions in the United States” and demanded reparations from churches and synagogues for the “exploitation, oppression, and neglect of black people.”<sup>149</sup> The Black Manifesto produced a harsh attack “against the crimes of white Christians and Jews:”

...Churches came with the military might of the colonizers and have been sustained by the military might of the colonizers.... We were captured in Africa by violence. We were kept in bondage and political servitude and forced to work as slaves by the military machinery and the Christian church working hand in hand.<sup>150</sup>

As a means for reparations, the BEDC demanded five-hundred million dollars for the “cumulative impact of the oppression and discrimination whites had practiced against

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<sup>146</sup> Leland Stark, “A Bishops’ Pastoral Letter,” *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), October, 1969, 2.

<sup>147</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 191.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>149</sup> Leland Stark, “A Bishops’ Pastoral Letter,” *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), October, 1969, 2.

<sup>150</sup> “Black Manifesto,” *The New York Review of Books*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1969/07/10/black-manifesto/>.

African Americans for over three centuries.”<sup>151</sup> The five-hundred million dollars requested by BEDC represented fifteen dollars for each of the thirty-million black Americans living in the country at the time. Reparatory monies were allotted for the establishment of black land trusts in the South, the creation of black universities, a black communications system, minority empowerment programs and more.<sup>152</sup>

On May 1, 1969, James Forman led a delegation of black activists to the Episcopal Church Center in New York City where the group sought to hand-deliver the manifesto to The Presiding Bishop, John Hines. Since Hines was unavailable, Forman read the manifesto and the BEDC demands to the Rt. Rev. Stephen Bayne and the Rt. Rev. J. Brooke Mosley, two bishops who worked at the Episcopal Church Center. Forman and others were met politely by Bishops Bayne and Mosley, and while they agreed with much of the Black Manifesto’s premise about white racism, they rejected the demand for sixty-million dollars in reparations from the Episcopal Church. Instead, they reiterated the Church’s commitment to urban mission by highlighting the nine-million dollars set aside for “urban renewal” programs by the 1967 General Convention as a part of the GCSP.<sup>153</sup>

Forman did, however, get his meeting with Bishop Hines a couple of weeks later and Hines brought the Black Manifesto to the attention of his Executive Council.<sup>154</sup> The Executive Council had mixed reactions to the manifesto. In order to provide a unified response to the BEDC, Hines established the "Coburn Committee" led by The Rev. John

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<sup>151</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 188.

<sup>152</sup> “Black Manifesto,” *The New York Review of Books*.

<sup>153</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 188-89.

“The Executive Council’s Response to the Black Manifesto,” *The Episcopal Archives*.  
<https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/files/original/d3aa94ccd02e84742c590f2438bbb97d.jpg>

<sup>154</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 188.

Coburn, then rector of St. James' Church in New York City and later bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts,<sup>155</sup> to answer the demands of Forman and the Black Manifesto. Aware that they could not fix the division and brokenness in American society, the Coburn Committee believed it was essential to respond to the Black Manifesto adequately. Relating directly to the manifesto, the committee produced this resolution for the 1969 Special Convention:

*Resolved*, that the church, without concurring in all of the ideology of the "Black Manifesto," recognize that the Black Economic Development Conference in a movement which, at this moment, shows promise of being an expression of self-determination for the organizing of the black community in America.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to the resolution about the Black Manifesto, the Coburn Committee report proposed many initiatives that broadly addressed the demands of the BEDC within the denomination. The Executive Council eventually adopted these resolutions before the 1969 Special Convention:

1. Diversify the Executive Council by adding six additional representatives. Two for youth and four for African Americans and other minorities;
2. Reaffirm the importance of the General Convention Special Program;
3. Support the principles of black economic development and self-determination, without adopting the ideology of the Black Manifesto;
4. Call for an ecumenical conference to study how religious bodies might better support racial and economic justice in the United States;
5. Strengthen the Episcopal Church's three black colleges in the South (St. Augustine's, St. Paul's, and Voorhees);
6. Form a permanent Executive Council committee to review and coordinate the church's ministry among ethnic and racial minorities;
7. Create and distribute promotional materials about the Episcopal Church's views on race;

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<sup>155</sup> The Rev. John Coburn served as the dean of Trinity Cathedral in Newark, NJ from 1953-1957 before being elected dean of The Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, MA.

<sup>156</sup> "Report and Recommendations of the Executive Council on Racial Programs," *1969 Journal of the Episcopal Church Special Convention*, Appendix 17, 444.

8. And, encourage dioceses and large parishes to follow the example of the national church and provide funds for investment in black communities.<sup>157</sup>

“Penitence must issue in action,” the Coburn Report concluded, “the Church must speak... out of the courage of its beliefs, [accepting] the division and brokenness as it seeks to overcome [it].”<sup>158</sup> Despite the encouraging tone struck by the committee report, the 1969 Special Convention “division and brokenness” came to the forefront of the meeting. Leaders became embattled over various social actions, past and present, that had already been done and over who made and should make those decisions. Aware of the tensions, Bishop Hines urged leaders at the Convention to stay the course of social action established with the GCSP and work together to “heal our broken world.”<sup>159</sup> Hines, to little avail, was attempting to unite the conservative members of the Episcopal Church only interested in “the vertical dimensions of their faith” and radicals who wanted to tear apart institutional Christianity. Striking a pragmatic tone, Hines begged each side: “Don’t give up on the church – even in its apparent defeats.”<sup>160</sup>

On the first evening during a joint session of the Convention, the Union of Black Clergy and Laymen (UBCL) coordinated an effort to take over the podium. Muhammed Kenyatta, a BEDC-sponsored leader, was chosen as the spokesperson for UBCL and when the time was right, wrestled the microphone away from bishop Hines.<sup>161</sup> After the ensuing chaos, Hines allowed Kenyatta to speak. Kenyatta demanded that the Episcopal Church

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<sup>157</sup> “Report and Recommendations of the Executive Council on Racial Programs,” *1969 Journal of the Episcopal Church Special Convention*, Appendix 17, 443-446; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 192.

<sup>158</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 193.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

address the Black Manifesto as a part of its convention business. The Rev. Paul Washington, a black priest and host of the 1968 National Conference on Black Power in Philadelphia, took the microphone next and condemned the Episcopal Church for setting the agenda without the coordination of black people in the Church. After his remarks, Washington led a walkout of all of the African Americans from the convention hall.<sup>162</sup> This display of solidarity helped set the tone for the remainder of the convention and personified the “Episcopal Awakening” of the 1960s.

As the convention gathered the next morning to discuss the Black Manifesto, a group of white anti-war protesters made their concerns heard as they read off the names of soldiers killed in the Vietnam War. These causes were amplified later in the week as two military deserters entered the convention hall unannounced and asked to be granted sanctuary by the Episcopal Church. After deputies voted down this request, separate groups of blacks and whites stood and turned their back to the convention to protest their decision. Furthering dissent throughout the gathering, Mary Eunice Oliver, an elected deputy from the Diocese of Los Angeles, was denied her seat on the floor of the convention because women were not allowed to serve as deputies.<sup>163</sup> The Rev. John Krumm, the rector of Church of the Ascension in New York City and former chaplain of Columbia University, passionately described the gathering as “the miracle convention of 1969” because it revealed that the Episcopal Church “is not the comfortable upper-middle-class version of respectable Christianity [but is] the most diverse, motley, widely varied group of human beings that could ever be imagined.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> “Black and White Militants Disrupt Episcopal Parley,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Aug. 31, 1969.

<sup>163</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 194.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

Against the backdrop of protest, the UBCL continued to request two-hundred thousand dollars from the Special General Convention to support the demands of the BEDC. Once this request was ultimately denied, The Rev. Junius Carter, one of the few black voting delegates at the convention, protested the decision. Standing at the microphone, he angrily equated the Church's decision of not supporting the BEDC as "the crucifixion of its black members." He continued, "You don't trust me, you don't trust black priests, and you don't trust black people." Carter then left the convention hall in disgust. His words, however, ultimately had a great effect as the convention reversed its earlier decision and authorized a two-hundred thousand dollar grant to be used by BEDC. Bishop Bayne of New York said that Carter's words made many people "uncomfortable... but they heard a lot of things they needed to hear." He continued, "what was done today was more than any simple allocation of money. It shows that the Episcopal Church has confidence in its black clergy."<sup>165</sup> In writing about the Special Convention, the Rt. Rev. Leland Stark, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, said the convention stamped the 1960s "as the decade of Episcopal Awakening" and that the Special General Convention had been "not only soul-stirring but soul-changing."<sup>166</sup>

While African Americans made gains within the Episcopal Church at the 1969 Special Convention, many middle-class white Americans began to think the Episcopal Church lost its "corporate mind." Hines and other leaders were caught between two groups within the Church: "those who wanted the church to be further engaged in social revolution

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<sup>165</sup> Seth S. King, "Episcopal Leaders Vote \$200,000 in 'Reparations,'" *New York Times* (New York, NY), Sep. 3, 1969.

<sup>166</sup> Leland Stark, "A Bishops' Pastoral Letter," *Newark Churchman*, (Newark, NJ), October, 1969, 2.

and those that wanted to turn back to strictly ‘spiritual’ concerns.”<sup>167</sup> These concerns only widened as the 1970s brought on new social challenges for the Church and society like the Vietnam War and the Women’s Movement.

Over the next couple years, despite their best attempts at supporting black empowerment causes, GCSP began to lose the support of many within the Episcopal Church as they were perceived as supporting organizations that promoted violence or went against the Christian ethos of a diocese. One example of this included the funding of Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, North Carolina. A group of Black Power leaders established Malcolm X University in the spring of 1969 after Duke University failed to develop an adequate black studies program. The Rt. Rev. Thomas Fraser, then bishop of North Carolina, adamantly tried to block the grant from his diocese because it supported separatism as a black institution. In 1966, Fraser went on record against the concept of Black Power in *The Living Church*, a well-established, though generally conservative magazine of the denomination. He believed the Black Power philosophy was on par with the racist philosophy of the Ku Klux Klan and he threatened to excommunicate any Episcopalian advocating for white or Black Power in his diocese.<sup>168</sup> Ultimately, the GCSP grant went to support Malcolm X University but a deep rift began between GCSP and diocesan bishops and leadership.

Another controversial GCSP grant was handed out to Alianza Federal de Mercedes, a Mexican American group seeking to repurchase land from the United States taken after the Mexican war. Since GCSP was designed to “assist and empower” poor people of all races, Alianza was granted forty-thousand dollars. This funding was met with immediate

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<sup>167</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 195.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

backlash from the Rt. Rev. C.J. Kinsolving, bishop of New Mexico and Southwest Texas, because of an alleged violent attack on a courthouse by the Alianza group. Organizations that acted in violence violated the GCSP guidelines. Modeste and Hines, however, argued that the violence was a form of self-defense due to the poor living conditions of the Mexican American people and the Executive Council voted to approve the grant 23-21. Kinsolving took action of his own and immediately withheld the remaining eighty-two thousand dollars his diocese owed the national church. Some bishops believed the Episcopal Church was overstepping by denying diocesan bishops the ultimate authority of vetoing a grant within their diocese.<sup>169</sup>

By 1970, there were undeniable rifts between the leadership of the denomination and Episcopalians in the South and Southwest. These tensions continued at the 1970 General Convention in Houston, Texas where many white Episcopalians were furious about the work “their” Church was supporting through the GCSP. One rector from El Paso, Texas thought the denomination’s leadership was acting like a “sacred cow” while “killing the goose that lays the golden egg.”<sup>170</sup> Mostly, he believed the Church’s social action programs that promoted black empowerment were pushing away middle-class whites who were big supporters in the Church. The El Paso priest’s observation became a reality as the Episcopal Church projected a one-million-dollar shortfall in its 1970 budget. Following the lead of Bishop Kinsolving, other dioceses and Episcopalians withheld financial support from the national church to repudiate the GCSP.

While blacks in the Church made progress during the 1967 and 1969 General Conventions, the 1970 General Convention effectively reversed that advancement. “The

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 202.

real issue at stake in Houston,” The Rt. Rev. James L. Duncan, bishop of Southeast Florida stated, “was not over the GCSP or any other program the denominational leadership was going to discuss, but control over the church itself.”<sup>171</sup> Many white, southern Episcopalians, fearful the denomination would fracture, were relieved after they successfully regained control over “their” Church at the 1970 General Convention. The convention reduced funds to support GCSP from three million dollars to about one million dollars in 1971 and gave bishops veto power over funding in their respective dioceses. This clause contradicted Bishop Hines’ original “no strings attached” and the GCSP’s core mission of enabling minority groups to control their own organizations (a main tenant of the Black Power Movement). White leadership in the Church once again had authority over which minority groups were worthy of the denomination’s support. After the 1970 General Convention, many white Episcopalians felt “relieved and content” while black Episcopalians and the UBCL felt that “racism had won the day at Houston.”<sup>172</sup>

The Rev. Nathan Wright, once one of the most prominent black priests in the Episcopal Church, announced his resignation from the Diocese of Newark before the 1970 General Convention. In a letter to Bishops Stark and Rath, Wright said he could work more effectively toward black empowerment as a lay member of the Church. He rescinded his priestly duties in order to better focus on education programs in black communities.<sup>173</sup> The

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Wright rescinded his priestly duties to serve the community through education endeavors (as a college professor) and furthering the fight for Black Power. However, later letters and documents between Bishop Stark and Nathan Wright share the intimate details of a divorce between Wright and his first wife, Barbara. Two years after the *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) decision in the United States Supreme Court, Wright married Carolyn May, a white publicist from Manhattan (and the niece of socialite Marjorie Merriweather Post). Wright shared in a letter to Bishop Rath that the decision to marry a white woman was partly to blame for rescinding his priestly status when he did. He was reinstated to the priesthood by Bishop Rath in 1975 and went

letter shared high praise for his colleagues, the work done by the diocese, and Bishop Stark's forward-looking and imaginative vision for hiring Wright against the prevailing will of the diocese in 1964. "The Church," Wright concludes, "has a major urban task ahead of itself in serving as a catalyst for broad social, political, and economic changes which go to the very heart of American life."<sup>174</sup>

With the GCSP severely diminished after 1970 and the changing tide in American focus from the black freedom struggle to the Vietnam War and the Women's Movement, race became a nuanced issue in the Episcopal Church. The shift away from social action led to the cancelation of the GCSP in 1973 and effectively ended the Episcopal Church's formal empowerment of blacks and other minority groups in the process. *The Living Church* editors praised the termination of the GCSP because "a giveaway program that smacked more of Lady Bountifulism than of apostolic Christianity" had ended.<sup>175</sup>

At the 1973 General Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, Bishop Hines announced his impending retirement as presiding bishop – two years before his term was set to end. Some speculated that he had been forced out by white conservatives, but it was more likely that he was exhausted from serving as bishop for thirty years during a turbulent period in America. The House of Bishops elected the Rt. Rev. John Allin as Hines' successor. As bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, he was a constant critic of Hines' GCSP and resisted Civil Rights involvement by church leaders in the state of Mississippi. Allin's election by the House of Bishops could be seen as a direct rejection of Hines' legacy of

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on to serve several parishes in the Episcopal Church. Wright also consulted with the presidential administrations of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

<sup>174</sup> Nathan Wright, Jr., "Impending Vocational Adjustment," A letter to the Bishops and Members of the Department of Urban Work, March 27, 1969, (Episcopal Diocese of Newark Archives).

<sup>175</sup> Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 211.

racial liberalism and was the beginning of a new era for the Episcopal Church: an era of a status quo, culture-bound institution.

After his election as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. John Allin led an effort to unify a splintering denomination. While Hines' ambitious vision for the Church of uniting a fracturing society through a crusade of empowerment programs was inspiring, it ultimately proved to be too controversial, costly, and divisive for the Church to maintain. Hines' strategy brought strife and division to a majority white denomination and his vision never fully integrated with the Black Power movement of the prior decade. Allin, in contrast, sought to unite and lead a denomination of the "great silent majority" while being attentive to the racial differences of the denomination.<sup>176</sup> The transition from Hines to Allin was indicative of the shifting social and political landscape of the United States in the 1970s.

A *Newsweek* report equated the 1970s to that of the 1870s when "northern whites backed away from active concern for the freed black minority in the South."<sup>177</sup> This was exacerbated and amplified by President Richard Nixon's chief domestic advisor, Daniel Moynihan, who called for "a period of benign neglect" in regard to the black freedom struggle and Black Power in the United States. Protestant denominations, including the Episcopal Church, began to turn their focus back to the spiritual concerns of the church, rather than social justice issues of society at large. Helen Smith Shoemaker, founder of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, opined in *The Living Church* that poor black Americans do not need economic, social, or political power. Rather, contrary to Hines' strategy with the GCSP, she suggested poor blacks needed spiritual power and a sense of God in their

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 205.

lives.<sup>178</sup> Shoemaker's sentiments were not isolated throughout the Episcopal Church and the 1970s saw the Church become more contemplative on the religious and spiritual matters of the institution. The issues of Black Power and disenfranchisement of blacks were compressed within the church, but the legacy and ripples of the Black Power Movement lived and lives on through the decades.

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<sup>178</sup> Helen Smith Shoemaker, "The Arrogance of Confrontation," *The Living Church*, (October 4, 1970), 25-26.

**Conclusion:**  
**The Episcopal Church**

The 1960s marked a decade of Episcopal Awakening and a turning point for the denomination in regard to race relations and its role within the larger American society. With the transformative work of Wright and other black leaders, the Diocese of Newark and the broader Episcopal Church worked toward an imaginative future where each individual had control of their own destiny, even and especially as the Black Power Movement entered the American consciousness. The Black Power Movement continued to be the catalyst for self-development and self-empowerment that was needed for black Americans to pursue political, social, and economic independence; it was too, as Nathan Wright would suggest, a movement that was for the good of the nation. Wright believed that Black Power would lift blacks to a greater attainment of confidence and control in their communities that would benefit all Americans.

Despite the Black Power Movements influence on the Episcopal Church's social action programs, like the General Convention Special Program (GCSP), the Church left its

black leadership and membership fundamentally disenfranchised throughout the denomination. Many black clergy and laity remained largely disregarded within the leadership of the Episcopal Church and throughout parish ministry at the beginning of the 1970s. However, through the development of organizations like the Union of Black Clergy and Laymen (later called the Union of Black Episcopalians) and leadership in African American led movements throughout the country, blacks in the Episcopal Church began to find a voice in an overwhelmingly white – and often intentionally oppressive – denomination.

The Rev. Nathan Wright, a bridge between the Black Power Movement and the Episcopal Church, used his activism and Christian witness to become a lasting legacy in the struggle for change in the denomination he served. While the Black Power Movement and its transformative message failed to produce the systemic change hoped for by Wright and others within the denomination, the movement influenced progress in the Episcopal Church in the subsequent decades. Following in the footsteps of blacks in the denomination, women began to make strides of progress as they went from supporting roles in the Church to leadership positions. After failing in 1970 and 1973, the 1976 General Convention of the Episcopal Church finally voted to allow the full priestly ordination of women. This decision led to the ordination of Pauli Murray in 1977 and Barbara Harris in 1980; the first African American women priests in the Episcopal Church. Harris went on to become the first woman bishop in the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion. This diversity of voices and a commitment to creating communities that are more just and equitable continue to enrich the Episcopal Church, its parishes, and the communities in which they serve, teach, and preach. Though it remains on the forefront of social justice and empowerment issues as a denomination, only four percent of members

in the Episcopal Church identify as black, and there remains room for significant improvement and diversity.<sup>179</sup>

The strides toward empowerment of the marginalized continued in 2015 as the Episcopal Church gathered for its 78<sup>th</sup> General Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah. The gathering followed another mass shooting in the United States. This time, the senseless attack took place at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. This racially motivated violence killed nine members of the historically black church and weighed heavy on the convention during their nine-day gathering. With racial tensions running high after the shooting in Charleston and the untimely deaths of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner at the hands of law enforcement, the Episcopal Church once again had to contend with racism in American society.

After the killing of teenager Michael Brown in 2014, a new slogan for racial justice rang through the country: “Black Lives Matter.” There was an eerie similarity to the 1960s chants for Black Power and it was and is not hard to notice the similarities in the disenfranchisement of black Americans still evident throughout the country. Both slogans, “Black Power” and “Black Lives Matter” come from a deep-rooted need for recognition and safety for black Americans. Calls for Black Lives Matter focused around “the ideological and political intervention in a world where black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.”<sup>180</sup> Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement affirmed the humanity of black Americans, their contributions to American society, and

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<sup>179</sup> “Racial and ethnic composition among members of the Episcopal Church,” *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/episcopal-church/racial-and-ethnic-composition/#demographic-information>.

<sup>180</sup> Black Lives Matter, “Herstory,” *Black Lives Matter*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>.

their resilience in the face of deadly oppression.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless, black communities from Newark to Flint, Michigan and Chicago to Los Angeles still remain ravaged by racial injustice.

With race once again at the forefront of the American consciousness, the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church chose to make racial justice and reconciliation their highest priority over the next triennium. Resolution 2015-C019 passed the House of Bishops and House of Deputies and made a commitment to combat racism's many forms:

*Resolved*, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church confesses that, despite repeated efforts at anti-racism training as well as racial justice and racial reconciliation initiatives including the passage of more than 30 General Convention resolutions dating back to 1952, the abomination and sin of racism continue to plague our society and our Church at great cost to human life and human dignity; we formally acknowledge our historic and contemporary participation in this evil and repent of it; *and be it further*

*Resolved*, That in the wake of the brutal, overtly racist murders of nine of our Christian brothers and sisters of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015; numerous inexcusable deaths of unarmed black men and youth at the hands of law enforcement personnel; and the moral atrocity of mass incarceration in which a hugely disproportionate number of persons of color have been unfairly caught in the net of an unjust criminal justice system, the 78th General Convention affirms as a top priority of The Episcopal Church in the upcoming triennium the challenging and difficult work of racial reconciliation through prayer, teaching, engagement, and action;<sup>182</sup>

Keenly aware of the prevalent racism in modern society, the Episcopal Church seeks to “be made new” by acknowledging its participation in the injustice and seeks to do the difficult work toward transformation. The Church’s transformation is fulfilled by fighting for the marginalized, seeking to correct the economic and political injustice facing men and women throughout the country and world, and as the Baptismal Covenant

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), 310-311.

demands, respecting the dignity of every human being. At the convention, the Episcopal Church was tasked with electing their next presiding bishop to lead the denomination. On the first ballot, the House of Bishops overwhelmingly elected the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, as the 27<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. This historic election made Curry the first African American to lead the denomination in its more than two-hundred-year history. “We’ve got a society where there are challenges before us and there are crises all around us,” Curry proclaimed during a speech after his election, “and the church has challenges before it, [but] nothing can stop the movement of God’s love in this world.”<sup>183</sup> Curry, like Bishop Hines, believed that the Church had a role to play in the larger American society in combating the social ills.

Since the 2015 convention, The Episcopal Church has made a long-term commitment to *Become the Beloved Community*.<sup>184</sup> These initiatives to combat the social ills of American life seek to repair the breach of society and “respond to racial injustice and grow a community of reconcilers, justice-makers, and healers.”<sup>185</sup> Rooted in the baptismal covenant, the Church has established concrete efforts to address racial injustice throughout the country and around the world. By confronting racism, along with other important social issues like mass incarceration, economic inequality, and climate change, the Episcopal Church has once again become a leader in the empowerment of individuals and communities. By adopting radical policies that seek to disrupt the status quo in

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<sup>183</sup> Mary Frances Schjonberg, “North Carolina Bishop Michael Curry elected as 27<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop: Historic decision will bring first person of color into top leadership office,” *Episcopal News Service*, June 27, 2015. <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2015/06/27/north-carolina-bishop-michael-curry-elected-as-27th-presiding-bishop/>.

<sup>184</sup> “Becoming Beloved Community,” *The Episcopal Church*, 2016. [https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/becoming\\_beloved\\_community\\_summary\\_0.pdf](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/becoming_beloved_community_summary_0.pdf)

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

American society, the Church continues to live out the gospel, entrenched in society's struggles in a changing world. The ripples of radical reforms from the Black Power Movement and the decade of Episcopal Awakening continue.

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