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Black Power And Neighborhood Organizing In Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Way Community Center, 1966-1971

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BLACK POWER AND NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZING IN MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA:
THE WAY COMMUNITY CENTER, 1966-1971

by

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ABSTRACT

The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc. was a non-profit community center that operated from 1966—1984 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Inspired by the national black power movement that arose in the 1960s, this community center led a local movement for African American equality. This thesis investigates The Way as a unique example of how black power ideology was implemented at the local level, in a city with a statistically small black population, presenting a northern urban context often overlooked by historians. The Way offered a space where aspiring young black musicians could perform, including Prince.

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INTRODUCTION

From 1966-1984, a small non-profit organization in Minneapolis, Minnesota worked to improve the social, political, and economic conditions of the local African American population. Although The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc. was a 501(c) non-profit organization, the early founders viewed it as a fluid movement unique to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.¹ Mahmoud El-Kati,² the director of the community center's education department in the early years, explained: "Wherever that [The Way] ends up, that's where we end up. We were in motion all the time...trying to get to human freedom in the end. You can call us an organization, but we were a *movement*."³ To the founders, their mission was to "deal with specifics as they arise...and let the chips fall where they may."⁴ Leading a movement, the Way Community Center provided the social services previously denied to Near Northside neighborhood residents with their own unique blend of black power ideology and multiracial collaboration.

While an August 1966 riot in Minneapolis was the catalyst for establishing The Way, the much larger riot of July 1967 marks the moment that brought The Way to

¹ "The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc." will be referred to as "The Way" and "The Way Community Center" throughout this thesis.

² Mahmoud El-Kati's birth name is Milton Williams. Although he is referenced in the *Records of The Way, Inc.* as Milton "Milt" Williams, this essay will refer to him as Mahmoud El-Kati, the name he adopted in the 1970s after a trip to Ghana.

³ Mahmoud El-Kati, interview with the author, February 2018.

⁴ "The Way Philosophy: 'We know the way we are going!'" 1969 Minutes, *Records of The Way, Inc.* Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society.

national attention. Governor Karl F. Rolvaag and Mayor Arthur Naftalin called in the National Guard to put an end to vandalism and rioting in the Near Northside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The event made national newspaper headlines amidst a summer of urban race riots across the country.⁵ Because The Way, a self-identified black power organization, served the same community where the protests erupted, they were quickly and falsely accused of involvement. The Way dropped out of national newspaper headlines and public memory shortly thereafter.

The 1967 summer events were neither the beginning nor end for this black power inspired movement. However, Minneapolis' role in the black power movement and urban race riots has been relatively overlooked by historians—overshadowed by cities with more destructive and fatal riots, ones with larger black populations.⁶ In cases where Minneapolis is mentioned, it is not examined in significant detail.⁷ The Way Community Center itself is absent from scholarly discourses on local black power movements and the racial disturbances of the 1960s. Historians have overlooked how Minneapolis' local conditions allowed a unique black power organization and movement

⁵ National headlines included: "Mayor Blames Few 'Lawless' Persons For Minneapolis Violence Outbreak," 21 July 1967, *Washington Post*; "Guardsmen Sent into Minneapolis: Governor Provides 600 Men" 22 July 1967, *New York Times*; "Minneapolis Calls Guard to End Riots," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 July 1967.

⁶ For example, the riots that occurred in New York, Los Angeles, Oakland, Detroit, and Cleveland from 1964 to 1968 are typically examined in local studies, all of which had black populations over 50,000 (See: Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising*, 1).

⁷ Steven M. Gillon's recent publication *Separate and Unequal* mentions Minneapolis as one of the many cities that had a race riot in the summer of 1967, but does not discuss the city beyond that statement. Peter Levy. However, The Way is briefly examined by a local Minnesota historian, but he does not engage with scholarly discourses on black power or discuss the community center beyond the summer of 1967 (see: Iric Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*).

to form in a Midwestern city with a small black population. The formative years of The Way, 1966 to 1971, most strongly reveal the distinct nature of a local black power movement in Minneapolis.

“Black Power” first came to national attention during the Mississippi March Against Fear in the summer of 1966. Activist Stokely Carmichael popularized the slogan that electrified African Americans.⁸ The national black power movement that followed was a historic moment that drew attention to police brutality and structural inequalities facing America’s urban black communities. These communities, particularly in the North, were consumed with dense concentrations of poverty, lack of adequate and affordable housing, unemployment discrimination, as well as other social and economic problems. As historian Steven Gillon notes, African Americans “were frustrated by the slow pace of change and dissatisfied with liberal pleas for moderation.”⁹ Many of these black communities, particularly in cities with larger black populations, began rioting in the 1960s in response to these conditions. During this period, what historian Peter Levy calls “The Great Uprising,” many black communities “challenged the primacy of nonviolence as a means to overcoming racial inequality and boosted the fortunes of both the Black Power movement and the New Right.”¹⁰ The first major riot to captivate

⁸ William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁹ Steven M. Gillon, *Separate and Unequal: The Kerner Commission and the Unraveling of American Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 11; Other historians have similarly identified these key issues that the black power movement sought to address (see: Peniel E. Joseph’s *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, Thomas J. Sugrue’s *The Origins of The Urban Crisis*, Robert O. Self’s *American Babylon*).

¹⁰ Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban American during the 1960s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2.

the national media headlines occurred in Harlem, New York in 1964. This riot, coupled with the Watts riots of 1965, typically mark the beginning of urban protests that consumed the second half of the decade.¹¹

The Way Community Center was born during this post-1965 moment in history, formed after a small-scale riot in the summer of 1966. However, the city of Minneapolis differed from other northern urban centers where racial disturbances occurred during this period. Notably, the city had a very small black population. In 1960, the black population of Minneapolis was only 2.4%, and rose to 4.4% by 1970. In comparison, by 1970, Detroit's black population was 43.7%, 34.5% in Oakland, 32.7% in Chicago, 24.7% in New York City.¹² Minneapolis was an outlier among the cities that experienced racial disturbances and riots. It is here that my project will be situated—a local examination of the impact of black power in a Midwestern city with a small African American population, amidst a period of urban race riots erupting across the country.

Specific elements of the Minneapolis movement situate The Way as a unique contribution to existing local black power studies. First, a coalition of leaders, diverse across race, gender, and class, ran The Way during its formative years.¹³ Second, unlike

¹¹ In his recent publication, *The Great Uprising*, Levy argues that the era of urban racial disturbances begins earlier in 1963 citing a riot in Cambridge, Maryland.

¹² Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

¹³ The methodology in many post-1965 local black power organizations studies tends to frame the narrative around an iconic figurehead leading the movement. Komozi Woodard and Daniel Martin have studied the role of Amiri Baraka in Newark (see: Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*; Martin, "Lift up Yr Self!": Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition"); Patrick D. Jones and Mark Rodriguez examine Father Groppi in Milwaukee (see: Jones, *The Selma of the North*;

many local movements, The Way procured enough funds to develop a community center, which allowed the leaders to execute programs in-house.¹⁴ Third, the focus of the movement was not on racial solidarity, rather neighborhood and community solidarity. The early leaders founded the movement so that it could specifically help alleviate the conditions of those living in the Near Northside neighborhood of Minneapolis, not the Twin Cities African American community. Under this geographic framework, The Way promised to help all Northside residents regardless of race, ethnicity, or class.¹⁵ Lastly, The Way forged partnerships with prominent local leaders, corporations, and small businesses to raise funds. Their willingness to engage in interracial collaboration allowed the Minneapolis black power movement to achieve a rare degree of success.¹⁶ The latter two features best capture the multiethnic and multiracial nature of the movement.

Rodriguez, "Defining the Space of Participation in a Northern City"); Angela D. Dillard and Thomas J. Sugrue make note of Reverend Albert J. Cleage's role in Detroit (see: Dillard, "Religion and Radicalism: The Reverend Albert J. Cleage, Jr. and the Rise of Black Christian Nationalism in Detroit"; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*).

¹⁴ Many local black power movements expressed a need or desire for a community center in their neighborhood, but most could not get the necessary funding. (See: Elizabeth Hinton, "'A War Within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State, *Journal of American History* 102, no.1, 2015) Instead, many would have their own offices, but would coordinate with other local groups and churches to host their programs (see: Jon Rice, "The World of the Illinois Panthers"; Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley, University of California Press), 2013).

¹⁵ The majority of black power movements were racially exclusive and sought to help the entire black community in their respective cities. Such cities include Oakland (Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*), Newark (Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*), and Detroit (Dillard, "Religion and Radicalism").

¹⁶ Historians have demonstrated how local black power organizations were often racially exclusive, and thus had to be self-sufficient. However, Kent Germany presents a southern local study in which Thugs United, Inc., a local black self-help group, engaged

This thesis is both a local black power movement study as well as community study of the Near Northside neighborhood in Minneapolis. The history of The Way Community Center begins with the history of the Near Northside. Chapter one examines Minnesota's African American history from the Great Migration of World War I to 1966, the year The Way was founded. Thus, the first chapter explores the history of black migration into Minnesota during the twentieth century, setting up the framework for understanding how a black power movement emerged where it did in the city. Chapter two spans 1966-1971, the years when The Way's movement and programs were most successful, despite the chaos brought on by numerous racial disturbances. Different demographics and circumstances contributed to The Way's distinctiveness. Similar to other movements in cities such as New York, Chicago, Oakland, Detroit and Newark, The Way adapted their engagement with black power to the local conditions and politics.¹⁷ Therefore, this chapter explores how The Way engaged in multi-ethnic and multi-racial collaboration to grow their movement during a period of urban race riots across the country.

in interracial collaboration with local politicians. Similar to The Way, they received significant funding from private and "predominantly white sources" (see: Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 212).

¹⁷ In most local black power movements, adhering to the principles of black power took precedence over remaining favorable in public opinion. For example, the Detroit movement became less moderate in the 1960s when independent black unionism and Black nationalism maintained a "radical network," see: Todd Shaw, *Now Is the Time! Detroit Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Durham, Duke University Press), 2009; the Black Panther Party of Oakland maintained armed defense to show the black community they could handle issues themselves, even if it intensified relations with local police, see: Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*).

CHAPTER 1
AFRICAN AMERICANS IN MINNESOTA:
FROM WORLD WAR 1 TO THE FOUNDING OF THE WAY

During World War I, American industrial employers turned to hiring African Americans from the South out of necessity. Thousands of jobs became vacant in primarily industrial Northern cities as white men were drafted into the Army, and there was a sharp decline in European immigration. With a diminishing native and foreign-born white labor force, employers temporarily set aside their prejudices against blacks, which consequentially “thrust a small minority of African Americans into the modern industrial economy.”¹⁸ African Americans living in the South saw greater employment and economic opportunities in the North, as well as the possibility for better living conditions. Blacks who moved North were also motivated to escape the racial terror, lynchings, Jim Crow segregation, poverty, and the instability of sharecropping that plagued the South. Approximately 450,000 to 500,000 black southerners moved North between 1915 and 1918, otherwise known as “the Great Migration.”¹⁹

Most black southerners, who were part of the first Great Migration, departed for cities with an industrial economy such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Gary, and Cleveland. The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were not major destinations of

¹⁸ Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration*, 7.

¹⁹ Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 1.

the Great Migration, especially in comparison to other cities.²⁰ By 1920, African Americans represented only 1% of the total population of Minneapolis.²¹ It did not experience a large influx of African Americans during the war. Many who did choose Minnesota moved there for job opportunities in the service industry and as porters for railroad companies.²² St. Paul marked the beginning of the Great Northern Railway, and was also the headquarters for the Northern Pacific Railway.²³ The Pullman Company porters were hired to tend to the needs of white passengers on the company's luxury sleeping cars, ranging from duties such as shining shoes to carting luggage. Although the Pullman Company maintained a strict racial division and job hierarchy, the job of a porter was still seen as a respectable middle-class position among African Americans.²⁴ Many African American families of the Northside neighborhood can trace their family's beginning in the state to a relative working as a porter on the railways.

While migration North continued in the 1920s and 30s, World War II was a catalyst for another large social and geographic movement. During the second Great Migration, black southerners left the South in even greater numbers and dispersed

²⁰ The Twin Cities was just barely a Great Migration destination during World War I. Between 1910-1920: St. Paul experienced a 7.3% increase in black population, 51.5% in Minneapolis; while other industrial Great Migration destinations such as Cleveland experienced a 307.8% increase, and Detroit increased by 611.3%. (see: Vassar, *They Chose Minnesota*, 81).

²¹ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Table 24, Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States (U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005).

²² Taylor, David Vassar, "The Blacks" in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981), 77.

²³ Arthur C. Wyatt, "'A Greater Victory': The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in St. Paul," *Minnesota History*, 204. The Pullman Company was the single largest employer of black Americans in the US by the end of World War I.

²⁴ Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration*, 17.

among more cities in the North and West. Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Portland, and Seattle became destinations for migrants seeking to take advantage of the employment opportunities wartime mobilization offered.²⁵ The number of African Americans increased slightly in Minneapolis— by 1950 they represented 1.3% of the population, and that number would grow significantly as the city experienced a 436% increase of African Americans from 1950 to 1970.²⁶ Minneapolis became a “Great Migration” city during the post—World War II period.

Both Great Migrations altered the racial landscape and neighborhood patterns of Minneapolis’ black communities. World War I was a catalyst for African Americans to relocate from the Northeast area to downtown, across the Mississippi River. This was mainly because inadequate transportation options led African Americans to pursue housing closer to work. Following World War II, African Americans in Minneapolis began moving away from downtown to the northwest region of the city.²⁷ The construction of Olson Memorial Highway in 1937 accelerated this trend of moving progressively west, and also deepened ethnic and racial neighborhood divisions. The physical construction of Olson Memorial Highway (MN-55) served as a barrier that only worsened de facto segregation patterns in the city.

²⁵ Deborah Gray White, Mia Bay, Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Freedom On My Mind: A History of African Americans with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2013), 561.

²⁶ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Table 24, Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States (U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005); David Vassar Taylor, “The Blacks”, *They Chose Minnesota*, ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press), 84.

²⁷ Taylor, “The Blacks”, 78.

Knowing Minneapolis' place during both Great Migrations, and the sociological impacts that each had on African American lives is necessary context for understanding how a movement like The Way was born in Minneapolis in 1966. Accounts often believed that it was only the Great Migration cities that had problems with race relations, because they received an overwhelming number of African Americans from the South in a short period of time. In 1966, The *Washington Post* reported that "Minneapolis, unlike most big cities of the North, has had little Negro migration from the South and, therefore, no real race problem," reflecting the incorrect assumption of the time.²⁸ Since Minneapolis was not a Great Migration city, it appeared to be an American exception, a place that enjoyed smooth race relations. The riots of 1966 and 1967 in Minneapolis showed that unequal conditions among blacks and whites, and racial tensions, did not necessarily correspond with the size of the black population. The Twin Cities black population experienced the same racial discrimination that could be found in anywhere else in America. With this context in mind, the rioting and movements that sprang up in Minneapolis during the black power era are not surprising. Similarly, Minnesota historian David Vassar Taylor explains:

"Against this backdrop of discrimination and limited opportunities, it is not difficult to understand why the Twin Cities experienced serious civil disorder during the volatile 1960s. The Black population of the two cities was becoming progressively younger with a median age of 25 in 1960. The average employed Black male earned \$1,000 less in 1970 than his white counterpart...the Black urban population of Minnesota was becoming increasingly resentful of its exclusion from the general prosperity."²⁹

²⁸ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Risk on Plymouth Street," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1966.

²⁹ Taylor, "The Blacks," 85.

The construction of Olson Memorial Highway in 1937 separated one of Minneapolis's wealthiest neighborhoods from one of its poorest. The highway was a physical barrier that reinforced residential segregation, and "effectively quarantined the black population into small, easily controllable areas."³⁰ As urban renewal projects in the downtown industrial area pushed out African Americans, many moved west into newly constructed housing projects north of Olson Memorial Highway. This neighborhood, the Near North Side, had been a predominantly Jewish community for decades.³¹ Unequal socioeconomic status between both minority groups increased the tensions and sense of animosity among struggling African American families. Eastern European Jews in Minnesota were similarly limited to blue-collar type jobs in the service industry, struggled financially, and faced housing restrictions. The difference was, however, that over the course of the twentieth century, the Jewish community experienced improved professional opportunities and median household income.³² Minneapolis also elected its first Jewish mayor in 1961, Arthur Naftalin. (The first African American mayor would not be elected for over 30 years, with the election of Sharon Sayles Belton in 1994).

Discriminatory real estate market practices restricted Jewish immigrants to living in the Near Northside of Minneapolis at the turn of the century. In the 1940s, Jewish families began moving west into the suburbs as African American families started to

³⁰ Swensson, *Got To Be Something Here: The Rise of Minneapolis Sound* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017), xii.

³¹ Swensson, *Got To Be Something Here*, 54-55.

³² For example, by the 1970s, 90% of Jews living in Minneapolis held professional, clerical, or management type positions.

enter. During the 1960s, more Jewish families continued to leave as a response to the decade's racial turbulence. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, many African Americans felt oppressed by the remaining Jewish presence.³³

Plymouth Avenue, the "main street" of the Near Northside neighborhood, was filled with a wide variety of Jewish-owned businesses. In the postwar years, tensions between the Jewish and African American residents began to increase. Since most of the businesses in the Near Northside were owned by Jewish families, they tended to only employ their own relatives or other Jews, actively discriminating against blacks in their hiring practices. Unemployment among black youth in the Northside became an increasing problem for the community. Although they experienced hiring discrimination all over the Twin Cities, black youths often targeted their frustrations against Jewish businesses in their own neighborhood. Years of pent up frustrations would eventually mount to a head in the summer of 1966.

On August 2nd, an employee at the Jewish-owned Silver's Market on Plymouth Avenue opened fire on 11 black youth, chasing them down the street.³⁴ In response to this event, in the early morning hours of August 3rd, local black teenagers started rioting and targeting multiple businesses on Plymouth Avenue around 1 a.m.³⁵ According to the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, the youth involved, who were "no more than 14 years of age," broke numerous store front windows, threw bricks at police vehicles, and robbed an

³³ Hyman Berman, "The Jews," *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981), 500-502.

³⁴ Interview with Harry "Spike" Moss; Facts presented by Moss are clarified in "Mill City Riot; Youngsters Get Jobs As Result," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

³⁵ "Riots Come to Mpls.: All Police Leaves Cancelled," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 4 August 1966.

appliance store. Reports indicated that one teenager only began shooting once Wayne Anderson, owner of Wayne's Bar, used his pistol to fire on the crowds. No fatalities occurred during the riot.³⁶ It was estimated that roughly 60-100 black teenagers participated.³⁷

The chief complaint among black youth concerned hiring discrimination, mainly by the Jewish business community. This conflict within the Northside was the primary motive for the 1966 riot. The black youth sought to destroy local establishments in order to call attention to the issues that plagued their neighborhood. However, the local Jewish community, interpreted such vandalism as an expression of anti-Semitism. An editorial in the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, pushed back against this assertion, stating that "such vandals would use the opportunity to loot any store owned by a white merchant whether he is Jew or Gentile." It appears that in reality, their frustrations with the Jewish counterpart in their community stemmed from prolonged discriminatory treatment, rather than religious or cultural differences.³⁸

Racial disturbances were a common occurrence in urban, particularly northern, areas at this time. Riots reflected deeper frustrations with structural inequalities that black Americans faced. From 1963 to 1972 approximately 525 cities experienced a race

³⁶ "Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

³⁷ "Truce in Minneapolis," *New York Times*, 4 August 1966.

³⁸ "Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet," *Minneapolis Spokesman* 11 August 1966; "Anti-Semetism Not In Vogue Among Nation's Responsible Negroes," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 10 September 1964; Harry "Spike" Moss, interview with the author, September 2017.

riot, and almost every single one had a black population over 50,000.³⁹ Minneapolis, however, only had a black population of 11,785 in 1960, and reached 19,005 by 1970.⁴⁰ The riots that occurred in Minneapolis were different from the infamous ones such as Watts, Detroit, and Cleveland because no fatalities occurred. Fatalities during this era were primarily the result of police shootings. In Minneapolis, the police exercised constraint because local politicians and the business community were determined to protect the city's reputation. Nevertheless, like all riots and disturbances across the country, African Americans in Minneapolis focused on destruction of property.⁴¹ The definition of a "riot" is, I would argue, more symbolic for this time period than descriptive. It was about protesting inequalities in the white power structure in a means black Americans thought would make their voices heard.

Given that most of the riots were erupting in larger cities with greater black populations, the Minneapolis riot came as an unexpected shock to some. The *Minneapolis Spokesman* expressed surprise at the rioting—"Minneapolis and St. Paul have the national reputation of enjoying the greatest amount of interracial good-will among the country's metropolitan areas."⁴² Mayor Naftalin gave a statement on the local WWTC Radio station a few days after the riot, expressing disbelief that "there are

³⁹ Levy, *The Great Uprising*, 1.

⁴⁰ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Table 24, Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States (U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005).

⁴¹ In Detroit, for example, which had the largest race riots in the 1960s resulted in 43 fatalities, 600 people displaced and became homeless, and property damages totaling \$45 million (See: Shaw, *Now Is The Time!*, 61)

⁴² "Riots Come to Mpls.; All Police Leaves Cancelled, *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 4 August 1966.

many people who do not understand the need for different programs to meet different types of situations.” In reality, the Twin Cities was not an exception to other urban areas in the country with social, political, and economic inequalities along racial lines. Many locals, black and white, had been blind to the race-related inequalities in the Twin Cities. The August 1966 riot forced many Minnesotans to see these issues.

The principal issue for blacks in the Northside community was employment discrimination and lack of equal job opportunities. Black youth involved in the riot were challenging the widespread economic disparities among blacks and whites in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. In the mid-1960s, the median income for black males in Minneapolis and St. Paul was nearly *half* of the median income for white residents.⁴³ Consistently, Minnesota has an unemployment rate below, often well below, the national average. The national unemployment rate was 4.5% in 1965, and lowered to 3.8% in 1966.⁴⁴ Whereas in Minnesota, from 1966-1969 the state maintained a 3.5% unemployment rate.⁴⁵ The Twin Cities white unemployment rate in 1966 was an impressive 3%, whereas the unemployment rate for blacks was three times greater at 9%.⁴⁶ Multiple newspaper editorials articulated the black peoples’ frustrations, offered only “dead end jobs—the casual, low-skill, minimum wage jobs that so many of the youths have had to take.” Additionally, local youths who were questioned by reporters

⁴³ “Public Support of T.C.O.I.C. Button Drive Urged By Cong. Fraser,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 17 November 1966.

⁴⁴ US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey.”

⁴⁵ David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald, *The Wage Curve*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 193.

⁴⁶ “Public Support of T.C.O.I.C. Button Drive Urged By Cong. Fraser,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 17 November 1966.

after the August 1966 riot reaffirmed that “the chief complaint about conditions which led to the disorder was the lack of job opportunity.”⁴⁷

The 1966 Minneapolis riot was unique because of how quickly the local government and business community responded. Mayor Naftalin, in particular, was a champion for the city’s black population. A native of North Dakota, Naftalin moved to the Twin Cities for graduate school where he earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Minnesota. He was a journalist and professor before serving as the Mayor of Minneapolis from 1961 to 1969.⁴⁸ The city’s leading African American newspaper, the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, praised Naftalin’s “outstanding record...in the arena of human and civil rights,” especially for his participation in the 1963 March on Washington.⁴⁹

While the 1966 riot was in full swing from approximately 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. on August 2nd, Mayor Naftalin was attending a meeting in Toronto, Canada. Upon hearing the news, he left immediately, returning to Minneapolis by 10 a.m.⁵⁰ His desire “to make the City of Minneapolis the model city of America” led him to respond to the race riots in a most productive and positive manner. He saw the riots as a moment of reckoning, an opportunity to call on his constituents to help the city “develop a pattern of human relations in which every individual does have equal opportunity in our economy and in

⁴⁷ “Minneapolis Disorder is Mild Reminder of Need for Action,”; “Additional Thoughts on Minneapolis Disorder,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

⁴⁸ “Arthur Naftalin, 87, Professor and Former Minneapolis Mayor, Dies,” *New York Times*, 19 May 2005; Jennifer Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ “Reelect Arthur Naftalin Mayor of Minneapolis,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 8 June 1967.

⁵⁰ “Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

our society.”⁵¹ Without Naftalin, the 1966 riot would not have had such productive outcomes for the Northside community.

On the evening of August 2nd, Mayor Naftalin and Governor Rolvaag organized a meeting at Oak Park in the Northside to discuss the dominant issues and frustrations felt by the neighborhood’s local businessmen, community leaders, and black youth. Some of these black youth would later become key employees at The Way, such as Clarence Benford, and one would also become The Way’s third and final Executive Director, Harry “Spike” Moss.⁵² Housing, residential segregation, poor law enforcement, and job discrimination were listed as the primary issues.⁵³ Many local black youths also expressed how job discrimination in the city impacted them personally. The other demand: a recreation center for the Northside neighborhood residents.

The Oak Park meeting shed light on the complexity of the job crisis and the limits of President Johnson’s War on Poverty initiatives. Clarence Benford, one of the Northside youth leaders who helped found The Way, blamed the OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity). Benford told Mayor Naftalin that OEO director Larry Harris “had promised a group of young Negroes jobs before and that they did not deliver.”⁵⁴

Benford’s criticisms were immediately confirmed at the meeting when an employee of

⁵¹ “Mayor Naftalin Defends Action on Disorder,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, August 11, 1966.

⁵² For the rest of this thesis, Harry Moss will be referred to as Spike Moss. (See: Harry “Spike” Moss, interview with the author, September 2017; *Records of The Way, Inc.*)

⁵³ “Mayor Naftalin Defends Action on Disorder,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, August 11, 1966; “Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

⁵⁴ “Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

the OEO, James E. Ware, complained “that his organization had not received the proper support [federal government funds] in its direction of the Poverty Program.”⁵⁵ Having both a victim of the job crisis, and an OEO employee agree on the shortcomings of the War on Poverty legitimized the accusation. After highlighting that federal programs and initiatives had failed the Northside community, Naftalin turned to the local government and business community for assistance.

Mayor Naftalin brought the issues of the Near Northside community to municipal consciousness. Following the Oak Park meeting, Naftalin called for the city to provide employment to the young people, decent housing opportunities for all, and “make certain that there are decent recreational programs and meaningful opportunities not only for jobs, but also for training and for counseling.” After the riot, newspapers reported that “145 unemployed Negro teen-agers have been handed good jobs.”⁵⁶ Naftalin was also key to the founding The Way. He secured the start-up funds for the organization, \$45,000, and procured the site of 1913 Plymouth Avenue so it could be turned into a community center.⁵⁷ By September 8th, The Way—Opportunities Unlimited was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of

⁵⁵ Mill City Youngsters Riot; Quick Action, & Jobs Brings Quiet,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

⁵⁶ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Risk on Plymouth Street,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 1966.

⁵⁷ Amidst this period of federal programs assisting local communities, many cities expressed a desire for a recreation or community center. Not all had the amount of start-up funds as The Way. For example, a youth recreation center existed in Washington, D.C. but was located on the first floor of a housing project (see: Elizabeth Hinton, “A War within Our Own Boundaries’: Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State”).

Minnesota.⁵⁸ This was the first time the neighborhood of the Near Northside collaborated together to highlight the realities of the urban black poor in Minneapolis, initiating a movement to bring about substantive change. The Way became an experiment in a distinct form of neighborhood-oriented black power organizing.

⁵⁸ "Mayor Naftalin Defends Action on Disorder," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, August 11, 1966; "City Riot: Youngsters Get Jobs as Result," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, August 11, 1966; "The Way, Inc. Articles of Incorporation," September 8, 1966, Records of The Way, Inc., Articles of Incorporation, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN; Rolland Robinson, *For a Moment We Had the Way*, 34-37.

CHAPTER 2
BUILDING A MOVEMENT:
THE WAY'S FORMATIVE YEARS

The founding of The Way Community Center in 1966 occurred during a time of massive experimentation at the local level across the nation. The approach to addressing issues in urban areas had cross-regional similarities.⁵⁹ The Model Cities Program, part of the War on Poverty, allocated federal funds to 150 cities.⁶⁰ As a result, numerous non-profit organizations were created in urban centers, designed to receive federal funds to help low-income residents in their respective communities. Many of them later became black power organizations that were governmentally funded.⁶¹ The

⁵⁹ For example, the News Orleans-based Thugs United, Inc. (See: Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*).

⁶⁰ The Model Cities Program was created by the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966. In order to receive federal funds, a local government would submit a grand application to the HUD. The program was controversial during its existence, particularly over inadequate funds and criteria for selection (see: Marilyn Marks Rubin, "Can Reorchestration of Historical Themes Reinvent Government?", *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 2 (1994), 165-166).

⁶¹ For literature on War on Poverty, Model Cities Program, and the OEO's Community Action Program, see: Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 149; Sarah Siegel, "Dominant Decision-Making Authority': Resident Leadership in St. Louis, Missouri, Model Cities Planning,"; Hinton, "A War within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State." Robert Wood, "Model Cities: What Went Wrong"; Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter? The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson*.

Way was not a product of the Model Cities Program; instead it was built on a much older tradition of relying on existing, local philanthropy.⁶²

Among non-profit black power organizations, The Way was particularly unique. First, the Minneapolis black power movement was not led by one key figure, rather a coalition of leaders employed at The Way who contributed to its successes. Second, the movement had their own community center and ran their programs in-house. Third, it had a specific geographic focus, the Near Northside neighborhood residents, as opposed to the Twin Cities black community. Lastly, the organization engaged in multi-ethnic and multi-racial collaboration to maintain their financial base and standing in the community. The Way's first five years, from 1966 to 1971, best capture these unique elements of the Northside, Minneapolis local black power movement.

During the The Way's first year, 1913 Plymouth Avenue was being transformed from a vacant hardware store into a viable community center and office space. Working alongside the renovation project, The Way's leaders focused on building and maintaining the movement's momentum. In the fall of 1966 and spring of 1967, their mission was to spread the word, create programs, assist local blacks in obtaining jobs, and build a strong donor base. The ethos behind The Way reflected the black power

⁶² The Minneapolis Model Cities Program was in effect from 1967 to 1975. The Way Community Center was not a direct recipient of these federal funds, almost all of their funding came from private industries (see: Minneapolis (Minn.) Model City Program records, Minnesota Historical Society; "1967 Audit," *Records of The Way, Inc.*). During these formative years, almost all of the organization's money came from no more than ten people (see: "Letter: To Past, Present and Potential Substantial Donors to The Way", 16 July 1970, *Records of The Way, Inc.*) However, The Way did receive federal funds through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in 1966 for a 10-week program on basic skills development (see: "1966 Minutes," *Records of The Way, Inc.*)

movement era's dedication to community organizing and empowerment. Spike Moss, one of the local black youth who helped found The Way, explained how he perceived the black power movement at the time: "with civil rights, you get the right to eat at the restaurant, but with black power you get the right to *own* the restaurant."⁶³

Furthermore, The Way implemented black power ideology in the form of "teaching racial pride and self-identity."⁶⁴

In September 1966, the organization's Articles of Incorporation Charter outlined the five main purposes of The Way. The first objective was to unite all members of the community "regardless of ethnic origin, color, age, sex, or other traditionally separating out techniques." Second, to teach the local community how to participate and help improve government services, schools, and private agencies. Third, to "hold public discussions, forums and panels to educate the public on improvement of the Community." Fourth, to help the young people complete their education through whatever means necessary. Lastly, to assist residents of the community in procuring a job and/or job training. In order to achieve these goals, the founders divided its services into two broader categories: recreation and self-improvement. As a place of recreation, the center would offer physical and social activities such as sports and dances. As a site of self-improvement, The Way would offer classes in all subjects to compensate for the substandard quality of education their youth were receiving at that time.⁶⁵

⁶³ Harry "Spike" Moss, Interview with the author, September 2017.

⁶⁴ "Lessons in the Slapping Incident-Part II," 26 December 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁶⁵ "Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation of The Way—Opportunities Unlimited, Article II," Box 1, Folder: The Way: Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws, MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*

Despite the renovation work, The Way's employees were quick to make improvements in the job crisis by forging partnerships in the Twin Cities. Local newspaper coverage reveals that locals were largely impressed with The Way's first year, noting progress on the job crisis among black youth. Immediately after the riot, 145 unemployed blacks were offered jobs, and two weeks later 600 jobs became available for blacks.⁶⁶ They also worked with the Youth Opportunity Counselors who assisted in offered Northside youth with job training and assistance. They were applauded for successfully getting kids off the streets and into "the stopgap community center...dancing to a donated juke box and making do with scrounged recreation equipment." Other local community and non-profit leaders also commended The Way for "reaching people the established agencies can't." Additionally, the *Minneapolis Tribune* expressed that The Way "has brought about some concrete achievements, and most important, it has given a sense of identity" to residents of the Near North neighborhood."⁶⁷

The Way's financial records of donations suggest the city government and local business community had greater awareness of the city's racial problem, given the amount of funds raised in the first year. Well-known individuals, primarily local business

"Activities," Box 1 Folder: Syl Davis Misc., *Records of The Way Inc.*

⁶⁶ "Rights head outlines theories," *Minneapolis Star*, 22 Jan 1970.

⁶⁷ "Northside Youths To Get Help From Neighborhood Workers," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, September 15, 1966.

"The Way Center Has Social Way Of Its Own," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 22, 1967. Comment made by "Tom" is Tom Hansen of Wells Memorial and T. Williams of Phyllis Wheatley, former co-worker of Syl Davis.

"The Way' Deserves Chance to Succeed," *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 16, 1967.

"Risk on Plymouth Street," *The Washington Post*, 19 August 19, 1966.

owners in the Twin Cities, were some of The Way's original donors.⁶⁸ Early supporters included Mayor Arthur Naftalin, Raymond Plank of the Apache Corporation, Warren McCoy of Pillsbury, Kenneth N. Dayton of The Dayton Company (which would later become the Target Corporation), A.L. Remington of JC Penney, and Paul Parker of General Mills. But perhaps what is even more impressive is the large quantity of smaller donations they received from the average citizen. Various doctors, reverends, churches, foundations, and other individuals contributed to The Way since its founding in 1966. The Way's accounting records reveal the degree of support the leaders successfully cultivated.⁶⁹

In June of 1967, the renovations at 1913 Plymouth Avenue were complete and The Way Opportunities Unlimited, Inc. was officially open. The staff and board members had successfully turned a vacant storefront, formerly "Fishing Unlimited!", into a new symbol for change in the North Side. The center contained a library, meeting rooms, kitchen, offices, study room, drop-in center for teens, gym equipment, and a boxing ring. With slight variations throughout the years, The Way had fairly consistent programs and day-to-day operations. They employed directors and coordinators to run five distinct departments: education, community service, youth and recreation, art program, and administrative expenses. The education department oversaw a pre-school day care center, courses for high-school drop outs, and a racism course for both blacks

⁶⁸ Similarly, the New Orleans black power group, Thugs United, Inc. received nearly all funds "from private foundations, corporations, and concerned citizens (see: Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, p. 216).

⁶⁹ "1966 Original Way Donors," Box 2, Folder: Donors (Original) in 1966 Establishing Financial Base, MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*
"Donations: Beginning August 1966," Box 1, Folder: Audit 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

and whites. Community services included legal services, help with voter registration, food and clothing donations, and job search assistance. The youth and recreation department held weekly sessions on “dope, smoking, drinking, hygiene, etc.” in addition to offering a variety of athletic activities. The art department included traditional art classes as well as instrument practices.⁷⁰

The various departments and programs conducted at The Way were inspired by other respected social service-oriented movements in the Twin Cities. One of which was the Wells Memorial Settlement House, a Christian social settlement house founded in 1930.⁷¹ The Way’s first executive director, Sylvester “Syl” Davis, was previously a social worker at the Wells House. While the records do not reveal exactly how Syl was selected as The Way’s first leader, it’s likely that his experience as a social worker and respected position among the African American community in Minneapolis made him a strong candidate.⁷² Although the formative years of The Way, from 1966-1971, Syl Davis was the Executive Director, the organization’s achievements during that time were not all attributable to his leadership.

In many local black power movement studies, historians often frame their narrative around one key individual.⁷³ Shifting away from this biographical method more

⁷⁰ “The Way Center Has Social Way Of Its Own,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 22, 1967.

⁷¹ “Wells Memorial House: An Inventory of Its Settlement House Records,” Minnesota Historical Society.

⁷² “The Way Center Has Social Way Of Its Own,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 22, 1967.

⁷³ Most local studies of black power organizations of the post-1965 period depict an iconic figurehead leading the movement. These scholars do not necessarily attribute the successes of their local movements to one leader, rather, they tend to focus on one individual in order to tell a local story. Komozi Woodard and Daniel Martin have studied the role of Amiri Baraka in Newark (see: Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*; Martin,

clearly reveals the unexpected forms of collaboration in the Minneapolis movement. At The Way, there was a coalition of leaders working for The Way that each played a significant role. For example, Joseph Buckhalton, the Assistant Director, was praised by the Board of Directors for being “most influential in bringing about more harmonious relationships both among Northside residents and between them and the larger Minneapolis community.”⁷⁴ Additionally, one of the key contributors was Louise Walker McCannel, a wealthy white woman who was the granddaughter of Minnesota lumber baron Thomas Walker.⁷⁵ Her official position at The Way was Treasurer, but records indicate that she was in many ways the de facto administrative assistant for all departments—she ran the show behind the scenes.

Unlike many black power organizations with predominantly male leadership, The Way employed many women in key leadership roles.⁷⁶ In addition to Louise McCannel, there were also African American women who had a significant impact on the organization. Gwen Jones-Davis, Syl’s wife, was one of the original three founders of the

“‘Lift up Yr Self!’”: Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition”); Patrick D. Jones and Mark Rodriguez examine Father Groppi in Milwaukee (see: Jones, *The Selma of the North*; Rodriguez, “Defining the Space of Participation in a Northern City”); Angela D. Dillard, Todd Shaw, and Thomas J. Sugrue examine the role of Albert J. Cleage in Detroit (see: Dillard, “Religion and Radicalism: The Reverend Albert J. Cleage, Jr. and the Rise of Black Christian Nationalism in Detroit”; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Shaw, *Now Is the Time!*).

⁷⁴ “The Way Board of Directors Meeting Minutes,” 1 March 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁷⁵ “Louise Walker McCannel dedicated a privileged life to others,” *Star Tribune*, 23 June 2012.

⁷⁶ Black Panther and black power movement groups were often led by men and presented a hyper-masculine image. For example, Thugs United, Inc. in New Orleans (see: Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, p. 212).

organization, as well as the program director.⁷⁷ Verlana Matey-Keke⁷⁸ was the secretary for the education department, and would later play a key role in developing the University of Minnesota's Black Studies program. Nevertheless, many of the female employees had positions in traditional gender roles, primarily working in clerical positions.⁷⁹

The Way's leadership coalition would have a difficult challenge to face in the summer of 1967. Amidst the post-1965 period of urban protests and race riots, 1967 saw a sharp increase in the number of incidents. There were a total of 233 riots in 1967, compared to 21 the previous year.⁸⁰ This drastic uptick in racial disturbances created a sense of alarm and panic across the country. In April of 1967, the *Minneapolis Spokesman* was already advising their readers on "the way to have long cool summers."⁸¹ The editorial was optimistic, stating it was possible to avoid joining other cities or having a repeat of last year, "but we must work at it." Moreover, the Twin Cities community did not want a riot because it would taint their national reputation—"No person or group of persons of intelligence in either of our Twin Cities wants to disgrace each of these areas with racial outbreaks." The Way was less than a year old when the succession of "long, hot summers" in 1967 began.⁸² Despite making headways in the job crisis for Northside youth, urban poverty could not simply be resolved through better

⁷⁷ "Articles of Incorporation"; "Budget for Current Year" Box 1, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁷⁸ Verlana Moss (of no relation to Harry "Spike" Moss) changed her last name to Matey-Keke, influenced by the black power movement.

⁷⁹ Budget for current year, Box 1, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁸⁰ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1968), p. 536.

⁸¹ "The Way To Have 'Long Cool Summers,'" *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 27 April 1967.

⁸² Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 185.

employment. Northside youth once again turned to the streets to express frustration and draw attention to the neglected urban black poor.⁸³ This time, however, the chief complaint was police brutality.

On the evening of Wednesday July 19th, during the annual Minneapolis Aquatennial Parade, a major riot broke out in the Northside neighborhood. The anger had been accumulating all day after an altercation occurred between a police officer and a black female in downtown Minneapolis. The press vaguely described the incident, citing “actions taken by the officer” toward the girl angered the black community.⁸⁴ However, Spike Moss recalls that the police had beaten the 14-year-old girl.⁸⁵ Regardless of what specifically took place that morning, police brutality was at the forefront of many minds in the black community. For two nights, neighborhood rioters engaged in “rock-throwing, car flipping and wholesale fire starting, causing approximately \$375,000 in damages.”⁸⁶ In response, Mayor Naftalin and Governor Harold LeVander called in the Minnesota National Guard. Approximately 600 guardsmen patrolled the city from July 21st to the 25th.

⁸³ While Mayor Naftalin was a strong advocate for Minneapolis’ poor blacks, his understanding of systemic racism proved limited after the 1967 riot. This was not uncommon during this time for “neither Johnson nor the advocates of opportunity theory interrogated the relationship between poverty and structural features of the economy.” President Johnson similarly believed that male unemployment was the primary cause of urban poverty (see: Guian A. McKee, “The Government Is with Us’: Lyndon Johnson and the Grassroots War on Poverty,” 38).

⁸⁴ Guard on Patrol in Minneapolis, New York Times, 23 July 1967.

⁸⁵ Harry “Spike” Moss, Interview with the author, September 2017.

⁸⁶ Guardsmen Sent to Minneapolis, Washington Post, 22 July 1967; “Hennepin County Grand Jury Report,” p. 3, Grand Jury 1967, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

The incident caught the attention of larger, national newspapers. The press appeared to be drawn to the story because the National Guard was called in. Thus, newspapers mention the riots, the troops, and the overlap between it and The Way Community Center. In one of Louise McCannel's notes, she wrote the day after the guardsmen arrived that "the newspaper account was out of proportion to the facts." Apparently, no looting occurred and only minor counts of vandalism (select store front windows shattered). Nevertheless, The Way was portrayed as a guilty party.⁸⁷

Given that the 1966 riot produced such concern over Northside conditions, Syl Davis proposed a meeting in which local blacks, Mayor Naftalin, city council members, and state officials could discuss solutions to the problems that triggered the 1967 riot. On July 24th, five days after the outbreak, 500 black and white residents of the Northside expressed their grievances in front of city officials. One of the demands was for greater black representation on the police force, requesting 50 blacks be hired among the 140 new policemen proposed.⁸⁸ Unlike the Oak Park meeting, in which black community leaders and youth achieved almost immediate results (in terms of job hiring and creating The Way), this meeting was really just an opportunity for members of the black community to raise awareness of over policing in the Northside neighborhood. It did not produce specific policy changes to alleviate this problem.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Box 2, Folder: Grand Jury 1967, Hennepin County Grad Jury report. *Records of The Way, Inc*; "Budget for Current Year," 20 July 1967, Box 2, *Records of The Way, Inc*.

⁸⁸ "Northside 'Marshall Plan' Suggested As Officials Hear Mass Meeting," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 27 July 1967.

⁸⁹ Although no policy changes occurred as a direct response to the 1967 rioting, Mayor Naftalin did increase pay, training, and special programs at the Minneapolis Police Department, as a first step to address issues of police brutality and racial discrimination.

The 1967 riot did not foster interracial collaboration to address the needs of Northside residents. Syl Davis gave a statement to the *New York Times*, asserting that “the root cause of the rioting was discriminatory treatment by police and city officials.” Davis explained that frustrations with constant physical and psychological forms of policing sparked the uprising. This time however, Mayor Naftalin did not agree with the the African American leaders, calling the accusation of police brutality “preposterous.” Instead, Naftalin believed the riot was provoked by a few local youths. Moreover, that the “Negro community is not at fault. We’re dealing with a few individuals who want to inflame the community.”⁹⁰ However, a local Rabbi named Arnold Goodman sympathized with the rioters and affirmed they had valid claims, arguing that it was time “to give the Negro his fair share of the American dream.”⁹¹ This disconnect between the mayor and the black community was not uncommon in the post-1965 period. Official investigation reports, politicians, the media, and many white Americans believed “a small group of agitators were responsible” for such riots, not systemic racial inequalities. Because of his response and inaction, black political support for Mayor Naftalin decreased following the 1967 riot.⁹²

For example, the community awareness program sought to help officers have a better understanding of the communities they serve, to reduce stereotyping. (see: “Reforms in Big-City Police Forces,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 8 December 1969; “The Training of a Police Recruit,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 22 December 1969).

⁹⁰ “Fund Raising Facts”, Box 2, *Records of The Way, Inc.*; “Mayor Blames Few ‘Lawless’ Persons For Minneapolis Violence Outbreak,” *Washington Post*, 21 July 1967.

⁹¹ “American Dream Must Be For Black As Well As For The Whites,” *American Jewish World*, 26 October 1967.

⁹² Historian Steven Gillon argues that this was the “general view among political leaders, police officials, and the media” during this period of urban riots (see: Gillon, *Separate and Unequal*, 7).

Mayor Naftalin's educational and professional background in political science influenced his policy-oriented perspective for social change. Although Naftalin did not alleviate police brutality in the black community, he did take measures to address other social problems in the city. For example, in November of 1968 Naftalin created a 186-member committee to run a program that "comprises all of the city's efforts at self-help in developing comprehensive programs to banish and prevent slums and blight." This committee worked to increase citizen and community participation in local politics, housing opportunities for minorities, and develop housing resources for displaced families needing relocation services.⁹³ Following the 1967 riot, the Minneapolis City Council was more likely to support these types of progressive initiatives, ones that were not exclusively about race and racial discrimination. The rioting and destruction of property during the 1967 disturbance deteriorated relations between whites and blacks in the Twin Cities. As a result, city council was hesitant to grant funding for initiatives to stop police brutality.⁹⁴

The Way Community Center eventually took the issue of police brutality into its own hands. One of the organizations leaders, Dan Pothier, created the Soul Patrol.⁹⁵ The patrol force mobilized young African American males from the North Side to patrol the neighborhood by car. Patrolling the streets by foot, their main goal was always to act as a buffer or middle-man between "potential law-breakers and law-enforcers" and

⁹³ "Mayor Arthur Naftalin Names 186 Member Committee For Mpls," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 21 November 1968.

⁹⁴ Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 195.

⁹⁵ The name of the patrol group had multiple times, also known as Soul Force and Black Patrol (see: Robinson, *For A Moment We Had The Way*).

prevent tension-filled situations from escalating.⁹⁶ They also sought to prevent outside agitation, help people in general emergency situations, or those in need of services such as transportation and babysitting.⁹⁷ The Way also created additional social service programs to compensate for the lack of changes in the policy arena. They also created a program to assist in criminal justice issues, which included services such as probation and parole counseling, and free legal counsel provided by volunteer lawyers.⁹⁸

The Northside community's anger over both psychological and physical policing in their neighborhood intensified in the fall of 1967. On September 12th, the Hennepin County Grand Jury publicly released a report of their month-long investigation into the July 1967 rioting.⁹⁹ They were given the task of determining if The Way was connected to the uprising. The published report shocked the organization. One particular statement enraged The Way's Board of Directors: "Should this establishment continue to show negative results in rehabilitating the hoodlum element, it either should be discontinued or its leadership changed."¹⁰⁰ The use of the word "hoodlum" outraged them. As a non-profit organization entirely dependent on philanthropic contributions from local corporations and businesses, these accusations could shut down the community center.

⁹⁶ Robinson, *For A Moment We Had The Way*, 81.

"Community Center Nears Completion," no date, *Minneapolis Tribune*; Box 1, Folder: Syl Davis Misc., *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁹⁷ "The Way Program: Urban Enablement Organization Current Recommendations," October 1969, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁹⁸ "Community Resources," 14 May 1968, 1968 Minutes, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

⁹⁹ "The Grand Jury Racial Riot Report," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 13 September 1967.

¹⁰⁰ Grand Jury Report 1967, Box 2, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

In response to the Grand Jury report, The Way's Board sought out the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union in October, claiming libel against the City of Minneapolis. The Minnesota Civil Liberties Union (MCLU) advocated on behalf of The Way in a public statement, declaring that "nowhere in the statutes do we read that grand juries are authorized to pass judgment or issue pronouncements about persons or organization which are not accused of crimes." Since the grand jury found no evidence connecting The Way to the race-related disturbances, their name shouldn't have been mentioned in their report at all, the MCLU argued. Although no official charges of libel were brought against the city, the support of the MCLU helped vocalize the discriminatory nature of the investigation.

The Way's Board of Directors were frustrated by the events of 1967 because it demonstrated the extent to which the organization's role and visions for the Northside community were misunderstood. The Board's president, Rev. Robinson, felt that all The Way could be accused of is "nothing more than a degree of unpopularity."¹⁰¹ The Board reflected on the recent incident and felt that "had The Way been in full operation by last January, as originally planned, there might not have been violence on Plymouth Avenue again this year." It suggested that many believed it was The Way's responsibility to prevent such outbreaks.

¹⁰¹ "N. Side Center Irked by Jury's Riot Report," September 13 1967, *Minneapolis Tribune*.

Box 2, Folder: Grand Jury 1967, Hennepin County Grad Jury report, page 4, MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*

"Statement Concerning Recent Charges Made Against the Way in a 1967 Grand Jury Report," Box 2, Folder: Grand Jury 1967, MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.* Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 44-48.

Nevertheless, The Way continued to grow and serve the needs of the community following the tumultuous year of 1967. Programs, fundraising, day-to-day operations carried on. Most importantly, The Way focused on maintaining the support of its influential donors. For example, in December of 1967, select Minnesota Gopher and Vikings football stars sponsored the Christmastime Benefit Basketball Game, to help raise money for The Way. There was also a “Day at The Way,” in which approximately 1,500 people attended with the help of special guest, Playthell Benjamin (an award-winning African American journalist and author). They also put on multiple events following the tumultuous summer. In November, they held a three day open house of the community center, as well as a musical performance by The Way Players ensemble.¹⁰²

Spike Moss, who oversaw the recreation department, organized numerous programs and activities for Northside youths. These included programs such as boxing, basketball, “Minority History” classes, book club, political education courses, and job seminars.¹⁰³ The Way Community Center was also a strong advocate for the arts, hosting music lessons, dances, and theater productions. The Way was unique in its ability to run its programs in-house through its own community center. Many local black power movements set in the post-1965 period did not have the resources for such a

¹⁰² “December 1967 Benefit,” Box 1, Folder: December 1967 Benefit, MNHS.
“Five Month Report: January 1-May 31, 1968,” Box 2, Folder: 1968 Minutes, MNHS.
Records of The Way, Inc.

¹⁰³ February 29, 1968 meeting minutes, p. 2, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

facility.¹⁰⁴ The community center itself was a symbol of hope and change to the residents of the Northside.

The community center also served as a place that welcomed aspiring black musicians, in a city where nightclubs and venues actively discriminated against African Americans. Downtown Minneapolis nightclubs did not want black music or bands with black performers on stage—“Most club owners agree that there is a definite, if unwritten segregation policy that keeps black bands out of the downtown clubs.”¹⁰⁵ The Way also attracted aspiring black musicians because they provided instruments that many couldn’t afford on their own, or would have access to in school. The Way had its own house band, The Family, which included a young boy named Prince Rogers Nelson. Prince, and other musicians from Minnesota who later became famous [Morris Day, Andre Cymone, Jimmy Jam, Terry Lewis], all spent a significant amount of time during their teenage years practicing in the back room of The Way.¹⁰⁶ The Way was a haven for both aspiring and successful musicians of color who were not welcome outside of North Minneapolis.

The Way was among many black power organizations that were founded during the second half of the 1960s. While both Detroit and Chicago reside in the Midwest,

¹⁰⁴ In Chicago, the Illinois Black Panther chapter operated from an office, and would then reach out to other organizations and churches for space to implement their programs (see: Jon Rice, “The World of the Illinois Black Panthers”); The Newark black power movement under Amiri Baraka did work with the local Spirit House Theater and Community Center and Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN) to execute their initiatives (see: Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*).

¹⁰⁵ “Black Bands Abound, But Not in Downtown,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 9 November 1969.

¹⁰⁶ Swensson, 37.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin has a similar local context compared to Minneapolis, among Midwestern cities that have been examined by historians. Both were destinations during the Great Migration that experienced a small increase in their African American populations. Milwaukee also had a black population of 1% by 1930, with steady increases to 1.5% by 1940 and 1.6% by 1945.¹⁰⁷ Although Milwaukee had a larger black population than Minneapolis in the 1960s, black power inspired movements arose in both Midwestern cities despite relatively small African American populations.¹⁰⁸

Milwaukee and Minneapolis both experienced a surge in African American migrants from the South following World War II, compared to only moderate population increases during the first Great Migration. Milwaukee did have a larger black population during the civil rights years, representing 10% of the city's total population by 1965.¹⁰⁹ It was also impacted by the construction of highways, accelerating the pace of suburbanization, leaving African Americans in the urban core, similar to the impact Olson Memorial Highway on Jewish flight into the western suburbs of Minneapolis. They also had similar leadership dynamics, with a small middle class representing the interests of the black community. Black youths and new migrants from the South

¹⁰⁷ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of a Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 149.

¹⁰⁸ Milwaukee's black population in 1960 was 8.4%, rising to 14.7% in 1970. Whereas Minneapolis had 2.4% in 1960, and 4.4% in 1970. (Source: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 23.

started to push for change in Milwaukee during the 1950s. Whereas in Minneapolis, black youth advocating for change did not begin until the 1960s.¹¹⁰

The role of a Catholic priest, Father James Groppi, in leading the Milwaukee civil rights movement reveals both key differences and similarities with the Minneapolis movement. *Selma of the North* portrays Father Groppi as a leader in the crusade for racial justice, aligning with other studies of the post-1965 period in which a single individual is often the focus of local black power movements. The Way was successful due to the combined efforts of multiple individuals—namely Syl Davis, Joe Buckhalton, Louise McCannel, Mahmoud El-Kati, and Spike Moss. However, it was particularly unique in the 1960s context to have a white Catholic priest lead African Americans in a black power campaign. As Patrick Jones argues, “the leading role of Father Groppi as a Black Power advocate and spokesman ran counter to the growing racial separatism of Black Power in some communities.”¹¹¹ Therefore, the Milwaukee and Minneapolis movements were similar in that they were both open to multiracial collaboration.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ In Milwaukee, the competition among the city’s white and black industrial workers ultimately strengthened the bond between the black working class and middle class. Unlike Minneapolis, blacks in Milwaukee had greater cross-class relations (see: Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of a Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

¹¹¹ In Patrick Jones’ study of Milwaukee he focuses on Milwaukee’s fight for civil rights amidst the black freedom movement of the postwar era (see: Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 140.

¹¹² However, the Milwaukee black freedom movement aligned more with traditional civil rights movement strategies. For example, the Milwaukee United School Integration (MUSIC) movement to end school segregation participated in nonviolent protests, armed self-defense, boycotts, and sit-ins (see: Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 117).

While the Minneapolis and Milwaukee black power movements reveal similar elements, The Way was still a distinct organization due to the ways it engaged in multiracial and multiethnic collaboration. The Way's mission and programs had a specific geographic and neighborhood focus, which meant that they served the Northside community rather than all African Americans in the Twin Cities. As Syl Davis explained, since the problem was "the ghetto system which has packed several thousand Negroes, of all levels of economic status in a tight area, with the poorest among them living in rat-infested ill-kept houses," The Way would be a place open to all residents of the Northside.¹¹³ The community center would help their Jewish neighbors, or any poor whites living in the neglected neighborhood.

This multiethnic and multiracial cooperation extended beyond Louise McCannel, for there were also white individuals on the payroll at The Way and on the Board of Trustees.¹¹⁴ They had history classes on Jewish and Native American history, in addition to the black power-inspired program on African and African American history. They also worked with religious groups, such as the Catholic Youth Center, where whites and inner city blacks met to discuss methods of fighting racism in suburban neighborhoods.¹¹⁵ Moreover, The Way consistently expressed their mission of racial and ethnic inclusion to the media. In June 1967, Davis explained to the *Minneapolis Spokesman* that their education programs were intended for both the black and white communities—

¹¹³ "Mill City Youngsters Riot," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11 August 1966.

¹¹⁴ For example, Rev. Robinson, Kurt Kaufman, Father James Schuller were members of the Board of Directors (see: "Syl Davis, Misc." *Records of The Way, Inc.*)

¹¹⁵ "Racial Parley Held," *Minneapolis Star*, 19 June 1969.

although “black identification with oneself will probably be a main theme,” The Way will be “open to all, and the effort will be to relate to the total community.”¹¹⁶

According to the scholarship on local black power local studies, this advocacy of inclusion would have been rare compared to other movements in the North.¹¹⁷ The Way openly partnered with the wealthy white elite in Minneapolis and St. Paul for donations to fund their operations. The leaders knew that for the movement to grow and improve the lives of the local youth, interracial cooperation was necessary. Almost all of The Way’s donations from foundations, corporations, and small businesses were acquired by the help of Louise McCannel. McCannel played an influential role in maintaining the organizations financial base by using “her connections, influence and resources to bring money to The Way.”¹¹⁸ As a wealthy white woman with a long family history in the Twin Cities, she used her own position of privilege to raise money for the Northside.

The Way maintained their relationships and partnerships with local private industries following the dramatic events of July 1967. Nevertheless, the words issued in the Hennepin County Grand Jury report had staying power. Its message of caution had particular resonance—“many of the criminals they [The Way, Inc.] are attempting to

¹¹⁶ “Five Month Report, January 1-May 31, 1968,” 1968 Minutes, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹¹⁷ For example, in Detroit, Reverend Albert J. Cleage was particularly critical of Martin Luther King Jr.’s acceptance of white liberal supporters. Cleage, one of the major proponents of Detroit’s 1963 “Walk to Freedom March,” firmly advocated for the march to be mainly black-led. He held the more radical black nationalist perspective on the Detroit housing crisis, supporting Malcolm X’s position that the solution should be to gain control of “the resources, housing, and governance of the black community.” (see: Dillard, “Religion and Radicalism,” 156; Shaw, *Now Is The Time!* 50).

¹¹⁸ “Louise Walker McCannel dedicated a privileged life to others,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 23 June 2012.

help are taking advantage, assuming too much power and actually using this establishment as their headquarters...we suggest the Police and the Board of Directors continue to keep a watchful eye on this problem.”¹¹⁹ Such a strong statement against The Way, coupled with the riots of July 1967, made it difficult for the organization to defend its credibility amidst a scandal in 1970 and surrounding negative publicity.

in April 1970, Syl Davis was about to enjoy his first lengthy vacation since he began working for The Way in 1966. Davis’s vacation included stops in various cities across the country, visiting friends and observing how other local poverty and minority programs were doing. In many of the states he visited, Davis was pulled over by the police, but no charges were filed against him. In early May, he was arrested once again, this time by the St. Louis police. The press reported that he had been arrested on six charges: Non-illuminated license plates, illegal possession of hashish, illegal possession of marijuana, possession of stolen property, fugitive from Indiana, and possession of guns.¹²⁰ Eventually, Davis’s lawyer was able to get the charges dropped in the Missouri Supreme Court, arguing that the car was searched under the illegal pretense of a traffic violation.”¹²¹ Nevertheless, the incident brought The Way under scrutiny once again, and triggered the black community’s grievances on police brutality and discrimination.

Despite Syl Davis’s acquittal, and well-established rapport with both black and white communities in the Twin Cities, The Way could not overcome the negative press

¹¹⁹ “Hennepin County Grand Jury Report,” p. 5, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹²⁰ “Syl Davis Takes Much Needed Vacation,” Box 1, Folder: Syl Davis Misc., MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*; Syl Davis Legal Defense Fund pamphlet, page 1, Box 1, Folder: Syl Davis Misc., MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹²¹

coverage his arrest and trial introduced. Shortly after the arrest, Rev. Robinson and Gordon Ritz, Chairman of the Finance Committee, sent out a letter to contributors advocating Davis's innocence, explaining the circumstances of his unjust arrest, and asking for their continued support. In this letter, they stated that "publicity surrounding the event has been brutal...If a design existed to damage The Way, it could not have been pursued more effectively than this was. As you know, it comes in the midst of our annual campaign for funds to keep The Way's programs going." The arrest had an immediate effect on contributions. By August 1970, The Way received \$63,000 in donations—\$80,000 less than the previous year.¹²²

The Way was also missing its ally in the local government—Mayor Naftalin. He chose not to run for re-election in 1969, and returned to teaching in 1970 as a professor at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.¹²³ Publicly, Naftalin stated that he chose not to run for a fifth term because he felt his "efforts were not properly appreciated by the general public nor effectively interpreted by the local newspapers."¹²⁴ Charles Stenvig, a former police lieutenant, won the mayoral election in 1969 after running on a "law and order" campaign platform. Stenvig's election led to a Republican-dominated city council and symbolized a conservative shift in Minneapolis local politics. Nicknamed "George Wallace of the North," he vowed to protect his constituents from "hoodlums and criminal elements,"

¹²² "Way Heads In Closed Session," *Minneapolis Star*, 2 October 1970.

¹²³ "Personal data in computers under study," *Minneapolis Star*, 28 March 1970.

¹²⁴ "Can Our Cities Survive?" *Minneapolis Tribune*, 26 October 1969.

exploiting fears over the turbulent 1960s.¹²⁵ While Naftalin “appointed persons of minority or ethnic backgrounds to every board and commission” in Minneapolis, Stenvig rarely appointed any minority persons to these commissions during his tenure as mayor.¹²⁶ His focus was on tax reduction and defending the actions of the Minneapolis Police Department.¹²⁷ Had Naftalin been the mayor in 1970 amidst the Syl Davis scandal, it’s possible he could have been the advocate The Way needed, helping to maintain donations and support from the local business community.

The Way could neither literally nor figuratively, afford a scandal. The *Minneapolis Tribune* reported in the fall of 1970 that “The Way’s image has been damaged by Director Syl Davis’ arrest,” and highlighted the decline in donations from local corporations and foundations.¹²⁸ Shortly after, Syl Davis resigned from The Way on November 1, 1970. To the press, Davis explained that personal health and ineffective institutions influenced his decision to resign. He lamented that “it’s unfortunate that the institutions [financial institutions, Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority, local welfare departments] which control the lives of people have not changed

¹²⁵ Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, 115-131.

¹²⁶ “Youth Told Plans of Urban Coalition,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 24 February, 1970; Some of these commissions Arthur Naftalin oversaw during his tenure as mayor included the Human Relations Commission, Urban Coalition, and the Minneapolis Planning Commission.

¹²⁷ “The how and why of Minneapolis’s vote,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 10 June 1971; As Stenvig created a Republican-dominated city council, he appointed individuals such as Mark Anderson who held the same beliefs and positions that he did. In an interview supporting Mayor Stenvig, Anderson stated: “One would think that the police were the villains in society and extremist groups such as the Black Panthers...the innocent victims (see: “Press bias is charged, *Minneapolis Star*, 22 October 1970).

¹²⁸ “The Way,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 4 October 1970.

significantly, if at all.”¹²⁹ There are no certainties that such institutions would have improved if Naftalin had remained Mayor, but institutions that provided social services were not a priority for Mayor Stenvig. The Way was most successful in the second half of the 1960s because they were able to navigate the terrain of Minneapolis local politics.¹³⁰

The Way’s unique blend of black power and interracial collaboration survived the 1967 racial disturbance, but could not overcome Syl Davis’s arrest. Numerous race riots in the late 1960s and negative media depictions of black power contributed to the election of a mayor who promised to be tough on crime. In this atmosphere, white locals perhaps quickly associated Davis’s arrest with the criminal stereotypes of the national black power movement. Through 1970, The Way revealed it was possible for a local black power movement, adapting to the local conditions, to achieve success relying on local philanthropy and support from city government. Davis’ arrest ignited fear that Minneapolis could become a Watts, Oakland, or Detroit. These anxieties, at both the national and local level, drowned out the distinctiveness of The Way. Ultimately, they could not overcome negative local media coverage, political portrayals of the black power movement, or recover their donation base. By the end of 1970, the formative years of The Way Community Center had come to an end.

¹²⁹ “Syl Davis Quits; Fate of The Way Remains in Doubt,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 3 October 1970.

¹³⁰ Letter to “Friends of The Way” by Gordon Ritz and Rolland B. Robinson, May 1970, Box 1, Folder: Syl Davis Misc., MNHS. *Records of The Way, Inc.*

CONCLUSION

In May 1969, The Way Community Center's financial situation was summed up at a board meeting in one word—"Gloomy."¹³¹ With a budget expanding every year, The Way's model of relying on philanthropic donations and contributions was not sustainable. For years, The Way's leadership debated the idea of joining the United Fund, now the United Way.¹³² Those who rejected the idea were philosophically opposed to jeopardizing The Way's independence and movement-oriented approach. Opponents believed the organizations were critically different, they were an "established, sterile, overly-objective, pragmatic, anti-philosophical, anti-cultural, one-eyed way of looking at and dealing with human life."¹³³ By 1973, The Way had a new Executive Director, Bert Davis, and was an approved participatory agency of the United Way of Minneapolis. Syl Davis's resignation, coupled with The Way's new United Fund

¹³¹ "The Way Inc. Budget Summary '69," Box 2, Folder: 1969 Minutes, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

¹³² United Way is a global non-profit organization with local branches. Each location invests in programs and collaborates with the local community and government to address various social issues.

¹³³ The Way Philosophy: 'We know the way we are going!'" 1969 Minutes, *Records of The Way, Inc.*

partnership and organizational structure, provoked many of the original founders and leaders to leave the movement.¹³⁴

Bert Davis led the renamed “The New Way” until 1974, when Spike Moss, one of the original founders, became the third and final director. Moss had been a part of The Way since the beginning, the Oak Park meeting in August of 1966 that launched the community center. Newspaper accounts provide a glimpse into the second half of The Way’s existence. The New Way continued to struggle financially throughout the 1970s and 1980s. At one point, they considered selling the community center to the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) for commercial development.¹³⁵ Additionally, Spike Moss did not engage in the same blend of multi-racial and multi-ethnic collaboration that The Way was founded on. He was known in the Minneapolis community for being a “militant black leader who has a reputation for alienating those who don’t support him.”¹³⁶ Ultimately, The Way Community Center closed its doors for good in December 1984. The United Way had rescinded their financial support, arguing that the organization’s “programs are underused, its record-keeping inadequate and the center poorly managed.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Letter dated 29 March 1973, Syl Davis Misc. *Records of The Way, Inc.*; Mahmoud El-Kati, Interview with the author, February 2018. McCannel expressed growing frustration with The Way’s financial decisions, suggested she was very close to quitting in September 1973 (see: Syl Davis, Misc., 28 September 1973, *Records of The Way, Inc.*)

¹³⁵ “New Way balks at selling site,” *Minneapolis Star*, 7 May 1976; “Will The Way get its way?” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 19 January 1978.

¹³⁶ “Marchers,” *Minneapolis Star*, 27 August 1983.

¹³⁷ “United Way panel hears the Way’s appeal,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 19 December 1984; Robinson, *For a Moment We Had The Way*, 60.

The formative years of The Way, 1966-1970, did not go unnoticed by local Minnesotans. “The Way will not pass on simply as another agency formed to meet the needs of a group of people at a specific period of time,” one editorial in the *Minneapolis Tribune* declared. The Way was unique because it successfully navigated local politics and partnerships in Minneapolis to produce substantive change for the Near Northside community. Many of The Way’s pilot programs to provide social services for Northside residents grew into city-wide programs. For example, the Pilot City Regional Medical Center originally began as a program for Northside neighborhood medical and health care. The Way’s volunteer lawyer committee, which provided free legal advice to the underprivileged in their community, inspired members of the Minnesota Bar Association to create the Legal Rights Center, providing those same services.¹³⁸

In 1970—1971, following the Syl Davis scandal, The Way faced the decision to either shut down or join the United Way. This statement from a *Minneapolis Tribune* editorial reveals that at least to some Minnesotans, the story and legacy of The Way would not be forgotten:

“Minneapolis can look back with pride at the accomplishments of The Way. Hundreds of North Side residents were able to seek out help for their problems and, at the same time, to be part of their own problem-solving process...The people of Minneapolis will never know of the untold situations involving hundreds of persons in which The Way brought their problems to a successful end. Likewise, we will never know of the dozens of explosive situations brought to a quiet conclusion through the efforts of The Way’s staff.”¹³⁹

The Way Community Center demonstrates that the national black power movement was situational within local contexts. The Way practiced black power best

¹³⁸ “The Way Has Record Of Accomplishments,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 11 October 1970.

¹³⁹ “The Way Has Record Of Accomplishments,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 11 October 1970.

suiting to the Minneapolis community. While The Way's leaders acknowledged the national "Black Power" slogan and moment—primarily its emphasis on racial pride and self-empowerment—they chose to distance themselves from exclusionary practices. Association with certain depictions of the national black power movement, such as militancy or racial exclusivity, would have collided with The Way's reliance on philanthropic contributions from a predominantly white business community. The Near Northside neighborhood was inspired by the national black power moment that emphasized racial pride, self-empowerment, and drew attention to political, social, and economic inequalities that disproportionately affect African Americans. For The Way's implementation of black power to be effective, the leaders purposely distinguished the national black power platform from how their community center would operate. In short, The Way pragmatically differentiated between black power as an ideology and as a program.

The Way also reveals that interracial collaboration and black power were not mutually exclusive; rather, leaders incorporated interracial collaboration depending on the local context. The successes achieved during the formative years of The Way were possible because the leaders adapted to the politics and demographics of Minneapolis. In a city with a black population of only 4%, The Way navigated and formed alliances with the mayor, governor, city council members, business community, and the press to keep their community center up and running. The black power movement in Minneapolis required multi-racial and multi-ethnic collaboration to bring about change in the Near Northside neighborhood.

Today, the legacy of The Way and the Near Northside neighborhood lives on in Minneapolis's music culture. "As an incubator for the new generation of talent that no one saw coming," The Way played a significant role in the creation of a music style specific to Minnesota, what Andrea Swensson calls the "Minneapolis Sound"—a distinct mix of jazz, soul, R&B, funk, disco, early punk, new wave, dance, and rock 'n' roll.¹⁴⁰ African Americans, restricted in where they could practice and perform, turned to The Way as one of a handful of places that welcomed black musicians and ambitious black youth with a passion for music. Geographic limitations on where blacks could practice and perform ultimately fostered greater collaboration and experimentation among local black musicians. The Way urged its musicians to create a distinct blend of genres out of necessity, to stand out among nationally successful black artists and gain appeal in the white-dominated downtown Minneapolis nightclub scene. The "Minneapolis Sound" is also a cultural product of the Near Northside.¹⁴¹

In 2016, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reported on the 50th Anniversary of The Way's founding and local celebratory events. Towards the end of the article, the author mentions the death of Jamar Clark in November 2015 at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. As a result, one of the demands made by Black Lives Matter activists was for The Way Community Center to be returned to the people of the Near North Side neighborhood. But today, doing so would require the removal of the 4th Precinct police

¹⁴⁰ Swensson, *Got To Be Something Here*, xiv & 55.

¹⁴¹ In the 1960s and early 1970s, there were only a few places where black musicians and bands could perform. These included The Way Community Center and downtown Minneapolis nightclubs such as King Solomon's Mines, Cascade 9, and the Flame (see: Swensson, *Got To Be Something Here*, 77; "'The Great White Way' in Downtown," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 12 November 1969).

station, which is currently on the original site of The Way—1913 Plymouth Avenue. In the words of Mahmoud El-Kati, “that’s more than something symbolic, that’s erasure.” That The Way became a rallying cry for the present-day Black Lives Matter movement demonstrates its persistence in historical memory, even if only by a small community.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Randy Furst, “Founders and supporters celebrate The Way’s 50th anniversary,” *Star Tribune*, August 5, 2016.

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