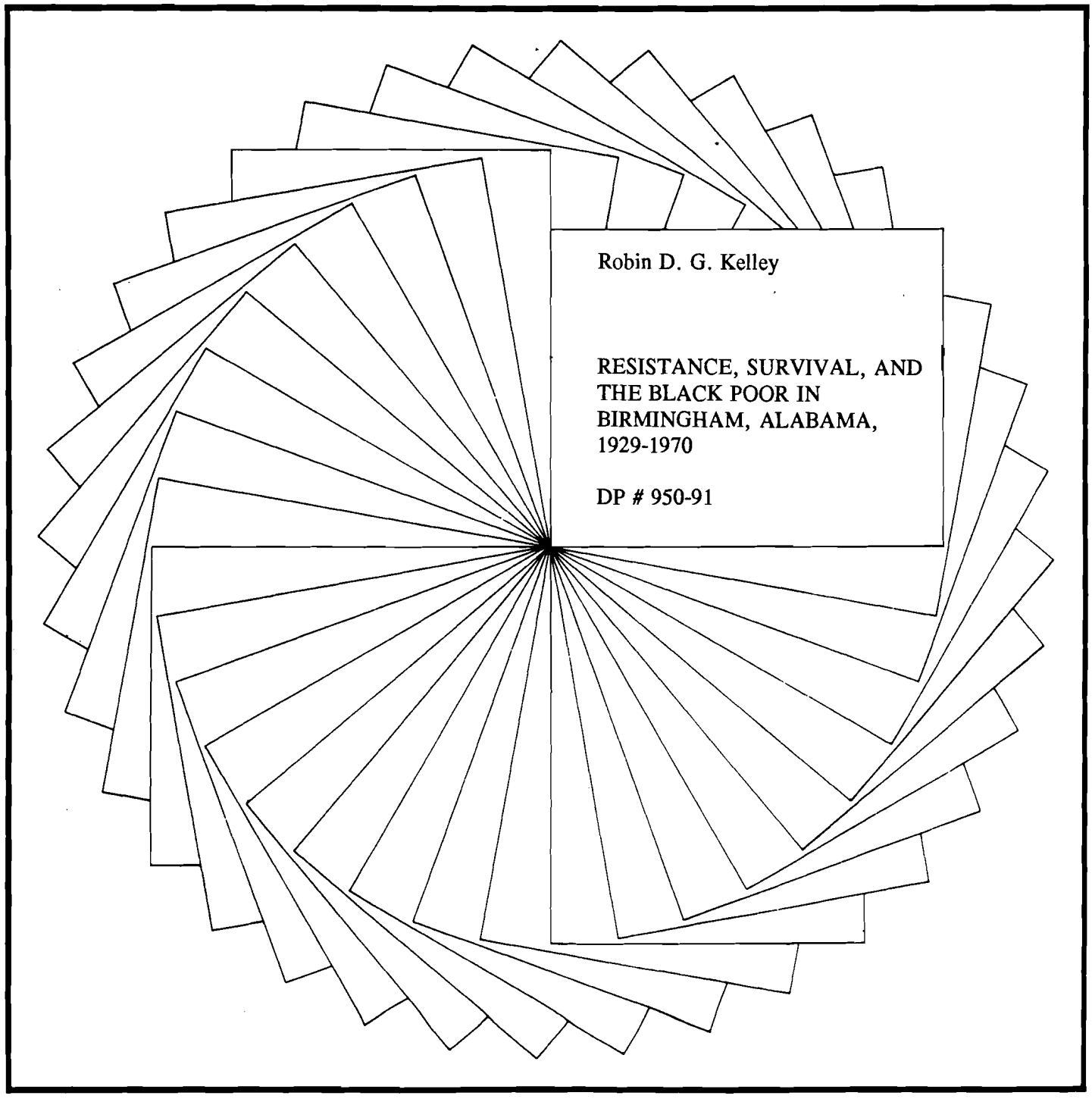
University of Wisconsin-Madison

# Institute for Research on Poverty

## Discussion Papers



Robin D. G. Kelley

RESISTANCE, SURVIVAL, AND THE BLACK POOR IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, 1929-1970

DP # 950-91

Institute for Research on Poverty
Discussion Paper no. 950-91

# Resistance, Survival, and the Black Poor in Birmingham, Alabama, 1929-1970

Robin D. G. Kelley, Ph.D.
Department of History
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

July 1991

The author would like to thank the Institute for Research on Poverty for its generous support of this project, and Glen Eskew, Tom Sugrue, Earl Lewis, Michael Katz, George Lipsitz, and participants in the IRP Small Grants Seminar in Washington, D.C. Any opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author alone and should not be construed as representing the position or policy of the Department of Health and Human Services or of the Institute for Research on Poverty.

**Abstract**

Using James C. Scott's concepts of "public transcripts" and "hidden transcripts" as a framework for discussion, the author examines the ways in which Birmingham's black urban poor fought a municipal government that barred them from the political process while subjecting them to verbal and physical abuse, a denial of municipal rights, and unchecked police brutality. The focus is on those moments when the "hidden transcript"--the dissident political culture of the oppressed--manifested itself, be it in the form of black passengers sitting next to whites on public busses, bottles and rocks being thrown at Bull Connor's policemen during the 1963 demonstrations, or the Alabama Black Liberation Front being organized to physically intervene in resisting evictions. The author argues that the position of poor urban blacks will improve only after policymakers and grass-roots organizers act with the hidden transcript in mind and leave off believing that the "public transcript"--the often decorous conversations between black and white public officials that only reinforce the subordinate position of the black poor--expresses the true needs and positions of the poor.

**Resistance, Survival, and the Black Poor in Birmingham, Alabama, 1929-1970**

> So long as we confine our conception of the political to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt and that, for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes. It is to focus on the visible coastline of politics and miss the continent that lies beyond.
>
> --James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance.

> The underclass itself is, as always, relatively quiescent politically. . . .
> --Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land.

Despite growing national interest in the plight of the urban "underclass," social historians, unlike social scientists and urban anthropologists, have generally ignored the black urban poor in the twentieth century, and those few historians who have examined race and poverty tend to focus primarily on policy issues rather than the lives and struggles of the poor themselves. Consequently, there is a dearth of studies on the social history of the poor, and what exists generally ignores the role(s) of ideology and consciousness, the formation of oppositional movements among the inner-city poor, and various forms of individual and collective resistance and survival strategies.[1]

The purpose of this paper is to restore politics and human agency to the study of the poor through an examination of the ways in which Birmingham's black poor attempted to survive, mitigate, or alter their circumstances. Covering the period from the origins of the Great Depression to the post-Civil Rights/Black Power era, I will examine the changing socioeconomic world of the jobless and working poor; the various legal and illegal methods by which African-Americans survived and resisted poverty, segregation, and racial oppression; and the relationship between poor people's oppositional practices and organized political movements that claim to speak on behalf of the black poor.

The following is much more than an historical survey of survival and resistive strategies; it seeks to redefine political practice in a manner that places poor people's self-activity--including oppositional forms hidden from public view--at the center of our analysis. My own theoretical framework is indebted to James C. Scott's most recent book, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts. Scott argues that interaction between subordinate and dominant groups represents a "public transcript," a power-laden discourse intended to reinforce the subordinate's station in society. But this public transcript, which Scott likens to a performance, does not necessarily represent the real thoughts of the oppressed. Offstage, in their "sequestered social sites," subordinate groups challenge ideological hegemony by constructing a "hidden transcript," a dissident political culture that manifests itself in the daily conversations, jokes, songs, folklore, and other cultural forms of the oppressed. The hidden transcript might surface in a disguised form in rituals with dual meanings or as everyday forms of resistance--theft, footdragging, the destruction of property, etc. Or, in some cases, the hidden transcript might be declared publicly in the form of an open, direct confrontation, a verbal or physical attack against those in power or symbols of domination. Scott labels the whole body of behind-the-scenes political discourse "infrapolitics." As he puts it, "the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum. That it should be invisible . . . is in large part by design--a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power." Infrapolitics is also a kind of infrastructure or foundational politics that is required in order for any organized, mass movement to be successful. These hidden forms provide the structural and cultural framework for the sorts of political action social scientists generally examine.[2]

In Birmingham, Alabama, where the black poor have been locked out of democratic political institutions throughout most of the twentieth century, been victims of legal and extralegal repression, and have had to face racial as well as economic barriers to fair wages and decent living and working

conditions, it should not be surprising that much of their oppositional practice remained at the level of infrapolitics. Indeed, perhaps the most effective way to characterize the struggles of the black urban poor is by using metaphors from guerrilla warfare: they were engaged in a protracted struggle, constantly testing the limits, attacking vulnerable sites, making tactical retreats, challenging the powerful in small-scale skirmishes.

For my own purposes, how successful these oppositional practices were is not as important as what they tell us about how the poor viewed domination and the social order, what political issues were foremost in their minds, and how infrapolitics shapes more formal political institutions. Inscribed in the daily oppositional practices of Birmingham's black poor--especially in those electric moments when the hidden transcript is publicly declared--is a very complex political agenda that has as its foundation a rejection of domination and material appropriation. Unless we understand this complex hidden agenda, the realm of poor people's infrapolitics, we will never understand (1) why so few poor black people support or join formal political organizations that purport to speak for the poor, and (2) why some organizations are more successful than others at mobilizing the black poor.

Finally, locating and documenting these forms of oppositional practice is no easy task. As James C. Scott explains, infrapolitics is "the realm of informal leadership and nonelites, of conversation and oral discourse, and of surreptitious resistance. The logic of infrapolitics is to leave few traces in the wake of its passage. By covering its tracks it not only minimizes the risks its practitioners run but it also eliminates much of the documentary evidence that might convince social scientists and historians that real politics was taking place."[3] Therefore, much of my argument about the offstage transcript relies on evidence drawn from moments when Birmingham's black poor threw down the gauntlet, so to speak; when the hidden transcript was publicly declared and documented. What is lacking in the following analysis is the world beyond the public gaze, the daily efforts on the

part of the poor to construct and sustain a dissident culture. Although I hint at this at times, a richer discussion of this aspect of the world offstage will have to wait.

## THE MAKING OF A POOR BLACK COMMUNITY: BIRMINGHAM, 1900-1929

From the discovery and exploitation of large mineral deposits in central Alabama rose the Birmingham industrial complex--a region often called the "Pittsburgh of the South." The juxtaposition of limestone, coking coal, dolomite, and red hematite ore substantially reduced production costs, but it was not enough to make Birmingham's coal and iron industry competitive on the national market. Birmingham's deposits' being buried deep below mountainous slopes, the region's insufficient water supply, increased transportation costs, and the lower metallic content of its ore rendered capital investments relatively high compared to other U.S. mining regions. However, cheap labor from the Alabama countryside compensated for the capital-intensive nature of mining, making the Birmingham district one of the country's least costly industrial centers. African-American labor was crucial to Birmingham's development. By 1900, 55 percent of Alabama's coal miners and 65 percent of its iron and steel workers were black, and by 1910 over 90 percent of Birmingham's unskilled labor force was African-American, thus constituting one of the largest black urban communities in the New South.[4]

Segregation in the public sphere reinforced the development of a separate black social and cultural world. Yet unlike northern urban centers such as New York or Chicago, where blacks were concentrated in one or two dense sections of the city, Birmingham's black communities were spread over several pockets situated along creekbeds, railroad lines, and alleys near the downtown area. Excluding the greater Birmingham area and the surrounding industrial suburbs, the central core of black residence settled along the Twentieth Street axis from South Birmingham towards the railroad

tracks which ran through downtown Birmingham. Most black neighborhoods, especially those with a rather high concentration of working poor, suffered from lack of streetlights, paved streets, sewers, and other city services.[5] African-American working people also lived in segregated company-owned settlements in greater Birmingham's industrial suburbs, especially North Birmingham, Woodlawn, Ensley, Greenwood, Collegeville, Smithfield, and Fairfield. Thousands of black miners and steel workers lived in company-owned double-tenant "shotgun" houses, ranging in quality from well-constructed wooden frame houses to shoddy board and batten dwellings.[6]

The black elite established a business district along Eighteenth Street in the heart of downtown Birmingham. Black businessmen and religious leaders made their small fortunes from a consumer base of working-class blacks and insured peaceful relations by creating alliances with white industrialists, and a handful secured enough "respectability" to retain the franchise. Like the white elite, they maintained their own exclusive social clubs and rarely interacted socially with poor blacks.[7] In other words, while the physical proximity between the black elite and the black poor can be considered relatively close, their social worlds were quite distant. Intraracial class divisions had tremendous implications for the politics of the poor since traditional black organizations tended to be led by, and composed of, the black petit-bourgeoisie. Traditional black leadership, however, did not always understand the circumstances and needs of the black poor, and more often than not promoted an agenda reflective of their own class interests. During and after World War I, for example, the rapid influx of rural African-Americans in search of job opportunities into the already overcrowded and highly segregated metropolis, the country's failure to fulfill wartime promises of equality, and the renewed militancy of returning war veterans combined to create an unusually tense political situation in Birmingham. Compounded by the struggles of black Birmingham miners during the violent strikes of 1919 and 1920-1921, postwar Birmingham could have erupted much like Chicago; indeed, authorities anticipated riots in the "Magic City."[8]

Responding to racial tensions and rising expectations, the NAACP established a branch in Birmingham in 1919, one of its avowed purposes being the redirection of black resistance toward more respectable avenues. An outgrowth of the Colored Citizens' League of Bessemer--an organization of ministers and businessmen founded in 1916--its initial agenda was to quell potential violence.[9] Although the Birmingham chapter claimed nearly a thousand members in 1919, in less than three years its membership dropped to a dismal thirty-six. By 1928, the branch ceased operating altogether. Ku Klux Klan intimidation and other forms of repression partly explain the rapid demise of the NAACP during the 1920's, but racial violence notwithstanding, the Association's local leadership ignored the problems of the black poor. The Birmingham branch's agenda focused more on the city's black business interests than on racial violence, the denial of civil liberties, the lack of decent housing, and the meager wages paid to black workers.[10]

Not all black workers depended on the black elite for leadership; some turned to interracial labor organizations. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, black coal miners, in particular, joined the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in order to improve wages and working conditions. During both the 1904 and 1908 coal miners' strikes, for example, black workers were in the majority. In the final analysis, however, the UMWA was not successful: employers adeptly used racist propaganda, violence, and black convict labor to weaken unionism in Alabama's coal fields. Moreover, when Birmingham coal miners struck for higher wages after World War I, the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI), a subsidiary of the U.S. Steel Corporation and the dominant company in Birmingham, crushed the strike as well as the UMWA in Alabama with the support of state troops. The UMWA's collapse marked the end of biracial unionism in Alabama until the 1930's. Organizing efforts among black ore miners and steel workers were even less successful before the 1930's. The Metal Trades Council of Birmingham concentrated exclusively on skilled

workers, thus ignoring black workers who comprised nearly one-half of the steel and iron workers and 70 percent of the ore miners.[11]

## SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The urban South began to feel the effects of the Great Depression as early as 1927, two years before the stock market crash. The Birmingham Trades Council reported an unemployment rate of 18 percent in February 1928, and between 1926 and 1929 the Jefferson County Red Cross' relief rolls more than doubled. In 1930, coal production had reached its lowest level since 1921 and pig iron output had dropped by over 41 percent. Cutbacks in jobs were exacerbated by a surge of migrants hoping to escape rural poverty. In 1931, TCI-owned mines and mills cut wages by 25 percent, followed by a 15 percent reduction in May 1932. More devastating for workers, however, were cutbacks in operations which effectively forced large numbers of employees to accept work on a part-time basis. TCI, Sloss-Sheffield, and Woodward Iron Company implemented a three-day schedule in 1931, and some steel workers and miners worked as little as one or two days per month.[12]

Black working women in the city, 82 percent of whom worked as domestics in 1930, were hit especially hard by the Depression. Without the benefit of sick pay, vacation, or regular hours, some women worked for as little as $1.50 to $2.00 per week and whatever they could "tote" from their employers kitchens.[13] Large numbers of household workers were laid off as well: in 1935, eight thousand black female domestic workers registered with the Alabama Employment Service.[14] Given the dominance of steel, iron ore, and coal mining industries in Birmingham, prospects for alternative employment for black women were not very promising. Because most black working-class families relied on two incomes, it was not uncommon for women to combine wage labor and housework. As

conditions worsened, the chore of providing for their families increasingly fell upon the shoulders of women. With few job opportunities and the burden of child rearing, women were more dependent on various forms of private and public relief than men. Moreover, some husbands chose to leave so that their families might receive more relief, or because of domestic conflict, or, in some cases, because they were simply tired of the tremendous responsibility.[15]

Prior to the New Deal, Birmingham's poor had few avenues to which they could turn for assistance. The families of miners and steel workers residing in company-owned suburbs received some support from their employers, but company-sponsored welfare programs were extremely limited. TCI workers, for example, paid all health care expenses through monthly fees levied on their paychecks, and most unemployed relief that workers received eventually had to be paid back. Employees unable to pay rent on company-owned homes were not automatically evicted, but the accumulated rent payments were deferred to a later date, and heat, electricity, and water were cut off immediately.[16]

Most unemployed and working poor turned to municipal, county, and private agencies for support. In 1931 the city commission proposed a $500,000 bond issue to create employment opportunities through public works projects. The twelve hundred jobs it created, however, paid only twenty-five cents an hour for three eight-hour days. Municipal and county government's inadequate resources left the Red Cross to bear the brunt of Birmingham's relief needs. Its monthly expenditures increased from $6,000 in 1929 to $180,000 by July 1933, and the number of cases rose from 450 in 1929 to 20,914 in 1933. By 1933, nearly 27 percent of Birmingham's total black population was receiving some form of welfare.[17]

Federal intervention under Roosevelt did not solve the problem of joblessness and expanding poverty, but it did take much of the burden off of government and private efforts. With the enactment of the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) in May 1933 (which meant a congressional

appropriation of over nine million dollars for emergency relief for Alabama), and the creation of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) that same winter, thousands were lifted from the relief rolls. And after 1935, the Works Progress Administration employed a substantial number of Birmingham's unemployed.[18]

As the effects of the Depression began to take their toll, black working people had few weapons against plant shutdowns and layoffs. However, as former sharecroppers or descendants of rural folk who lived through many harsh winters, most poor blacks adopted dozens of creative methods of survival. In addition to performing odd jobs in exchange for food, obtaining grocery store throwaways, selling roasted peanuts, and hauling and selling firewood, the poor turned to urban cultivation--both as a source of additional food as well as cash income. Urban cultivation was the most common survival strategy during the Depression. Jobless and underemployed workers invested in various forms of livestock, from milk cows to pigs, and cultivated vegetable gardens in the back alleys of industrial suburbs. Most of the land was either rented or purchased from company-owned property, although occasionally the poor planted on vacant lots without permission from the owner. A 1934 Health Department report found at least 7,595 pigs and 1,996 cows within the city limits, the vast majority belonging to black families.[19]

The poor took pride in their ability to get through difficult times, but they also insisted on receiving some government or private assistance. Their public demeanor evoked an image of gratitude for whatever little relief they might receive, and humility, in most cases at least, toward social workers and other social agency representatives. But in private conversation, many poor people rationalized that the Depression was not their fault and, therefore, they should not have to suffer unduly. Providing adequate assistance was not only the "right" thing to do, it was an obligation. In an anonymous letter to a radical publication, one black unemployed resident described the city's relief program as worse than slavery. "In slavery times, I am told, the master would put

good shirts and overalls on you and today we can't even eat on $6 a week." When welfare agencies were not responsive enough, frustration and fear of starvation could turn the most humble, mild-mannered poor person into a militant. Birmingham resident Curtis Maggard, an unemployed steel worker during most of the Depression who took pride in his ability to "make it . . . without stealing or robbing," was pushed to a point of desperation by the city welfare agency's reluctance to provide relief. He and his wife had not eaten in four days and his daughter was crying for something to eat. Angry and desperate, Maggard marched down to the welfare office armed with a "croker sack" and insisted on some material aid. When he was told that a relief check was in the mail, he delivered a powerful monologue, a public declaration of the hidden transcript:

> I said, "You been telling me that for four weeks . . . . You got a grocery store up there, and here is a croker sack. When I get home, I'm going to have that croker sack full of food. Ya'll got a grocery store down there, and I'm going to send somebody to hell to get me something to eat." And that's the only thing that stirred them up.

Although Maggard did not leave with a full croker sack, he was issued a check immediately.[20]

How relief was administered and how individuals were treated in welfare offices or on public works projects was just as important as how much one received. On public relief projects, black workers frequently complained that the easier jobs were reserved for whites, and occasionally resisted work they thought to be demeaning or too tiresome. Curtis Maggard remembers a fight he had with a foreman on a relief project who ordered him to work as a "water boy" in addition to his assigned task of loading a wheelbarrow. Maggard threw down the gauntlet: "I wouldn't do it. That was too much work . . . He began to cuss me . . . and I got a shovel and was going to bust him in the head." Working for the Red Cross was not much better. Its public improvement projects involved demolishing abandoned buildings, rebuilding rural schools, draining lowland areas, and gardening. As one unemployed black worker complained, the "Red Cross boss stands with a pistol over us while we work, like we are prisoners working out a term." These conditions were compounded by the fact

that the Red Cross' relief payments were among the lowest in the country. It did not get any better: by August 1932, the Birmingham Red Cross stopped providing cash relief altogether, offering only food, fuel, and medication.[21] During the late 1930's, black women who struggled desperately to obtain WPA jobs in order to escape domestic work often resisted the hard and demeaning work they were assigned to perform. A black woman on a WPA beautification project near Bessemer who, along with other black women, had to dig trenches, remove rocks, and repair roads irrespective of the weather, probably summed up the feelings of her fellow workers when she wrote, "We are colored women and [are] treat [sic] worse than stock."[22]

The city's black relief applicants resented the condescending attitudes of caseworkers, many of whom established reputations for being verbally abusive to poor blacks. According to one former welfare recipient, black caseworkers were no better than whites. "They was rough folks. See they was getting [theirs], but they have to treat us mean . . . So they do like the whites tell them to do against their color."[23] Once in a while, an applicant would reach a breaking point and curse out a social worker or demand to be accorded at least of modicum of dignity and respect, but such action might lead to a complete withdrawal of assistance--a consequence few could afford. Nevertheless, in the context of a welfare office crowded with hungry and frustrated applicants, these public declarations of the hidden transcript often brought collective approval from other relief applicants who shared the same feelings of frustration. An anecdote told by Birmingham resident and Communist leader, Hosea Hudson, is very revealing on this score:

> I said, "Everytime I come out here, 'Get back side the wall,' and when I get in the office, they tell me 'your coal's on the way.' When I get home, I ain't got no coal to make a fire." I said, "I'm getting tired of getting back side the wall!"
>
> I was talking loud. That was just loud-mouthing. Let the people know somebody had some courage to speak. And several guys in the line there knew me, had worked in Stockham foundry with me, they said, "Tell them about it, Big Red!" "I hear you, Big Red!" cause I was always raising the devil in the shop anyhow. There was about 75-100 people, it was a lot of people there.

In some cases, disdain for condescending and insensitive caseworkers manifested itself in more collective, even violent, confrontations. According to one observer, during the early 1930's a group of angry black women who had had enough of one particularly notorious black caseworker, Ida Shepherd, simply "called her out and almost whooped her naked. The way she treat them."[24]

One of the most despised aspects of receiving welfare was dealing with investigators who would visit homes unannounced to determine whether an applicant was truly in need. Red Cross and city welfare officials required applicants to sell personal belongings considered superfluous, such as radios, watches, clothes, or new furniture. Possession of too much food or a garden sometimes led to an immediate cancellation of assistance. Of course, within the complicated matrix of "welfare politics" we find survival strategies that entailed collaboration with the powerful and, thus, were not oppositional at all. Some residents offered welfare agents and social workers their services as neighborhood spies in exchange for a larger grocery order or a few more pounds of coal. They would tell on neighbors who hid food, earned unreported wages, or maintained gardens. However, serving as a "neighborhood stool pigeon" was a rare strategy. No matter how beneficial such practices might seem, they led to ostracism, character assassination, and even verbal and physical harassment. As James C. Scott argues, the powerless also have sanctioning power within their own world; the hidden transcript enforces certain forms of conduct among subordinates, and thus social pressure is, in and of itself, a powerful weapon of the poor. "This means that any subordinate who seeks privilege by ingratiating himself to his superior will have to answer for that conduct once he returns to the world of his peers."[25]

Nobody went to jail for lying to a social worker, but those who hid food and personal items, moonlighted, or kept sub rosa gardens were clearly breaking the rules and regulations governing welfare recipients. Some of these same individuals went further, however, adopting strategies for which many wound up behind bars. During the Depression, thousands of poor African-Americans

depended on the informal economy to survive or supplement their income. Shoplifting, fencing, prostitution, "numbers" running, and making and selling liquor were just a few of the variety of crimes committed by the poor. Most common were forms of theft that rarely led to prosecution, and therefore are not reflected in crime statistics. Domestic workers were adept at "toting" or packing their employers' food and other items in their bags, coats, and uniforms as they skirted out the back door for home. During the winter, underemployed coal miners could sometimes be found appropriating chunks of coal and coke for their home ovens. Empty homes were occasionally torn apart by the poor desperately in need of fuel. (Individuals who might not have benefited directly from the stolen wood took advantage of the situation, obtaining free rent in exchange for "protecting" some landlord's private property.)[26] These latter crimes, especially theft at the workplace, should not be regarded as examples of what Roger Lane calls a black "criminal subculture." Several criminologists have argued that most property crimes, especially during recessions, are committed at work. Employee theft is not only easier to commit than most crimes, but it reflects a rational response on the part of workers to retrieve wages they feel they deserve.[27]

The appropriation of coal from the railroad is an especially interesting survival strategy precisely because of its collective character. Before sunup or late evening, as trains passed through certain sections of Birmingham, black firemen would "accidentally" shovel or kick pieces of coal off the train to black and white residents waiting in the darkness with empty sacks and carts by their sides. The trains that carried coal and coke from the mines were also prime targets: residents would jump on slow-moving trains and roll the coal off for everyone bold enough to show up. According to Hosea Hudson, "Nobody fighting over 'this is my coal' or nothing, but everybody trying to get what they can get. It wasn't any jim crow line around that coal, and there wasn't any fights among the Negroes and whites."[28]

Hosea Hudson and others like him did not depend solely on incipient strategies of survival and resistance. As many as four thousand other unemployed or working-poor black Birmingham residents joined the Communist Party (CP) and/or its various auxiliary organizations in an effort to improve conditions. Although the CP and Communist-led organizations such as the neighborhood relief committees, the unemployed councils, and the International Labor Defense represented less than one-sixth of the total black population on relief, this is still a remarkable figure given the lack of organized political activism among the poor as well as the level of repression Communists experienced in Birmingham. In a city where the consequences of open resistance compelled the black poor to adopt evasive forms of opposition, joining a Communist-led movement represented a serious breach of the public transcript. Hundreds of black radical activists were harassed, arrested, kidnapped, and beaten severely for their participation in Communist politics. Yet, despite a clear knowledge of the dangers involved, a substantial segment of the poor black community continued to support Communist organizations in Birmingham. Why? Because the movement spoke directly and unambiguously to the unemployed and working poor; in a word, it articulated the hidden transcript. In 1931, for example, as jobless black men and women complained about the paltry relief available from municipal and private agencies, the Communists demanded that the jobless receive a weekly minimum of ten dollars cash relief, free coal and carfare, a minimum of twenty dollars per week for city relief jobs, and a moratorium on evictions and the shutting off of utilities. Moreover, the Communists organized neighborhood relief committees to present their demands to the Birmingham Welfare Board and private relief agencies, especially the Red Cross.[29]

More significantly, because the Party and its auxiliaries were composed of poor black people, community activists simply brought local oppositional practices into the movement--in short, they enveloped organized radicalism within their own infrapolitics. Everyday forms of resistance and survival were far more common than dramatic marches and demonstrations. The neighborhood

committees generally dealt with the Birmingham Welfare Board on a case-by-case basis, confronting social workers with varied tactics ranging from begging to collective intimidation. They also fought evictions and foreclosures, but unlike New York or Chicago Communists and unemployed activists who defied police orders, Birmingham radicals adopted more subtle methods. Committee leaders frequently dissuaded landlords from evicting their tenants by describing the potential devastation that would occur once the abandoned house became a free-for-all for firewood. When a family's electricity was shut off for nonpayment, Unemployed Council activists frequently used heavy gauge copper wire as "jumpers" to appropriate electricity from public outlets or other homes. Council members also found ways to reactivate water mains after they had been turned off, though the process was more complicated than pilfering electricity. In some cases, Communists adopted more confrontational tactics when they seemed appropriate. On one occasion, when two black women committee organizers noticed a city worker preparing to turn off their water, they feigned an argument with one another in order to attract a gathering of neighbors. Once the neighborhood women were assembled, the two activists suddenly turned on the white male employee and, with the assistance of the female onlookers, chased him out of the neighborhood.[30]

The Communist-led neighborhood relief committees also regularized the practice of sanctioning community informants who were enlisted by social workers and welfare agencies. "Vigilance committees" were organized to advise neighborhood "stool pigeons" to keep their mouths shut, thus collectively protecting the community's right to break the rules. If this tactic failed, committee members flooded informants with penny postcards conveying threatening messages.[31] In short, the Communist-led neighborhood committees worked from an understanding of power relations that developed out of the everyday oppositional practices and specific social locations of the poor.

Birmingham's Communist movement was unusual in that it was the only militant organization for the poor composed of the poor. Traditional black leaders claimed to represent the entire

African-American community, but they utterly failed to garner support from economically disadvantaged blacks. Indeed, their constant attacks against African-Americans who joined Communist-led organizations illustrate their attitudes toward the self-activity of the poor. At the root of their criticisms was a presumption that the masses were incapable of speaking for themselves. Alabama's black Communists, according to black newspaper editor Oscar Adams, were merely "irresponsible suckers who are biting at this propaganda either because of ignorance of the results or wanton desire for criminal adventure." Birmingham NAACP secretary Charles McPherson simply dismissed the International Labor Defense as an illegitimate movement comprised of a "large number of our own non-reading classes" which will never become a real force because "[i]ntelligent and informed people can not be swept off their feet by the propoganda [sic] of a questionable organization." What McPherson, Adams, and other traditional black leaders failed to admit, however, was that the organizational activity of their tiny inner circle excluded the opinions of the "non-reading classes." They never made an effort at that time to recruit poor blacks, and looked askance at individuals who showed up at NAACP meetings in overalls. Hence, in January 1931, while the Communist-led International Labor Defense claimed two hundred black members, the Birmingham branch of the NAACP reported only six dues-paying members.[32]

The failure of traditional black leadership to mobilize support from the poor cannot be attributed entirely to their insensitivity or inability to understand the poor people's lives. Rather, in many cases the black petit-bourgeoisie were merely acting in their class interests. Black politician Robert Durr, a preacher from Mississippi who moved to Birmingham in 1931, was offered capital from TCI to launch an antiunion black newspaper, the Weekly Review, whose columns he used to exhort the black masses to accept their plight and utilize only the "proper channels" to improve conditions. In an interview granted five years later, Durr offered an epigrammatic explanation of his politics: "By all means keep in with the man who hires and pays you."[33]

Most traditional black leaders, however, straddled the line between class interest and what they perceived to be the "collective" interests of the race. This was especially evident among black clergy, whose vocation often depended on the accumulation of nickels and dimes poor congregations could contribute to the collection plate. Some churches served as centers of charity, providing food, clothes, and other basic necessities to their most destitute members. A few modest preachers who had no pastoral obligations went so far as to devote time and energy to building the labor movement, and some even became active in Communist organizations. Nevertheless, the majority of pastors opposed black involvement in radical or protest politics, and some preached sermons blaming the poor for their plight and condemning to hell those whose survival depended on the informal economy. Indeed, Birmingham's black clergy were notorious for using the pulpit to preach a politics of accommodation and dissuade poor blacks from joining radical organizations, and some received healthy subsidies from companies to do so. TCI and other companies built and maintained segregated churches for their employees and only hired pastors willing to disparage organized labor from the pulpit. Fearing reprisals from hostile whites or southern philanthropists, segments of the ministerial community avoided association with organizations as tame as the NAACP during the early 1930's.[34]

The Party's influence among the black unemployed and working poor did not last forever. When the Communist Party shifted its political stance in 1935 and concentrated on building a Popular Front with white liberals, establishing the Congress of Industrial Organizations and working with New Deal politicians, it lost much of its mass base among the black poor--the one possible exception being the Communist-influenced Workers' Alliance.[35] On the eve of the Second World War, the poor had no viable political organizations to which to turn, and those that purported to speak for them simply did not speak their language.

During the Depression, then, the black poor chose to either struggle on their own or turn to political organizations that openly articulated the grievances and aspirations of their offstage

discourse. The evidence suggests a disjunction between the infrapolitics of the black poor and the political practices of "traditional" black leadership. Indeed, given the lack of mass support for mainstream black organizations during the 1930's, we should reevaluate the notion that these sorts of organizations could be used as barometers for determining the political attitudes of the black poor and working class.

## HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS AND PUBLIC SPACE: RESISTANCE AND REPRESSION DURING WORLD WAR II AND THE POSTWAR PERIOD

For most white Birmingham working people who had spent much of the Depression jobless or underemployed, the outbreak of war provided much needed employment opportunities. Government contracts reinvigorated heavy industry, especially steel and coal, and the demand for soldiers provided still another outlet for the jobless. African-Americans benefited as well, although not nearly as much as whites. The majority of blacks were denied access to employment training programs, and white-controlled industrial unions actively limited black occupational mobility. The Fair Employment Practices Committee, which held hearings in Birmingham in 1943, was powerless to bring about changes. In fact, during the war the percentage of blacks employed in the steel industry actually declined from 41 percent in 1940 to 38 percent in 1945, and black steel workers on average earned 80 percent of what their white co-workers earned. Conditions for black women were worse. Many tried desperately to escape domestic work and take advantage of industrial jobs, but in Birmingham virtually all "female positions" were reserved for white women. Those who successfully moved out of domestic work merely filled other kinds of service jobs--dishwashers, cooks, bus girls, mechanical laundry workers, etc.--jobs white women had vacated.[36]

Nevertheless, to say black poverty continued through the war unabated would be inaccurate. A large percentage of jobless black males found employment, either in the armed services or in the lower echelons of industry. And despite a massive influx of rural blacks searching for wartime opportunities, a significant number of black working people left Birmingham and headed north. Infrapolitical discourse and oppositional practices among the poor, therefore, shifted in several ways. First, World War II was a unique political moment for African-Americans across class lines because the nature of the war itself, and the rhetoric surrounding it, undermined the public transcript. African-Americans were expected to support a war against Hitler--whose plan for Aryan supremacy was treated as a threat to Western democracy--while white supremacy and segregation continued to be a way of life in the Deep South. They knew racism could no longer be justified on home soil, and some were unwilling to tolerate it any longer. The black poor, especially the youth, exhibited greater militancy in public spaces such as busses, streetcars, and city streets. To use James C. Scott's words, they refused to "reproduce hegemonic appearances."[37]

In some ways symbolic resistance took on greater importance than practical resistance to material appropriation. The proliferation of acts of defiance in public spaces resulted in a more vigilant effort on the part of the dominant groups to quash insubordination. The result was greater police repression and, by the same token, renewed struggle on the part of the poor against police brutality. Second, although resistance to ideological domination continued into the 1950's, eventually laying the foundations for the modern Civil Rights movement, the material conditions of the poor had not improved significantly. Thus, overcrowded and deteriorating housing, a decline in industrial jobs for black workers, and inadequate relief for the existing poor were added to the list of critical issues central to poor people's political agenda.

It is no accident that public transportation became one of the most important sites of resistance during the war. First, as more jobs became available and more rural residents migrated to the city to

fill these jobs, the sheer number of people moving to and from work overtaxed an already limited fleet of streetcars and busses. Second, these vehicles provided limited space that had to be shared--even if racially divided--between blacks and whites. Battles over space, as well as the manner in which space was allocated, resulted in intense racial conflict. Third, public transportation, unlike a waiting room or a water fountain, was "commodified" space. Passengers pay for transportation, which if used on a daily basis can add up to a significant portion of the working poor's income. When one pays for a service that one depends on for her/his livelihood, there seems to be less willingness to accept certain forms of domination--particularly forms that affect a person's ability to get to her/his destination on time.

Finally, Birmingham's busses and streetcars might be regarded as "moving theaters." Here I'm using theater in two ways: as a site of performance and a site of military conflict. First, plays of conflict, repression, and resistance are performed in which passengers witness, or participate in, a wide variety of "skirmishes" that shape the collective memory of the passengers, illustrate the limitations as well as possibilities of resistance to domination, and draw more passengers into the "performance." Second, theater as a military metaphor is particularly appropriate in light of the fact that all bus drivers and streetcar conductors carried guns and blackjacks, and used them pretty regularly to maintain (the social) order. As one Birmingham resident recalls, during the 1940's streetcar conductors "were just like policemans [sic]. They carried guns too." In August 1943, when a black woman riding the South East Lake-Ensley line complained to the conductor that he had passed her stop, he followed her out of the streetcar and, in the words of the official report, "knocked her down with handle of gun. No further trouble."[38]

Why would a white, male streetcar conductor find it necessary to strike a black woman with the handle of a gun? In part, because no matter how valid her complaint might have been, the very act of complaining was testing the limits of white authority. As James C. Scott reminds us, "The

logic of the constant testing of the limits alerts us to the importance, from the dominant point of view, of making an example of someone. Just as a public breach in the limits is a provocation to others to trespass in the same fashion, so the decisive assertion of symbolic territory by public retribution discourages others from venturing public defiance . . . They are intended as a kind of preemptive strike to nip in the bud any further challenges of the existing frontier."[39]

Despite the repressive, police-like atmosphere on public transportation, black passengers, especially youth, still resisted. In fact, according to an internal report by the Transportation Department of the Birmingham Electric Company (the owner of the city's transit system), the majority of "racial disturbances" on public transportation "are provoked, to a large extent, by younger negroes." Over the course of twelve months beginning with September 1941, fifty-five incidents were reported of African-American passengers either refusing to give up their seats or sitting in the white section. More importantly, in most cases the racial compartmentalization of existing space was not the primary issue. Rather, most poor blacks who had no other alternative transportation contested (1) the power of drivers to allocate or limit space for black passengers; (2) the practice of forcing blacks to pay at the front door and enter through the center doors; (3) being shortchanged; and (4) the manner in which they were treated by operators and other passengers. The last point of contention is very reminiscent of the struggles the poor waged against the condescending treatment they received from caseworkers and welfare authorities. Indeed, dozens of fights broke out between black passengers and white operators, and between black and white passengers, over a gesture, a comment, or an action which was interpreted as a personal attack or collective attack against black people.[40]

These issues must be contextualized if we are to understand how they reflect the infrapolitics of the poor. It was not uncommon, for instance, for half-empty busses or streetcars to pass up African-Americans on the pretext that space needed to be preserved for potential white riders. Nor was it unusual for a black passenger to pay at the front of the bus and be left standing while s/he

attempted to board at the center door. Black female domestics complained periodically of having been passed up by bus drivers, resulting in their being late to work or stranded at night in hostile white communities.[41]

While not every black passenger was willing to breach the public transcript of accepted behavior, some black male riders seemed to thrive on "testing the limits" of Jim Crow. Between 1941 and 1944, there were over a dozen incidents that could have been candidates for a place in the voluminous "Stagolee" folklore which was so popular among urban African-Americans. These "baaad niggers" put on public displays of resistance that left other black passengers in awe, though they did not lead directly to improvements in conditions, nor were they intended to. Some boldly sat down next to white female passengers and challenged operators to move them, often with knife in hand. Others refused to pay their fare, or simply picked fights with bus drivers or white passengers. To cite one interesting example of such daring public declarations of the hidden transcript, a black passenger on the Ensley-Fairfield line boarded, moved the color dividers forward to increase the space allotted to black passengers, and sat down next to a white man. The operator expelled him, but he reboarded on the return trip and this time "sat between two white men and began to laugh and make a joke about it." He was then moved bodily to the black section, but a few stops later approached the driver with an open knife. Before the police arrived, however, he jumped out of the window and escaped. When the bus returned later in the evening, he had the audacity to board again.[42]

Among those passengers who could be identified as the working poor, it seems that black women slightly outnumbered black men in the number of incidents of resistance on busses and streetcars. This should not be surprising since more black working women rode public transportation. Male industrial workers commonly lived in industrial suburbs within walking distance to their place of employment, while the vast majority of black working women were domestics who had to travel to

relatively wealthy white neighborhoods on the other side of town. The black women who did resist rarely fit the prim and proper "Rosa Parks" stereotype. On the contrary, during those explosive moments when black women publicly declared the hidden transcript, their opposition tended to be especially profane and violent. Throughout the war, dozens of black women were arrested for merely cursing out the operator. One of those cases involved nineteen-year-old Pauline Carth. When told there was no more room on the College Hills bus for "colored" passengers, she forced her way into the bus anyway, threw her money at the driver, and cursed at and spit on him. The driver responded by knocking her out of the bus, throwing her to the ground, and holding her down until police arrived.[43]

The act of cursing elicited police intervention not because the state maintained strict moral standards and would not tolerate profanity, but because the act of black women cursing at whites (especially whites in authority) represented a serious transgression of the boundaries between the powerful and the powerless. Cursing, for which only black passengers were arrested, was an especially potent challenge to relations of domination.[44]

African-American passengers adopted a score of other oppositional practices, many directed at the symbols of inequality and segregation. The most common forms included hiding or moving the color dividers, insisting on paying only part of the fare, holding the center door open while dozens of unpaid passengers forced their way into the bus, and vandalism. Black youth, in particular, frequently directed their attacks against bus property: they threw rocks, disengaged electric trolley connectors, and at least one teenager set off a stink bomb on a bus. Perhaps the most fascinating and often overlooked form of resistance was the use of sound to invade space designated for whites. Black passengers were routinely ejected for making too much noise, which in many cases turned out to be harsh words directed at a conductor or passenger, or a monologue about racism in general. One passenger of the East Lake-West End line was eventually arrested after he "started talking in a loud

voice to negroes about white people." Black youth were particularly bold, especially when travelling in groups. On the Central Park-Vinesville line, the operator reported "a bunch of negro draftees who were 90% drunk . . . made improper remarks to everyone they passed."[45]

Because African-American passengers shared a collective memory of how they were treated on a daily basis, both within and without the "moving theaters," an act of resistance or repression sometimes drew other passengers into the fray, thus escalating into collective action. A very interesting report from an Avenue F. line bus driver illustrates just such a moment of collective resistance: "Operator went to adjust the color boards, and negro woman sat down quickly just in front of board that operator was putting in place. She objected to moving and was not exactly disorderly but all the negroes took it up and none of [the] whites would sit in seat because they were afraid to, and negroes would not sit in vacant seats in rear of bus." In some instances, black riders invented ways to protest that protected their anonymity. On the College Hills line in August 1943, black riders grew impatient with a particularly racist bus driver who, in the course of a few minutes, drew his gun twice on black passengers, intentionally passed one black woman's stop, and ejected a man who complained on the woman's behalf. According to the report, "the negroes then started ringing bell for the entire block and no one would alight when he stopped."[46]

Some passengers attempted to take the idea of collective action to still another level. Following the arrest of Pauline Carth in 1943, a group of witnesses brought the case to the attention of the Birmingham branch of the NAACP, but aside from a perfunctory investigation and an article in the Birmingham World, no action was taken. The Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), a left-wing youth organization based in Birmingham, took up the case of Mildred Addleman, a black woman who was beaten and arrested by Fairfield police for moving the color boards on a bus. As a result of the incident, the SNYC formed a short-lived organization called the Citizens Committee for Equal Accomodations on Common Carriers. Nevertheless, the treatment of African-Americans on

public transportation was not a high priority issue for either organization during the war, and thus the working poor, whose livelihood depended on city transit, had to literally fend for themselves.

The critical point here is that self-activity on the part of black passengers forced mainstream black political organizations to at least pay some attention to conditions on Jim Crow busses and streetcars. The unorganized, seemingly powerless working poor brought these issues to the forefront by their very acts of resistance, which were ultimately shaped by real power relations as well as the many confrontations they witnessed on the stage of the moving theater. More importantly, what they resisted and the sorts of oppositional practices they adopted serve as a window into the elusive hidden transcript, the ideological nature of black infrapolitics. Sitting with whites, for most black riders, was never a critical issue; rather, African-Americans wanted more space for themselves, they wanted to receive equitable treatment, they wanted to be personally treated with respect and dignity, they wanted to be heard and possibly understood, they wanted to get to work on time, and above all, they wanted to exercise power over institutions that controlled them or on which they were dependent.

The fact that most regular black riders were not primarily concerned with challenging the idea of allotting separate (but equal) space for blacks and whites did not diminish or mitigate repression on Birmingham's public transit systems. Their very acts of insubordination challenged the system of segregation, whether they were intended to or not, and their defiance in most cases elicited a swift and decisive response. By the end of the war everyday acts of resistance on busses and streetcars actually declined, but not because black passengers were successful in forcing reforms. On the contrary, their acts of defiance led to an increase in punitive measures and more vigorous enforcement of segregation laws. As one internal study conducted by the Transportation Department revealed, "additional vigilance on the part of our private police, has resulted in some improvement."[47]

Increased police repression against the black poor was not limited to public transportation. Beginning in 1941, a wave of police homicides and beatings reignited resistance to police brutality, and nearly all of these incidents were sparked by an act of insubordination. In some ways, the situation on Birmingham's busses and streetcars offers a clue as to why incidents of, and opposition to, police brutality increased during and after the war. As the public transcript crumbled in the face of wartime hypocrisy, more and more poor blacks were refusing to play the roles expected of them in Jim Crow society. On public transportation, as in other public spaces, they spoke back to whites, disobeyed authority, and stepped out of place--in a word, they were insubordinate. "The open refusal to comply with a hegemonic performance," James C. Scott explains, "is, then, a particularly dangerous form of insubordination. In fact, the term insubordination is quite appropriate . . . because any particular refusal to comply is not merely a tiny breach in a symbolic wall; it necessarily calls into question all the other acts that this form of subordination entails." In the Jim Crow South, maintaining law and order meant, in large part, upholding the racial order. As the number of incidents of insubordination rose to what some whites believed were epidemic proportions, the police had to beat them back with a vengeance.[48]

In 1941, black Fairfield resident O'Dee Henderson, for example, was arrested and jailed for merely arguing with a white man. The next morning Henderson was found badly bruised and fatally shot as he lay handcuffed in a Fairfield jail cell. Within weeks of Henderson's murder, a young black metal worker named John Jackson died at the hands of Fairfield police. The officers who killed Jackson were responding to a local grocer's complaint that a line of black moviegoers waiting to enter a neighborhood theater blocked his store's entrance. After exchanging words with the two officers, Jackson was arrested, handcuffed, and forced into the backseat of their patrol car. By the time the officers had completed the four-block journey to the Fairfield police station, he was dead.[49] Even perceived acts of insubordination met the crushing blows of Birmingham's finest. Less than two

weeks after Jackson's death, twenty-three-year-old Foster Powers was unjustly arrested and beaten by Birmingham police. Powers, an epileptic, had had a seizure in a local movie theater and a misguided manager called police rather than an ambulance. The officers interpreted his uncontrollable jerking actions as resisting arrest.[50]

The sheer number of serious incidents over such a short period of time prompted a response from Birmingham's dwindling radical community. The Communist-led Southern Negro Youth Congress joined forces with its white counterpart, the League of Young Southerners (LYS), and demanded a full and impartial investigation of the Fairfield police department. The NAACP tried to file charges against John Jackson's arresting officers, but the district attorney and the city commission not only sided with the two officers but explained the rising tide of police shootings and beatings as acts of self-defense. When due process failed, the NAACP basically turned its attention to other issues.[51] The SNYC, the LYS, and the Communist Party, on the other hand, attempted to mobilize community support against the Birmingham and Fairfield police departments by forming the Jefferson County Committee Against Police Brutality. But as soon as the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, prompting the CPUSA to shift from a propeace to a prowar agenda, the black and white activists who now comprised the leadership of Birmingham's Left focused more attention on mobilizing for war. Besides, their broader agenda had always placed more emphasis on building the Congress of Industrial Organizations and winning the franchise--issues that did not directly affect the working poor since (1) the lowest paying "Negro" jobs were generally not affected by union organizing, and (2) even if the poor could register, few could afford the accumulated back poll tax.[52]

The cases cited above attracted the attention of Civil Rights organizations for the same reasons they were reported in the black press: these were dramatic, clear-cut cases of injustices resulting in injury or death. But poor people's attitudes toward the police were informed by an accumulation of daily indignities, whether they were experienced or witnessed. What must be understood is the

semipublic discourse between the police and the black poor that rarely appears in the "evidence" scholars must rely on. The case of Bessie Ammons, a fifty-year-old janitor employed by the Smithfield Court Housing Project, is instructive in this respect. On January 20, 1951, at about 5:45 A.M., Mrs. Ammons was on her way to work when two police officers pulled up and one asked "Gal, where are you going? Come here!" She not only refused to walk over to the car, but would not get in the car when ordered to do so, despite the fact that one of the officers had drawn his gun. Taken aback by her open defiance of the law, the two officers continued to harass her. "I ought to put your black a--- in jail for vagrancy," one of the officers declared. But because she was clearly on her way to work, he gave up on the possible vagrancy charge, choosing instead to threaten her with the last word: "Whenever any policeman tells you to get in the car, you had better do it. I mean what I say. I'm the law. Get on down the street." These incidents took place on a daily basis, although there is very little public record of such exchanges.[53]

Of course, not all African-Americans arrested or harassed by police were consciously engaged in acts of public insubordination. The fact remains that more African-Americans, especially poor black male youth, were arrested and prosecuted for committing crimes than any other group in relation to their percentage of the total population. An interesting report submitted by a Birmingham police official in charge of the vice squad concluded that most juvenile arrestees come from families dependent on welfare or some form of charity, or whose parents earned extremely low wages. As the report put it, "in seeking to have things that other children have, they resort to stealing, in order to have money to buy the little luxuries they desire."[54]

However, the relatively high arrest rate and unequal treatment poor black male youth received at the hands of white police officers must also be understood in terms of how the dominant ideology "criminalizes" poor young black men. Here, social labelling and conflict theory might be useful for understanding why poor young black males were arrested in greater numbers and were more likely to

be victims of police brutality. As criminologist Steven Box suggests, those who fit the stereotype of criminal "are more likely to be viewed with suspicion . . . The police adopt deployment policies and methods of routine suspicion that result in the surveillance and apprehension of 'suspicious' persons--i.e., those resembling stereotypes." The accumulation of everyday confrontations with police becomes a central discursive element of the hidden transcript. Over time, the subject population, in this case Birmingham's black poor, begin to view the constant search and seizure, interrogation, and brutal beatings as pure harassment and racial discrimination. "This leads a community to think of itself as 'under occupation.' It leads to the police being viewed with extreme suspicion and hostility. It inflames discontent already generated by thwarted ambition or relative deprivation. It creates an atmosphere where the unemployed and ethnic minorities feel that the forces of law and order are merely to oppose them and therefore shore up a system of social injustice."[55]

Box's argument is persuasive when we look at the disjunction between the actual criminal activity among poor black youth and the assumptions about the extent and nature of criminal behavior in poor black neighborhoods. During the war, for example, the number of juvenile delinquency cases in Birmingham (the majority of which being property crimes) actually decreased:

Juvenile Delinqueny Cases: Birmingham[56]

| | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Black Male | 1,275 | 1,098 | 755 |
| Black Female | 211 | 256 | 190 |
| White Male | 895 | 704 | 604 |
| White Female | 141 | 263 | 236 |

More significantly, the number of crimes committed by black juveniles in communities with high concentrations of poverty was astonishingly low. In 1943, the city of Birmingham reported only 11.1 cases of juvenile delinquency per one thousand black families. When we examine environmental factors in the most poverty-stricken, predominantly black census tracts, the findings are even more

astonishing. In tract 26 located in North Birmingham, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, African-Americans living there in 1940 made up 84.4 percent of the population; 92.3 percent of the homes were substandard (many lacked running water and indoor toilets) and of 1,280 occupiable units, only 3 were owner-occupied; the infant mortality rate was well above the city average at 60.8 per one thousand; and the average resident had a fifth-grade education. Nevertheless, in 1943 there were only 13.95 reported cases of delinquency per one thousand families in tract 26.[57] On the other hand, in tract 52, located in what seemed to have been a well-established and comfortable neighborhood in the West End, the rate of black juvenile delinquency cases was among the highest--17.85 percent per one thousand families. Here, the 410 black residents made up 15.7 percent of the total population; 33.59 percent of the dwellings were substandard; 46 out of 112 dwellings were owner-occupied.[58]

Yet, during this same period, crime among black youth was viewed by government officials, social workers, police officers, and mainstream black leadership as an alarming problem. In 1943, a Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency was created, and the Jefferson County Youth Protective Association decided to invite black leaders to a special "Negro meeting." Out of this meeting emerged the Birmingham Negro Youth Council in 1945, whose stated agenda was to offer religious guidance and recreational and educational opportunities, and improve employment and health conditions for poor black youth. City Commissioner Cooper Green even invited FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to Birmingham to speak on the subject. "In this large industrial area," Green reported to Hoover, "of which 38 percent of the residents are Negro, we have an immediate and growing problem."[59]

The black middle class unwittingly reniforced the practice of social labelling by supporting the assumption that the black poor, especially young people, were more likely to be criminals. Indeed, the demand for black police officers in Birmingham put forth by a score of mainstream black political

organizations during the 1940's and 1950's was motivated less by their interest in reducing police brutality than by their desire to reduce black crime. Birmingham World editor Emory O. Jackson waged a campaign during and after the war to clean up black crime. In 1946 he called on Birmingham police to step up their work in the predominantly black Fourth Avenue district and get rid of the "profaners, number racketeers, bootleggers, and foul-mouthers" once and for all.[60] In Jackson's view, he was merely fighting a situation that he found particularly embarrassing for the race. What he did not understand was the extent to which the black poor in the Fourth Avenue district depended on the informal economy both as a source of income and pleasure, or how a greater concentration of police in the area without reforms in law-enforcement practices could lead to more incidents of police brutality.

## MAKING THE HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT PUBLIC: CIVIL RIGHTS, CLASS POLITICS, AND THE OPPOSITIONAL PRACTICES OF THE URBAN POOR

Like most of urban America experiencing white flight and early signs of postindustrial decline, postwar Birmingham witnessed an expansion of black poverty and unemployment. However, Birmingham differed from other industrial cities in that the Second World War did not lead to major long-term structural shifts in employment patterns. The mechanization of agriculture in the countryside propelled thousands of rural African-Americans into the city during and after the war. Unfortunately for these new migrants, by the 1950's industrial opportunities for blacks were declining. According to historian Robert J. Norrell, seven out of every ten black miners lost their jobs during the 1950's, in part because Birmingham steel companies began importing higher grade ore from South America and the coal industry introduced a machine called the "continuous miner" which replaced scores of black underground workers. Furthermore, the transition to "strip mining" led to

greater mechanization overall, thus reducing the need for black labor. The white-dominated locals of the United Steel Workers of America also put pressure on companies not to promote blacks to skilled positions. The percentage of blacks employed in heavy industry declined from 54 percent in 1930 to 41 percent in 1950, and to 33 percent in 1960.[61]

If there had not been significant northern migration of Alabama blacks after World War II, the material conditions of the poor might have been a lot worse, particularly during Birmingham's 1958 recession. Nevertheless, the jobless and working poor who remained could expect very little relief during this period. In 1950, 75 percent of black families reported annual incomes of less than $2,500. Health and welfare programs sponsored by the city and county were woefully inadequate. The city could hardly afford to maintain its welfare program, which consisted largely of distributing surplus food. Altogether, some thirty-five thousand residents took advantage of the program, many of whom stood in lines that stretched at least four blocks.[62]

Housing conditions for African-Americans were among the worst in the country. In 1950, 88 percent of black dwellings were considered subsubstandard according to the Birmingham Housing Authority. As one study conducted by the Jefferson County Board of Health revealed, "Practically every section of the city which is heavily populated by the Negro race might be considered as blighted areas." The report argued that there was a direct correlation between poor health and substandard housing. In some census tracts, the percentage of homes with no private baths was as high as 95 percent, whereas the percentage of homes without a flushing toilet ranged as high as 72 percent to 86 percent [see table 1]. Rates of infant mortality and tuberculosis in predominantly black census tracts were much higher than in white tracts. At least twelve hundred dwelling units had been condemned and vacated, and over six hundred units had been entirely demolished.[63] During and after the war, several housing projects were built to replace dilapidated dwellings as part of a general slum clearance, the most significant projects being Elyton Village, Central City, Southtown,

## TABLE 1

### Population, Housing, and Vital Statistics for Specified Census Tracts, Birmingham, Alabama

| | The City | Census Tracts 11 | 13 | 24 & 25 | 26 | 28 | 32 | 42 | 43 & 44 | 45 | 46 | 51 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. African-American population (1940 Census) | 108,961 | 2,820 | 2,045 | 5,204 | 4,577 | 9,961 | 5,939 | 4,674 | 8,857 | 5,197 | 2,843 | 2,134 |
| 2. Percentage of total tract population | 40.7 | 54.0 | 82.6 | 61.9 | 84.4 | 88.7 | 80.1 | 95.2 | 81.7 | 92.8 | 94.2 | 86.2 |
| 3. Infant mortality rate | 59.4 | 62.3 | 62.2 | 62.2 | 60.9 | 61.1 | 76.2 | 65.1 | 67.9 | 79.4 | 68.9 | 66.5 |
| 4. Stillbirth rate | 48.6 | 63.3 | 52.2 | 62.2 | 45.5 | 54.0 | 46.9 | 47.6 | 55.7 | 47.9 | 52.3 | 43.5 |
| 5. Tuberculosis death rate | 113.9 | 140.1 | 80.8 | 102.4 | 108.5 | 118.8 | 134.7 | 86.6 | 113.3 | 139.5 | 100.3 | 124.9 |
| 6. Occupied dwelling units | 29,477 | 735 | 457 | 1,453 | 1,290 | 2,605 | 1,619 | 1,057 | 2,428 | 1,567 | 820 | 540 |
| 7 Percentage of homes needing major repair | 41.4 | 41.5 | 33.6 | 39.1 | 47.3 | 42.7 | 51.4 | 26.9 | 61.9 | 57.3 | 39.5 | 25.0 |
| 8. Average monthly rental | $8.66 | $7.02 | $10.17 | $7.46 | $8.25 | $9.33 | $9.53 | $9.43 | $8.95 | $8.60 | $9.18 | $10.39 |
| 9. Percentage of homes with 1.51 or more persons per room | 24.0 | 23.4 | 20.1 | 26.4 | 26.5 | 24.2 | 27.9 | 24.0 | 26.8 | 26.5 | 25.3 | 15.6 |
| 10. Percentage of homes with no private bath | 84.2 | 94.8 | 65.0 | 93.5 | 88.0 | 87.0 | 93.9 | 76.6 | 90.8 | 95.3 | 95.7 | 59.0 |
| 11. Percentage of homes with no private flush toilet | 55.5 | 66.9 | 42.4 | 65.0 | 72.5 | 65.9 | 74.4 | 24.2 | 77.8 | 68.3 | 86.2 | 15.8 |
| 12. Percentage of homes tenant-occupied | 84.9 | 63.8 | 56.0 | 90.6 | 99.6 | 98.0 | 89.9 | 70.2 | 97.8 | 99.7 | 99.6 | 52.8 |

Note: Rates for infant mortality, stillbirth, and tuberculosis mortality are per-one-thousand averages for the ten years, 1940-1949. Housing and population data are from the Federal Census of 1940.

Smithfield Court, and Eastwood Project. Despite these efforts, however, by 1950 the Jefferson County Board of Health noted "an acute shortage" of housing for the black poor.[64]

Unfortunately, I do not as yet have evidence that might illuminate the hidden transcript or even open, unorganized protest against poverty, layoffs, and housing conditions during the 1950's. I do, however, think it is safe to assume that the poor were dissatisfied with housing conditions, frustrated by the lack of industrial jobs, and disappointed with government relief measures, especially since the black poor were surrounded by whites and some blacks whose conditions were improving. The evidence we do have reveals, once again, the inability of mainstream black leadership and middle-class interracial organizations to develop policies that deal directly with the problems of the poor.

Ironically, as war contracts reinvigorated Birmingham's economy, both mainstream black political leaders and white liberals seemed to take greater interest in the plight of the black poor. As early as 1943, traditional black leaders and a handful of white liberals attempted to establish a chapter of the National Urban League in Birmingham, but the project was eventually aborted in the face of virulent white opposition. The idea of an interracial organization with national, specifically northern, links was not very popular among white liberal or conservative politicians. Despite the fact that the short-lived chapter counted a few major Birmingham corporate executives among its executive board, it did not have sufficient support and was subsequently abandoned in 1950.[65]

The organization that took on most of the responsibility for tasks generally assigned to the Urban League, or to charity organizations such as the Community Chest, was the Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces, founded in 1939. In 1951, an interracial organization was created within the Council consisting primarily of business people, social workers, liberal politicians, educators, and ministers. The Interracial Committee (IC) was created to administer to the needs of black residents, serving as an acceptable substitute for the Urban League. Their agenda consisted of

six issues: to establish hospital facilities for blacks; to facilitate the hiring of black police officers; to establish day-care facilities for children of working parents; to provide better housing for the black community; to improve and expand recreational facilities; and to improve the conditions of public transportation for black passengers.[66]

The Interracial Committee was part and parcel of county government and thus was never intended to be a protest organization. Rather, as an elite body it sought to raise money, reappropriate county and city funds for their projects, and lobby public officials in order to implement changes in police practices, transportation, and housing. Available evidence suggests that its members never talked directly to, or requested input from, the poor. Indeed, its policies, ostensibly made on behalf of the poor, reflected the class interests of its black leadership. In the area of recreation, for instance, black IC leadership placed at the top of its agenda the construction of a nine-hole Negro golf course, which they successfully secured. Also placed under the rubric of recreation was the "distressing number of young unmarried parents." Mrs. H.C. Bryant, long-time club woman and YWCA leader, believed that the growing number of unwed mothers in poor black communities stemmed from a lack of guidance and recreational facilities for young black women. Although the Interracial Committee consistently demanded black police officers, they were motivated more by the need to control black crime than by the rising incidence of police brutality. Perhaps most revealing was the fact that in the area of housing, black IC leadership placed more emphasis on the "development of a real estate subdivision for high class Negro homes" rather than low-income rental units. Black participants wanted better quality homes to purchase, and white members hoped that "if an adequate high class subdivision could be started," it would ultimately reduce the dynamite attacks on middle-class African-Americans attempting to purchase homes outside of their restricted areas. The particular property the Interracial Committee planned to obtain was "to be developed somewhat along the lines

of Mountain Brook or Homewood, with the possibility of having a golf course in connection with it."[67]

Although poor working women were in dire need of day-care facilities, the IC never made it a top priority issue. There had not been any public service day-care facilities since the war, and the three day-care centers run by the Community Chest were exclusively for mothers too sick to care for their children. Moreover, the primary day-care center for black children in Birmingham was comprised mainly of children whose parents were "not disadvantaged." When the Committee, with the support of the Community Chest, finally succeeded in establishing an extra day-care facility, the cost to parents was set at $6.50 per week, a relatively high figure in relation to the earnings of single working mothers, or even two-parent working-class families who had to survive on as little as $20 to $30 per week.[68]

Likewise, IC's subcommittee on employment was equally insensitive to the needs of the black poor, as well as to the disastrous effects that technological change and racist hiring practices were having on black industrial labor. First, committee members did not attempt to use their influence to improve wages and working conditions for existing black industrial workers, in part because its members clearly sided with employers. Committee member A.B. White wanted to "show profit-making advantages to employers in our efforts to seek employment opportunities." Second, the committee put more emphasis on hiring college-educated blacks in civil service and public relations positions who would "prove valuable to employers if properly used--and with a minimum of training."[69]

By the time the Interracial Committee was disbanded in 1956, it had accomplished very little, especially with respect to the needs of the poor. Yet, racist white residents and politicians viewed the Committee as a radical threat to the status quo. White members of the Committee decided to disband because "of the violent attacks upon it by proponents of the White Citizens Councils." The decision

was made unilaterally, without input from black members. Moreover, the Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces decided that, while continuing to work toward improving social services for black residents, it "would not engage, directly or indirectly, in any activity toward desegregation."[70]

Birmingham's Civil Rights movement, culminating in the 1963 direct action campaign and subsequent riots, might best be understood as a period of collective public declarations of the hidden transcript. The powerful feeling of thousands of people "breaking the silence" in the face of dogs and water hoses, not to mention the pervasive belief that the federal government sided with the movement, encouraged those who had been silent to speak and act against segregation. Charismatic leaders like the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were able to mobilize thousands of black Birmingham residents because they publicly articulated elements of a shared discourse that had remained, for the most part, "in the nooks and crannies of the social order, where subordinate groups can speak more freely." In other words, the secret to their "charisma" lay in the fact that Civil Rights leaders were reading from a script that had already been written by the black community offstage. Their daily confrontations with Jim Crow, not merely the persuasiveness of black leadership, brought thousands into the direct action movement. Armed with organization, a clear agenda, and limited support from the federal government, Civil Rights leaders were in a position to turn mutual sentiment and shared experience into a movement.[71]

But the vast majority of Civil Rights activists were drawn from the ranks of the middle class and stable working class. The poor, as a whole, did not participate in organized forms of opposition. The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), under the leadership of the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, had the largest working-poor membership of any of the city's Civil Rights organizations. Yet, when we examine the ACMHR's makeup, we find that in 1959 only one-third of its members earned less than two thousand dollars, 55 percent of its members were

homeowners, and 40 percent earned more than four thousand dollars annually (in the city as a whole, only 20 percent of black residents earned that much or more). What is most significant is that practically all of its members were employed. The group itself was much older and more politically active: 70 percent of its members were between the ages of thirty and sixty, and the same percentage were registered to vote.[72]

Although Shuttlesworth was far more sympathetic to working people than Birmingham's traditional black bourgeoisie had been, the strategies and long-term goals of the ACMHR were not directed at the material impoverishment of the poor or the horrible conditions in the black slums of Birmingham. Growing poverty and unemployment caused by technological changes and creeping deindustrialization was simply not a priority of the movement during the late 1950's and early 1960's. Of course, issues such as school and bus desegregation and the hiring of black police officers affected, and even drew support from, the black poor, but ACMHR leadership defined racial equality in employment in terms of civil service and professional jobs for qualified blacks. Meanwhile, according to a report produced by the Jefferson County Coordinating Council, in 1960 at least 70,000 people of Jefferson County were malnourished, most of whom were black Birmingham residents. In this same year, when the city experienced a recession in steel and related industries, 11.5 percent of the families living in census tracts with 98 percent black population or more earned incomes below the official poverty level. Between March 1963 and December 1964, 16,523 households, representing 74,334 Birmingham residents, received food stamps. And in order for a family of four to be eligible for food-stamp assistance in 1963, their annual income could not exceed $1,380.[73]

Black middle-class spokespersons did not direct their attention to black poverty, in part because they simply did not identify with the way in which certain segments of the poor had to live their lives. Although middle-class African-Americans frequently blamed segregation for placing a ceiling on their own upward mobility, they tended to place at least part of the blame for slum

conditions on the poor. Geraldine Moore, a black middle-class resident of Birmingham and author of Behind the Ebony Mask, wrote the following description of the Magic City's "truly disadvantaged":

> For some Negroes in Birmingham, life is a care-free existence of wallowing in the filth and squalor typical of the slums with just enough money to eke out a living. Some of these know nothing but waiting for a handout of some kind, drinking, cursing, fighting and prostitution. But many who live in this manner seem to be happy and satisfied. They apparently know and desire nothing better.[74]

Activists in the ACMHR--all of whom were intensely religious, lived in stable families, and shared a set of values that kept most from participating in the informal economy--viewed conditions in the slums as essentially a moral dilemma rather than a product of poverty. At an ACMHR-sponsored mass meeting to discuss "the problems of Crime, Delinquency, and Lawlessness among some of our citizens," Shuttlesworth labelled the slums "uncontrolled crime breeding places" that had to either be transformed or removed. He suggested greater punitive measures and longer sentences for black criminals who committed crimes against other black people; that parents take greater control in raising their children; and that ministers conduct more militant preaching and foster stronger religious and civic programs. In Shuttlesworth's opinion, because crime was essentially a moral dilemma, proselytizing was the way to reduce it.[75]

Ironically, segments of the poor who were least likely to join the ACMHR suffered disproportionately from state-sanctioned retaliation against the movement. Early in 1960, less than a month after the U.S. District Court ruled that blacks have a right to ride anywhere on Birmingham Transit Company vehicles, the Jefferson County Commission announced a procedural change enabling the board of registrants to disfranchise people convicted of prostitution, vagrancy, gambling, and drunkenness. Similarly, the state legislature had recently approved a provision allowing only citizens "who are of good character" to vote. The Jefferson County registrar used the provision to disfranchise parents of children born out of wedlock. The decision affected a significant number of black residents since one out of every four black children born in Jefferson County in 1959 was born

out of wedlock, the majority to poverty-stricken households. Moreover, in 1962 in response to a boycott of downtown stores, city commissioner "Bull" Connor and Mayor Arthur Hanes threatened to discontinue appropriations for the county's surplus food program. The program at the time affected twenty thousand families in Jefferson County, 95 percent of whom were black.[76]

Unlike racial extremists such as Bull Connor, white business establishments were willing to negotiate for limited reforms, but only with handpicked members of the black bourgeoisie. In 1962, a special black negotiating committee was created, which included millionaire A.G. Gaston, Miles College president Lucius Pitts, and businessman John Drew, to work out a plan to desegregate downtown business establishments and to put an end to the ACMHR's direct action campaign once and for all. Their initial efforts failed miserably because grass-roots activists simply did not trust them. As one historian noted, "Gaston's close ties to the white establishment, his aloofness in the black community and his past record of carefully avoiding any confrontations with the white power structure, contributed to his impotence among the movement's membership." But when Shuttlesworth invited the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to lead a direct action campaign in Birmingham in 1963, King successfully wooed the black bourgeoisie to support the ACMHR and mass demonstrations. As soon as he arrived, however, King legitimized the role of bourgeois blacks by creating a Negro Advisory Committee, which ultimately had the effect of shifting power away from Shuttlesworth's group to King and a group of black businessmen and professionals who had little support from local black residents. When the spring 1963 campaign came to an end, King negotiated a settlement with the city that fell short of the ACMHR's demands.[77]

The story of the SCLC's direct action campaign in Birmingham in May of 1963--Bull Connor's vicious use of dogs and high-powered water hoses to disperse demonstrators in Ingram Park and the subsequent publicity that ultimately gave birth to the Civil Rights Act of 1964--is well known

and need not be repeated here. What should be examined for the purposes of this paper is the degree to which the poor participated in these campaigns, in what capacity, and to what ends. Although the evidence is still quite tentative, I believe historian Glenn T. Eskew is essentially correct when he writes: "While the demands of the Birmingham movement failed to address the needs of the underclass, the campaign itself led to the involvement of these poor and powerless blacks in the struggle."[78] What needs to be explored is precisely how the black poor participated, what were the issues that prompted their participation, and what effect did their involvement have on the relationship between the poor and the Civil Rights movement.

One need only examine film footage of the Birmingham confrontation to know that the hundreds of school children who crowded into the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, recruits of the direct action campaign who marched nonviolently into the hands of waiting police officers, were not products of Birmingham's worse slums. Rather, the vast majority of neat, well-dressed, and orderly children were the sons and daughters of activists or movement supporters. The slum dwellers, teenagers and young adults alike, did show up at Ingram Park to participate on their own terms in the May demonstrations. Historians and activists have labelled them "onlookers" or "bystanders" merely because they were neither directed nor controlled by any Civil Rights organization.[79] On Friday May 3rd, as Bull Connor ordered the use of police dogs and clubs on the demonstrators, the crowd of so-called "onlookers" taunted police, retaliated with fists, profanity, rocks, and bottles, and if possible escaped into their own neighborhoods. On the very next day, "Negro spectators were seen brandishing knives and pistols along the fringes of the demonstrations." Shocked by the show of armed force, SCLC leadership decided to call off the demonstration that day. While these "fringe dwellers" had no intention of filling the jails, they were clearly demonstrating their utter contempt for the police, in particular, and racist oppression, in general.[80]

A more dramatic example of collective violence on the part of the poor occurred late Saturday night, May 11, after the home of Reverend A.D. King and A.G. Gaston's motel were bombed by racists. An angry crowd gathered in front of the Gaston Motel and began throwing bottles and bricks at the police officers on the scene. According to some observers, the predominantly male gathering had come "from the taverns and dance halls of the surrounding commercial district, which had been emptied of their Saturday night customers." The fighting escalated into a full-scale riot, as hundreds of black residents destroyed glass storefront windows, overturned cars, set buildings on fire, and seized all the commodities they could get their hands on. Police officers themselves were prime targets. One patrolman chased a group of rioters down a dark alley and emerged with three stab wounds in his back. A police inspector was found soaked in blood, having been "brained by a rock." Armed with megaphones, SCLC leaders A.D. King and Wyatt T. Walker implored the rioters to stop the violence and go home, but their efforts were to no avail. Walker himself was struck in the leg by a brick tossed by a rioter. The uprising finally came to an end after state troopers intervened with unbridled violence. By morning, six businesses, several homes, and a two-story apartment building had been burned to the ground, several automobiles had been destroyed, and some seventy people were injured.[81]

Civil Rights leaders treated the riot as an impediment to the progress of the "real" movement. Dr. Martin Luther King and his staff had gone so far as to venture into the local pool halls in an effort to persuade potential rioters from reverting to violence. Overall, Civil Rights leaders were contemptuous of African-Americans who had participated in the rioting or threw rocks at police during the nonviolent demonstrations, some believing that their actions were somehow linked to their character. Middle-class activists variously described the crowds of violent demonstrators as "wineheads" or "riff-raff," and one scholar categorized them as part of the "desperate class."[82] What Civil Rights leaders failed to understand was that the actions of the poor were rooted in a very

different political reality. No matter how much the SCLC or the ACMHR tried to control the situation, the people of Birmingham's black slums and segregated pool halls resisted symbolic injustice and material appropriation on their own terms, which included attacking police officers and taking advantage of the crisis to appropriate much needed or desired commodities.

The irony is that the very movement which sought to control or channel the aggressive, violent behavior of the poor was the catalyst for their participation. In spite of the movement's failure to deal with the specific problems of the poor, the 1963 demonstration was in and of itself a powerful declaration of aspects of the hidden transcript. However, from the perspective of the poor, the accumulation of indignities and level of anger was so great that it precluded, for younger people in particular, the possibility of nonviolent resistance. They lived in a world more violent and more repressive than the middle-class leaders who led the movement. Their unmitigated rage directed at the police reflects years of brutalities, illegal searches and seizures, and incidents of everyday harassment. As James C. Scott surmises about subordinate groups in general, "If the politics they engender is tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent, that is perhaps because the powerless are so rarely on the public stage and have so much to say and do when they finally arrive."[83] The black poor, I would argue, had more to be angry about and much more to say about their plight, grievances over which even their "leaders" were unaware. So when the opportunity came in the series of crises of 1963, they seized it.[84]

The change in the public posturings of black poor youth and young adults caught much of white Birmingham off-guard. One year after the demonstrations, one public official attributed the defiant attitudes of black youth living in the Elyton Housing Project to narcotics. Throughout the mid-1960's, complaints by white residents of the growing impudence and discourteousness of Birmingham blacks flooded the police department and mayor's office. In 1964, a white woman whose residence bordered a black community observed to her utter horror "Negro boys . . . step out

in front of the car driven by a white woman--wanting to ride. Hitch-hiking." In her view, the attitudes and actions of black passengers after desegregation rendered public transportation unbearable: "Can't get on the bus and ride to town because the colored have taken the buses." In 1967, a visiting school teacher from Pleasant Grove, Alabama, simply could not believe his eyes when he drove past a group of black demonstrators militantly protesting police brutality. He wrote the following to Birmingham Mayor Albert Boutwell: "I was in your city last night and it was a disgrass [sic]! . . . There were some Negroes demonstrating. I had to wait until they crossed both sides of the street! I got angry and many other people did also . . . I suggest you look into this matter at once and stop this before they destroy Birmingham's dignity!"[85]

The same circumstances that unleashed such fervent opposition to the powerful and emboldened the powerless to assert a public oppositional presence also unleashed a more sustained effort on the part of the state to put things back in order, so to speak. The public posturings on the part of African-Americans actually led to an increase in confrontations with the police, whose reputation for racial tolerance left much to be desired. Police repression reached an all-time high between 1963 and the early 1970's, and, of course, black male youth from poor communities accounted for the majority of incidents.

During the tumultuous year of 1963, a large proportion of confrontations between black youth and police were more explicitly political than the run-of-the mill criminal cases.[86] For example, although the number of black juvenile delinquency cases increased 40 percent between 1962 and 1963, 550 of those cases, or 23.4 percent of all cases brought to juvenile court in 1963 (irrespective of race or sex), were placed under a new category called "Demonstrating." Property offenses, which usually account for the majority of juvenile cases, comprised only 34.1 percent of the total cases. Altogether, in 1963 black males made up 1,012, and black females 626, of the total cases, whereas white males and females constituted 556 and 255 of the total cases, respectively.[87] Moreover, police

frequently used excessive force in politically volatile situations. On September 15, 1963, hours after the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church killed four black girls, sixteen-year-old Johnny Robinson was fatally wounded by police after he and an unidentified black youth were seen throwing rocks at a passing car full of white teenagers. "Negroes Go Back to Africa" was scrawled on one side of the car in shoe polish, and a Confederate flag draped the other side. The white youth, who were clearly celebrating the murder of the four black children, yelled racial epithets to the two black teenagers. As soon as police in the vicinity observed Robinson and his companion throwing rocks at the passing car, they gave chase. According to the police version, they told Robinson several times to halt, but he kept running away. When the smoke cleared from a volley of police gunfire, Robinson lay dead, bullets lodged in his back and head.[88]

Nevertheless, two years after the mass demonstrations of 1963, arrests of black youths were still proportionately higher than arrests of white youths. In 1965, 677 black males and 291 black females, respectively, were arrested and brought before juvenile court, compared to 546 white males and 259 white females, respectively. (In 1960, Birmingham's "non-whites" accounted for 39.6 percent of the total population.) Of course, given the fact that black youth registered a higher percentage of property crimes than white youth suggests that relative poverty and joblessness among poor black teenagers had something to do with the higher number of black juvenile cases.[89] However, as we suggested above, it would be wrong to assume that because African-Americans presumably commit more crimes, one should expect statistically higher rates of black arrests and homicides at the hands of police officers. How many African-Americans were arrested for engaging in acts of ideological resistance? Given the limited oppositional strategies available to poor blacks and the patently racist practices of the Birmingham police department, we can assume that some of the arrestees were either falsely accused of crimes they did not commit or engaged in consciously political acts of resistance.[90] Besides, by 1966 the number of white juveniles convicted of crimes nearly

equaled that of blacks; white males and white females accounted for 662 and 282 of total cases, respectively, whereas black males and females accounted for 712 and 263 cases, respectively. And yet, in the fourteen months between January 1966 and March 1967, ten black men, the majority of whom were teenagers or young adults, were killed by Birmingham police. During this same period, there were no white victims of police homicides.[91]

Poor black youth were affected disproportionately by the use of excessive force by Birmingham police officers, but other segments of the poor suffered as well. An arrest or beating prompted by a mistaken identity or a particularly angry patrolman could prove to be a substantial setback for poor working residents whose families depended on meager wages to stay afloat. A case in point is the arrest of North Birmingham resident Catherine McGann, a single mother of seven children who worked as a domestic for a living. On the night of September 4, 1964, she and two black men whom she did not know were standing in front of a store in her neighborhood when several police officers drove up and forcibly shoved the two men into a police car. When she tried to walk away, two of the officers "rushed up and grabbed me and were hollering, 'Get in this car nigger.'" She struggled desperately to break free, but they hit her several times, dragged her into the vehicle and slammed her ankle in the door. McGann was subsequently taken to jail and refused medical attention, though she was not charged with anything until her son appeared to post bail. The court found her guilty of resisting arrest and loitering after a warning, for which she was fined $125.00. The beating and arrest turned out to be much more than "a very terrible and humiliating experience." It nearly devastated Catherine McGann financially. "All my children are in school and I do not have the money to get books for them or to pay their fees. I don't earn much and then to have what little I earn to be taken away from me for no reason at all is very hard."[92] A similar case involved Willie Johnson, an extremely hard-working black man who held three jobs just to make ends meet. Johnson worked five days a week for Hackney Steel Company from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M.,

Republic Steel at Sayreton mines from 3 P.M. to 11 P.M., and performed yard work on Saturdays. One Saturday night in May 1964, he was arrested and jailed on charges of having a concealed weapon and arson--the latter charge turning out to be a case of mistaken identity. He spent two days in jail without having an opportunity to call his wife, and he probably would have spent a much longer time behind bars had his employer not intervened. Moreover, losing a full day's wages from two jobs turned out to be an enormous setback for Johnson's family, which lived dangerously close to the edge.[93]

Police harassment was so pervasive in the 1960's that middle-class blacks began to file complaints against the Birmingham department. In 1968, one black man was arrested and charged with auto theft simply because he was driving an expensive sports car. Once he was able to prove ownership he was released. While few petit-bourgeois black residents experienced arrests and actual physical violence, they vehemently protested the abusive language officers used when speaking to them. As one person complained, four days after being stopped and questioned by police officers, "I cannot condone the use of vile and abusive terminology by any public servant regardless of how trying his job may be. While I realize that everyone has a right to his personal racial bigotry, I find the words 'nigger,' 'bastard,' and 'girl,' (when used as a form of address) to be intolerable when used by a public servant in the course of his duties . . . I would suggest that in the future the requirements for becoming a member of the police force include the ability to converse civily with and about people of all races."[94] In some cases, black bourgeois political figures who were hassled by the police were accorded privileges few poor people enjoyed. To cite one particularly revealing case, in September 1965, when the Reverend John Porter's wife, Dorothy, was arrested after getting into a traffic accident, the Reverend wrote a private letter of complaint to Mayor Boutwell. Porter promised to keep the incident secret if the city dropped the case entirely and apologized. He did not want Boutwell's administration to suffer any more bad publicity, and he even congratulated the police

force for doing a fine job. Mayor Boutwell, in turn, warmly thanked Porter for having no desire "to magnify the incident" and added "I certainly wish that everyone would follow a like procedure in first discussing the problem with the appropriate department official, as you did with an initial conversation with Chief Moore."[95]

By 1967, local Civil Rights organizations, spearheaded by the ACMHR, placed the rising tide of police brutality at the top of their agenda. This marked a significant change since the late 1940's and early 1950's, when black middle-class spokespersons were more concerned about reducing black crime than police use of excessive force. Although the movement's tactics had not changed (the ACMHR organized a sixty-day boycott of downtown stores to protest recent police killings), its rhetoric reveals a heightened level of militancy. Shuttlesworth not only threatened to build alliances with black power organizations, but his group distributed a flyer proclaiming in no uncertain terms that "Negroes are TIRED of Police Brutality and Killing Our People. Negroes are tired of 'One Man Ruling' of 'Justifiable Homicide' every time a NEGRO IS KILLED!" More significantly, the ACMHR was less willing to negotiate with the city; instead, Shuttlesworth attempted to file suit against the city in order to obtain police department and coroners' records so they might investigate past cases of police homicides.[96]

The ACMHR's efforts failed to bring about any major improvements in police practices with respect to African-Americans. Both Mayor Boutwell and his successor, Mayor George Seibels, refused to form civilian review boards. Indeed, no significant progress was made on the issue of police brutality until the fatal shooting of Bonita Carter by Birmingham police in 1979. During the early 1970's, a number of poor and working-class African-Americans joined grass-roots organizations that investigated and fought police misconduct, such as the Committee Against Police Brutality and the Alabama Economic Action Committee (which was investigating twenty-seven separate incidents in 1972), but these movements received very little support from the black bourgeoisie. Thus, the utter

refusal of "old guard" leadership to deal with the problem of police brutality led future Mayor Richard Arrington to the following conclusion: "The failure of the so-called black leaders in this community to speak out about police brutality simply confirms my belief that there is really no such thing as black leaders in this community--they are people who are used by the white power structure in this community who take an ego trip because they are called upon by some powerful white citizens to fit black folk into an agenda that has been set up by the white community, particularly the business structure here."[97]

While police brutality remained an important issue in the public political discourse of and about the black poor, long-term structural changes were affecting the lives of the poor in more profound ways, forcing more and more African-Americans into an increasingly marginalized existence. In Birmingham, the concentration and expansion of poverty proceeded rapidly during the 1960's. The percentage of families living below the poverty line increased threefold and fourfold in census tracts in which blacks accounted for 95 percent or more of the total population. The table below indicates shifts in black poverty in these Birmingham census tracts between 1960 and 1970:[98]

| Census Tracts | 1960 % black popu-lation | 1970 % black popu-lation | 1960 % families below poverty | 1970 % families below poverty | 1970 % families receiving assistance[99] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 92.47 | 97.90 | 8.86 | 26.50 | 23.90 |
| 7 | 99.30 | 99.70 | 8.56 | 43.90 | 26.40 |
| 9 | 91.58 | 98.90 | 10.58 | 41.90 | 20.50 |
| 14 | 99.90 | 99.90 | 8.94 | 25.60 | 8.50 |
| 28.01 | 97.46 | 96.00 | 14.82 | 46.10 | 28.10 |
| 28.02 | 98.65 | 99.70 | 13.47 | 41.20 | 21.50 |
| 29 | 99.15 | 99.70 | 12.61 | 36.00 | 21.00 |
| 43 | 99.72 | 98.60 | 13.12 | 65.10 | 37.00 |
| 45 | 96.45 | 96.80 | 15.86 | 57.90 | 33.40 |
| 46 | 98.51 | 99.30 | 14.34 | 39.30 | 32.00 |
| 51 | 98.49 | 99.50 | 9.39 | 27.90 | 35.90 |

Moreover, these increasingly impoverished areas reflect a demographic shift from several poor black neighborhoods spread out across North, West, and south Birmingham to communities immediately north and south of downtown where several housing projects are located.

It should be noted that the concentration of poverty in Birmingham proceeded along lines quite different from those in northern postindustrial cities. Whereas major northern cities experienced a mass in-migration of black southerners after World War II on the eve of industrial decline, Alabama was experiencing the largest out-migration of any state in the South, although Birmingham continued to absorb rural migrants from surrounding counties and neighboring states. When we compare changes in black population in Birmingham with other urban centers, especially after World War II, we find that the percentage of African-Americans in Birmingham remained virtually the same throughout the twentieth century:[100]

| | 1900 | 1920 | 1950 | 1970 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 43.1% | 39.3% | 39.9% | 42.0% |
| New York | 1.8% | 2.7% | 9.5% | 21.1% |
| Chicago | 1.8% | 4.1% | 13.6% | 32.7% |
| Cleveland | 1.6% | 4.3% | 16.1% | 38.8% |
| Detroit | 1.4% | 4.1% | 16.2% | 43.7% |

Thus, industrial decline and probably spatial shifts caused by urban renewal programs were much more important than migration as a cause of concentrated poverty in Birmingham.[101]

Deindustrialization in Birmingham dealt a devastating blow to young black workers entering the work force and to existing black industrial laborers. Although antidiscrimination laws and successful litigation on the part of the NAACP removed racially based ceilings to occupational mobility for black industrial workers, by the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's it did not matter. TCI laid off thousands of workers in the 1970's and by 1982 ceased operating altogether. The Sloss-Sheffield furnace shut down in 1971, and Pullman-Standard closed shop in the early 1980's.

The shift from industrial to service-sector jobs, combined with years of racial discrimination with respect to occupational status and wages, meant that the ratio of black male income to white male income had actually decreased since World War II. In 1949, black men in Birmingham earned an average of 53 percent of what white men earned; the ratio dropped to 48.8 percent in 1959, and rose to 51.5 percent in 1969, thus representing a decrease of 1.5 percent since the immediate postwar period.[102]

The end of the 1960's marked still another turning point in the history of poor people's political opposition. The partial revelation of the hidden transcript (evidenced by the increasingly militant public posture of the poor), an intensification of police repression in response to this new public defiance, the deteriorating conditions of the poor caused by deindustrialization and a concentration of poverty, and a general mistrust of traditional black leadership combined to at least momentarily convince some segments of the black poor to support more radical alternatives. As in the 1930's, when the combination of immiserization and intraracial class conflict facilitated the growth and expansion of black left-wing radicalism among the poor, segments of Birmingham's growing black underclass turned to collective movements that exhibited both militancy and a modicum of class consciousness. And like the organizations of the 1930's, the movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's faced an inordinate amount of repression.

As early as 1967, the Nation of Islam attracted a great deal of attention from the poor, especially former convicts who had been converted in prison. Local minister James X received a warm greeting at St. Paul's Church when he spoke at a rally there protesting police brutality in March 1967. According to a police report, he garnered tremendous applause from the audience when he referred "sarcastically to Uncle Tom negroes" in Birmingham. Although the Nation preached a strategy of economic self-help in some ways reminiscent of Booker T. Washington, its open hatred and defiance of "white devils" made it a prime target of state repression. From the moment black

Muslims appeared in Birmingham, local authorities deemed them subversive, especially after they purchased two parcels of land totalling 917 acres just outside of Jefferson County. They had planned to purchase 100,000 acres of land in the state for the purposes of establishing a cattle processing farm that would ship meat and produce to Muslim-owned stores in the North. White citizens of St. Clair County responded by forming an organization called RID--Restore Integrity to Development--in an effort to pressure the Muslims to leave the state. Local police eventually jailed farm operator Jimmy Holmes for failing to "register as a Muslim," and the attorney general launched an investigation on the pretext that "the so-called farms can easily be used for storage of weapons and training in guerrilla warfare."[103] Police harassment made it almost impossible to maintain operations in Birmingham, which deterred many African-Americans from joining or supporting the Nation of Islam. Besides, no matter how much the strongly Baptist and Methodist population identified with the strategies and goals of the Muslims, their support generally did not translate into conversion to Islam.

More significantly, in 1970 several community-based interracial organizations created specifically to concentrate on poor people's needs came into being, including the Jefferson County Welfare Rights Organization--a local chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO)--the Southside Action Committee, the Alabama Economic Action Committee, the Committee for Equal Job Opportunity, and the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic Justice (formerly the Southern Conference Educational Fund).[104] A short-lived organization that attracted a considerable amount of attention, however, both from the black poor and city officials, was the Alabama Black Liberation Front (ABLF). Like the Black Panther Party, the ABLF went beyond demonstrating against police brutality to advocating armed self-defense groups. Its primary agenda, however, was to help the poor resist evictions, obtain relief, and establish collective self-help programs to provide food, clothes, and other necessities to community folks. Its long-term goal was to educate black residents and prepare the groundwork for revolution.[105]

Most of its leaders were poor young residents whose past livelihood often depended on the informal economy. One of its founding members in 1970 was twenty-three-year-old Ronald Williams: "I guess I used to be what you'd call an illegitimate capitalist. I acted for myself alone--whatever I could take, I took it. I did time. I'm not ashamed of all that. I learned to survive the way people had to survive in this society. Until I got hip--and I learned how we have to organize and help each other and change the system." Another founding member, forty-three-year-old Wayland Bryant, was radicalized by his utter disappointment with the "so-called civil rights movements" in which he had participated for over twenty years. He came to realize that integration was not the panacea he believed it would be since it did not attack the fundamental problems of poor people under capitalism.[106]

From the outset, the police and FBI made it virtually impossible for the ABLF to operate in Birmingham. Literally within weeks of their founding, its members were rounded up en masse and arrested in a preemptive strike by police to stop a "planned ABLF ambush." The incident centered around Bernice Turner, a fifty-five-year-old domestic who was being forced out of her home by land developers. She had originally purchased the tiny house in 1960 and added three rooms to accommodate her five children, for which she borrowed $4,100 in order to make the purchase. Ten years later, after having paid a total of $7,983 to her lenders, she was told that she had to come up with $1,400 immediately to pay off her loan or be evicted. Turner could not understand the turn of events, since her mortgage holder informed her in 1967 that she only owed a sum total of $884, which included attorneys fees. She promptly contacted the ABLF for assistance.

Before the ABLF had an opportunity to investigate the case, Turner was served an eviction notice on September 14, 1970. Five Liberation Front activists, including Bryant, Williams, Harold Robertson, and another man and a woman--both unidentified--decided to stay with Mrs. Turner that night and leaflet the community the next morning. The next day, after Mrs. Turner had left for

work, nearly two dozen police officers surrounded her home to arrest the ABLF activists. "A Malcolm X record was playing," recalled Wayland Bryant, "when I heard the door crash open--I never heard any knock." The officers tossed tear gas through the doors and windows, shot Ronald Williams, and beat the remaining members occupying the house. The five ABLF members were arrested, Bryant and Williams were charged with assaulting a police officer with a deadly weapon and intent to murder, and Robertson was extradited since he was on parole from a New York state prison. Over the next few weeks, practically the whole membership of the ABLF was arrested for distributing literature and other assorted charges, thus breaking the backbone of the organization before it had an opportunity to mobilize mass support.[107]

The rapidity with which the Birmingham police crushed the ABLF served as an important reminder that, no matter how many reforms the Civil Rights movement secured in terms of extending participatory democracy to African-Americans, the poor still remained powerless to alter conditions and relationships that affected them the most. Although some segments of the black poor did not give up entirely on organized politics, especially since newly formed community-based organizations were more concerned with issues of poverty, joblessness, survival, and police repression than were previous Civil Rights organizations, they were reminded of the consequences of publicly declaring the hidden transcript. Some, like Mrs. Turner, viewed the collapse of the ABLF with anger and remorse. As she expressed soon after the arrests, "Those men are in jail and it's just not right . . . All they wanted to do was help."[108] Others quietly interpreted the movement's destruction as an important political lesson: stay away from militant organizations or you might get shot.

The period after 1963, therefore, turned out to be a mixed bag of victories and defeats. The black poor exhibited greater militancy and political participation, on the one hand, but faced an intensification of police repression, poverty, and joblessness, on the other. Although the Civil Rights movement succeeded in desegregating public space, winning the franchise, and securing federal job

antidiscrimination legislation, neither the vote nor legislative initiatives were effective weapons against unemployment, deteriorating housing conditions, and police brutality. The limitations of the Civil Rights agenda, the emboldening of the black poor, and the declining material conditions in Birmingham's slums led to the formation of militant, black, class-conscious organizations whose expressed purpose was to assist the poor. Influenced by Malcolm X, the Black Power philosophies of the late 1960's, and/or the Nation of Islam, these movements--much like the Communist Party three decades earlier--showed more sensitivity to the specific problems of poor residents and sought change through alternative means of opposition. However, they were ultimately crushed by police repression, which served as a powerful deterrent to the participation of the vast majority of poor people. Although several less radical community-based organizations continued to exist in Birmingham throughout the 1970's and 1980's, the poor for the most part remained unorganized. What we need to examine next are the everyday survival strategies and oppositional practices Birmingham's black poor adopted during the last two decades. That will have to await future research.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The foregoing discussion of Birmingham's black poor not only fills a substantial gap in our knowledge of the virtually ignored southern "underclass," but, more significantly, it offers a window into the elusive political consciousness and oppositional strategies developed by America's most stigmatized and powerless populations. By shifting our focus from an emphasis on structural factors to the self-activity of the poor, we have been able to at least glimpse at the multiple ways in which disadvantaged African-Americans experienced, interpreted, and resisted poverty, racism, and exploitation. Poor blacks, as I have tried to demonstrate, did not sit passively as structural changes

acted upon them; rather, the poor developed strategies of survival and resistance that grew out of their specific social and historical locations, and those strategies changed as conditions changed. During the Depression, the poor relied on legal and illegal strategies to survive massive unemployment, increase their capacity to be self-sufficient, obtain more relief, and resist symbolic domination. Some segments of the poor took their defiance of the status quo to the level of collective action by joining the Communist Party and/or its auxiliary organizations. Structural and ideological transformations caused by World War II weakened the dominant ideology of segregation and raised the hopes and expectations of poor black residents. The belief that the end of the war would bring profound political and economic changes, especially among the youth, radicalized segments of the African-American community, thus laying the foundations for the Civil Rights movement. Although few poor blacks participated formally in Civil Rights organizations, the direct action campaign and subsequent riot in 1963 altered the public posture of the poor significantly, leading to more acts of defiance and, by the same token, an intensification of police repression.

Cognizant of the racial and class dimensions of power in the Deep South, the black poor tended to adopt evasive strategies to resist material and symbolic domination--from stealing coal to vandalizing busses. Occasionally, a few individuals openly challenged authority in isolated acts that might best be described as public declarations of the hidden transcript. Birmingham's poor black communities constituted multiple, even contradictory, voices; they were not a monolithic group concerned only with material well-being and day-to-day survival. In some cases, issues of personal dignity and/or state-sanctioned violence outweighed material needs. During the Depression, men and women gambled with their relief checks by insisting that welfare authorities treat them more courteously. In the midst of war, hundreds of unemployed and working-poor black residents risked arrest or beatings to resist racist practices on public transportation. And for many black Birmingham residents living on the edge, police harassment constituted a greater threat than hunger.

The historical and structural relationships between the hidden transcript and organized political movements during these four decades suggest that, even when poor people adopted more public, direct forms of resistance, few joined organized political movements, and those who did were drawn to certain kinds of organizations. Those rare political movements able to mobilize significant segments of the black poor were successful because they articulated important aspects of the hidden transcript. A case in point would be the Communist Party, one of the few movements in Birmingham's history to have been led and organized largely by the black poor themselves.

When political organizations publicly declared the hidden transcript in the face of power, however, they experienced an inordinate amount of repression, which in turn had the effect of deterring poor people's participation. On the other hand, the black poor did not participate in or support most black middle-class or liberal interracial organizations, which would have been far less dangerous than joining radical movements such as the ABLF or the CPUSA. The disinterest, and even disdain, Birmingham's black poor exhibited toward traditional black political institutions which claimed to speak for them is tied to the character of class relations within the black community. Black businessmen and religious leaders exploited a consumer base of poor and working-class blacks and insured peaceful relations by creating alliances with white industrialists, and a handful secured enough "respectability" to retain the franchise. Like the white elite, they maintained their own exclusive social clubs and rarely interacted with poor blacks. In fact, there was even a degree of spatial separation in Birmingham since thousands of black working-class families lived in company suburbs. The black elite, as I have pointed out several times, was not always knowledgeable of or sensitive to the specific problems, needs, and desires of the poor, nor did they allow or encourage poor blacks to participate in decision-making or leadership capacities within their organizations.

The character of intraracial class relations in Birmingham has important implications for William Wilson's argument that the deepening of class divisions within the black community is

largely a post-civil rights phenomenon, the result of the collapse of segregation and the migration of the black middle class out of the ghetto. However, the portrait he paints of intraracial class harmony and the importance of black middle-class role models in the inner city before the 1970's is not entirely true for Birmingham. Sharp class divisions within the black community existed throughout the period of our study, largely because the poor and working class did not share the same class interests as the black bourgeoisie. Racism was certainly an ameliorating factor in terms of collapsing or lessening class divisions, but the black poor and middle and upper classes did not experience racism in exactly the same way. Besides, traditional black leaders did not always earn the respect or trust of poor and working-class blacks, and the black poor resented the rude and condescending treatment they often received from middle-class blacks. While these findings do not completely refute Wilson's hypothesis that the removal of the black middle class and the stable working class from the inner city led to a greater concentration of poverty, they do challenge his presumptions regarding the importance of black middle-class institutions for the poor during the age of segregation.[109]

In closing, the history of Birmingham's black poor offers important policy implications for developing an approach to the problems of the urban underclass. First, the ways in which the black poor have historically experienced, interpreted, and resisted poverty and racism on a daily basis provides insights that cannot be found in computer-generated data bases. Indeed, few, if any, mainstream black political institutions that claim to speak for the poor have succeeded in understanding the complexity of everyday life from the perspective of poor people themselves, or the multiplicity of voices and experiences within inner-city communities. In short, the poor need to play a more direct role in creating policies that affect them, particularly since they clearly understand the inner workings and contradictions of their world better than middle-class politicians and academics.

A case in point--which in and of itself carries important policy implications--is the black poor's sustained opposition to police brutality. Tension between police and Birmingham's black

communities highlights the relationship between racism and the experiences of the black urban poor. While I agree that race-specific theories do not adequately explain social dislocations and persistent poverty in America's inner cities, I do think that racism is the critical factor determining the daily character of police-community relations. Throughout the twentieth century, Birmingham's black poor have viewed the police as an occupying army whose role is to protect whites and keep "niggers in their place." Police officers, on the other hand, have regarded poor black communities as naturally criminal populations that need to be controlled--a view held by most of Birmingham's white community and segments of the black middle class. The pervasiveness of police intimidation and violence against blacks, especially young males, explains why the Birmingham police department continues to be such a potent symbol of domination in the political discourse of the black poor.

In many inner-city communities today, police brutality is still one of the most salient political issues. One need only refer to the recent brutal beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles or the mass popularity of rap songs critical of police treatment of African-Americans--most notably NWA's (Niggas With Attitude) hit single "Fuck Tha Police" or Ice Cube's "Tales from the Darkside." Despite the staggering increase in violent crimes, inner-city residents--youth in particular--continue to return to the issue of police repression.[110] If the actual complaints of the poor were part of the policy-making process, then perhaps the problem of policing the poor would take center stage as a "poverty" issue.

Finally, those who operate outside of government agencies and organize grass-roots community-based movements need to be able to read the infrapolitics of the poor, the hidden transcripts which are continually being revised and reiterated in the tenements and projects, laundry mats and liquor stores, sidewalks and basketball courts of the inner city. This offstage political discourse, from the language and culture of Hip Hop to the reconstructed memories of the elderly, expresses the often contradictory thoughts and dreams of the poor.[111] The success of any effort to

mobilize poor people depends on a movement's ability to articulate and comprehend that hidden transcript, no matter how incongruous it might seem in relation to what policymakers and grass-roots organizers believe are the "real" needs of their constituency.

## Notes

[1]Aside from a forthcoming collection of historical essays on the urban underclass edited by Michael Katz and sponsored by the Social Science Research Council, there are a few exceptions. See, for example, James Borchert, Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970 (Urbana, 1980); James Grossman, Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration (Chicago, 1989); Lois Rita Helmbold, "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working Class Women During the Great Depression," Feminist Studies 13, no. 3 (Fall 1987), 629-55, and "Downward Occupational Mobility During the Great Depression: Urban Black and White Working Class Women," Labor History 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988), 135-72; Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present (New York, 1985); Henry Louis Taylor, ed., African-Americans and the Rise of Buffalo's Post-Industrial City, 1940 to the Present (Buffalo, 1991), 2 vols. None of these works deal exclusively with the black urban poor, however. Nicolas Lemann, in The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America (New York, 1991), does take a more historical approach than most other journalists and social scientists writing on the subject, but his method is not very rigorous and his scope is limited mainly to the period from the mid-1960's to the present. Some very important forthcoming studies include Linda Gordon's work on women and the welfare state and Jacqueline Jones' book on the southern origins of the northern underclass. Nonetheless, some of the best historical work on poverty, while not primarily on blacks, focuses on the history of public and private responses to the poor rather than the poor themselves. See for example James T. Patterson, America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1985 (Cambridge, 1986); Michael Katz, Poverty and Policy in American History (New York, 1983), In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America (New York, 1986), and his most recent The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare (New York, 1990); Mimi Abramowitz, Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present (Boston, 1988). For a critique of social scientists who ignore ideology and consciousness in their work on the underclass, see Jennifer L. Hochschild, "Equal Opportunity and the Estranged Poor," The Annals 501 (January 1989), 144-45.

[2] James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, 1990), 183-84 passim. My work is also indebted to George Rawick's pioneering essay, "Working-Class Self-Activity," Radical America 3, no. 2 (March-April 1969), reprinted in Peter Linebaugh, George Rawick, 1930-1990: In Memoriam (Jamaica Plain, Mass., 1990), 32-52. Rawick's piece, though just a brief schematic sketch of how labor historians should begin to examine the working class, anticipated Scott's explorations into the ways in which subordinate groups resist. Rawick writes, "The formal organization--how many workers organized into unions and parties, how many subscriptions to the newspapers, how many political candidates nominated and elected, and how much money collected for dues and so forth--is not the heart of the question of the organization of the working class. The statistics we need to understand the labor history of the time are not these. Rather, we need the figures on how many man hours were lost to production because of strikes, the amount of equipment and material destroyed by industrial sabotage and deliberate negligence, the amount of time lost by absenteeism, the hours gained by workers through the slowdown, the limiting of the speed-up of the productive apparatus through the working class's own initiative." (Linebaugh, George Rawick, 41.) Throughout this paper, however, I draw on Scott primarily because his work is much more developed theoretically.

[3] Scott, Domination, 200.

[4] Rupert Vance, Human Geography of the South: A Study in Regional Resources and Human Adequacy (Chapel Hill, 1932), 302-3; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War (New York, 1986), 170; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, vol. 4 (Washington, D. C., 1912), 538-39; Carl V. Harris, Political Power in Birmingham, 1870-1921 (Knoxville, Tenn., 1977), 187; Paul Worthman, "Black Workers and Labor Unions in Birmingham, Alabama, 1897-1904," in Black Labor in America, edited by Milton Cantor (Westport, Conn., 1969), 54-84; Sheldon Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama (Princeton, N.J., 1969), 182-208; Joseph Matt Brittain, "Negro Suffrage and Politics in Alabama since 1870" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1958), 148.

[5] Blaine Brownell, "Birmingham, Alabama: New South City in the 1920's," Journal of Southern History 38 (February 1972), 28; Saunders Walker interview, July 23, 1981, Birmingfind Papers and Related Materials, Birmingham Public Library [hereafter cited BPRM], p. 4; Joe Moton interview with author, November 9, 1986; Hosea Hudson interview with author, November 15, 1986; Carl V. Harris, Political Power in Birmingham, 25-26; Paul Worthman, "Working Class Mobility in Birmingham, Alabama, 1880-1914," in Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth Century Social History, edited by Tamara K. Hareven (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), 205; Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South (New York, 1941), 166-67; L. Giddens, "Happy-Go-Lucky Harlem of the South: Birmingham's Picturesque Negro Quarter," Travel (July 1929), 40-44.

[6] James A. Fitch, "The Human Side of Large Outputs: Steel and Steel Workers in Six American States: IV, The Birmingham District," Survey (January 6, 1912), 1532-37; Marlene Hunt Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford: Man of the New South," in From Civil War to Civil Rights: Alabama, 1860-1960, edited by Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1987), 244-49; Hastings H. Hart, Social Problems of Alabama: A Study of the Social Institutions and Agencies of the State of Alabama as Related to Its War Activities (Montgomery, 1918), 81; Brownell, "Birmingham," 27; George R. Leighton, Five Cities: The Story of Their Youth and Age (New York, 1939), 128-29; Leon Alexander interview, conducted by Peggy Hamrick, July 8, 1984, pp. 3 and 7, Working Lives Collection, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa [hereafter cited as WLC]; Birmingham Historical Society, Village Creek: An Architectural and Historical Resources Survey of Ensley, East Birmingham and East Lake--Three Village Creek Neighborhoods, City of Birmingham (Birmingham, 1985), 67; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Housing by Employers in the United States," Bulletin no. 263 (Washington, D.C., 1920), 31, 69-71.

[7] Brownell, "Birmingham," 28; Franklin D. Wilson, "The Ecology of a Black Business District," Review of Black Political Economy 5, no. 4 (Summer 1975), 358; John Hornady, The Book of Birmingham (New York, 1921), 68-69; Leah Rawls Atkins, The Valley and the Hills: An Illustrated History of Birmingham and Jefferson County (Woodland Hills, Calif., 1981), 79, 82, 97; Booker T. Washington, The Negro in Business (Boston, 1907), 133-38. On Birmingham's black electorate, see Paul Lewinson, Race, Class, and Party: A History of Negro Suffrage and White Politics in the South (New York, 1965, orig. 1932), 218. For a broader discussion of black elite social life, see Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Aristocrats of Color: South and North: The Black Elite, 1880-1920," Journal of Southern History 54 (February 1988), 3-20.

[8] Report of E. Newdick, War Labor Board, March 5, 1919, and George Haynes, to Secretary of Department of Labor, March 7, 1919, File No. 8/102-D, Special Problems-Birmingham, 1919,

Department of Labor Records, 174. See also Birmingham Reporter, February 1, 8, March 8, June 21, 1919, June 19, 1920; Birmingham News, June 21, 1920.

[9]Dorothy Autrey, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Alabama, 1913-1952" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985), 13-14, 59.

[10]Ibid., 61, 63, 67, 96-99; Birmingham Reporter, December 23, 1922.

[11]Alabama Department of Labor, Third Annual Report of the Department of Labor, 1938 (Montgomery, 1939), 32-33; Sterling Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement (New York, 1931), 355; Ronald L. Lewis, Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980 (Lexington, Ky., 1987), 41-44; Philip Taft, Organizing Dixie: Alabama Workers in the Industrial Era, edited by Gary Fink (Westport, Conn., 1981), 21; Carl V. Harris, Political Power in Birmingham, 202-5; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Hearings Before the Committee on Investigation of United States Steel, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C., 1912), 2962, 2982, 3111-12; Albert B. Moore, History of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1951), 814-17; Elizabeth Bonner Clark, "The Abolition of the Convict Lease System in Alabama, 1913-1928" (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1949); Horace Cayton and George Mitchell, Black Workers and the New Unions (Chapel Hill, 1939), 316-20; Leighton, Five Cities, 123; Richard Straw, "The Collapse of Biracial Unionism: The Alabama Coal Strike of 1908," Alabama Historical Quarterly 37, no. 2 (1975), 92-114, "The United Mine Workers of America and the 1920 Coal Strike in Alabama," Alabama Review 48, no. 2 (April 1975), 104-28, and "'This is Not a Strike, It is Simply a Revolution': Birmingham Miners Struggle for Power, 1894-1908" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1980); Taft, Organizing Dixie, 15-16, 21-24, 27, 52-53.

[12]Edward S. LaMonte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama: 1900-1975" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1976), 160; Barbara Bailey, "Ten Trying Years: A History of Bessemer, Alabama, 1929-1939" (M.A. thesis, Samford University, 1977), 49; Wendell M. Adamson, "Coal Production in Alabama," University of Alabama Business News, February 15, June 15, 1931; E. M. Henderson, Sr., "Relief in Jefferson County: A Brief Survey" (typescript, Birmingham Public Library), 9; Douglas L. Smith, New Deal in the Urban South (Baton Rouge, La., 1988), 17-18; Morris Benson interview, conducted by Peggy Hamrick, June 8, 1984 (WLC), 15; Samuel Andrews interview, conducted by Peggy Hamrick, July 18, 1984 (WLC), 20-21; King Chandler, Jr., interview, conducted by Brenda McCallum, May 23, 1983 (WLC), 3-4; Willie Johnson interview, conducted by Brenda McCallum, June 26, 1984 (WLC), 10; Cleatus and Louise Burns interview, conducted by Cliff Kuhn, June 12, 1984 (WLC), 1.

[13]Lizzie May Lopp interview, conducted by Brenda McCallum, June 26, 1983 (WLC), 5-11; Essie Davis interview, conducted by Peggy Hamrick, August 20, 1984 (WLC), 2; Evelena McClindon, oral testimony, May 5, 1981 (BPRM), 1. In 1930, 34.5 percent of the black female population was gainfully employed, compared to 17.4 percent of the white females in Birmingham. Although I have no figures for the number of single-parent female-headed households, it should be noted that black women outnumbered black males in Birmingham 52,495 to 46,582 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population, vol. 1, p. 93). For a broader discussion of changes in domestic work during the Depression, see Jones, Labor of Love, 205-7.

[14]The figure of 82 percent includes domestic workers in hotels, restaurants, and boarding houses, but this represents a very small percentage compared to the number of women employed in private homes. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census . . . 1930: Population, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 122; U.S. Employment

Service, A Report on the Availability of the Services of the National Reemployment Service, Affiliated with the U.S. Employment Service, to Negro Applicants, Particularly Birmingham (typescript, December 16, 1936), in L.A. Oxley's files, Records of the Department of Labor, RG 183.

[15]For a discussion of how the Depression affected women's work and the response of some male wage earners to the crisis, see Helmbold, "Beyond the Family Economy," 629-55 and "Downward Occupational Mobility," 169-71; Jones, Labor of Love, 221-30.

[16]Marlene Hunt Rikard, "An Experiment in Welfare Capitalism: The Health Care Services of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1983), 270-79; Virginia Foster Durr, Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr (University, Ala., 1985), 79.

[17]Birmingham Post, February 23, 1931; LaMonte, "Politics and Welfare," 204-6; Henderson, "Relief in Jefferson County," 9; "Minutes of the City Commission, City of Birmingham," November 18, 1930, p. 139; Mark Cowett, Birmingham's Rabbi: Morris Newfield and Alabama, 1895-1940 (University, Ala., 1986), 105-6; Douglas L. Smith, New Deal in the Urban South, 36-37, 41; U.S. Employment Service, A Report on the Availability of the Services. The numbers on relief practically equaled the unemployment rate. In 1933, 27.4 percent of Birmingham's black male population were unemployed (Labor Research Association, Labor Fact Book [New York, 1935], vol. 2, p. 130).

[18]Taft, Organizing Dixie, 64; Southern Worker, August 31, September 20, 1933; "Draft Resolution for District Convention, District 17 (1934)," 1-2, Earl Browder Papers, microfilm reel 3.

[19]Constance Price interview, conducted by Cliff Kuhn, July 18, 1984 (WLC), 7. Several WLC interviews provide rich descriptions of urban farming as a Depression survival strategy. See especially Mitchell Jerald interview, by Peggy Hamrick, August 9, 1984, 9; Andrews interview, 21; Morris Benson interview, by Peggy Hamrick, June 8, 1984, 15; George J. Brown interview, by Cliff Kuhn and Brenda McCallum, April 25, 1983, 3; Alex Bryant interview, by Brenda McCallum, June 26, 1984, 6; Chandler interview, 3; Clarence Darden interview, by Steve McCallum, May 24, 1983, 12-13; Mack Gibson interview, by Cliff Kuhn, July 14, 1984, 6; also, McClindon, oral testimony (BPRM), 1. The data on livestock and gardening are from Bailey, "Ten Trying Years," 51, and J.D. Dowling et al., "Consolidated Report and Analysis of Surveys and Studies of the Blighted Areas of Birmingham and Bessemer, Alabama" (typescript, Jefferson County Board of Health, 1936), 5.

[20]Southern Worker, January 17, 1931; Curtis Maggard interview, by Peggy Hamrick, July 13, 1984 (WLC), 22-23.

[21]Thomas Gadson interview [interviewer not identified], October 7, 1981 (BPRM), 2; Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 16-17; Daily Worker, December 5, 1932. For rich first-hand descriptions of Red Cross work by Birmingham blacks, see the following WLC interviews: Elizabeth March interview, by Peggy Hamrick, August 1, 1984, 13-15; Lera Maggard interview, by Peggy Hamrick, July 13, 1984, 3, 16; Essie Davis interview, 5-6.

[22]Unsigned letter to Labor Policies Board, November 5, 1936, Box 784, WPA Records.

[23]Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 4.

[24]Nell Irvin Painter, The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 161; Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 4. Hosea Hudson, who refers to her as "Hallie Moses" in his narrative, had similar run-ins with Ida Shepherd (pp. 161-62). The fact that these women chose to assault an African-American social worker suggests a clear knowledge of power relations. If they had attacked a white woman, we can be quite certain that the consequences for their actions would have been more severe.

[25]Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 1-3; also Rosa Jackson interview, July 23, 1984 (WLC), 10; George J. Brown interview (WLC), 3; Painter, Narrative, 162; Scott, Domination, 191.

[26]Essie Davis interview (WLC), 3-5; Benson interview (WLC), 15; Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 6, 13-15; Painter, Narrative, 100, 157-59; Robin D. G. Kelley, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression (Chapel Hill, 1990), 19.

[27]Steven Box, Recession, Crime and Punishment (Barnes and Noble Books: Totowa, N.J., 1987), 34; see also, J. Ditton, Part-Time Crime (London, 1977); S. Henry, Informal Economy (London, 1978); R.C. Hollinger and J.P. Clark, Theft By Employees (Lexington, 1983).

[28]Painter, Narrative, 157-59.

[29]Kelley, Hammer and Hoe, 21-22, 30-33.

[30]Hosea Hudson interview with author, November 15, 1987; Painter, Narrative, 100, 138-40; Southern Worker, January 24, April 18, May 9, October 10, 1931; Clyde Johnson to author, April 10, 1989; Robert Washington interview, conducted by Peggy Hamrick, July 9, 1984 (WLC), 35-36; Working Woman, September, 1934. For a discussion of Unemployed Councils' tactics in other major urban areas, especially Chicago and New York, see Robert Fisher, Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America (Boston, 1984), 35-42; Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression (Urbana, 1983), 41.

[31]Painter, Narrative, 162-63.

[32]Birmingham Reporter, August 15, 1931; Charles A. J. McPherson to Mary White Ovington, April 7, 1933, Box G-2, NAACP Branch Files; "Report of Membership for Birmingham, Alabama, Branch of NAACP," January 21, 1931, Box G-1, NAACP Branch Files.

[33]"Interview, Dr. E.W. Taggart," November 18, 1940, p. 38, "Memo on interview with Mr. Irving James and Mr. Joseph Gelders," July 25, 1939, p. 4, Box 82, Bunche Papers; excerpt from Birmingham Weekly Review, December 16, 1934 (typescript), ILD Papers, reel 8; Birmingham World, December 22, 1934; Southern Worker, January, 1935; "Interview, Robert Durr," November 18, 1939, p. 42, Box 82, Bunche Papers; memorandum from Nelson C. Jackson, Southern Field Director [National Urban League] to Lester B. Granger, December 10, 1948, Birmingham Urban League Papers, microfilm, Birmingham Public Library.

[34]Hudson interview with author; Clyde Johnson interview with author; Morris Benson interview (WLC), 2, 5; Curtis Maggard interview (WLC), 2; Earl Brown interview (WLC), 7; Wilmington (N.C.), Union Labor Record, August 22, 1930; resolution from G.W. Reed, Forty-Fifth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, March 11, 1935, Drawer 103, Governor Graves Papers, Alabama Department of Archives

and History, Montgomery; "A Call to Action" (handbill, 1934), Box 143, J.B. Matthews Papers, Duke University; Chandler interview (WLC), 1; Jesse Grace interview, by Cliff Kuhn, July 16, 1984 (WLC), 4-5; William Mitch, Jr., interview, by Cliff Kuhn, June 27, 1984 (WLC), 7; Charles A. J. McPherson to Robert W. Bagnall, November 2, 1932, Box G-2, NAACP Branch Files. According to a Department of Labor report in 1919, "All the Negro preachers had been subsidized by the companies and were without exception preaching against the negroes joining unions"; H.B. Vaughn to George E. Haynes, March 5, 1919, File No. 8/102-D, "Special Problems--Birmingham," Records of the Department of Labor, RG 174.

[35]Kelley, Hammer and Hoe, chapters 6-10. The Workers' Alliance, however, collapsed in 1940.

[36]Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," Journal of American History 73, no. 3 (December 1986), 687; Mary Martha Thomas, "Alabama Women on the Home Front, World War II," Alabama Heritage 19 (Winter, 1991), 9; Geraldine Moore, Behind the Ebony Mask (Birmingham, 1961), 28.

[37]On the political and ideological changes caused by the war, see Pete Daniel, "Going Among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II," Journal of American History 77 (December 1990), 893, 906-8; Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," Journal of American History 75 (December 1988), 786-811; Bernice Reagon, "World War II Reflected in Black Music: Uncle Sam Called Me," Southern Exposure 2 (Winter 1974); George Lipsitz, Class and Culture in Cold War America: A Rainbow at Midnight (New York, 1981); Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," Journal of American History 58 (December 1971), 661-81. The quote from Scott is from Domination, 203.

[38]James Armstrong interview, by Cliff Kuhn, July 16, 1984, (WLC), p. 9; "Report Involving Race Question," August 1943, p. 1, Box 10, Cooper Green Papers, Birmingham Public Library.

[39]Scott, Domination, 197.

[40]Report by N.H. Hawkins, Jr., Birmingham Electric Company Transportation Department, n.d., Box 10, Cooper Green Papers; "Analysis of Complaints and Incidents Covering Race Problems on Birmingham Electric Company's Transportation System, Twelve Months Ending August 31, 1942"; and see numerous examples from "Reports Involving Race Question" [1942-44], Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[41]"Reports Involving Race Question" [1942-44], Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[42]"Report Involving Race Question," September 1943, p. 1; see also numerous incidents from "Reports" [1942-44], Box 10, Cooper Green Papers. For a discussion of "Stagolee" folklore and the political implications of "baaad niggers" in African-American working-class consciousness, see John W. Roberts, From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom (Philadelphia, 1989), 171-215; Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York, 1977), 407-19.

[43]"Reports Involving Race Question," June, August, September, October, December 1943, Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[44]To quote James C. Scott again, "A direct, blatant insult delivered before an audience is, in effect, a dare. If it is not beaten back, it will fundamentally alter those relations [of domination]." Scott, Domination, 215.

[45]"Report Involving Race Question," May 1944, pp. 2-3, "Report Involving Race Question," February, 1943, p. 3, also see "Reports" for June, August, September, October, November, December 1943, January, February, and March 1944, Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[46]"Report Involving Race Question," October 1943, p. 3, "Report Involving Race Question," August 1942, p. 2, Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[47]N.H. Hawkins, Jr.,Birmingham Electric Company Transportation Department, n.d., Box 10, Cooper Green Papers.

[48]Scott, Domination, 205; and for a discussion of the role of police in maintaining the racial order, see Lee P. Brown, "Bridges Over Toubled Waters: A Perspective on Policing in the Black Community," in Black Perspectives on Crime and the Criminal Justice System, edited by Robert L. Woodson (Boston, 1977), 79-100.

[49]"Southern Negro Youth Congress-Forum," untranscribed tape (Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Library, NYU); Cavalcade 1, no. 1 (April 1941), 1; Ibid., 1, no. 3 (June 1941), 1; Southern News Almanac, May 1, 1941; Birmingham World, May 2, 6, 1941.

[50]Southern News Almanac, February 20, 1941; Cavalcade 1, no. 3 (June 1941), 1; Junius Irving Scales, with Richard Nickson, Cause at Heart: A Former Communist Remembers (Athens, Ga., 1987), 119-21; Southern News Almanac, May 22, August 14, 1941; Memorandum re: Joseph Gelders from S.K. McKee to J. Edgar Hoover, January 13, 1942, FBI HQ File 61-9512; Marge Frantz interview with author; Southern News Almanac, May 22, 29, 1941.

[51]Cavalcade 1, no. 3 (June 1941), 1; Southern News Almanac, May 1, 1941; Birmingham World, May 2, 6, 1941; "SNYC-Forum," untranscribed tape (OHAL). After the war, however, the NAACP took up the issue of police brutality after some of its members were harassed by police. In fact, during the late 1940's a group of black veterans and middle-class political leaders formed the Citizens Defense Committee. The Committee protested the bomb attacks against black middle-class homeowners who were challenging racial zoning practices, as well as the deaths of six African-Americans at the hands of police officers (Corely, p. 47-8).

[52]Kelley, Hammer and Hoe, chapter 11.

[53]"Statement by Bessie B. Ammons, Janitress, Smithfield Court Project," January 24, 1951, N.C. Ward, Manager, Smithfield Court to Eugene Connor, Commissioner of Public Safety, January 24, 1951, Box 14, James Morgan Papers, Birmingham Public Library.

[54]Report from Earl Heaton-M.S. Davis, city detectives in charge of the vice squad, to C.F. Eddins, Assistant Chief of Police, May 24, 1943, Box 8, Cooper Green Papers.

[55]Box, Recession, Crime and Punishment, 46-47; see also Brown, "Bridges Over Troubled Waters," 87-88.

[56]"Study of Number of Offenses of Boys 16 to 21 Inclusive, Girls 18 to 21 Inclusive; Birmingham City Jail and Jefferson Co., Sheriff's Office," Box 15, Cooper Green Papers. Note that these totals do not include servicemen, and female statistics represent a smaller age range.

[57]Untitled report on juvenile delinquency in Birmingham, April 19, 1945, Box 15, Cooper Green Papers.

[58]Untitled report on juvenile delinquency in Birmingham, March 14, 1945, Box 15, Cooper Green Papers. The relatively high number of juvenile cases might have something to do with the nature of police protection. In areas where a minority community is surrounded by white residents, one could expect greater police protection. But in communities where nearly all residents are black and poor, the number of police dispatched to the area is probably rather slim. However, I do not have the evidence at this point to prove this hypothesis.

[59]W. Cooper Green to James E. Chappell, August 9, 1943, Florence Adams to Green, September 7, 1943, Adams to Celia Williams, September 7, 1943, "Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Youth Protective Association," January 31, 1945, W. Cooper Green to J. Edgar Hoover, August 3, 1943, Box 15, Cooper Green Papers; "Youth Protective Association of Jefferson County," Alabama Social Welfare 10, no. 5 (May 1945), 12-13.

[60]Birmingham World, November 5, 1946.

[61]Charles L. Joiner, "An Analysis of the Employment Patterns of Minority Groups in the Alabama Economy, 1940-1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1968), 51-55; John Franklin Pearce, "Human Resources in Transition: Rural Alabama Since World War II" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1966); Norrell, "Caste in Steel," 675, 686-87.

[62]LaMonte, "Politics and Welfare," 245, 251. The city was so poor that it ended up cancelling its $1,000 monthly allocation to the welfare department for emergency relief.

[63]Robert Gaines Corely, "The Quest for Racial Harmony: Race Relations in Birmingham, Alabama, 1947-1963" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Virginia, 1979), 36; George A. Denison, M.D., "Health as an Indication of Housing Needs in Birmingham, Alabama, and Recommendations for Slum Clearance, Redevelopment and Public Housing," report by Jefferson County Board of Health, April 12, 1950, p. 1 and 9. Conditions were still appalling by the end of the decade. In 1957, only 50 percent of black families lived in dwellings with hot water heaters. Moore, Behind the Ebony Mask, 33.

[64]Birmingham Housing Authority, Ninth Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (June 30, 1948); George Denison, M.D., to Birmingham City Commission, November 10, 1949, Box 8, Cooper Green Papers; Denison, "Health as an Indication of Housing Needs," p. 9-10.

[65]Corely, "The Quest for Racial Harmony," 44-46, 54; Florence S. Adams to Mrs. E.D. Wood, Controller's Office, September 28, 1950, Box 1, Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library.

[66]"Organization and Rules of Procedure of the Interracial Committee of Jefferson County Coordinating Council," "Minutes of Interracial Committee Meeting, Friday June 15, 1951," Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library, microfilm.

[67]"Minutes, Interracial Committee Meeting," September 18, 1951, "Minutes, Interracial Committee Meeting," January 10, 1952, "Minutes, Interracial Committee Meeting," December 18, 1952, "Minutes, Interracial Committee Meeting," November 4, 1953, "Minutes, Interracial Committee Meeting," May 17, 1955, "Minutes, Interracial Committee, Subcommittee on Housing," July 31, 1951, "Minutes, Interracial Committee, Subcommittee on Housing," September 15, 1955, Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library, microfilm. Mountain Brook and Homewood were wealthy white suburbs in East Birmingham.

[68]"Minutes, Interracial Committee, Subcommittee on Daycare," September 17, 1951, "Minutes, Interracial Committee, Subcommittee on Daycare," August 17, 1954, Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library, microfilm.

[69]"Minutes, Interracial Committee, Subcommittee on Employment Relations," May 31, 1955, Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library, microfilm.

[70]"Minutes of Joint Community Chest-Red Cross Meeting, Executive Committee, April 2, 1956," Box 1, Jefferson County Coordinating Council on Social Forces Papers, Birmingham Public Library.

[71]My description of charismatic leadership as a function of the hidden transcript is drawn from Scott, Domination, 221-23. On the Civil Rights movement in Birmingham, see David Garrow, ed., Birmingham, Alabama, 1956-1963: The Black Struggle for Civil Rights (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1989); David Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York, 1988), 231-75; Corley, "The Quest for Racial Harmony"; Jacquelyn Clarke, "Goals and Techniques in Three Civil Rights Organizations in Alabama" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1960); Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York, 1988), 747-802.

[72]Clarke, "Goals and Techniques," Appendix B, pp. 134-49; Glenn T. Eskew, "The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and the Birmingham Struggle for Civil Rights, 1956-1963," in Birmingham, Alabama, 1956-1963: The Black Struggle for Civil Rights, edited by David Garrow (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1989), 45-46.

[73]Birmingham News, September 27, 1960; Richard Fussell, A Demographic Atlas of Birmingham, 1960-1970 (University, Ala., 1975), 66; I. N. McCluskey, Food Stamp Supervisor to Mayor Albert Boutwell, February 19, 1964, "To Be Eligible for Food Stamps" (flyer, ca. 1963), Box 9, Albert Boutwell Papers. These figures only include Birmingham proper and therefore the industrial suburbs of Greater Birmingham are not counted.

[74]Moore, Behind the Ebony Mask, 15.

[75]Petition from Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights to City Commissioners, July 25, 1965, Box 12, Boutwell Papers.

[76]Eskew, "The ACMHR," 49, 69; Corley, "Quest for Harmony," 234.

[77]Quote from Eskew, "The ACMHR," 66, 91-95; also see Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 256-59; Branch, Parting the Waters, 783-91.

[78]Eskew, "The ACMHR," 94.

[79]All of the accounts describing the Birmingham demonstrations refer to those who engage in acts of violence as "onlookers," "spectators," people "along the fringes," or "bystanders." See, for example, Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 254-55; Eskew, "The ACMHR," 82; Branch, Parting the Waters, 759-60; Lee E. Bains, Jr., "Birmingham, 1963: Confrontation Over Civil Rights," in Birmingham, Alabama, 1956-1963: The Black Struggle for Civil Rights, edited by David Garrow (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Pub., 1989), 181.

[80]Eskew, "The ACMHR," p. 85; Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 254-55; Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested (New York, 1978), 190.

[81]Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 261; Branch, Parting the Waters, 793-802; Bains, Jr., "Birmingham, 1963," 182-83.

[82]Bains, Jr., "Birmingham, 1963," 228-29.

[83]Scott, Domination, 277.

[84]In some ways this argument resembles Frantz Fanon's interpretation of violence by the oppressed as a transformative process which ultimately alters the personalities of subordinate groups. [See especially, Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Grove Press: New York, 1966), 29-74; Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation (Bobbs-Merrill Co.: Indianapolis and New York, 1970), 148-49.] However, what I am suggesting is that collective violence served to open the door, so to speak, to the hidden transcript. The feeling of frustration and hatred existed long before the uprising but only occasionally found a public platform. What appeared to be a transformation in personality was really a change in the public posturings of segments of the black poor.

[85]Memo from George Seibels to Albert Boutwell, October 15, 1964, re: "Probable Dope Consumption by Teenagers in the Elyton Housing Project Area"; "Telephone Conversation Between Mrs. Virginia Davis and Birmingham Police," May 11, 1964 (tsc.), Box 30, Boutwell Papers; Mike Brock to Mayor Albert Boutwell, March 18, 1967, Box 15, Boutwell Papers.

[86]In 1965, four sociologists and criminologists completed a study which concluded that crimes of violence against other blacks decline when there is a well-organized, direct action campaign, because race-pride replaces self-hatred. The movement allowed "lower class" blacks to channel their aggression in more positive directions. [See Frederick Solomon, Walter Walker, Garrett J. O'Connor, and Jacob R. Fishman, "Civil Rights Activity and Reduction in Crime Among Negroes," Crime and Social Justice 14 (Winter 1980), 27-35 (orig. publ. in Archives of Psychiatry 12 (1965): 227-36.]

[87]Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of Jefferson County, Annual Report (1963), 15, 25.

[88]Memo from Det. C.L. Pierce to Chief Jamie Moore, September 15, 1963, re: shooting of Johnny Robinson, Birmingham Police Department, statement of Officer J.E. Chadwick, September 16, 1963, statement of Marvin Kent, September 16, 1963, statement of Jimmy Sparks, September 16, 1963, statement of Officer P.C. Cheek, September 16, 1963, statement of Sidney Howell, September 16, 1963, Box 31, Boutwell Papers, BPL. Statements were taken from the whites in the car, though no black people were asked to submit statements or serve as witnesses.

[89]In 1965, 57.9 percent of black male cases and 50 percent of black female cases were property-related crimes (larceny, shoplifting, burglary, vehicle theft, and robbery). For white males, property crimes only accounted for 28.2 percent; for white women, 32 percent. Whites, especially males, had higher incidents of vandalism, truancy, and runaway--the highest being a category labelled "incorrigible." Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of Jefferson County, Annual Report (1965), 20-21.

[90]As Piven and Cloward put it, "The lesson of [poor people's] vulnerability is engraved in everyday life; it is evident in every police beating, in every eviction, in every lost job, in every relief termination. The very labels used to describe defiance by the lower classes--the perjorative labels of illegality and violence--testify to this vulnerability and serve to justify severe reprisals when they are imposed. By taking such labels for granted, we fail to recognize what these events really represent: a structure of political coercion inherent in the everyday life of the lower classes." Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail (New York, 1979), 26.

[91]Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of Jefferson County, Annual Report (1966), 18; "Negroes Are Calling a 60-Day Period of Mourning for the Dead!" (ACMHR flyer, ca. March 1967), unsigned, "Racial Notes [Birmingham Police Department]," March 6, 1967, Box 15, Boutwell Papers.

[92]Statement by Mrs. Catherine McGann (typescript), n.d., Lawrence E. McGinty to Mayor Albert Boutwell, September 15, 1964, inter-office communication from Jamie Moore, Chief of Police, to Mayor Boutwell, September 17, 1964, Box 30, Albert Boutwell Papers.

[93]Andrew E. Moody, Pres. and General Manager, to George Seibels, May 12, 1964, "Arrest Order for Willie James Johnson, March 5, 1964," inter-office communication from Jack Warren to Jamie Moore, Chief of Police, June 16, 1964, Box 30, Boutwell Papers.

[94]J.E. Walker, Jr., to the City Council, October 2, 1963, Box 30, Boutwell Papers.

[95]Southern Patriot 26, no. 2 (February 1968); Rev. John Porter to Mayor Albert Boutwell, September 27, 1965, Boutwell to Porter, September 28, 1965, Box 30, Boutwell Papers.

[96]"Negroes Are Calling a 60-Day Period of Mourning for the Dead!" (ACMHR flyer, ca. March 1967), unsigned, "Racial Notes [Birmingham Police Department]," March 6, 1967, unsigned, "Racial Notes [Birmingham Police Department]," March 8, 1967, Box 15, Boutwell Papers.

[97]Jimmie Lewis Franklin, Back to Birmingham: Richard Arrington, Jr., and His Times (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1989), 92-133, quote from p. 104. In fact, Franklin argues that Arrington's successful bid for mayor can partly be attributed to his stand against police brutality.

[98]Data derived from Fussell, A Demographic Atlas of Birmingham, 66, 67, 70.

[99]What is most striking about these figures is the fact that in most tracts, the percentage of families receiving aid is significantly smaller than the percentage of families below the poverty line. Although this disparity still needs to be explored in greater detail, it is likely that not everyone living below the poverty line was eligible for assistance. See, for example, David T. Ellwood and Lawrence H. Summers, "Poverty in America: Is Welfare the Answer or the Problem?" in Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't, edited by Sheldon Danzinger and Daniel H. Weinberg (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 78-105.

[100]David R. Goldfield and Blaine A. Brownell, Urban America: A History (Boston, 1990, 2nd ed.), 222-23.

[101]This point indirectly challenges Lemann's argument (The Promised Land) about the role of the post-World War II migration in the making of the urban underclass. Whereas a mass influx of poor and working-class blacks streamed into Chicago on the eve of industrial decline, leaving millions with no future job opportunities, the percentage of Birmingham's black population remained relatively stable during the twentieth century. And yet, like most northern cities, Birmingham is characterized by social dislocation and a concentration of poverty. For more on the out-migration of Alabama's urban black workers, see Joiner, "An Analysis of the Employment Patterns," 51-56.

[102]Norrell, "Caste in Steel," 690-91; Michael Reich, Racial Inequality: A Political-Economic Analysis (Princeton, 1981), 51-52.

[103]Report from Detectives A.B. Swindall and E.T. Coleman to Chief Jamie Moore, March 10, 1967, Box 15, Boutwell Papers; "Muslim Farm Under Attack," Southern Patriot 28, no. 2 (February 1970).

[104]Carl Braden, "Birmingham Movement Grows," Southern Patriot 30, no. 7 (September 1972).

[105]Anne Braden, "Law and Order in Birmingham: Two Black Liberation Front Leaders Failed," Southern Patroit 29, no. 3 (March 1971), 5.

[106]Ibid., p. 5.

[107]Ibid., p. 5-6.

[108]Ibid., p. 6.

[109]William J. Wilson, The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions (Chicago, 1978), and The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (Chicago and London, 1987), 56-57.

[110]One scholar has argued persuasively that inner-city blacks are more likely to be victims of police repression than "black on black" violence. See Bernard D. Headley, "'Black on Black' Crime: The Myth and the Reality," Crime and Social Justice 20 (1983), 52-53.

[111]There have been a number of excellent efforts to examine the relationship between mass cultural forms and politics. See, for example, Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare," History Workshop 18 (Autumn 1984); Steve Chibnall, "Whistle and Zoot: The Changing Meaning of a Suit of Clothes," History Workshop 20 (Autumn 1985); Mauricio Mazon, The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Ben Sidran, Black Talk (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," Callaloo 11, no. 3 (Summer 1988); Charles Keil, Urban Blues (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Bernice Reagon, "World War II Reflected in Black Music"; George Lipsitz, Class and Culture, and "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll," in Lary May, ed., Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Peter Guralnick, Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University

Press, 1977); Hazel Carby, "'It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime': The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," Radical America 20, no. 4 (1987); Brenda McCallum, "Songs of Work and Songs of Worship: Sanctifying Black Unionism in the Southern City of Steel," New York Folklore 14, nos. 1 and 2 (1988), 9-33; Geneva Smitherman, Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977); Tricia Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile," Camera Obscura 23 (1991), 109-31, and "Orality and Technology: Rap Music and Afro-American Cultural Theory and Practice," Popular Music and Society 13, no. 4 (1989), 35-44; Judith Halberstem, "Starting from Scratch: Female Rappers and Feminist Discourse," Re-visions 2, no. 2 (Winter 1989); Michael Dyson, "The Culture of Hip Hop," Zeta (June 1989); Nancy Guevara, "Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'" in Mike Davis et al., eds., The Year Left 2 (London: Verso Press, 1987).