



**EPISODE 8:**

**TWO SOCIETIES (1965–1968)**

Northern cities served as the backdrop for confrontations on a scale the civil rights movement had never seen before the mid-1960s. Scarred by widespread discrimination, black inner-city neighborhoods became sites of crumbling houses, poverty, and street violence. Although the black-led movement for social change and equality in the North had a long history, it had not received the same media attention the struggle in the South had. In the mid-1960s, however, many activists who participated in the Southern freedom struggle headed north determined to refocus the nation’s attention on the plight of urban blacks. Additional impetus came after the summer of 1964, when riots swept urban centers across the nation, and in the wake of the 1965 August riot in Watts, Los Angeles. These riots also made the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., keenly aware of the need for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to extend the scope of its operation beyond the confines of the South.

When the SCLC brought their nonviolent movement to the North, they selected Chicago, Illinois, where a pre-existing grassroots movement eagerly awaited their leadership and support. Together, they decided to organize a campaign against unemployment, discrimination, and inadequate housing. The activists faced a host of obstacles including the political machine of Mayor Richard Daley, Chicago’s longest-serving mayor, and a pervasive distrust among some black leaders. Mayor Daley, who had supported Southern civil rights campaigns, was nevertheless wary of the SCLC’s efforts in Chicago. His half-hearted and evasive responses sent King a clear message of disapproval. As activists focused their campaign on the slums, anger in black communities built up.

In July 1966, King led a massive demonstration in a dramatic march from Soldier’s Field to city hall, where he posted a list of comprehensive demands on business, local, and national leaders. This episode then follows the Chicago

**1965**

**Aug. 11-17** Following a confrontation with the LA police, a riot breaks out in the district of Watts in Los Angeles destroying large areas of the neighborhood; 34 residents are killed

**1966**

- Jan.** King and the SCLC shift their attention to Northern urban centers and join the Chicago Freedom Movement to campaign against poverty and discrimination
- Jul. 10** King leads a march of 5,000 to the City Hall and posts a list with the group’s demands for ending discrimination
- Jul. 12-16** When Chicago police officers attempt to close off fire hydrants black residents were using to cool off from the summer heat, a four-day riot breaks out
- Aug. 5** King leads a march in southwest Chicago to protest the deplorable living conditions in the slums and widespread discrimination against black homebuyers
- Aug. 26** The Chicago Freedom Movement signs a 10-point agreement with Mayor Daley to implement open housing laws and other measures. King leaves Chicago. Activists are disappointed that the SCLC has moved on and lead an independent march into the hostile white suburb of Cicero

**1967**

- Jul. 23** A raid by Detroit police officers on an illegal night club explodes into a devastating race riot that results in 43 deaths and millions of dollars of property damage
- Jul.** President Lyndon B. Johnson establishes the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly known as the Kerner Commission, to investigate the causes of the 1967 race riots

**1968**

- Feb.** The Kerner Commission reports that economic disparities and racial discrimination were the cause of the civil unrest behind the race riots of 1967, asserting that the country was being divided into two separate and unequal societies, one white and one black

campaign as it moved beyond the ghetto.\* Frustrated with their efforts to improve living conditions in the slums, organizers looked for ways to challenge housing segregation in Chicago's white neighborhoods. For, in the North, segregation wasn't written into law; rather, it was often enforced by government agencies and maintained by long-standing customs followed by ordinary people in the private and commercial sectors. In many cases, banks and real estate agents simply refused to offer fair loans to black customers (a practice common throughout the North). In others, home sellers attached "covenants" (private agreements) on their properties which prevented selling the house to blacks. These unofficial policies drove up housing prices in the ghettos and kept blacks out of white neighborhoods. In an attempt to draw attention to these discriminatory strategies, the SCLC decided to hold marches in the traditionally white neighborhoods of Gage Park and Marquette Park. In Gage Park, the peaceful protestors encountered white residents who carried Nazi swastikas and set off homemade bombs. After the violent outbreak, Mayor Daley brokered a tenuous peace agreement with King. Assured that nonviolent resistance could work in the North, the SCLC redirected its attention to other locations.

But local organizers thought the struggle was far from over. Despite King's objections, activists from Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) decided to lead a march into the Chicago suburb of Cicero, a town notorious for its hostile segregationist attitudes (15,000 blacks worked in the area, but none of them lived there). In a shift from the Chicago movement's earlier nonviolent approach, when the demonstrators were attacked by angry mobs, some fought back.

The second segment of the episode focuses on Detroit, Michigan, in 1967, where 40 percent of the population was black. Although the black community had several elected officials and two black congressmen, it faced widespread discrimination in almost every area. Moreover, despite a prosperous auto industry, black citizens continued to struggle for decent livelihoods. Their feelings of powerlessness were reinforced by widespread police brutality and regular raids on black-owned businesses. In July, pressure reached a boiling point when police raided an after-hours club during a reception for black veterans. The raid turned into an all-out confrontation. Over the course of five days of rioting, gun battles and fires raged throughout the city. In an effort to stem the violence, President Lyndon B. Johnson sent federal troops to aid National Guardsmen and local firefighters. In the wake of the riot, forty-three people were dead, seven thousand had been arrested, and thousands were left homeless.

Following the events in Detroit, President Johnson established an advisory commission headed by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner to investigate the root causes of the riots in Detroit. In late February 1968, the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders published a report stating that America is "moving towards two societies: black and white—separate and unequal." The report urged the nation to remove racial barriers in education, employment, housing, and all other areas of public services. By then, however, President Johnson had turned his attention to the war in Vietnam.

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. What new challenges did the movement face when it shifted its focus to urban centers in the North? How did the struggle there differ from the struggle in the South? What factors were similar?
2. What were the characteristics of discrimination in Northern urban slums? How does discrimination differ from segregation? Was the struggle against discrimination harder than the battle against segregation in the South?
3. In what ways did the civil unrest in the mid-1960s challenge the leadership, strategies, and philosophy of King and the SCLC?
4. What is the distinction between a protest and a riot? What conditions make it most likely for a protest to turn violent? Why did the conflicts in Los Angeles and Detroit escalate into riots?

\*The producers of *Eyes on the Prize* use the word "ghetto" to describe racially distinct poor urban neighborhoods.

5. What role did the riots play in the movement for black freedom?

*Document 1: KING IN WATTS*

On Wednesday August 11, 1965, a California Highway Patrol Officer pulled Marquette Frye over on 116th Street in Watts, a neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. Frye's brother, Ronald, had just been discharged from the Air Force and the two were celebrating. The officer taunted the Fryes while he administered a sobriety test to Marquette. When the two reportedly laughed, the backup officer pointed a shotgun just as their mother, Rena, arrived on the scene. Before long, a crowd of over 1,000 onlookers gathered. Events escalated and an officer hit Marquette with a nightstick. In the confrontation that ensued both Ronald and his mother were bruised, and all three Fryes were taken into custody. When additional police arrived, they were barraged with insults and rocks. Unable to control the crowd, the police pulled out; in the chaos that followed, crowds chanted, "burn, baby, burn," and six hundred buildings were either destroyed or damaged in six days of rioting.

King felt compelled to respond to the riots. Despite warnings, King flew to Los Angeles to meet with local leaders in an effort to encourage them to use nonviolent tactics to protest police brutality. Nearly a week after the Fryes' arrest, King was able to deliver his message to locals. Taylor Branch describes the reception King received in his book *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68*:

King pushed through a crowd that engulfed the Westminster Neighborhood Association in the burned-out heart of Watts, and climbed on a small platform with [Bayard] Rustin a step behind, just above heads packed within reach of their chins. A man shouted, "Get out of here, Dr. King! We don't want you." A woman shouted at the man, "Get out, psycho."

Rustin pleaded with the crowd to hear King, who tried several times to begin. "All over America," he said, "Negroes must join hands and—"

"And burn!" shouted a young man near him.

"And work together in a creative way," King persisted.

A young woman called out that "[Police Chief] Parker and [Mayor] Yorty" should come themselves to "see how we're living." Another cried, "They'll burn the most." A third scoffed that big shots never would bring air-conditioned Cadillacs to Watts.

King promised to do "all in my power" to persuade the police chief and mayor to talk with residents. "I know you will be courteous to them," he said with a smile, which brought howls of laughter. He asked about living conditions, police relations, and details of the riots, then shouted out that he believed firmly in nonviolence. "So maybe some of you don't quite agree with that," said King. "I want you to be willing to say that."

"Sure, we like to be nonviolent," called out one man, "but we up here in the Los Angeles area will not turn that other cheek." He denounced local Negro leaders as absentees: "They're selling us again, and we're tired of being sold as slaves!"

Over cheers and cross-talk, another man's voice prevailed. "All we want is jobs," he yelled. "We get jobs, we don't bother nobody. We don't get no jobs, we'll tear up Los Angeles, period."

King continued when the exchanges died down. "I'm here because at bottom we are brothers and sisters," he said. "We all go up together or we go down together. We are not free in the South, and you are not free in the cities of the North."

This time he ignored interruptions. "The crowd hushed, though," observed reporters for the *Los Angeles Times*, "as Dr. King began to speak in an emotion-charged voice." A correspondent for the Negro weekly *Jet* agreed: "The jeering had stopped, and the cynics were drowned out by applause and cheers." King preached on the suffering purpose of the movement to build freedom above hatred. "Don't forget that when we marched from Selma to Montgomery," he intoned, "it was a white woman who died." He called the roll of white martyrs who had joined black ones, crying out that James Reeb had followed Jimmie Lee Jackson in Selma, as Schwerner and Goodman were lynched with James Chaney in Mississippi, the year after Medgar Evers was shot. "Elijah Muhammad [the leader of the Nation of Islam] is my brother, even though our methods are different," King shouted to a thunderclap of surprise, and his peroration built hope on boundless redemption. "There will be a brighter tomorrow," he cried. "White and black together, we shall overcome."<sup>1</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. What is a riot? Why do some incidents become riots?
2. Why do you think King felt it was essential to go to Watts and spread his message of nonviolence? What do you think he hoped to accomplish? Based on this account, how would you judge the results?
3. Branch writes that King spoke about "the suffering purpose of the movement to build freedom above hatred." What does he mean? How do his comments relate to the religious philosophy behind the nonviolent movement?

### *Document 2:* THE CHICAGO PLAN

As one of the world's leading commercial centers, Chicago, Illinois, attracted Southern blacks who moved north in search of opportunities and greater freedoms. What they encountered, however, was the harsh reality of those racially isolated, neglected, low-income neighborhoods known as urban ghettos. The novelist James Baldwin grew up in the historically black neighborhood of Harlem in New York City. In his essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter From Harlem," about life in the ghetto, Baldwin recalled being asked, "Why don't all the Negroes in the South just move North?" He responded that they invariably, "do not escape Jim Crow: they merely encounter another, not-less-deadly variety. They do not move to Chicago, they move to the South Side; they do not move to New York, they move to Harlem."<sup>2</sup>

Segregated not by law but by social and economic customs, blacks were forced to live within the confines of a ghetto, where they faced inadequate education, unlivable apartments, and chronic unemployment. White Northerners, Baldwin warned,

indulge in an extremely dangerous luxury. They seem to feel that because they fought on the right side during the Civil War, and won, they have earned the right merely to deplore what is going on in the South, without taking any responsibility for it; and that they can ignore what is happening in Northern cities [...].<sup>3</sup>

Despite the prosperous national economy, a decline in several industrial sectors in the 1950s led to high rates of unemployment among black Chicagoans; in its decrepit ghettos, poverty, gang crime, and disillusion held sway. In 1966, the SCLC joined grassroots organizations in Chicago in the hopes that nonviolent direct action would bring national attention to the plight of the Northern urban poor. King explained that “if we can break the backbone of discrimination in Chicago, we can do it in all the cities in the country.”<sup>4</sup> In January 1966, the SCLC’s Reverend James Bevel drafted the *Chicago Plan*. In the excerpt below, Bevel offered an overview of the situation in Chicago:

Chicago is a city of more than a million Negroes. For almost a century now it has been the northern landing place for southern migrants journeying up from the Mississippi Delta. It was the Promised Land for thousands who sought to escape the cruelties of Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee; yet, now, in the year 1966, the cycle has almost reversed. Factories moving South, employment and opportunities on the increase, and recent civil rights legislation are rapidly disintegrating the cruelties of segregation. The South is now a land of opportunity, while those who generations ago sang, “Going to Chicago, sorry but I can’t take you,” now sink into the depths of despair.

Educational opportunities in Chicago, while an improvement over Mississippi, were hardly adequate to prepare Negroes for metropolitan life. A labor force of some 300,000 have found little beyond low paying service occupations open to them, and those few who possessed skills and crafts found their ranks rapidly being depleted by automation and few opportunities for advancement and promotion. In 1960, Negroes represented twenty-three percent of the population and accounted for forty-three percent of the unemployed. This was not including the thousands of new migrants and young adult males who were entering the laboring market, but who had not yet made their way to an unemployment office, knowing full well in advance that only a few dirty jobs were available to them.

Those few Negroes who were fortunate enough to achieve professional and managerial status found themselves victimized in their search for adequate housing. Two distinct housing markets were maintained by Chicago real estate interests, carefully separate and controlled; and those who were able to make what should have been a living wage found that they had to pay ten to twenty percent more on rental of homes, purchase of property, and insurance and interest rates than their white counterparts.

Langston Hughes asks, “What happens to a dream deferred?” But these dreams were not deferred, they were denied and repudiated by vicious though subtle patterns of exploitation. So the dreams do not “dry up like raisins in the sun.” They decay like sun-ripened oranges that are devoured by worms and birds until they fall to the ground, creating a rot-

ten mess. But centuries ago Victor Hugo proclaimed that, “When men are in darkness, there will be crime; but those who have placed them in darkness are as much responsible for the crime as those who commit it.” And so the social consequences of our repudiated dreams, denied opportunities and frustrated aspirations are very much present.

Chicago is not alone in this plight, but it is clearly the prototype of the northern urban race problem [...].

### **THE SCLC PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

In our work in the South two principles have emerged: One, the crystallization of issues, and two, the concentration of action. In Birmingham we confronted the citadel of southern segregation. In 1963, not one aspect of Birmingham community life was desegregated. In approaching this complex segregated society, the issue was simplified deliberately to: Segregation. Early newspaper critiques challenged the simplification and offered a thousand rationalizations as to why such complex problems could not be dealt with so simply and suggested a hundred more “moderate, responsible” methods of dealing with our grievances. Yet it was the simplification of the issue to the point where every citizen of good will, black and white, north and south, could respond and identify that ultimately made Birmingham the watershed movement in the history of the civil rights struggle.

The second point was the concentration of action, and we chose lunch counters, a target which seemed to most social analysts the least significant but one to which most people could rally. It was a target wherein one might achieve some measure of change yet which sufficiently involved the lines of economic and social power to a point beyond itself—to the larger problem. The concentration of action led to an immediate local victory at the level of the lunch counter, but pointed beyond the lunch counter to the total problem of southern segregation and produced a ten-title legislative victory on a national level in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### **THE PROBLEM IN CHICAGO**

For the past months the SCLC staff has been working in Chicago trying to apply the SCLC philosophy to the problem of Chicago. Their work has been concerned with strengthening community organizations and recruiting new forces to join in a nonviolent movement, but they have also given a great deal of thought to the crystallization and definition of the problem in Chicago in terms which can be communicated to the man on the street, who is most affected. The Chicago problem is simply a matter of economic exploitation. Every condition exists simply because someone profits by its existence. This economic exploitation is crystallized in the SLUM.

A slum is any area which is exploited by the community at large or an area where free

trade and exchange of culture and resources is not allowed to exist. In a slum, people do not receive comparable care and services for the amount of rent paid on a dwelling. They are forced to purchase property at inflated real estate value. They pay taxes, but their children do not receive an equitable share of those taxes in educational, recreational and civic services. They may leave the community and acquire professional training, skills or crafts, but seldom are they able to find employment opportunities commensurate with these skills. And in the rare occasions when they do, opportunities for advancement and promotion are restricted. This means that in proportion to the labor, money and intellect which the slum pours into the community at large, only a small portion is received in return benefits. [James] Bevel and our Chicago staff have come to see this as a system of internal colonialism, not unlike the exploitation of the Congo by Belgium.

This situation is true only for Negroes. A neighborhood of Polish citizens might live together in a given geographic area, but that geographic area enters into free exchange with the community at large; and at any time services in that area deteriorate, the citizens are free to move to other areas where standards of health, education and employment are maintained. [...]<sup>5</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. Baldwin wrote, “one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one’s own.”<sup>6</sup> What do you think he meant? How do his comments relate to his perception of the prevailing American view of life in the ghetto? According to Baldwin, why didn’t many Northerners recognize the systematic discrimination that led to the formation of Northern ghettos?
2. How did the SCLC distinguish the problems of black residents of a Northern city like Chicago from those in a Southern city like Birmingham?
3. According to the SCLC’s Chicago Plan, what made Chicago a “prototype of the northern urban race problem”? What do you think has changed since the SCLC drafted the Chicago Plan? What obstacles remain?
4. In the Chicago Plan, Reverend Bevel made a reference to the Langston Hughes poem “Harlem.” Hughes concluded his 1951 poem with the question “What happens to a dream deferred?” Why do you think Bevel used this metaphor? What are the consequences of deferred dreams and ambitions? Read the poem and consider Hughes’s description of life in Harlem. Compare it to the analysis of the Chicago Plan. How do the different accounts build a picture of life for black citizens in the ghettos of the North?
5. How did the Chicago Plan define a “slum”? How did slums embody the problems in Chicago and other Northern cities?

### *Document 3:* DEMANDS

An umbrella organization called the Chicago Freedom Movement, the SCLC, and the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO, which represented a coalition of local organizations) coordinated the campaign in Chicago. The CCCC was formed in 1962 to protest the segregationist policies of Chicago school superintendent, Benjamin Willis. By 1965, the CCCC reached out to the

SCLC in an effort to breathe new life into their organization. Under the Chicago Plan, the battle against Chicago's racial and economic problems spread to all facets of life. Led by the Reverend Jesse Jackson, one of the first initiatives of CCCO—Operation Breadbasket—was designed to improve economic opportunities for blacks. Other initiatives dealt with school reform, welfare programs, and equal housing opportunities. On July 10, 1965, King led a massive march from Soldiers Field (the home of the Chicago Bears Football Team), to city hall, where he posted a list of demands for Mayor Daley, the city council, and other city and state institutions:

#### **REAL ESTATE BOARDS AND BROKERS**

1. Public statements that all listings will be available on a nondiscriminatory basis.

#### **BANKS AND SAVINGS INSTITUTIONS**

1. Public statements of a nondiscriminatory mortgage policy so that loans will be available to any qualified borrower without regard to the racial composition of the area.

#### **THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL**

1. Publication of headcounts of whites, Negroes and Latin Americans for all city departments and for all firms from which city purchases are made.
2. Revocation of contracts with firms that do not have a full scale fair employment practice.
3. Creation of a citizens review board for grievances against police brutality and false arrests or stops and seizures.
4. Ordinance giving ready access to the names of owners and investors for all slum properties.
5. A saturation program of increased garbage collection, street cleaning, and building inspection services in the slum properties.

#### **POLITICAL PARTIES**

1. The requirement that precinct captains be residents of their precincts.

#### **CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY AND THE CHICAGO DWELLING ASSOCIATION**

1. Program to rehabilitate present public housing including such items as locked lobbies, restrooms in recreation areas, increased police protection and child care centers on every third floor.
2. Program to increase vastly the supply of low-cost housing on a scattered basis for both low and middle income families.

#### **BUSINESS**

1. Basic headcounts, including white, Negro and Latin American, by job classification and income level, made public.
2. Racial steps to upgrade and to integrate all departments, all levels of employment.

## UNIONS

1. Headcounts in unions for apprentices, journeymen and union staff and officials by job classification. A crash program to remedy any inequities discovered by the headcount.
2. Indenture of at least 400 Negro and Latin American apprentices in the craft unions.

## GOVERNOR

1. Prepare legislative proposals for a \$2.00 state minimum wage law and for credit reform, including the abolition of garnishment and wage assignment.

## ILLINOIS PUBLIC AID COMMISSION AND THE COOK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AID

1. Encouragement of grievance procedures for the welfare recipients so that recipients know that they can be members of and represented by a welfare union or a community organization.
2. Institution of a declaration of income system to replace the degrading investigation and means test for welfare eligibility [...].<sup>7</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. In the South, discrimination against blacks was codified in the Jim Crow system and state laws. In the North, racism assumed an economic form; it was encoded in practices and economic policies that primarily benefited whites (although the North had its share of poor whites). In Chicago, to whom did the SCLC appeal in order to break the link between race and poverty? Where did the power lie?
2. How can economic policies (such as discriminatory lending and housing practices) divide a community? How can such practices legitimize the exploitation of one group by another? How do policies like the ones used in Chicago conflict with basic democratic principles?

### *Document 4:* ON TO CICERO

By August, city leaders, embarrassed by the violence and national attention their city received after the Chicago Freedom Movement's open-housing marches, decided to discuss a settlement. Andrew Young, a top SCLC aide, recalled the event:

SCLC went to Chicago to see if non-violence would work in the North [...]. The marches were part of an open-housing effort. But we were also trying to end slums and create home-ownership opportunities for poor people. We were trying to generate



1966: Whites protesting the open-housing campaign. In the first massive civil rights campaign outside the South, activists marched through hostile white neighborhoods to protest discriminatory housing practices.

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jobs. We were trying to integrate the economic opportunities through Operation Breadbasket [...]. And all of these were working enough to know that we could do many of the same things in the North that we'd done in the South. But Chicago was much bigger than any city we'd worked in the South. We knew we couldn't do it all at the same time. And that we couldn't sustain an aggressive movement much longer. So we were trying to find a way to wind it up, maybe institutionalize it. We wanted to get some settlement and some response and agreements from Daley. And then commit to a slow, long-term change period.<sup>8</sup>

Linda Bryant Hall, a Chicago native and member of CORE, worked with other activists to improve conditions in Chicago's slums. After King and the SCLC left the campaign in 1966, some groups felt it was time to try new tactics in the struggle. In an attempt to keep the pressure on, CORE's Bob Lucas announced plans to march through Cicero, an all-white community of 15,000, just outside the city of Chicago. In an *Eyes on the Prize* interview, Hall remembered the expectations and tensions surrounding the march to Cicero:

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you feel when Dr. King came to Chicago?

**LINDA BRYANT HALL:** Well, when I first heard that Dr. King was going to come to Chicago, I was elated. I said, Oh, my gosh, Chicago is going to get involved in all of this. You know, Dr. King has got a powerful following, a powerful message, and he's going to bring it to Chicago to help with the movement here. We sure need it. I was looking forward to his coming.

**INT:** Now, what were the differences between the southern communities and the northern community that he was coming to here in Chicago?

**L.B.H.:** Well, I didn't really understand how different the communities were until he came and the people he brought with him, I got a chance to meet them, and see what kinds of people they were. In the South I got the impression that that community was more monolithic. After he came here, it was quite obvious—at least to me—that this was a more diversified community and the tactics were going to have to be a little different here. [...] We had blacks who lived in Chicago public housing, we had blacks who lived in very poor slum areas, and we had blacks who lived on Chicago's gold coast [...]. In Chicago—as I said—there are people who are very diversified. And some people in Chicago didn't even believe in churches, didn't believe in God; I mean, they were avowed atheists; and for [Martin Luther King, Jr.] to come in now and ask them to come into the church and follow his movement through that mechanism, it didn't wash so well with a lot of people. And then, too, the churches might have—in Chicago—represented something different from what they did in the South. In Chicago, the churches, many of the black churches—not all of them—many of them had very close connections to the political machine. The political machine supported many of the churches. I mean they did so much as buy the

pews where the people set. They provided the church with a storefront. They provided the minister, in some cases, with a salary. So for him, now, to turn to the community people who had been fighting against this kind of setup and say, Come and follow me—you know, it just wouldn't go over. [...]

**INT:** When Dr. King called off the march [to Cicero on September 4, after the open housing agreement had been signed], how did you feel?

**L.B.H.:** When he called off the march, we were surprised; we were shocked. This is the march we looked forward to. The other marches were nice. But the one in Cicero had special meaning for us. The Cicero community has been a very hostile community to blacks for years—ever since I can remember. And I looked forward to the time that I could march down those streets in defiance of all those people there. When I was a little girl, we were told never go to Cicero—and, especially, don't go there by yourself. So when Dr. King said he wasn't going to march in that neighborhood, I said, My gosh, well, what's it all about? This is the neighborhood to march in. They've been known to have "toughs" in that neighborhood, and even some gangster connections there. But we were saying, you know, we're talking to all of those white bigots, and whether they're Mafia people, or whether they're just, ah, some white hecklers, we want them to know, yeah, we're going to come to Cicero; Cicero's got to yield, too, like the rest of the country.

So when we decided that we were going to go that morning when we gathered for the march, we had made this big statement, saying we were going to defy Dr. King and march to Cicero. Well, that took a lot more than just conversation to do. So we got in the park at the gathering point, where we had announced to the city in public press releases, we were going to march. There were practically more reporters than there were people; there were about six or seven of us who showed up to go on this march, and we just knew we were going to fall flat on our faces, and just, this is going to be the ultimate in embarrassment. We waited around, we were supposed to start I think about twelve o'clock; we waited around and waited around and waited around until, finally, we had to go. [...]

As we got into Cicero, the hecklers got so bad that everybody decided, well, you know, I'm not going to let my people go over there and maybe I need to go with them. I think it was sort of a groundswell. [...] So as we got into Cicero, we noticed that the National Guard had been alerted, of course. [Chicago CORE president Bob] Lucas had promised the city that there was going to be no violence. [...] When we got there, we noticed that all of the bayonets and the guns that were out were aimed at the marchers and not at the hecklers. The hecklers were throwing bottles and rocks and spitting and calling us all kinds of filthy names and doing some other things that I wouldn't even repeat. But what happened is that people became so excited and [there] was a closeness in that march. Even the Chicago police, I think, saw some of the things that were going on and felt that those

things were unjust, and they decided, for the first time—Chicago police did not beat the marchers, did not throw the marchers around. Chicago police decided to protect us. Because it was obvious who the National Guard were there to protect; they were there to protect Cicero and those people who were heckling us. [...]

**INT:** How was the character of the Cicero march different from Dr. King's [...] marches in Chicago?

**L.B.H.:** Well, Dr. King's marches in Chicago were usually made up of movement people. This march was community people. These people had not attended any workshops on non-violence; they had not listened to any lectures on love and loving your fellow man and all; they were just people who were angry about what was happening and wanted to do something. And when they all decided to go on this march, and people started to throw bricks and bottles at us, a couple of people caught the bricks and threw them back, threw rocks back; they even would jump in-between a lady sometimes. Women who were on the march were very protected. [...] These people were saying, you know, yeah, we're going to come to Cicero and we're not going to go limp. We're going to march through Cicero, and we're going to march to the point that we said we were going to march to, and we're going to come back. And that in itself was a triumph, because people just didn't do that in Cicero.<sup>9</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. Why did local activists want King to come to Chicago? What tensions and expectations did his presence create?
2. How does Hall describe the differences between the black community in the North and the South? How did those differences affect the movement for equality in both sections of the country?
3. What happens to a movement when leaders have decided that they are ready to compromise and the community has not?
4. Hall explains that the Cicero march was not made up of movement people, but was made up of "community people". What does she mean? How did the differences manifest themselves in Cicero?

### *Document 5:* RIOTS

On July 12, 1965, two days after the march to city hall, police shut down a fire hydrant used by youngsters on Chicago's West Side to cool off in the summer heat. Soon, clashes between police and residents exploded; eleven people were injured, including six policemen. During the riot, movement leaders, including Al Raby, took to the streets to calm tensions. Al Raby remembered:

We understood their [the people's] frustration, we were trying to address it and find avenues for that energy and frustration and anger to be channeled in a constructive way.

The riots were a threat to the movement and to everything we were trying to do. The only way we had been successful [...] whether it was voting rights or public accommodations was by garnering the support and understanding of the broader society. There was no way in which a riot promotes that understanding.<sup>10</sup>

While leaders were able to quell riots in Chicago, riots in Detroit changed the way people looked at the problems of race and poverty in America. Detroit, Michigan, home to a prosperous car industry, was an unlikely site for riots. Black Americans made up 40 percent of the population and were served by officials who had a reputation for negotiating racial tensions better than many other cities. But conflicts still brewed under the surface: many successful blacks were forced to live in slums; an “urban renewal” project and a new expressway undermined the structure of the black community; and outsourcing and new mechanized production processes in the motor industry left many blacks out of work. In this environment, black militancy held strong appeal.

In addition, a predominantly white police force continually harassed and brutalized blacks. Notorious “elite” teams, ‘Tacs’ or Tactical Squads comprised of four officers, patrolled black communities for illegal alcohol sales, prostitutes, and drugs. During these patrols, suspects were regularly harassed and beaten; in a few cases, blacks were even shot and killed. In July 1967, a ‘tac’ squad entered a club serving alcohol after hours to a reception for black Vietnam War veterans. When they attempted to make arrests, the officers were met with hostile reactions, which attracted a large crowd outside the bar. The confrontation escalated, and blacks from neighboring streets began to riot and set fire to stores known for their discriminatory practices.

Activist and bookstore owner Edward Vaughn remembers the riots that followed:

During the riots, the people who were looting or taking, the people who were in the streets, the people who were making the rebellion, by and large, were people who lived in the community, just average people. I came across a group of brothers [black men], for example, who said they were just fed up and that they did not want to live like they had before, and every night they went out with their guns, and they shot at police, shot at National Guardsmen, and of course, went back into their homes. [...] Most of the people were just community people who just had a sense that they were fed up with everything and they decided they would strike out. That was the way that they would strike back at the power structure.<sup>11</sup>

By the time calm was restored, forty-three people had been killed. According to the producers of *Eyes on the Prize*, estimates for the number of injured was as high as six hundred people, four thousand residents had been arrested, five thousand people were homeless, and 682 buildings were damaged. Property loss from fires ran over \$45 million. Vaughn explained:

It wasn't Black Power that caused the rebellion, it was the lack of power that caused the rebellions around the country. People did not see any hope for themselves. People were beginning to be unemployed more and more. We had no access to government. We were



Detroit, July 1967. Black residents put out a fire during the riots. The Detroit riots were born of black citizens' frustration over unemployment, inadequate housing, and regular harassment by the police.

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still pretty much confined to the ghetto, and then our consciousness was being raised at the same time, and I think the masses of people made a decision that they would do something, and I think that they did.

We felt that we had accomplished something, that the riots had paid off, that we finally had gotten the white community to listen to the gripes and to listen to some of the concerns that we had been expressing for many years. I don't think it was the call for Black Power that did it. I think it was the lack of power that did it.<sup>12</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. Raby and Vaughn both believed that social change required the understanding of the larger community. However, Al Raby argued that “the riots were a threat to the movement and to everything we were trying to do,” whereas Edward Vaughn felt that the riots “paid off”. How do you explain their different perspectives?
2. What “avenues” could have been found to channel “the energy, frustration, and anger” that Raby describes?
3. Vaughn says of the riots, “I don't think it was the call for Black Power that did it. I think it was the lack of power that did it.” What does he mean?
4. Vaughn uses two different words to describe what happened in Detroit: riots and rebellion. What does each word mean? How are they similar? What are the key differences? Others use the term civil disturbances. Does it matter which word you use?

### *Document 6:* TWO SOCIETIES: SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

In riots that would be surpassed by only the Los Angeles riots of 1992, looting and arson spread to many neighborhoods in Detroit, leaving forty-three people dead, hundreds injured, thousands jailed, and hundreds of buildings damaged or burned down. It took five days and the assistance of federal troops for local firefighters and National Guardsmen to restore peace and order.

In response to the Detroit riots, President Johnson convened an eleven-member commission in July 1967 to investigate root causes of the race riots that had plagued American cities since 1964. The commission, headed by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, submitted its final report in late February 1968—a little more than a month before dozens of American cities were again lit in flames following the assassination of King. The report warned that discrimination and segregation “now threaten the future of every American” and ended with a call for urgent action. Below are excerpts from the report's introduction:

The summer of 1967 again brought racial disorders to American cities, and with them shock, fear and bewilderment to the nation.

The worst came during a two-week period in July, first in Newark and then in Detroit. Each set off a chain reaction in neighboring communities.

On July 28, 1967, the President of the United States established this Commission and directed us to answer three basic questions:

- What happened?

- Why did it happen?
- What can be done to prevent it from happening again?

To respond to these questions, we have undertaken a broad range of studies and investigations. We have visited the riot cities; we have heard many witnesses; we have sought the counsel of experts across the country.

This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.

Reaction to last summer's disorders has quickened the movement and deepened the division. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American.

This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. Choice is still possible. Our principal task is to define that choice and to press for a national resolution.

To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and, ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values.

The alternative is not blind repression or capitulation to lawlessness. It is the realization of common opportunities for all within a single society.

This alternative will require a commitment to national action—compassionate, massive and sustained, backed by the resources of the most powerful and the richest nation on this earth. From every American it will require new attitudes, new understanding, and, above all, new will.

The vital needs of the nation must be met; hard choices must be made, and, if necessary, new taxes enacted.

Violence cannot build a better society. Disruption and disorder nourish repression, not justice. They strike at the freedom of every citizen. The community cannot—it will not—tolerate coercion and mob rule.

Violence and destruction must be ended—in the streets of the ghetto and in the lives of people.

Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans.

What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.

It is time now to turn with all the purpose at our command to the major unfinished business of this nation. It is time to adopt strategies for action that will produce quick and visible progress. It is time to make good the promises of American democracy to all citizens—urban and rural, white and black, Spanish-surname, American Indian, and every minority group.

Our recommendations embrace three basic principles:

- To mount programs on a scale equal to the dimension of the problems;
- To aim these programs for high impact in the immediate future in order to close the gap between promise and performance;
- To undertake new initiatives and experiments that can change the system of failure and frustration that now dominates the ghetto and weakens our society.

These programs will require unprecedented levels of funding and performance, but they neither probe deeper nor demand more than the problems which called them forth. There can be no higher priority for national action and no higher claim on the nation's conscience. [...]

As Commissioners we have worked together with a sense of the greatest urgency and have sought to compose whatever differences exist among us. Some differences remain. But the gravity of the problem and the pressing need for action are too clear to allow further delay in the issuance of this Report.<sup>13</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

1. The Kerner Commission concluded that America “is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” What were the causes? Who was responsible for the division?
2. The Commission asserted that “it is time now to turn with all the purpose at our command to the major unfinished business of this nation.” What was America’s “unfinished business”? What actions did the Commission recommend in order for America to finish this “business”?
3. Why do you think the Commission concluded that the process of polarization in America undermined basic democratic values? What solutions would reverse it and bring unity to America?

<sup>1</sup> Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68* (New York: Simon Schuster, 2006), 296–97.

<sup>2</sup> James Baldwin, *Vintage Baldwin* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> King Encyclopedia, “Chicago Campaign,” *The King Institute*, [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about\\_king/encyclopedia/chicago.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/chicago.htm) (accessed on June 14, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> “A Proposal by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for the Development of a Nonviolent Action Movement for the Greater Chicago Area,” *King Library and Archives, Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change* as quoted in Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, *The Eyes on the Prize Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 291–95.

<sup>6</sup> Baldwin, *Vintage Baldwin*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> “Dr. King's Demands of the City of Chicago (1966),” *CFM40, Loyola University Chicago*, <http://www.luc.edu/curl/cfm40/issue1.html> (accessed on June 2, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 314–15.

<sup>9</sup> “Interview with Linda Bryant Hall,” Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, *The Eyes on the Prize Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 310–15.

<sup>10</sup> Hampton, *Voices of Freedom*, 309–10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>13</sup> Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), *University of Washington*, <http://faculty.washington.edu/qtaylor/documents/Kerner%20Report.htm>, (accessed on July 24, 2006).