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Black Yields: Race, Space, Labor and Working Class Resistance in  
Bakersfield, California, 1960-1974

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts

In

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Daniel Rios

Committee in charge:

Professor Sean Malloy, Chair  
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The Thesis of Daniel Rios is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, Merced

2018

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*To my family,*

*For tio Gilbert, uncle Mike, and my Grandma Sue. Thank you for teaching me about the meaning of resilience. I hope to see you again someday.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to say thank you to all the family, friends, and mentors who have helped me during educational career and my overall life. I also want to show my gratitude to those interviewees who opened up their homes for me to learn about their personal narratives. Thank you to all

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## Introduction

Fitted up in their best attire with their afros pulled out and dancing to the popular sounds of James Brown and Marvin Gaye, over 180 primarily Black youth attended a summer 1969<sup>?</sup> night dance at the recently opened Fraternal Dance Hall in Bakersfield, California. The music was loud and filled the space, the play of each record set the mood, and young women and men spent the night releasing the drudgery from working. For many youth, the dance was not only a space to show their afros and best moves, but also was a pleasing end to a long day of laboring the cotton fields. Throughout the school year, youth worked in the fields on the weekends, but during the hot Bakersfield summer teens worked almost every day in the fields. From morning to sunset, they worked picking fruit, vegetables, and cotton across Kern County. After a day of yielding, teens went home, got fitted up, and engaged in the weeknight dance hall culture prominent throughout Bakersfield. The kinds of events hosted at the Fraternal hall varied. But, on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1969, during the last summer of the 1960s, it was black working class youth who created the meaning of the space.

Stress withered away while the sounds of funk, soul, and rhythm & blues filled the hall. Although the dance provided a space for release and leisure, youth still had to worry about one thing beyond their control, the police. Suddenly, amid the sounds of the music, dancegoers heard commotion outside when Bakersfield Police officers appeared with Billy clubs and told the dance chaperones to shut down the event. Before the music could stop on a fade out, the MC grabbed the microphone and announced to the crowd that the dance was over. As youth began to walk out of the front doors, many dancegoers rushed back inside the hall. Bakersfield Police chased them back in and proceeded to indiscriminately beat young women and men with nightsticks while spraying them with mace. What began as a night of dancing and leisure ended with dozens injured and several youth arrested.<sup>1</sup>

I highlight this incident not only to showcase the brutality that Bakersfield police officers deployed against Black residents but also to illustrate the precarious position that many working class residents, particularly youth, underwent as a result of how city officials and law enforcement viewed Black neighborhoods and places of leisure as spaces of vice, deviancy, and delinquency. In response, Black residents mobilized to attain justice for the youth and called for the Bakersfield police department to end violence against Black residents. These efforts were situated within a larger movement of Black working-class resistance in Bakersfield that organized against the racial and economic inequalities that affected their communities, neighborhoods, and families while showing how their communities and labor mattered.

Located on the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley just north of the grape vine, Bakersfield, California is the political and economic center of Kern County. From its establishment in the late 1800s and into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Bakersfield's economy revolved around the oil industry and corporate agriculture. The economic opportunities for Black residents were shaped by the limited amount of opportunities afforded to them. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Black labor was primarily

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<sup>1</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Seven Arrested at Dance Hall," July 24, 1969.

present in three major areas of employment: migrant labor, sanitation services, and domestic household work. Black workers in Bakersfield endured various structural inequalities that included stagnate wages, policing, racial violence, educational disparities, union busting, and housing segregation. City officials' decisions such as cutbacks to the city's transit system and sanitation department directly affected the employment of domestic household workers and sanitation workers. The political decisions of city officials did not only impact employment, but also negatively impacted the educational system and structural development of Black communities in Bakersfield. Additionally, conservative campaigns against racial equality deepened the structural inequality that Black residents endured.

This thesis provides a social, cultural, and labor history of working class Black communities in Bakersfield, California from the early 1960s to mid 1970s by examining how race, space, and labor played an integral part in shaping resistance. In addition, I focus my analysis on Black youth. Rather than exclude or situate youth at the periphery, my research views youth as central political actors who responded to a specific set of exploitative working and social conditions such as limited economic opportunities, educational disparities, and police brutality that undergirded their everyday experiences. My project is primarily focused on Black residents, but I also consider the relationship between Black and Brown communities through the workplaces, organizing efforts, and spaces of leisure on the Eastside of Bakersfield as both communities shared the landscape.

My main argument is threefold: First, Black working-class organizing efforts sought to mobilize against the racial and economic inequalities that affected their communities, neighborhoods, and families. Black workers resisted city officials who were determined to limit their economic opportunities. These efforts sought to fill the gaps and voids that other organizing outlets either overlooked or ignored. For instance, the NAACP and CORE both had platforms centered on self-help and civil rights, but support from these organizations varied between its leadership and members. For Black workers, the split between social and economic justice was a false dichotomy. From the cotton fields to the corporation yards, Black workers pursued better working conditions that both provided adequate compensation and quelled racial degradation. Given their limited power within formal organizing spaces, youth exerted forms of resistance that focused on achieving and maintaining self-empowerment, cultural identity, and economic opportunity. Additionally, youth engaged in creative forms of labor like cultural expression, gambling, and music which expanded their economic opportunities when opportunities in the formal economy pushed them out.

Secondly, city officials, law enforcement, and rank-in-file white residents viewed Black communities, neighborhoods, and places of leisure as spaces of criminality that justified police brutality, school policing, and the denigration of Black labor. The racialization of public space reflected the larger assault on Black residents and their neighborhoods. The positions that city officials took in decisions on city planning, public space, schools, violence, labor, and policing reinforced the structural inequalities that Black workers and their communities endured. City officials specifically viewed Black organizing as a problem and thwarted any efforts for social and economic justice while ensuring that white business owners and residents' job security and economic

foundations would be protected. Specifically, city officials viewed Black youth as a problem and exacerbated the social and economic conditions that youth endured by increasing the racial policing of youth.

Lastly, I argue that dance halls functioned as spaces of leisure and resistance where Black and Brown youth responded to a specific set of exploitative conditions of the fields, the limited economic opportunities outside of the fields, the racialized policies in the school system, and the daily experiences of police brutality all of which put a stranglehold on their lives and identities. Although Black and Brown youth didn't make money from dancing, dance halls provided a way to reclaim their labor and restore the energy that was lost during the day for something that mattered to them. These halls allowed for the possibility to transcend the racial, class, and cultural boundaries that were expected of them in other spaces. In these spaces, youth were able to create and recreate a dance hall and music culture that reflected their identities and cultural expressions.

By examining the nexus of race, space, labor, and youth, I use several fields of scholarship to help inform my study of Bakersfield including suburban, cultural, labor, and working class historiography. Although postwar urban histories provide a framework in understanding the city, the geographic and economic landscape of Bakersfield encompasses urban, rural, and suburban qualities that necessitates a partial departure from urban scholarship.<sup>2</sup> In one of his most seminal works, *Race Rebels*, Robin Kelley takes to task scholars who have ignored the methods oppressed peoples engage in politics, have agency, and exert various forms of resistance. Kelley builds from James C. Scott's concept of *infrapolitics* and applies it to the Black working class. Per Kelley, *infrapolitics* are the "daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movement."<sup>3</sup> In turn, Kelley provides a new way for how scholars should think about the politics of the working class. Scholars traditionally measure political engagement by examining protests, political campaigns, marches, and voting, yet *Infrapolitics* helps us to uncover the everyday forms of resistance that the archive doesn't always show. Additionally, Kelley's analysis helps me rethink terms like "class" and "labor."

Becky Nicolaides touches upon this in her book, *My Blue Heaven*, when she writes that class is not a simple "economic category defined by occupation of wealth and expressed mainly in the workplace, but it refers to broader experiences expressed in all realms of life: political, social, cultural."<sup>4</sup> Though Nicolaides' analysis is on point, I suggest Joao Vargas' definition of class in his book, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, more aptly applies to my examination of Bakersfield. Vargas writes, "terms such as

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<sup>2</sup> For insight on the postwar urban city see Thomas Sugrue's, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Robert Self's *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. (New York: The Free Press, 1994) p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002) p.5.

middle class or working class are unable to capture the intermediate classifications that are used in everyday conversations...[since]...class concepts used by Blacks in South Central frequently refer less to empirical, social, and economic standing than to everyday matters of speech, style, labor, and leisure, to how one walks and talks, where one lives, what and how one eats, how and where one spends free time, and with whom one interacts.”<sup>5</sup>

In his book, *A World of Its Own*, Matt Garcia examines Mexican labor in the San Gabriel Valley and greater Los Angeles. Garcia illustrates that despite the structural inequalities and reduced union efforts, Mexican residents developed strategies to fight against racism such as popular culture. Garcia describes popular culture not as “exclusive and essentialist definitions of culture as elite art forms, artifacts, and representations”, but rather as “the expressions of working class women and men that reflect their experiences and practices both within, and outside of, the workplace.”<sup>6</sup> In my research, I view space as a geographic location and a place where people played a direct role in shaping their environment. Garcia highlights this when he writes that landscapes’ “form and process of creation often possess the key to understanding the type of social relations that exist within a given society.”<sup>7</sup>

To help me think about Black youth and dance halls in Bakersfield, I turn to Gaye Johnson’s book, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity*. In it, Johnson uses the concept of “spatial entitlement” to refer to the “way in which marginalized communities have created new collectivities based not just upon eviction and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces.”<sup>8</sup> She argues that “spatial entitlement provides a means for understanding how working class communities and individuals secure or create social membership, even when the neighborhoods and meaningful spaces of congregation around them are destroyed.”<sup>9</sup> In particular, Johnson explains how scholars have failed to recognize the ways working class youth engage in these practices.

How did white residents maintain power over marginalized communities in Bakersfield? What incentives did white residents gain in marginalizing communities of color? In her book, *The Culture of Property*, LeeAnn Lands argues that property ownership and “park-neighborhoods evolved to signal whiteness [and]...private and public interests reasserted homeownership as a desired status marker”.<sup>10</sup> Lands explains that the advent of white homeownership identity and its incentives brought forth the

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<sup>5</sup> Joao Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) p.7.

<sup>7</sup> Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own*, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Gaye Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press) p.x.

<sup>9</sup> Gaye Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict*, p.xi.

<sup>10</sup> LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) p.2.

consolidation of power over public policy and resources and the overall shaping of white and black residents' neighborhoods, schools, and economic opportunities in Atlanta. For Lisa McGirr in her book, *Suburban Warriors*, the political insurgence around taxes, schools, resources, and conservative policies on the local level were due to the mobilizing of ordinary white rank-and-file residents.<sup>11</sup> Both studies demonstrate how integral white political community was in shaping the political and economic barriers for Black residents.

There are several limitations in my thesis that I want to acknowledge. Throughout my paper, I use the term "Brown" to pertain primarily to Mexicans and Mexican youth in Bakersfield. Although there were other non-black communities present, I chose to specifically focus on Mexican communities. In addition, there are several problems with using terms like "Black" and "Brown" as they do not reflect the ways in which people identified. Another limitation in this paper is an in-depth critical gender analysis that looks at gender as an axis of power through which race, labor, class, and resistance operate in the political, social, economic, and cultural context of Bakersfield during the 1960s. In addition, an analysis of performative masculinity is needed when examining cultural exchange, political resistance, and the dance hall culture among youth. I plan on exploring these important and critical examinations in my dissertation research. In the pages that follow, I will illustrate a picture of Black working class resistance in Bakersfield in order to highlight the everyday lives of those who endured and made it possible for me to be here.

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) p.12

## ***Chapter One: Black Labor and the Economic Landscape***

Our shame as a nation is not that so many children work the fields but that so few of them have other options, that the life chances of too many are defined by the cycle of the seasons. In environments characterized by minimums—minimum wages, minimum shelters, minimum food and education—individual character, the love of a family, can only do so much; the rest is up to the country.<sup>12</sup>

—Sherley Anne Williams

Preparing themselves for the day ahead, Black women and men wait alongside Cottonwood Road for the buses of independent labor contractors to show up and take them throughout the cotton fields of Kern County. Next to them, Black women wait for the city bus to arrive to transport them to their jobs as domestic workers in the hotels and private households across town. Just a couple of miles uptown, Black men arrive at the city's corporation yard and assemble their crews to drive out the sanitation trucks in order to pick up the city's garbage neighborhood to neighborhood. Residing among them, Black youth get ready to finish out a day of school in the area's elementary, junior high, and high schools. Enduring the seasonal changes, working conditions, and the precariousness of their employment, Black women and men labored the landscape of Bakersfield in one way or another. Mostly residing in the working class neighborhoods of Lakeview and Cottonwood in East Bakersfield, these Black women and men commuted in and out of the places where their time and labor was greatly needed but their presence was not wanted. In the process, Black workers faced a number of challenges that shaped their working conditions, but generated organizing efforts to better their conditions and communities. Yet, the scope of their livelihood should not and cannot be reduced to the specific work places in which they labored nor the times that they were on the clock. Rather, their livelihood encompassed the picket lines, bargaining sessions, bus rides home, and inside the pool halls, clubs, and dance halls across the city. This is because in each one of these spaces, political resistance from white city officials and residents sought to regulate, constrain, and dismantle the economic foundations and everyday lives of working class Black residents.

### *Neighborhood Geographies*

Located in Bakersfield's southeast side, south of California Avenue and east of Union Avenue, the Lakeview and Cottonwood neighborhoods are the historically Black communities of Bakersfield. Officially, the area was known as the Sunset Mayflower District, but this does not speak to the everyday social relations between residents in the communities. Since its annexation in 1950, Black residents in the area have undergone a number of social, political, and economic challenges that has made life difficult. Generational poverty, housing segregation, job discrimination, tax revolts from white residents, and ghettoization from city services all encompassed the foundation of

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<sup>12</sup> Sherley Anne Williams, *Working Cotton*. (San Diego: Scholastic Inc., 1998) p.2.

structural racism present within Bakersfield. Although these neighborhoods historically have been predominately Black, Mexican residents also resided in the areas' communities and even sometimes lived next door to each other. El Okie, La Colonia, and La Loma were barrios located in East Bakersfield where mostly Mexican residents resided. Culturally, the boundaries where these communities began and ended depended on who was asked. Spatial differences existed between Black and Mexican residents, but not for the same reasons that racial segregation existed between whites and people of color. Indeed, businesses, churches, and neighborhoods all were sites where the spatial and cultural differences between Black and Brown communities were present, but this type of racial separation was not structurally cemented through a history of policies like racially restrictive housing covenants. In part, there was not a realty market based on incentivizing racial segregation between Black and Mexican residents. For instance, even though these barrios were predominately Mexican, Black residents sparsely lived in these barrios alongside Mexican residents making them into multiracial enclaves of working class residents.<sup>13</sup>

Many postwar urban historians have examined the political, social, and economic plights and development of the city. In *The Origins of an Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue demonstrates the interplay between racial discrimination, housing segregation, the ghettoization of neighborhoods, economic restructuring, joblessness, and failed social policies. "No one social program or policy, no single force," asserts Sugrue, can alone fully answer or demonstrate the basis of urban inequality.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the geographic and economic landscape of Bakersfield makes it difficult to characterize it as either urban or rural. In the 1960s, Bakersfield's economic landscape encompassed one of the nation's largest oil production areas, corporate agriculture, an established rail road industry, service industries, and construction.

In my paper, I am going to provide an overview of Black working class labor, by focusing my attention on three key areas of employment: cotton workers, domestic workers, and sanitation workers. A much more in-depth analysis is needed in order to demonstrate the significance of oil workers, railroad workers, and construction workers in Bakersfield, an analysis in which I intend to expand on in my future research. In his book, *American Babylon*, Robert Self asserts that urban historiography has overwhelming focused on black violence, ghetto formation, deindustrialization, and segregation, but has overlooked how "Black Americans, too, imagined the city and its possibilities, reacted to urban decline and decay, and fashion politics and social movements with the ambition of making their neighborhoods and cities better places to live. Whether they succeeded or failed, their efforts require serious attention and reflection."<sup>15</sup> . Beyond the descriptive

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<sup>13</sup> Yolanda Flores grew up in El Okie in the 1960s in East Bakersfield. She wrote that growing up in the barrio of El Okie, it comprised of working class Mexican, Black, and a few white families. See Yolanda Flores, *Claiming Home, Shaping Community: Testimonios de los valles* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017) p.79-82.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race, Industrial Decline, and Housing in Detroit, 1940-1960*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) p.13

analyses and general overviews, I examine inequality as a reflection of Black working class residents' lives and as an entry point into thinking about the forms of resistance that Black residents deployed.

### *Working in the Cotton Fields*

During the 1960s, working in the cotton fields was a primary source of employment for many Black residents in East Bakersfield. This was because employment options were nonexistent due to the racial discriminatory hiring practices present in other fields especially in clerical and professional jobs. For instance, in 1964, the local chapter of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized a campaign that challenged the virtually absent representation of Black women and men in Bakersfield's business district and called for an end to racial discrimination in the city's business district.<sup>16</sup> Despite their employment in the fields, Black residents in the Lakeview and Cottonwood neighborhoods still faced the consequences of low wages, poverty, housing segregation, economic precarity, and other forms of structural racism. Throughout the 1960s, structural disparities were virtually present in all aspects of the lives of Bakersfield's Black residents. The unemployment rate, housing conditions, educational attainment rates, and household median income for Black residents in Bakersfield were vastly unequal in proportion to white city's white residents.<sup>17</sup> For the most part, Black working class residents did not witness the type of large scale economic organizing that occurred over several decades prior.

In the 1930s, union organizers from the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) set in motion massive cotton strikes that organized thousands of cotton laborers in Tulare, Kings, Fresno, and Kern Counties, including Black migrant workers in Bakersfield. An interracial organizing machine that encompassed Black, Asian, Mexican, and White farmworkers, took to task the repressive working and living conditions which cotton growers in the valley imposed on workers. Through the use of racial violence, law enforcement, and propaganda, growers thwarted the interracial mobilizing efforts that organizers deployed.<sup>18</sup> By the 1960s, over three decades later, the cotton landscape still functioned as a source of employment for Black residents, but organizing efforts in the decades since have only been intermittently with little to no changes. For instance, in the 1950s, the National Farm Labor Union, which would later become the United Farm Workers of American (UFW), contested the ways in which

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Papers of Walter Kaufmann, 1960-1969*.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Fair Employment Practices Report, *Negro Californians: Population, Employment, Income, Education* (San Francisco, 1963); see also, Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Fair Employment Practices Report, *Black Californians: Population, Education, Income, Employment* (San Francisco, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> For a more concrete history of the Central Valley cotton strikes of the 1930s then see Debra Weber's *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); see also, Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).



cotton growers set abusive and deplorable working and living condition for its workers was met with minimal improvement.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the mid-1960s and on that large scale organizing in California's agriculture plains, particularly Kern County, were set in motion.<sup>20</sup>

During the mid-twentieth century, cotton growers in California were part of and represented by the Western Cotton Growers Association (WCGA). The cotton industry comprised a sparse network of cotton cooperatives. In order to distance the chain of labor, growers would employ independent labor contractors who were responsible for the transportation, compensation, and suppression of migrant workers.<sup>21</sup> The narratives that assert businessmen settled on the land and crafted the valley's agricultural empire through hard work and ingenuity are ahistorical. Generations of Black migrant workers labored the land for what were unlivable wages while growers and firms accumulated massive amounts of wealth on the exploitation and consolidation of Black labor since the 1880s.<sup>22</sup> In fact, speaking at the annual conference of Calcot Ltd in Bakersfield, then Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, revered California cotton growers for the production of cotton in the Valley. Butz remarked that in one year, Fresno, Tulare, and Kern counties:

“accounted for 1.2 billion in gross farm income, which exceeds the total of any one of 37 states in the union. They are a powerful reason why California is far and away the nation's no.1 agricultural state in dollars in farm product sales. And cotton, of course, looms high in this leadership situation. About 85% of California's cotton is grown here in the Valley. Year in and year out, cotton has ranked at or near the top of California's list for foremost cash crops—a bulwark of the agricultural economy of this western region. It took vision and cooperation to create your strength in cotton.”<sup>23</sup>

The “cooperation” that Butz referred to was the network of growers who worked collectively to circumvent regulation, lobby policies, and shape, or rather constrict, the economic opportunities of workers. Calcot Ltd, the largest cotton marketing corporation in the American West, owned numerous cotton ginning warehouses throughout the Central Valley including Bakersfield. While cotton growers hired independent labor contractors to transport and oversee migrant workers in the fields, cotton warehouses were used for cotton ginning. Essentially, the cotton industry was, and continues to be, an economic agreement between growers who handle manual labor and Calcot Ltd which handles ginning and marketing worldwide.

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<sup>19</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Cotton Labor Conditions Under Study,” October 9<sup>th</sup> 1950.

<sup>20</sup> For an in depth history of the UFW see Matt Garcia's *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Notes from interview with Ralph Anthony and Wayne Johnson.

<sup>22</sup> *Kern County Californian*, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1884; see also, Glenn Dumke's *The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1944) p.15.

<sup>23</sup> Address by Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz at A5th Annual Meeting of Calcot. Ltd., Bakersfield, California. June 16. 1972.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Black labor in the cotton fields was marked by low wages and abusive working conditions. A large segment of the migrant worker force were actually youth. Despite their age, youth were not exempt from the harsh and exploitative working conditions of the cotton fields. Growing up Black and working class in Kern County meant that the cotton fields were folks only opportunity for employment. Very few residents had the same opportunities for economic mobility and steady employment that white working class residents did in the 1950s and 1960s. For the few Black business owners in Bakersfield business district, their businesses were mostly relegated to serving white patrons and denying Black patrons in fear of white patrons response. A Long time Black resident, Tarea Pittman recalls:

“[Bakersfield] always had some big barber shops. [They] operated by the old Southern pattern—they only catered to white people...Negro barbers!...Houston’s barber shop was at one time the biggest shop in Bakersfield, white or black, and they’d cut nothing but white people’s hair.”<sup>24</sup>

Black female poet Shirley Anne William’s quote in the epigraph perfectly encapsulates the labor dynamic for the many generations of Blacks residents and their children in the Central Valley. From an early age and into their teens, the futures of many youth’s lives were determined by the seasonal changes and fluctuating wages of working in the cotton fields. In other words, youth had to choose a life working in the blazing hot summers in Bakersfield for virtually unlivable and unsustainable wages or nothing. In the mid to late 1960s, Black youth began to push back against city officials who they felt purposely constrained their economic options to the fields. Unlike traditional forms of resistance, however, youth creatively developed methods of fighting back that were etched in the political, economic, cultural context of their time.

### *Domestic Workers*

Scholarly inquiry into the lives of household workers has demonstrated the complexity of their strategies of resistance. Tera Hunter reminds us even though they had their place, “strikes and formal unions were not the only tools of working-class resistance.”<sup>25</sup> For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have viewed working class resistance as docile or unorganized, referring to the ways in which many Black workers were not under unions. This view privileges traditional forms of direct resistance such as marches and protests over indirect and informal ways of resisting. The problem with this idea is that the actions of black women household workers were actually calculated and aware of the consequences of open protest. In order to avoid termination, Black women had to shape their resistance in ways that were not so direct and confrontational. For instance, many household workers would threaten to quit their job close an important event in order to contest employers’ abusive working conditions. Black women

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<sup>24</sup> Tarea Pittman, interview by Joyce Henderson, May 20, 1971 in *Earl Warren Oral History Project*.

<sup>25</sup> Tera Hunter, *To Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) p.224.

household often time had families to financially support, which made steady employment and adequate compensation important benefits for them to acquire. Yet, in a lot of cases, household workers' wages were extremely low and inadequate. In turn, household workers engaged in a form of resistance called "pan-toting," which was the act of taking things from their employer's home like leftover food, supplies, and other goodies in order to make up for the compensation they were not receiving.<sup>26</sup>

Although migrant labor encompassed both women and men, racial and gendered dynamics shaped the economic opportunities of Black women who were employed outside of the cotton fields in Bakersfield. For many Black women, the only other viable option for employment was domestic work in the middle-class white communities across town. Due to racial discrimination practices in employment, generations of Black women in Bakersfield had virtually no economic opportunities other than the cotton fields and domestic work. This dynamic was not a new phenomenon for Black women's employment. As Tarea Pittman describes the racialized job market in Bakersfield during the 1940s and 1950s, "[you] couldn't get a job as a clerk in a store or secretary in an office. None of these jobs were open to negroes. Domestic work was available to [Black] women"<sup>27</sup>

In turn, by the early 1960s, 77% of Black women were employed as private household workers in Bakersfield. Throughout the 1960s, Black domestic household workers in Bakersfield maintained a steady level of employment.<sup>28</sup> Unlike sanitation workers whose labor was more invisible and detached from white residents, Black household laborers worked inside the private and intimate spaces of white residents. Direct forms of resistance to harsh working conditions and inadequate wages such as unionization and striking did occur during the 1960s contrary to the beliefs of many labor scholars.<sup>29</sup> Yet, resistance in direct forms was more difficult for household workers to exert given the power dynamics of their workplace. Regardless, this did not mean that household workers were without agency or navigated to find ways to resist. Black women shared time and space, gossiping about the families they worked for, relieving their frustrations, and talking about the personal details of their lives. Outside of the male centric face of labor organizing, the long bus routes from the Black neighborhoods of lakeview and Cottonwood to the white communities of Westchester and Oleander allowed for Black women to convey strategies and solutions to combat the barriers and repressive actions their employers imposed on them. In addition, they were able to know

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<sup>26</sup> Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels*, p.17-20,70.

<sup>27</sup> Tarea Pittman, interview by Joyce Henderson, May 20, 1971, Transcript of *Earl Warren Oral History Project* (Berkeley, 1974) p.14-15.

<sup>28</sup> The California reports, *Negro Californians (1963)* and *Black Californians (1973)* show that domestic household work was a primary form of employment for Black women in Bakersfield throughout the 1960s. The reports do not show if there were dips in the employment of Black women in the domestic household field, but just the state of employment from the beginning of the decade to the end.

<sup>29</sup> For an examination of domestic worker organizing, see Premilla Nadasen's *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016).

who to avoid. Essentially, the bus route was a public arena for many to organize in the ways in which they believe would be beneficial to them.

Indeed, inadequate and unstable compensation, abusive and exploitative working conditions, and physical and racial violence were primary problems that directly affected the employment of Black domestic workers. But, the hurdles for employment manifested well before entering the households of white communities. Racial segregation in housing meant that Black women had to travel across town to work. Often time, they depended upon the local transit system to get to work. Buses that ran through Lakeview and Cottonwood neighborhoods were always subjected to the budget cutbacks, fare increases, and changing routes. These cutbacks had the potential to impact the employment opportunities of many household workers as well as Black residents who relied on public transportation. In response, household workers found ways around structural changes such as borrowing the family car, getting dropped off, staying with relatives who lived closer to the employer or having their employer pick them up. In some cases, these tactics worked but only for a short time as new barriers often arose such as car breakdown or getting laid off. Overall, although domestic workers developed strategies to navigate around problems, abusive conditions inside employers' homes and structural changes to the transit system affected the employment opportunities and lives of Black women as well as the economic foundations of many Black households. Black employment was high, especially for Black women, but the racial dynamics of employment opportunities and its low wages meant that it was necessary for both parents to be acquiring income. For many Black women, work in and outside the home was a critical for many working-class Black families.

### *Sanitation Workers*

At the city's corporation yard located downtown, Black sanitation workers arrive early morning to jump into their crews and roll out the garbage trucks to pick up the city's trash. Intermittently, many sanitation workers also labored in the fields, but most ventured out to work for the city. Since sanitation workers were considered city employees and whose responsibilities were required daily, employment was a bit more stable. During the 1940s and 1950s, Black residents working for the city was rare. Although Black workers were employed for the city doing arduous low paying work like street sweeping, street grading, and hauling trash, the type of critical mass of Black workers in the sanitation department was not present until the 1960s.<sup>30</sup> By the early 1960s, under 15% of employed Black men in Bakersfield were employed in the city's sanitation department as street sweepers and garbage collectors. In fact, Bakersfield's sanitation department was one of largest area of employment for employed Black men outside of the cotton fields.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tarea Pittman, interview by Joyce Henderson, May 20, 1971; also, notes from Wayne Johnson, interview by Daniel Rios, June 23, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Fair Employment Practices Report, *Negro Californians: Population, Employment, Income, Education* (San Francisco, 1963).

Unlike the cotton fields where the amount of wages and the duration of work depended on the growers and seasons and unlike domestic household workers whose wages and working conditions depended primarily on each individual family, sanitation workers had certain benefits that other workers did not have. Things like stable wages, pensions, holidays, sick leave, and overtime pay were available to sanitation workers given the bureaucratic structure of city employment. In addition, during the instances of possible termination, supervisors had less discretion to fire their employees in the same way that homeowners and growers did. This is not to say that firing on the spot did not happen, but the dynamics at play made it more difficult for supervisors to do. Yet, for many Black sanitation workers, these benefits were not seen as guaranteed benefits but merely were fine print on their contracts. By function, sanitation workers were required to travel on a daily basis in and out of the communities they lived and the communities they would come to be familiar with.

Yet, traveling through the town also meant moving in and out of the cultural, racial, class boundaries that existed. Everyday Black sanitation workers traveled throughout the city in neighborhoods picking up the trash of communities to which they did not belong and were not wanted. This daily experience only contributed to the problems they endured on the clock. In fact, working conditions for Black sanitation workers did not just amount to the number of hours and wages they received, but also encompassed the daily experiences of racism and denigration that supervisors and white workers spewed out to them. Racial dynamics in the workplace also meant that Black workers were subject to more surveillance by yard supervisors.<sup>32</sup>

I write about Black sanitation workers not as individuals hired by the city, but as a reflection of how Black workers were organized by their supervisors, shift managers, and even the city. Each sanitation worker hired was assigned to work in a different unit who were responsible to different sections of town. Much like migrant workers, sanitation units were racially segregated. Many of the white sanitation workers lived in Oildale, a section of north Bakersfield known for its communities of predominately white working class residents whom are the descendants of poor whites southerners who migrated from the South during the Great Depression. Black and Mexican sanitation workers labored alongside each other but rarely worked alongside white workers. Although Blacks were the majority of sanitation workers, the department took on a demographic shift in the late 1960s as the number of Mexican workers employed increased, which created a somewhat balanced multiracial atmosphere. Consequently, the exploitative working conditions for Black and Mexican workers led to organizing efforts across racial and cultural lines.

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<sup>32</sup> Wayne Johnson, interview by Daniel Rios.

## **Chapter Two: Labor, Whiteness, and Resistance in Bakersfield, 1966-1974**

Public spaces and resources were a contested area in Bakersfield. Contributing to the structural issues of poverty and segregation, Black residents endured a surge of resistance from city officials, law enforcement, and white homeowners throughout the mid-1960s and onward that significantly impacted both organizing efforts and overall life in Sunset Mayflower district. Several scholarly studies on the politics and identity of white homeownership illustrate the ways in which whiteness, property, and homeownership were interlinked. In part, this matrix led to the maintenance of white neighborhoods through a series of political, social, economic strategies to keep people of color out of the private and public spaces of the everyday with, perhaps with one exception: labor. Becky Nicolaides remarks that “in the postwar years, racial purity became an increasingly important aspect of community identity—of the suburban ideal itself—during a historical moment when challenges to racial purity erupted.”<sup>33</sup> In Bakersfield, the housing geographies of white residents did not merely signify *where* one lived, but came to assume *how* people lived including their socio-economic status, behavior, values, safety etc. Whiteness became discursively and attached to cultural constructs such as homeownership and material landscapes.<sup>34</sup>

The white power structure of Bakersfield in the late 1960s was cemented through a nexus of racial, economic, and political battles and transformations that occurred in the decades prior. First, a number of local ballot initiatives that seemed promising were struck down by Bakersfield’s white middle communities. In 1953, a ballot initiative called Measure 4 was proposed for the construction of a housing project in the Sunset Mayflower District and would include the expansion of city services to the area. After the annexation three years before, housing conditions in the area was still significantly inadequate for many of the residents. However, in opposition to the initiative, a so-called “citizens committee” was formed and campaigned staunchly against the passing of the measure. Built into the fabric of the neighborhoods in Bakersfield, racially restrictive housing covenants were still legal in Bakersfield. It was not until the passing of the Rumford Fair Housing act ten years later in 1963 that the erosion of legal covenants began to shift.

Yet, at this time, white middle class homeowners responded to the ballot with disdain. One of the Citizens’ Committee’s advertisement urged taxpayers to vote against the measure. The ad stated,

“The measure appears harmless but watch it!” It continues to say that “If this rezoning ordinance is not defeated it will leave the doors open for the public housing authority to construct not only the Mayflower-Sunset Housing project but many more

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<sup>33</sup> Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) p.275.

<sup>34</sup> LeAnn Lands, *Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) p.3.

high-cost units and You will be paying all kinds of public service for them...schools, police, and fire protection etc....As long the Housing project is in existence.”<sup>35</sup>

The advertisement clearly showed the spatial distinctions between the areas of town that were racialized. In addition, the Citizens’ Committee invoked the economic anxieties and the racial fears of white homeowners by claiming how the measure would lead to the white residents paying for the city services such as schools for “them” as in Black residents of the Sunset Mayflower district. Consequently, the measure was struck down. Structurally, the failure of the measure set in motion the worsening of the economic and social conditions for many Black residents.

In 1966, more than a decade later, white homeowners and residents were able to maintain power over communities of color by refraining from supporting measures and ordinances that would economically benefit Black residents. Organizations like the Bakersfield Board of Realtors, initiated campaigns against the Title IV section of the Civil Rights Act of 1966 that promoted open occupancy and ending racist housing practices. One of the representatives, Allan Stramler Jr., speaking to group of civic clubs, stated that

“[u]nder the façade of banning bias on the grounds of race, color, religion, or national origin, this bill will empower the federal government to force an owner to sell or rent his property to a person not of his choice, whether the property is his home, rental housing, a room for rent in his home or boarding house, or even land to be used as a site of housing.” He continues, “open occupancy cannot be achieved by the federal government with its vast power wiping out freedom of choice and contract for all citizens under the guise of providing a new right for minority groups.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite advocates against the 1966 Civil Rights Act, attempts to couch their campaign under the discourse of individualism, choice, and big government, the emergence of tax revolts and the defeating of racially progressive initiatives marked the racial fear and economic anxieties of many white homeowners.

Undergirding the “rights” discourse, Stramler’s words demonstrates the hegemony of what Daniel Hosang posits as “political whiteness,” which he defines as “a political subjectivity rooted in white racial identity, a gaze on politics constituted by whiteness.”<sup>37</sup> Essentially, political whiteness encompasses the collective white racial identity that spans across the political spectrum, but, at the same time, denies its existence and “operates instead as a kind of absent referent, hailing and interpolating particular

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<sup>35</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “A Final Reminder,” March 23, 1953; see also, Oliver Rosales, “Mississippi West”: Race, Politics, and Civil Rights in California’s Central Valley, 1947-1984” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012), p.10-14.

<sup>36</sup> *Bakersfield News Bulletin*, “Realtors Urge Defeat of Title IV Section of 1966 Civil Rights Act,” May 29<sup>th</sup> 1966.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Hosang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) p.20.

subjects through various affective appeals witnessed in claims to protect ‘our rights,’ ‘our jobs,’ ‘our homes,’ ‘our kids,’ ‘our streets,’ and even ‘our state.’”<sup>38</sup> By describing every possible way the Act would impact white homeowners and making the distinction between rights and “new minority rights,” the Realtors’ discourses connects with white homeowners on multiple levels. From the white segregationists members of the White Citizens’ Council to the homeowner who is pro integration but doesn’t want to privilege anti-racism over economic rights, political whiteness reveals the violence of white supremacists and the limitations of white liberal’s support for progressive initiatives.

### *Sanitation Workers’ Resistance*

Emerging in the mid-1960s, Black workers began to shift towards more direct forms of resistance by way of unionizing and even engaging in rebellions. Two years before Martin Luther King Jr began organizing sanitation workers in Memphis, on October 25, 1966, Black sanitation workers engaged in a strike for unionization at the city’s corporation yard in Downtown Bakersfield. Workers formed a line across from the yard’s entrance and refused to roll out the trucks. They insisted that the trash spoil in the heat unless their working conditions improved. The strike crew ran 45 workers deep with picket signs in their hands that wrote “strike.” The strike was the result of city council’s refusal to take seriously the grievances of Black sanitation workers. Prior to this dispute, the city council formed the Governmental Efficiency Personnel Committee (GEPC) which functioned to assess areas in the city that council members should cutback and save money.<sup>39</sup>

Their grievances were not only complaints about their wages and workload, but also the racist working conditions and organizational structure of the department. One striker expressed,

“We don’t want to see any more Bill Burnett. There’s too many grayheads in this bunch for him to be callin us ‘boy.’ We had enough of that ‘boy’ crap. Bakersfield ain’t no different from Bama, but we gonna make it different. Us ‘boys’ are about to get treated like men, or watch out!”<sup>40</sup>

The worker was referring to Bill Burnett, a white supervisor in the sanitation department who many Black sanitation workers claimed referred to them as “boy” despite their stark age difference. “Boy,” was a term that signified the emasculation, racialization, and denigration of Black labor all at once. Alongside the sanitation workers during the strike were one white and one Mexican worker. In the mid-1960s, the Bakersfield sanitation department largely employed Black residents from the Lakeview and Cottonwood neighborhoods. But, as years went on and the efforts grew stronger, the racial demographic of the department changed.

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<sup>38</sup> Hosang, *Racial Propositions*, p.21.

<sup>39</sup> Alfredo De Venado, *The Movement*, “Sanitation Workers Strike,” December 1966.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*,





Figure 1: Sanitation workers form a row of workers outside the city's corporation yard. The strike lasted three days and made national headlines on October 25, 1966.<sup>41</sup>

During a city council the night before the strike, Bill O'Rear, the organizing director for ASFCME and Jim Mason, a black union organizer, presented to the council the signed union cards of the Black sanitation units calling for union representation. O'Rear read a letter written by the city manager which stated "public employees do not have the right to strike, refuse to cross picket lines, engage in work stoppages or work slowdowns, or disrupt in any manner the operation of city services."<sup>42</sup> The council's response to O'Rear and Mason was filled with hostility. In the following two days, during the strike, the city attorney, imposed an injunction that forced workers to break a strike. Despite the resistance they received, the group of 45 sanitation workers were able to make incremental gain in pay increases and exemption from termination. Additionally, James Mason was able to expand organizing efforts in the area of Kern County in Delano. Negotiations over contracts and working conditions continued over the next couple of years.<sup>43</sup>

By 1972 the sanitation crews expanded and Black workers witnessed an increase in Mexican sanitation workers as they were hired in the department and in the union. Despite the cultural differences, conflicts and tensions between Black and Mexican sanitation workers did not occur in the ways that many growers in the 1930s used against

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<sup>41</sup> Alfredo De Venado, *The Movement*, "Sanitation Workers Strike," December 1966.

<sup>42</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Refuse Crews Strike," October 25, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Bakersfield City Council Minutes, October 24, 1966, p.169-170; also, *Bakersfield News Bulletin*, "Refuse Trucks Rolls in City," October 30, 1966.

migrant workers. Perhaps conflict did occur, but not to the extent that it broke union efforts. On July 26<sup>th</sup> 1972, dozens of Black and Mexican sanitation workers engaged in a three day strike over what they viewed to be racially discriminatory and abusive working conditions. On the day of the strike, city officials initiated law enforcement to break up the strike. Law enforcement prevented the strikers from interacting with the garbage trucks as they rolled out of the yard. However, rather than have workers continue the strike, the city and the union came to a verbal agreement to which the workers would exempt from termination.<sup>44</sup> Although much of the grievances were never solved, the strikes showcased the collective power of Black and Brown organizing, a power that in many ways transcended the racial and cultural boundaries which existed between them. Within a period of ten years, Black and Mexican sanitation workers in Bakersfield successfully organized for the proposals they sought out to implement. Work stoppages were a prevalent way of showcasing their collective power in a context where individually workers had no power. But, also loud talking and shouting and foot dragging by the front of the yard were strategies of indirect organizing that management could not practically police.



Figure 2: On July 27, 1972, over 45 Black and Mexican sanitation workers strike outside of the city's corporation yard surrounded by city officials and law enforcement.<sup>45</sup>

Although the sanitation department's organizational structure was racist and compensation for workload was inadequate, it would be wrong to assume that sanitation workers did not have agency. Indeed, striking was a direct form of organizing that was both politically and economically contesting the city's government structure. In fact, each

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<sup>44</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Termination Orders Given Garbage Men," July 28, 1972; also, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Strike of Refuse Workers Settled," July 30, 1972; also, Bakersfield City Council Minutes, July 28, 1972, p.37-51.

<sup>45</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Termination Orders Given Garbage Men," July 28, 1972.

time they had a strike, Black and Brown workers exerted power over white communities and businesses. The upkeep of their services was crucial for maintaining an integral component for white homeowner identity: cleanliness. For white residents in Bakersfield, the spatial, cultural, and social imagining of Black communities was that they were unsanitary, deviant, and filled with vice. As Robert Self points out, “in the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition.”<sup>46</sup> In turn, this racial imaginary of black and Mexican communities was foundational in the creation and recreation of the identity of white property owners.

Yet, for Black workers to refuse to pick up even one day’s worth of trash meant that trash would both pile and spoil in the white communities throughout Bakersfield and the business district downtown. In the private spaces of white communities and the public spaces of downtown Bakersfield, both spaces where hostility towards Black residents were prevalent, the labor of Black and Mexican workers were in many ways invisible. Like most working class workers, the invisible labor of sanitation workers meant that white residents did not have to deal with the harsh working conditions or be confronted with the consequences of their indifferences towards the communities of Black workers. However, with a strike the concerns of the workers become clearly visible to white homeowners and city officials. As the years went on, Black and Mexican sanitation workers made considerable strides through striking and organizing efforts. Yet, by 1974, under the recommendation of the GEPC, the city council voted increase the wages of some sanitation workers and restore the seniority vacation rights of workers who participated in the strike two years prior, but also voted to slash the jobs of two dozen of sanitation workers while at the same time voted to increase their own salaries and the salaries of city employees including police officers.<sup>47</sup>

Black residents viewed this as nothing new. The increasing of resources for the policing of black communities and spaces of leisure went in parallel with the denigration of Black labor. For instance, public transportation was a crucial aspect of many black women’s employment. Traveling back home in the evenings meant that if domestic workers did not have an adequate form of transportation to get home then it could jeopardize their employment in so many ways. For instance, without transportation, it made it difficult for Black household workers to stay for late night events or special occasions or to work overtime. But, in 1970, the city council and the superintendent of the bus system, voted in agreement to save the city money by raising the bus fares and terminating the evening and Sunday routes in the Sunset Mayflower neighborhood, which significantly affected the employment of dozens of women. In parallel to this cutback, the city council proposed a city ordinance that gave the Mayor and Law enforcement officials the power to declare riot emergency to which they could shut down all public places and impose curfews. It was clearly apparent that this ordinance would be geared

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<sup>46</sup>Self, *American Babylon*, p.9

<sup>47</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “4-1 Council vote Oks Reduction of 23 Sanitation, street jobs,” July 23, 1974; see also, *Bakersfield Californian*, “\$1.7 million voted for city pay increases,” July 23, 1974; see also, Bakersfield City Council Minutes, July 22, 1974, accessed May 15, 2018, p.1.

towards Black neighborhoods which prompted Del Rucker, an African American council representative of the Sunset Mayflower district to speak in opposition.<sup>48</sup>

Cutbacks on public transportation was the destructive end to many of Black women's jobs as Household workers. Although they were still employed during the end of the decade, by 1970, their jobs the domestic service began to subside. Additionally, cutbacks on public transit effected all areas of Black life including workers, youth, the disabled, and the elderly. Functionally, the profession was more or less under the table since the household cleaning companies were not as prevalent as they would become later. So, records of employments, salaries, timesheets, formal complaints, and termination records are virtually nonexistent. Household workers' labor was invisible in almost every meaning of the word. But, it should be noted that city officials were not clueless of Black women's employment. Census records, labor statistics, and market statistics were all resources that the GEPC used to evaluate where to make cutbacks and increases. The invisible nature of domestic work made it so it was not considered in the view of city government as an important way to support families, which in turn made domestic workers more vulnerable to changes in city cutbacks in public transportation.<sup>49</sup> Rather than securing the employment of Black women, city officials chose not to care about their labor while increasing police efforts in the area. Consequently, Black workers had to find other avenues to secure their employment and communities, but were met with some limitations.

Despite the community efforts surrounding the War on Poverty and CORE that emerged in Bakersfield during the mid to late 1960s, Black workers had to take their own initiative in saving their jobs since there was not much help in these areas. This is not to not say that the War on Poverty efforts were unimportant. Indeed, these efforts cultivated an interesting and dynamic community mobilization that included Black, Brown and white residents, organizations, and civic leaders who set out to create programs to combat poverty, but there were some limitations since the federal programs was not centered on maintaining current jobs for Black working-class residents.<sup>50</sup> This was also true for CORE. Several months before the first sanitation strike, a Black resident named James Mason, who was also a member of the Bakersfield chapter CORE, was disregarded by CORE leadership about his organizing efforts for sanitation workers.

In an interview with the *Bakersfield Californian*, Ben Ratner, the organization's public relations officer, explained how the grievances of Black workers did not reflect racial discrimination. Although there was racial segregation and disparities in the sanitation department, Ratner claimed that "they [sanitation workers] are segregated because there are mostly negroes on the job. You can't complain there's discrimination just because they hire negroes only." Ratner

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<sup>48</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "City to Boost Bus Fare, End Sunday Runs,"; see also, "Council Votes for Emergency Riot Controls," March 3, 1970. Both are on the same page.

<sup>49</sup> I could not find any sources directly showing that city officials employed Black domestic workers in their homes, but given city officials' relentless pursuit to denigrate and constrain black labor, it is not unfounded that they knew who they were affecting through cutbacks.

<sup>50</sup> Rosales, "Mississippi West," p.52-120.

continues on to say that “[t]he Bakersfield chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality wishes to publicly disclaim the action attributed to it by Mr. James Mason in connection with the organization of the sanitary workers...As Core we are not in the union organizing business. Core’s business is civil rights.”<sup>51</sup>

Ratner’s statement demonstrates the indifference that many civil rights organizations exerted towards the Black working class. Instead of understanding economic and civic empowerment are interconnected, many organizations of the so-called “Big Four” focused more on civil rights while ignoring the economic foundations for many Black working residents. Additionally, even when CORE focused on economic empowerment for Black citizens, the organization focused its attention on Black representation in professional fields rather than wage labor.

### *School Segregation*

In the late 1960s, structural segregation present throughout the city’s housing markets and schools further isolated Black and Brown residents and their children from achieving equal opportunity. A report by U.S Commission on Civil Rights, noted that residential segregation was so apparent in Bakersfield, that in order to achieve “even distribution of the population” between Black and white residents, over 87% of Black residents would have to move to white neighborhoods.<sup>52</sup> Structural racism stretched beyond the workplaces of working class Black and Brown residents and into the schools of their children. In the late 1960s, racial segregation in schools between white communities and communities of color in Bakersfield was present in all levels including elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools. Conditions were so apparently discriminatory that Black and Brown parents began to organize together to fight against what they believed to be a detriment to their children’s education and future.

Black and Brown parents formulated a community level movement that place parents at the forefront of fighting for better education. Despite the Civil Rights of 1964, school district officials in Bakersfield fought rigorously against school desegregation by, among others, overcrowding children of color in under resourced schools and preventing the employment of Black and Brown teachers. On Wednesday May 8<sup>th</sup> 1968, about three dozen working class Black and Brown parents met at the Bethany Methodist Church in East Bakersfield with Harriet Ziskin, an educational specialist for the U.S Commission on Civil Rights to discuss the racist conditions in the Bakersfield schools. Black and Brown parents focused their attentions towards how segregated and under resourced their children’s schools are. For instance, Mexican parents that were present claimed that their children endured racist abuse from white teachers refusing to work with students who were Spanish-speaking.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bakersfield Californian, “Core Says Dispute Not Its Affair,” July 7<sup>th</sup> 1966.

<sup>52</sup> A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation in Public Schools*, p.12.

<sup>53</sup> Bakersfield Californian, “Five-Level Class Setup Questioned,” May 9<sup>th</sup> 1969.

Many community advocates turned their efforts towards the desegregation of the school system. For community advocates, school segregation highlighted the economic and racial inequalities that resulted from the accumulation of revenues kept within certain school boundaries. At the core of school segregation was how funding for schools ran along racial and class lines. Black and Brown parents believed that instead of financial support for students being evenly distributed throughout the city's schools, the amount of funding a particular school depended on the amount of taxable income that existed in a community which restricted the flow of financial support from wealthier schools and to poorer schools.

Following newly established guidelines around racial balance in public schools, the Kern County Committee on School District Organization, proposed a 14-district unification plan that would reorganize the school boundaries in Bakersfield and around Kern County in order to tackle racial imbalance of the different schools. For some advocates, this was a step forward in solving racial segregation, but for others this plan was not suitable enough to truly solve the problems. Beyond the discursive tensions between city officials surrounding the impact of the plan, Black and Mexican parents had another significant roadblock ahead. The large disposal of white homeowners whose influence and tenacity against racially progressive measures displayed the extent of how white homeownership identity in Bakersfield was tied to securing the racial and economic power over communities of color. Hundreds of white residents, primarily white parents attended public hearings over the plan.<sup>54</sup>

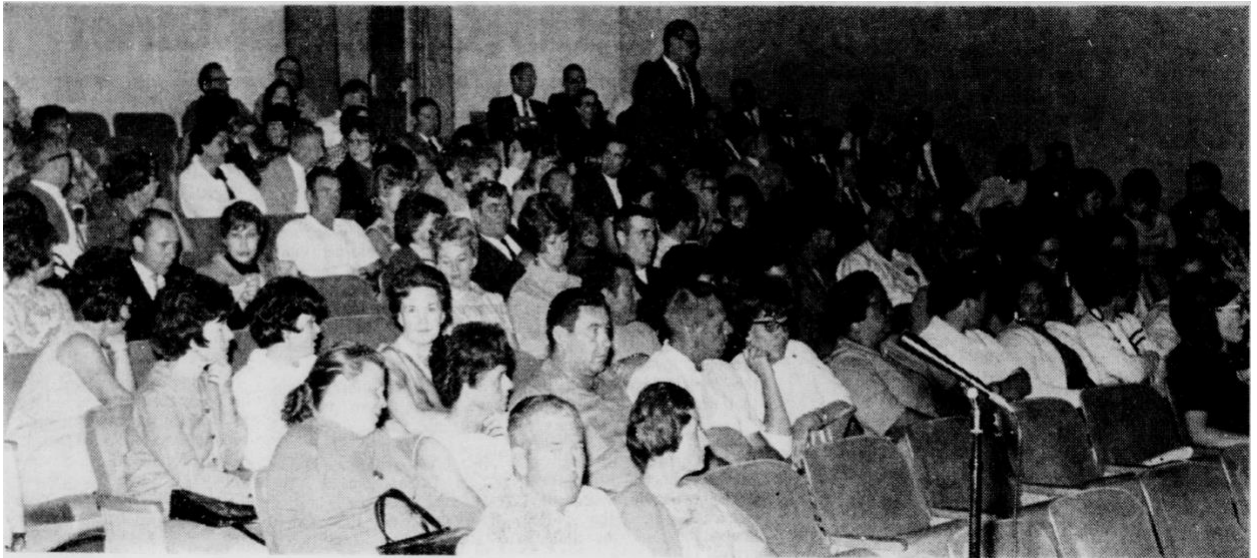


Figure 3: On October, 25, 1968, parents showed up to a district board meeting in droves about the violence of minority students in schools.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Trustees Name Two to Conduct Inquiry," October 25, 1968; see also, *Bakersfield News Bulletin*, "Names committee to probe conditions at high schools," October 27, 1968.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*,

On the surface, discourses surrounding opposition of the plan were based in the concerns that the plan inconveniences white students in particular areas who would have to be bused into other areas. During this time, however, it was not unknown that support for the district plan was a way to provide better resources for Black and Brown students and to help dismantle the prevalence of racial segregation. A preliminary report by the Health, Education, and Welfare showed that in the city's elementary schools, white teachers were not qualified to help Spanish speaking students and that the Bakersfield City School failed to make any efforts to remedy the racial dynamic in the educational system.<sup>56</sup> In addition, it was not a mystery that racial inequality was present in Bakersfield. In fact, it was believed that maintaining racial segregation meant that it would maintain economic segregation too. Support for the plan among white parents was not entirely absent. But this support was not a gesture towards supporting the plan original intent of ending racial segregation. Depending on the area of town and the type of redistricting taking place, support somewhat varied.

For instance, many white residents in the North Bakersfield area of Oildale, an exclusively white area of town, showed support for the district plan. As one white parent noted at a public hearing, "I feel the fact that not one single negro is in the northern district has great value to this [Oildale] area."<sup>57</sup> Although she spoke bluntly about her position of support towards the plan, Vanessa's statement expressed the racial sentiment that white parents and residents felt about the district plan. Kern High School District Trustee George Ablin showed opposition to the plan and displayed concern for white students being shipped out to disadvantaged schools when he stated, "[t]he 14-District plan... would impose upon a large majority of the students an unfair, unjust and inappropriate burden of less than quality education."<sup>58</sup> Ablin's words seemed to express an acknowledgement over the inadequate racial disparities that existed in schools where children of color primarily attended. White residents and city officials knew that educational disparities along racial and class lines existed, but they opposed efforts for desegregation because it would put an end to the structure that provides the affluency for their communities, neighborhoods, and schools in the first place. Overall, what the battle over the district plan demonstrates is the disposal of resources that white parents had over the lives of Black and Brown parents and children. But, more importantly, is illustrated the ways in which the racialization of public space did not just pertain to communities of color, but to the neighborhoods, businesses, and spaces of leisure of white people. White parent's concerns over their children's education in their own district was also a reflection of their views of communities and schools of color. In other words, what was implied to be true about communities of color was the implied to be opposite for white communities and therefore justifying actions that refrain from funding schools on the East side.

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<sup>56</sup> Washington Research Project, NAACP Report, *Is it Helping Poor Children?* (Washington D.C, 1969) p.32-33; see also, "Chronicle of Race and Schools", in *Equity & Excellence in Education*, (1969) p.65, DOI: [10.1080/0020486690070511](https://doi.org/10.1080/0020486690070511).

<sup>57</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "North Meeting Raises Little Boundary Dispute," November 14<sup>th</sup> 1969.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*,.

## *Youth Rebellions*

Beyond the ballot measures, city ordinances, and realtor associations, the white power structure in Bakersfield often solidified and maintained the consequences of these measures through the use of police brutality against Black and Brown communities. Law enforcement was an extension of the power that white communities had and exercised over communities of color. The traditional archives have little to no record of the daily experiences of Black residents in Bakersfield. In fact, if one were to posit the archive material as truth, then the outcome would show that racial brutality, violence, and policing never existed. Yet, the racialization of public spaces was instrumental in the perpetuation of racial segregation, structural racism, and denigration of Black labor. Although these issues prevented economic mobility and stifled organizing efforts, Black youth resistance took several forms beyond the unions, picket lines, and marches.

During the mid-to-late 1960s, despite their involvement in political movements that emerged around the issue of structural racism, many Black youth still experienced the consequences of the ways in which city officials and law enforcement officials viewed Black communities such as the deployment of racial policing in their communities. Encapsulated in a period where Black working class communities across the nation witnessed large scale economic decline and racial violence, the onset of urban rebellions became common response to their social and economic plights. For the youth of the Sunset-Mayflower district, the Bakersfield Police Department's violence against Black residents built up the frustration and resentment of youth. Police brutality is perhaps the core reason for the onset of the rebellions, the limited economic opportunities exacerbated the tensions for youth while the presence of a viable solution end structural inequalities for Black youth was absent. I use the term "rebellion" to connote how youth's responses to police brutality were not irritational actions of violence brought on by a lack of cultural morale, but rather to showcase how these rebellions were a direct response to their social and economic conditions of structural racism. Although these rebellions were not politically coordinated or well-organized, a term like "riot" only perpetuates the problem of viewing these incidents as irrational and without any real justification.

Just two weeks after the Watts Rebellion unfolded in Los Angeles, on the night of August 27<sup>th</sup> 1965, Bakersfield Police officers confronted a group of Black youth standing on the sidewalk. The two white officers intended to break up the group, but a couple of youths did not leave. It is unclear why the officers approached the youths in the first place, though perhaps they were enforcing a curfew. Whatever the reason, policers ended up arresting 17 year-old Sylvester Warner Jr. and his younger brother 15 year-old Vernon Warner for failing to disperse and for resisting arrest. For what seemed to be unwarranted arrests, these actions sparked a reaction from youths as 40 officers descended upon Lakeview Ave which resulted in the arrests 10 Black youth and adults. In the aftermath, damage was costly, but the economic opportunities for youth continued to be constricted to low paying wage work. Frustration and anger from Black residents, in



particular youth, remained high as law enforcement officers continued to exert racial violence against residents in the community.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 4: Officers Patrolling Lakeview Ave after youth rebellion sparks arrests<sup>60</sup>



Figure 5: Deputies with police dogs on Lakeview Ave after youth rebellion sparks arrests<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Arrest of Youth Sparks Two Hours of Unrest," August 28, 1965.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1966, two white patrolmen approached a minor traffic accident alongside California Ave between two Black residents. Across the street at California Park, Black youth watched as they perceived the officers' behaviors towards one of the residents to be denigrating. From that point, frustrations mounted as youth began shouting back and forth with officers. In turn, BPD dispatched dozens of police officers to the park as youth resisted the advances of several police officers. In the end, thousands of dollars of property was damaged, one youth was shot in the leg, and dozens more were arrested.<sup>62</sup> Acts of police violence were not merely based in the individual actions of police officers towards residents. Rather, the presence of police brutality was part of a much more structural process related to the racialization and regulation of youth and public space.

The limited economic choices available to Black youth, primarily were in low wage service jobs or the fields, the educational disparities, and police brutality were all inextricably linked to these youth rebellion. Educational disparities meant that college and better paying jobs were not afforded to Black youth while police brutality imploded their frustrations and anger towards their social conditions. In between the educational disparities and police brutality against Black youth, limited economic opportunities prevented a hopeful future for Black youth looking to escape the impact of structural racism. Low wage jobs like the car washes or in the cotton fields were not just temporary jobs that youth used to make some extra money on the side.

Instead, these employment opportunities were the few offered for many Black youth as long-term employment options that stifled economic mobility and empowerment. When asked about the causes of these youth rebellions, Jim Mason responded “[t]here’s no place to go to work outside of the fields or car washes.”<sup>63</sup> In turn, it is important to understand that the rebellions that emerged during the late 1960s were rational responses to the underlying conditions of economic exploitation and racialized social control of Black communities. As one Black youth told a reporter of the *Bakersfield Californian* after Lakeview rebellion, “Give us some jobs—post office, stock clerks, driving delivery trucks, we don’t want the fields.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Swearing Fires, Bottle Tossing Mark Unrest Area,” May 24, 1966.

<sup>63</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Young Folk Need Jobs, Aide Says,” May 24, 1966.

<sup>64</sup> Bill Gharrity, *Bakersfield Californian*, “Negro Youths Want Brighter Future for their Children,” May 25, 1966.



Figure 6: Black youth at California Park venting their frustrations after two days of rebellion against police and economic hardship.<sup>65</sup>

As social venues began to open, patrons also took with them white people's perception about them. The racialization of these public venues cannot be attributed to any particular behavior brought on by patrons and dancegoers. It is crucial that scholars think about the ways in which the venues, music, styles of clothing, and sections of town were already racialized before patrons arrived. Essentially, the structural boundaries of race were already cemented in the social, geographic, and economic fabric of Bakersfield's East side before venues for youths sprang up.<sup>66</sup> On July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1969, city recreation officials hosted a teen dance at the Fraternal Hall on 410 E. California Ave. Around 200 primarily Black youth from the surrounding high schools of Bakersfield were in attendance. Three adult chaperones were also present keeping the dance going as youth began to arrive. Sometime during the dance, commotion ensued outside of the fraternal hall. A police officer claimed that someone had shattered the back window of his car. In response, the police officer left and returned with a riot squad and forced organizers to end the dance. Despite the dance being over, Bakersfield Police Officers initiated mass beatings and arrests against the youth and dance chaperones, which ended with seven youth being arrested for resisting arrest and assault on police officers. What ensued was a battle between Black residents and the Bakersfield police department. For Black residents, they urged all charges to be dropped against the seven youth and that disciplinary action be issued against the officers involved.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bill Gharrity, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Negro Youths Want Brighter Future for their Children," May 25, 1966.

<sup>66</sup> See George Lipsitz's "White Spatial Imaginary", in *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011) p.25-50; For a look into how white residents craft an understanding of white spaces then see also Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Seven Arrested at Dance Hall", July 24, 1969; also, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Dance Hall Incident Still has Repercussions," October 21, 1969. Notes from Ralph

In an interview with a reporter, a chaperone at the event, Caren Floyd, who was 25 at the time and has since passed away, stated that “teens were very cooperative and started leaving the dance peacefully. About half of the boys and girls were out of the hall when girls and boys started screaming and yelling and running [back] into the hall...then they [police] on us...I told them I was a chaperone and he said ‘get the hell out.’”<sup>68</sup> Her husband, Ernest Floyd, who was also a chaperone stated that, “I believe it started outside the hall and then came inside. The police rushed in the hall and started grabbing people and started beating people up. I tried to cover up my wife from being beaten by police officers. It was just so much going on I was just ready to get out of there.”<sup>69</sup> One of the youth arrested, Mujehad Abdul-Qadir (known then as Julius Brooks Jr.), sustained multiple injuries from officers who beat him relentlessly. “Julius was got it the worst. I remember they took him to the hospital afterwards,” lamented Wayne Johnson. Recent health issues have made it difficult for Mujehad to speak when I interviewed him. But these issues did not affect his memory in the slightest. Over 50 years later, now residing in Georgia, the details from Mujehad’s interview still matches much of the community’s voices and official statements from law enforcement officials during the time of the incident and the months that followed. Mujehad stated:

The MC announced that they were having problems outside...the dance was over when I came outside...We were in the parking lot and the police were all across the street...The sergeant announced that we were disturbing the peace [and] he said that we should go home...we just looked at him...This policeman approached me and put his hands on me. I resisted his advances and then he beat me with his stick. But, I resisted.<sup>70</sup>

Much like the rebellions that sprang up in the Lakeview area, Mujehad’s recollection of what happened reveals the daily acts of racial aggression that police officers exerted towards Black youth. Yet, it also reveals that despite the fact that the charges of resisting arrest and assault on a police officer was a default charge that white officers often charged people of color, there were people who indeed resisted but not in ways or for the reasons one might think.<sup>71</sup> Mujehad’s resistance was not based in some random act of aggression towards police officers, but rather it was a response to what he considered to be an unjust arrest and an unwarranted assault on his body as well as his dignity. It is true that economic and racial oppression surrounded the daily lives of youths causing them to rebel, but it was the attacks on their cultural dignity that led many youth to resist police officers beyond the infrapolitical.

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Anthony, Wayne Johnson, Mujehad Abdul-Qadir, and Steve Powers interview by Daniel Rios; see also, *Bakersfield News Bulletin*, “Arrests of Youths Trigger Melee,” July 27 1969.

<sup>68</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Black Citizens Accuse Officers of Brutality,” July 26, 1969.

<sup>69</sup> Ernest Floyd, phone interview by Daniel Rios, June 20, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Mujehad Qadir Interview by Daniel Rios, March 23, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Ralph Anthony Interview by Daniel Rios, February 20, 2018. Ralph, now over 80 years old, mentioned that as far back as he can remember, any interaction with police officers could result in a false like resisting arrest or assault on a police officer.

What is not clear is the extent of this violence. Many of the Black residents proclaimed that these incidents were played up by news reporters. One thing is clear though, there was a clear disdain between the community and the *Bakersfield Californian*. Within a period of six years, youth rebellions against the police took place in the Lakeview and cottonwood districts. members of the media reported the incidents as stemming from lawless youth while ignoring police brutality as the underlying causes. In the opinions of Black residents, the news outlets and city officials worked together to fictionize the causes of youth rebellions while covering up actions of the police. In an editorial, editors of the *Bakersfield Californian* wrote firmly about their support for police officers and who was to blame for the fraternal hall assault. The editorial wrote:

“This newspaper challenges those claiming police over-reaction to produce concrete evidence...Bakersfield’s black community, by the same token, has the responsibility of providing guidance and counsel its youth. Responsible Negro adults should have straightened out the unruly youngsters who precipitated before the situation got out of hand.”<sup>72</sup>

The *Bakersfield Californian* was a part of a structure of white supremacy which took a political stance against efforts for racial and economic justice. The editors’ opinions obfuscated the reality of racially motivated police violence. For instance, in an interview with former BPD officer Steve Powers, when I asked him about racial bias among police officers, he stated the following:

There [were] things [officers] could do like get in a fight with somebody and use excess [force] on a person but it wouldn’t become an issue. Because back in those days it was like the dark ages. There were no cell phones, no video cameras, there was no helicopters for the ABC news with cameras looking. It was just one word [of a officer] against another person’s word. There was definitely a conservative bent there [in Bakersfield]...but I kept my mouth shut...Sometimes I would hear police use bad language like ‘Nigger’. Some police officers would tell me, ‘this thing that we call a baton, we sometimes call a Nigger knocker’”.<sup>73</sup>

The candid culture of racism that Steve Powers expressed seemingly was widespread. It was not a few bad cops but indicative of the entire department. Powers was one of the officers who was there that night at the Fraternal Hall. When he got back to the precinct, he wrote his version of the police report and submitted. Consequently, officer Powers was prevented from submitting his official report. He was contacted by his higher ups to change his version of the report to match that of a fake one constructed by the department. In turn, he resigned from the department and testified at the grand jury hearing. Even with a white police officer backing up the testimonies of the youth and

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<sup>72</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Let’s Get All the Facts!,” August 1, 1969.

<sup>73</sup> Steve Powers Interview by Daniel Rios, January 24, 2018.

chaperones, the all-white jury still decided to convict those arrested with resisting arrest and assault on a police officer.<sup>74</sup>

By the early to mid 1970s, Black sanitation workers, domestic workers, and cotton pickers were devastated by the structural changes from union busting, erosive cutbacks, wage stagnation, poverty, and unemployment. The cutting of public services, sanitation jobs, and having no recourse for workers demonstrated what labor did and did not matter to the city. However, it was not just that the city had no plan to deal with the consequences of these changes, but rather city officials were central players in the efforts of containing and dismantling the economic opportunities of Black residents. With economic opportunities constrained, city officials reigned in on policing youth more rigorously in all aspects of youth's lives. As far as city officials were concerned, Black and Brown youth were future criminals whose deviant behavior stemmed from a lack of moral, a culture of poverty, and an apathy to do better in society.<sup>75</sup>

The policing of youth was encapsulated within an historical and political context where city officials utilized the police to contain Black residents in low wage jobs such as domestic work, sanitation work, and migrant labor. Although the structural impact was devastating for black residents and youth, it is important to remember that the organizing efforts and youth rebellions were the initiatives in which Black residents had to take in order to secure their employment, communities, and futures. Rather than viewing Black workers as unorganized and apathetic, their methods of organizing must be situated within a broader scope of political resistance that includes both the informal and formal

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<sup>74</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, "Riot Trial Jury Convicts Three," Oct 4, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> Report on the Bakersfield Hearing on Juvenile Justice (Sacramento, 1974).

## Chapter Three: The Labor of Sound and Space: The Original Souls and East Bakersfield Sound

Among the structural inequalities of racial segregation and increased policing, working class youth developed ways to renegotiate racial, class, and ethnic boundaries. Where rules and boundaries existed, youth found ways around them by taking part in the “evasive actions” of the everyday. What bounded them in the schools and the fields, connected them in the dance halls and created new avenues of possibilities for cultural exchange. Spaces for youth events were positioned all throughout the city. Whereas prominent spots like Rainbow Gardens and Fraternal Hall regularly hosted music events, promoters, bands, and patrons had the choice to choose from a variety of spots that could be transformed from a space filled with union organizers planning out a strike on one day to being filled with youth dancing to the sounds of R&B on another. These spaces included the Elks lodge, the Veterans hall, the Women’s club, and the many union halls sparsely located throughout the East side of town.<sup>76</sup> Inside of these halls, were the racial, class, and cultural boundaries that conditioned their formative years,

The Bakersfield dance hall culture of the late 1960s permeated throughout the town’s youth communities. On any given night, dance halls across the city, particularly in East Bakersfield, encountered groups of youth looking to hear the top hit on the radio or their favorite record while dancing the night away. This dance hall culture did not spontaneously emerge out of nowhere, but rather the music and dance hall culture of East Bakersfield in the mid to late 1960s was the outcome of the long established cultural and music styles of the late 1950s. Beyond the imagery and narratives of the Bakersfield Sound, the “East Bakersfield Sound,” as local musician Billy Haynes put it, had a strong history of sonically filling the radio waves and dance halls of Bakersfield’s East side, Kern County, and even across the nation.<sup>77</sup> In the Central Valley, doo wop groups, a popular genre of Rhythm & Blues that dominated the music charts during that time formed and performed in dance halls and music venues throughout the Valley from Stockton to Fresno to Bakersfield.

The first African American doo wop group from Bakersfield were The Colts, who formed during the mid-1950s. The Colts saw success with their single “Adorable,” which topped the national charts at #11, but eventually disbanded in 1959. One of the most notable doo wop groups from Bakersfield was The Paradons. Formed in Bakersfield in the late 1950s, The Paradons were a Black group that sung doo wop. Members included West Tyler, who was the lead singer, Chuck Weldon Billy Myers, and William Powers. Fitted out in matching suits while wearing the signature conk hairstyles, The Paradons were able to top the billboard at number 18 with their single “Diamonds and Pearls” as well as even aired on an episode of *American Bandstand* in September 1960. However,

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<sup>76</sup> Bakersfield City Directories, 1969 in Local History Room, Kern County Public Library.

<sup>77</sup> Phone Interview with Billy Haynes, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2018. He explained how when people think about music in Bakersfield, the only musicians mentioned are Merle Haggard and Buck Owens. However, Billy coined the term the “East Bakersfield Sound” as a way to show how the music culture of East Bakersfield during the 1950s and 1960s was primarily Black and Brown and distinct from the Bakersfield Sound, which was based in country music.

just like with The Colts, they broke up soon after without very little recognition. Even though the group witnessed a short success on the national scene like the Colts, The Paradons were real music innovators of Bakersfield's music scene and would go on to inspire an entire generation of young musicians throughout the east side of Bakersfield.

The sounds of R&B and soul were present in Bakersfield and throughout Kern County. Just up the highway in north Kern County in Delano, "The Rhythm Kings," a Mexican group that played R&B throughout the dance halls of Delano and the Central Valley from 1960 to 1963. Their 13 year old lead singer named Ray Jimenez, eventually moved down to L.A and became the leader of "Thee Midnites" for a short time. The Rhythm Kings eventually went on to form "Al Garcia and The Rhythm Kings" which adopted a fusion of instrumentals from R&B, surf, and rock n roll with the sounds of Mexican music in their prominent hits like "Pachuco Soul" and "Soul Surfin.'" Despite his split from the Rhythm Kings and move to L.A and the change in line up, both Richard Jimenez (Little Ray) and Al Garcia and the Rhythm Kings continued to gain a following in the Central Valley throughout the 1960s.

Twenty minutes south of Bakersfield, in the small town of Lamont, known as "little Mexico," groups like "The Monterrey's," a soulful doo wop band, attracted crowds of Mexican residents and youth in Bakersfield, Lamont, and throughout the Kern County area during the early 1960s. Lead vocalist and song writer, Manuel Canez wrote the group's two most prominent songs, "Send me a letter" and "Darlin (Love you so)" in 1962. Indeed, it is quite difficult to label each band neatly in a musical, but this is because each band was influenced by the specific area in which they lived. In some cases, each group added their own twist to fit the popular trends specific to their town, and in other cases, the mixed cultural dynamics allowed for bands to experiment with both traditional and new styles of music. Overall, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, towns across Kern County witnessed the formation of a hybrid musical landscape among Black and Brown communities that was influenced by the popular trends and sounds of R&B, doo wop, and rock n roll, but also blended with the specific racial, ethnic, and cultural fabric in the rural areas of each communities.

### *A New Generation of Culture: The Original Souls and Blue Rose*

In Bakersfield in the late 1960s, the landscape of the dance hall culture was multiracial. Depending on the music being played, location of the hall, and the promotion dances were at times ethnic specific. Even with these barriers, one thing is for certain, interethnic and interracial cooperation flourished as Black and Brown youth across the East, Southeast, and East central Bakersfield went to halls despite the racial, cultural, and class boundaries. Some of the bands reflected the multiracial makeup of the audiences. Two weeks before Police officers entered the Fraternal Hall and proceeded to beat and arrest youth, dance-goers arrived to celebrate the opening of the space. One of the bands performing at the opening was called The Original Souls, which was promoted by Joe Orosco, a prominent music promoter during the 1960s. The Paradons not only influenced musicians but laid the foundation of the area's cultural landscape for Black and Brown residents and youth. By the time The Original Souls came to the scene, there was already over a decade of R&B at the forefront of the radios, bars, pool halls, and dance halls of



Black and Brown residents throughout East Bakersfield. The Original Souls was a notable soul based band that played music at school events, parks, dance halls across East Bakersfield. Where ever promoters advertised where the music would play, it was widely known that the space would be packed when the Original Souls were present.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the racial, cultural, and class boundaries that existed within the city, the Original Souls was a multiracial group that had two Black members Billy Haynes and Ron Goosby, two Mexican members, John Diosdado and Mike Bonilla, a white band member Jack Swift, and Richard Rugnao, a half Mexican and Filipino drummer and lead vocalist for the bands. Their focus music was R&B and Soul music, but their multiracial makeup and Richard Rugnao's soulful voice allowed them to transcend musical genres and cross fertilize musical and cultural styles. Billy recalled, "Me and Johnny Diosdado...started trying to recruit people. And then we heard about this Filipino guy from Lamont that was playing in another band and he was the singer and the drummer. So we went to go check him out was like 'that's they guy we need!'"<sup>79</sup> Richard actually grew up in Lamont, the same town that the Monterey's were from and played. The multiracial makeup and various styles made The Original Souls a versatile weapon in the music culture of East Bakersfield. Depending on the event and crowd, The Original Souls even played corridos for Mexican audiences in the predominately Mexican neighborhoods of La Colonia and The Loma in Bakersfield and the predominately Mexican cities like Lamont, Shafter, Arvin, and Delano.<sup>80</sup>



Figure 7: A picture of the main three members, (From left to right) Billy Haynes, Richard Rugnao, and Mike Bonilla, of the Original Souls taken sometime in the mid-1970s.

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<sup>78</sup> Billy Haynes interview by Daniel Rios June 27<sup>th</sup> 2018

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

<sup>80</sup> Advertisements in the local newspapers and music pamphlets indicate that the Original Souls were booked in venues all throughout Bakersfield and Kern county.

Another local band was The Blue Rose, a multiracial group popular in the garage band and backyard party scene in Bakersfield during the 1960s. The Blue Rose, who also played in dance halls and music venues throughout the county, was mixed with two Mexican members Ygnacio “Nacho” Espinoza and Leo Mendez as well as two white members Brent Stickler and Pat Clark. Together, the members played in and out dance halls, backyard parties, and cultural celebrations during the 1960s. “It seemed at that time there were lots of garage bands playing for weddings and private backyard parties,” stated Ygnacio Espinoza, bass and sax player for the Blue Rose, “quite a few of these bands were mixed race and several were economically diverse... We were a very good cover band and played top 40 across all genres. Hendricks, CCR, Moddy Blues, Beatles, Santana, Booker T and the MGs, James Brown, Jimmy Walker and the All Stars. If it was on the radio and [was] hot we played it.”<sup>81</sup>



Figure 8: Ygnacio “Nacho” Espinoza and Leo Mendez of the Blue Rose perform at a school dance July 1969.

Blue Rose’s mixing of R&B and rock n roll as well as their racial makeup meant that they were able to tap into youth audiences and areas outside of east Bakersfield. The Original Souls and Blue Rose’s audiences, styles, and cultural expressions were similar and different in many ways, but both contributed to the dance hall culture of the late 1960s. In terms of music, Bakersfield has been known for country musicians like Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, but what gets lost are the sounds and tunes that traveled throughout the eastside of town in Black and Brown working class communities. “Those guys [Buck Owens and Merle Haggard] went on to do a bunch of different things, but there was definitely a musical culture going on here that had nothing to do with that over

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<sup>81</sup> Ygnacio Espinoza email with Daniel Rios, January 14, 2018.

there.”<sup>82</sup> Essentially, by experimenting with the resources available to them, these youths were able to creatively craft a new direction of dance hall culture and music that shaped and reshaped the racial, class, and cultural boundaries throughout the city.

### *Youth Culture: Labor and Leisure*

Understanding class purely as an economic category is reductive. It only evaluates how much money someone makes and places into categories such as middle class and working class that are in many ways arbitrary. To understand class, one needs to examine beneath the surface and look at how it plays out during the everyday. The racial and class neighborhood boundaries of Bakersfield were clear on the surface. Political discourse, city ordinances, law enforcement, and labor organizing made it clear that boundaries were apparent in the daily experiences of Black and Brown communities. But, beneath the surface lied a more complex and complicated landscape that illustrated that in spite of the racial and class boundaries throughout Bakersfield, the everyday lives of youth demonstrated just how fragile and at times how blurred these boundaries were. “Economically we were pretty diverse. Leo didn’t come from a poor poor family but he was probably lower maybe middle class, I was middle class although I didn’t think so at the time. Pat Clark...lived out up on the hill. I remember him inviting us over for breakfast one day. He said ‘come on over man’ and we went over to and he pulled out [of the fridge] fresh strawberries. I mean I ate fresh fruit but I had to pick it.”<sup>83</sup>

Although band member Pat Clark was white and lived on the northeast part of Bakersfield on the hill, a section of town that wealthier predominately white residents lived, Ygnacio and Leo identified with Pat as a fellow band member making music. It was the music product that bought them together beyond the class, racial, and cultural differences. As Ygnacio pointed out, the Band members were not ignorant to the apparent class differences. Their neighborhoods, their parents’ occupations, their access to musical equipment, and their food ways all revealed the racial and class differences that were present between them and in Bakersfield. Yet, playing together also reveals the cooperation and negotiation that occurred in spite of these boundaries. In fact, Ygnacio mentioned that “In his [Pat’s] living [room] he had a big Hammond C3 organ which was not the portable model. It was like night and day [between us]. But, he was a band member and when I made suggestions for a play or registrations, then he was a part of the team and we got along.”<sup>84</sup>

With the exception of Jack Swift who was lower middle class and had access to musical equipment, the members of the original souls were all from working class backgrounds whose families either worked in the fields or did other forms of wage work. Billy Haynes was raised by his grandparents whom were his parental guardians. Given their economic status, much of their audiences and bookings were situated in the halls and venues of East Bakersfield. Gathering a fanbase that transcended the racial and class

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<sup>82</sup> Billy Haynes Interview by Daniel Rios, June 27, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Ygnacio “Nacho” Espinoza interview by Daniel Rios March 4<sup>th</sup> 2018

<sup>84</sup> Ygnacio Espinoza, interview by Daniel Rios, March 4, 2018.

boundaries in East Bakersfield was not as difficult as it was to garner support in middle-class white communities. But, it was not impossible. One method of renegotiating racial and class boundaries between white communities and communities of color was through popularizing their reputation. “We played every place but the white places,” recollected Billy Haynes. But, as they increased their reputation the band was able to transcend boundaries. He continued, “we were able to cross the freeway...started playing a lot of high school dances...we even played at North high school.”<sup>85</sup> Prior to the construction of Highway 99, Union Ave, the old 99, was a physical marker that separated Bakersfield’s West and East communities. Transcending racial and class boundaries didn’t mean that they stopped existing. Instead, through their labor, youth were able to navigate the landscape in order to secure and expand their economic opportunities across boundaries.

Traditional ways of thinking about labor center on physical work that includes compensation. This view constricts any examination of labor to the confines of when someone is on the clock and has a formal job. Many scholars have attempted to expand this view of labor. Scholars have largely ignored both the labor of youth and how they are situated within social and labor movements. Although youth couldn’t formally strike, join unions, or vote which made their impact in labor and community organizing limited, but they were still politically active. Youth were involved in the organizing efforts of community organizations and campaigns through petitioning, canvassing, and even political education. They were a part of youth councils for various community organizations and formed student organizations like the Black Student Union which organized against police brutality and racial violence occurring on and off campus.

Still, for these youths, it is quite difficult to think about labor and leisure as distinct when the structural dynamics of policing and racial violence from working in the fields are seeping into the spaces of leisure. That is, the spaces that youth utilized to develop creative methods for economic empowerment and to contest the structural racism that produced the limited economic opportunities for Black and Brown youth were being contested by increasing racial policing. As Robin Kelley explains “in a postindustrial economy, fewer opportunities for wage work that might be financially or even psychologically fulfilling, art and performance—forms of labor not always seen as labor—become increasingly visible as options to joblessness and low-wage service work.”<sup>86</sup> Undergirding Kelley’s sentiment of rethinking how we understand the labor of youth in the context of social control and economic decline includes an ability to think about these forms of labor as not just for economic gain but also for “the visceral pleasures of the form, the aesthetic quality of the product, the victory, the praise.”<sup>87</sup>

The “product” could be anything that generates an extra source of income. For youth like Billy Haynes and Ygnacio, the “product” was music. Beyond the economic gain, making and playing music provided an outlet for exerting agency over their own labor. As Ygnacio remarked, “It was about the music man. It was getting together and

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<sup>85</sup> Billy Haynes, interview by Daniel Rios, June 27, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Robin D.G Kelley, *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997) p.75.

<sup>87</sup> Kelley, *Yo Mama’s* p.75.

playing and finding the product, trying to make a good product, trying to move something ourselves.”<sup>88</sup> On the one hand, music making was a way for youth to culturally express themselves in creative ways that would otherwise not be possible. And, on the other hand, music making was an arduous form of physical, cultural, and intellectual labor whereby youth had to find ways to negotiate the racial and class boundaries in the community while having to maintain the amount of prominence in the community. In other words, sounding good and looking good was hard but essential for survival since the popular styles of music, clothes, language, and geography were constantly being made and remade to fit the particular needs of the community.

In addition, music-making was a changing economy both physically and culturally. For every conk hairstyle, two or three afros were in the crowd. Musicians had to traverse the terrain of Bakersfield’s political and economic boundaries. For bands like the Original Souls, the generational shift of musical and cultural styles was not difficult to adapt to given their multiracial status. Each member brought with them their own unique style which made The Original Souls, as Billy Haynes put it, “not only just a band, but a cultural experience man.”<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that not every dance hall was viewed in the same way. It was known to many youth that there was an informal, though constantly changing, hierarchy to what halls were more prominent. For musicians like Billy Haynes, some venues had a rigorous vetting process, which either made or broke the existence of some bands. Some hotels like the Caravan Inn, Ramada Inn, Bakersfield Inn had prominent bars and banquet halls that hosted music shows during the nights. These places mainly booked more experienced and popular out of town bands traveling throughout the state. Unlike the Original Souls, very few local bands ever made it to the level of playing at the Caravan Inn.<sup>90</sup>

Black and Brown youth also sought out ways to make money outside of the formal economy. Working in the fields meant extra cash in their pockets. However, with seasonal changes, shifting wages, and the harsh working conditions, the fields sometimes took a backseat to other more fulfilling methods of economic gain such as gambling. The residential and commercial makeup of Lakeview Ave in Bakersfield during the late 1960s provided an accessible and social atmosphere where youth could participate. Lakeview Ave and Cottonwood Road was a long commercial strip of businesses such as pool halls, grocery markets, restaurants, and dance halls that were sparsely connected with neighborhoods, apartment complexes, and project housing.<sup>91</sup> The diverse arrangement of residential and commercial meant that patrons and even youth frequented the establishments for essential needs and social fulfillments. This was true for places like The Cotton Club, which was a grocery store, pool hall, and dance hall all in one. Depending on the time of day, the Cotton Club was a place where residents could buy their groceries and learn about the music lineup and theme later on that night. It even provided a space for migrant workers to destress after a day of laboring as the name

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<sup>88</sup> Ygnacio Espinoza, interview by Daniel Rios, March 4, 2018

<sup>89</sup> Billy Haynes, phone interview by Daniel Rios June 21<sup>st</sup> 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Billy Haynes, interview by Daniel Rios, June 27, 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Bakersfield City Directories 1968 in Local History Room, Kern County Public Library, Bakersfield, California. Notes from Wayne Johnson Interview, by Daniel Rios, June 23, 2018.

Cotton Club was not a coincidence. In fact, the Cotton Club was a music venue that generations of migrant workers, musicians, and residents frequented in southeast Bakersfield.

The open and social environment also meant that youth were subject to push back from residents and harsher policing. One of the most popular forms of gambling among youth in the area was “craps,” a gambling dice game that involved betting on the numeric outcome of each roll of the dice. “Craps” or “shooting craps”, is an inherently social game whereby players vocally cheer in anticipation of each outcome, get into scrimmages after loss of money, and also involved capping on each other after every roll. On the one hand, the ample public space allowed for a craps game to be played in a parking lot, an alley way, and even on a sidewalk. Yet, on the other hand, the open and social space of Lakeview and Cottonwood Road along with the shouting and loud-talking during a craps game had the potential to audibly aggravate the surrounding residents and increase policing. In fact, city officials and the area’s more conservative residents produced efforts to stop this informal economy. After receiving complaints from some of the area’s residents, Del Rucker, the only African American representative on the city council actually called on the Bakersfield Police department and the city manager to figure out ways to stop youth from gambling.<sup>92</sup>

The social interactions from gambling gave a sense of psychological fulfillment for youth looking to make some money outside of the formal economic structure, but informal economic methods were deployed in employment formal spaces. Although physical labor was arduous, this did not mean that youth were not creative in finding ways to make the time in the fields a bit easier, amusing, and more lucrative. While working in the cotton fields, Black youth took longer breaks or created their own breaks, pan-toted melons and plums or whatever they picked that was in season, and stole time laughing and capping on each other.<sup>93</sup> Laughing about his experience working in the fields, Wayne remarked, “we would be joking around with each other and capping on each other. They had people go on the bus and steal people’s lunches. It would be a few during the breaks where they would get a gambling dice game going.” Just because youth also found ways to deploy play-labor when working in the cotton fields did not mean that working in the fields was play, but rather the fields provided a space where youth could steal time and plan out the night’s festivities, who was playing where, and who was throwing a party. “It was almost every weekend they had a party,” said Wayne Johnson.<sup>94</sup> The constant flow of backyard parties, shows in the park, and dance halls meant youth had numerous viable options for leisure.

Depending upon the promoter and location, Black and Brown youth had to make choices on how far they would travel, how much money they could spend, and what type of night they wanted to have. For dancegoers, these choices were mitigated by both the amount of money at their expense and the resources available to them. The dance hall scene was a cultural economy for youth to expend the economic gains of their labor and

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<sup>92</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “Rucker Asks City to Stop Crap Games,” October 28, 1969. See also, Bakersfield City Council Minutes, October 27, 1969, p.213.

<sup>93</sup> Capping is a term that means making fun of someone.

<sup>94</sup> Wayne Johnson, interview by Daniel Rios, June 23, 2018.

traverse the cultural landscape of the city. For many Black youth who spent the day working in cotton fields, the dances provided a way to destress from the arduous labor earlier in the day. Once the picking was over, there had to be a recovery period from the fields to the dance halls. Soreness and even injuries were a common outcome after working in the fields. The scars and strained muscles from work traveled with them where ever they went, but by nighttime the sheer anticipation of partying set in and the soreness and agony from the fields was no longer an important focus. “it was like when you got home and you were tired and then once you took a shower and it started getting dark when it was time go out and party you started feeling good again.”<sup>95</sup> Essentially, releasing the agony from hard labor was both a mental and physical process as youth sought out leisure as a way of destressing.

For the dancegoers, attending a dance hall was itself a laborious process. Given the limited income of many working class youth, getting dressed, organizing venues, and protecting one’s own involved a lot of labor. If one were to ruin their clothes by staining or ripping them then it would cost money to repair or replace them. Sometimes the amount of money to replace clothes would be outside of their economic means, so many youth made sure to their gear was kept fresh. Also, the distance from one’s neighborhood to a dance hall on a different part of town was difficult for youth who didn’t have to the means pay bus fare and entry admission. In fact, when the city council cut the evening and Sunday bus routes of the Lakeview area, it took away access for many Black and Brown youth that would travel to spaces and halls located downtown or in south Bakersfield. This form of “*transit racism*” confined many working class youth to the physical proximity of their neighborhoods.<sup>96</sup> Even within the sprawling makeup of East Bakersfield, walking to a hall, depending on where one lived, could be an unviable option not just in terms of mere distance but walking in the heat caused sweat. Moreover, the circumventing of city services to middle class neighborhoods and business districts where patrons frequented led to a lot of sidewalks from being paved or repaved when broken up or worn out. In turn, this had the potential for dirtying up shoes or dresses, but caused youth to walk in the street and subjected them to citations and arrests by police. So, an often simple remedy that youth engaged in was just bringing the party home.

Backyard house parties was a prominent phenomenon in East Bakersfield during the 1960s. Depending on the setup, backyard parties were both cheaper for the dancegoers and lucrative for musicians. Birthday parties, cultural celebrations, and house parties meant that bands like the Blue Rose and Original Souls had a constant source of income if and when bookings at dance halls fell through. For the dancegoers, house parties were cheaper to host and attend. If youth could not afford to pay a band than the records was an adequate alternative for live music and most of the parties were set up this way.<sup>97</sup> House parties were not free from policing since police often broke up these parties through racial violence and arrests. But, the parties allowed youth to privately engage in the most uncensored forms of resistance outside of the scope of city regulation. Unfortunately, since these parties were internally situated in one’s neighborhood, it

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.,.

<sup>96</sup> Gaye Johnson, *Sounds of Solidarity*, p.2.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Wayne Johnson

meant that the racial, ethnic, and cultural exchange and mixing that took place inside dance halls would be significantly decreased or some cases nonexistent.

Nevertheless, Black and Brown youth did not have to be present in the same space for cultural exchange to occur. Historian Gaye Johnson introduces the concept of soundscape, which meant that cultural exchange also happened through “radios in living rooms, bedrooms, neighborhood hangouts, and automobiles” across the city and within each neighborhood.<sup>98</sup> When asked about the types of music youth playing at the dance halls and over the radio, Wayne Johnson remarked, “soul, black [music], temptations, Smokey Robinson. Most of the Mexicans listened to it too... We had radio stations and they be blowing it just as hard as we was.”<sup>99</sup> In this sense, the physical and geographic area of East Bakersfield was not just a landscape where youth worked in the fields and lived in the neighborhoods but an arena of cultural exchange and negotiation shaped through a nexus of youth labor, culture, and music.

Yet, cultural exchange between Black and Brown youth did not just manifest itself in the limited spaces of dance halls or during the formation of soundscapes of the East Side, but also a visual display of interracial cooperation played out on the television screens of working-class families. Local broadcast television was a new medium that allowed for the influx of local advertisements and performances from local artists. During the late 1960s, KERO 23, an NBC affiliate hosted Don Rodewald’s “The Afternoon Show” on weekday afternoons in Bakersfield from 3:00 to 5:00pm. The Original Souls also played live on this show. The visual image of an integrated band playing R&B in the midst of social turmoil, violence, and resistance was a profound sight for many Black and Brown residents not just youth. Although renegotiating boundaries proved to be temporary and, in some ways, ephemeral, what mattered to youth were the psychological benefits. It is only understandable that leisure and labor were intertwined.<sup>100</sup>

### *Youth Resistance and Cultural Exchange*

Venues like the Fraternal Hall were subject to city’s regulations such as curfews and police patrols and received much criticism from white officials. But even with the specter of policing and regulations, the formation of a music venue was not constrained to the physical space of a music dance hall. Sometimes a backyard house party provided the freedom from the ordinances that constrained the length and function of an event. Even within these public spaces, there were things outside the bounds of regulations that even the most conservative legislation could not police and regulate. Racial policing of youth did not only exist in the dance halls or walking along Cottonwood beyond a curfew, but schools became a site of policing. For instance, in August 1969, two weeks after the fraternal hall incident, the Kern High School District voted to implement district wide dress and hair codes for all students. Many Black parents and students believed that

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>99</sup> Wayne Johnson, interview by Daniel Rios, June 23, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Billy Haynes, interview by Daniel Rios, June 27, 2018.



these codes were directed towards Black students as it placed certain restrictions on the types of clothes students could wear and the length of hair students could wear out.

The justification of the codes was based in protecting the order on the different campuses. As the district superintendent remarked, “we are responsible to the taxpayers of this community to provide a decent and orderly campus on which students can study and learn undisturbed.”<sup>101</sup> Despite the sentiment of providing an adequate learning environment for all students, it was no mystery that white parents and officials were at the forefront of initiating the onset of these codes. A year prior, in 1968, hundreds of white parents organized in critical mass at the Kern High School District Board of Trustee meeting to express their fears of minority students’ violence against white students in the high schools and that “double standards of discipline” were happening where white students were being disciplined through suspension more than Black students for the same incidents. In spite of parent’s concerns, board members actually provided evidence showing the opposite, that Black students were being suspended more than white students and that “preferential treatment” was happening.<sup>102</sup> As the suspension rates of African American students were already in a disparity, policing Black students in the class room only heightened as this new code promoted teachers to make sure students adhere to the provisions of dress and hair code.

In fact, the most detrimental stipulation in the district wide code for Black students was that Afros could not exceed “3 inches on the top and 2 inches on the side” and that anyone who was not conforming to the code would be subject to suspension.<sup>103</sup> This was devastating for many students across the different high schools. However, the policing of Black students’ cultural expression was not a new phenomenon. A year before the codes were established, Black students’ cultural expression were already being policed. As Wayne Johnson remembered, faculty and administrators at Bakersfield High School made Black female and male students cut through afros, but remained silent to white students with long hair. Despite the district’s discourse of remaining neutral, implementation of hair codes only meant that black students would be officially policed across the district. However, there two important take away from examining the hair codes. One is that Afros must have been a prominent hairstyle among Black students. Secondly, the hair codes allowed Black students to know that Black students at other schools were also wearing afros and being targeted and develop strategies of resistance.

The emergence of Black as an identity among youth in the 1960s meant that Afros were an important aspect of Black youth identity. In some ways, afros or “naturals” among Black youth marked a cultural and generational shift away from the popular “conk” hairstyles of the early 1960s. Despite the structural pressures, it must be noted that even youth in their limited power found ways around. At the halls, the renegotiation of the space played out as youth contested over styles of music, clothes, and hair. “I had the biggest the afro in Bakersfield” remarked Wayne Johnson when I asked him about his

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid,.

<sup>102</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “High School Violence, Coercion Eyed,” October 25, 1968.

<sup>103</sup> *Bakersfield News Bulletin*, “Educators brace for dress code confrontations,” September 3, 1969.

own style during his youth. “I would say like 10 inches after I picked it out.”<sup>104</sup> Instead of combing it out, teens would pad down their afros to the length and pick it out later. This form of resistance was one method that prominently used among Black male and female youth to navigate around school policy while maintaining their sense of cultural identity and style. It was dance halls that provided at least a place for them to wear their Afros out. Essentially, in the fields, they couldn’t wear their afros picked out since the working conditions didn’t allow for it. In the streets, wearing an afro led to the profiling and scrutiny from police and city officials. But inside the dance halls of the east side of town, they could wear out their afros, trash talk, and wear the clothes they wanted to wear.

Marked with the profiling from law enforcement, youth also exerted other more subtle forms of resistance when directly confronted by police officers. For instance, when police officers formulated a line along California Ave across the street from the Fraternal Hall and ordered youth to go home, they were met with youth’s refusal to leave. When police officers tried to disperse a crowd of Black youth on Lakeview Ave and arrested Sylvester Warner and his younger brother Vernon Warner for merely hanging out, the crowd of Black youth did not leave.<sup>105</sup> On the surface, this would seem like a group of delinquent youth looking for trouble. In reality, however, youth refusing to leave and immediately comply was a reflection of their contestation of what they believed to be unjust. Simply put, they did not want to go because they felt they were not doing anything wrong. In other situations, youth would comply and leave but would take their time in doing so knowing that it would frustrate police officers. Dragging your feet was a way of displaying autonomy over yourself and illustrating resistance to authority. Another tactic was “to act dumb” and pretend not to understand what the police officer was trying to communicate. Although the consequences of these tactics sometimes meant arrests and beatings, what should be noted is that they were forms of resistance that youth creatively performed at the expense of their amusement as well as were the only forms of resistance they could utilize short of physically responding. Overall, the infrapolitics of youth were not irrational, but rather were rational responses to what they viewed as unjust and unwarranted attacks on their working class communities, their bodies, and their identities.

### *Mapping Interethnic Narratives*

When writing interethnic histories, scholars often focus on conflict between communities or focus on areas of solidarity in a romantic way. In reality, histories of black and brown communities are complex, conflictive, contradictory, and depended on the context. In the context of Bakersfield, Black and Brown conflict among youth did in fact occur. Fights, insults, and cultural differences indeed shaped the daily experiences between Black and Brown youth in schools, in the communities, and even in the dance halls. Scholar Yolanda Flores, a onetime Mexican resident of Bakersfield recalls her experiences of growing up in East Bakersfield during the early 1960s:

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<sup>104</sup> Wayne Johnson, interview by Daniel Rios, May 10, 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Bob Jones, *Bakersfield Californian*, “Arrest of youth sparks two hours of unrest,” August 28, 1965.

[W]hile walking to and from school, my brothers were often jumped by groups of older African American kids, who would beat them and taunt them to ‘go back to Mexico.’ I must have been around four or five when I witnessed my brother Armando being beaten by a group of kids right in front of my house. While I witnessed these sort of beatings only once, they happened much more frequently than my brothers cared to tell my parents.<sup>106</sup>

Yolanda’s narrative reflects the experiences of many Black and Brown youth during the early 1960s whereby racial violence and conflict was present. Billy Haynes also ensured racial conflict from being in an interracial band. “There was some [conflict]... I remember I was attacked once by some Mexican guys that got in to fight with some black guys. So [since] I was Black at a Mexican dance they got me. There was animosity from my own [community] for hanging around Mexicans and there were some Mexicans that were racist towards me.”<sup>107</sup>

But, focusing on conflict overlooks the profound connections that Black and Brown youth engaged in by negotiating public space, cultural differences, and even conflict through dance halls. In fact, interracial working class solidarity built by both communities existed in schools, union organizing, and protests against police brutality. Segregation between Mexicans and Blacks did not occur for the same reasons that it did between whites and people of color. Geographically, there were distinct neighborhoods that Black and Mexican residents predominantly resided in. The Black neighborhoods of Lakeview and Cottonwood and the Mexican barrios of La Colonia and La Loma were situated in East Bakersfield. Their close proximity meant that they had to traverse the area’s grocery store, schools, job market, churches, hospitals and dance halls together. Class boundaries between and within Black and Brown youth did exist, but they were not so clearly defined, static, or structural in the ways we might think.

On July 11<sup>th</sup> 1969, Lake Ming hosted the “Battle of the Bands,” an annual event where bands throughout the county would showcase their musical skills to win the contest. At that year’s contest, bands were competing to headline the Broadway’s musical fashion show at the Hollywood Bowl down at the Valley Plaza Center. Thirteen bands were in the lineup for the spot including The Blue Rose and The Original Souls. Unlike The Blue Rose and The Original Souls, many of the bands were all white and played surf music. According to the *Bakersfield Californian*’s interview with Jack Igo, a Lake Ming marina operator, “the event drew the greatest crowd ever assembled at the lake. [Igo] estimates the crowd was between 3,000 and 4,000 people.”<sup>108</sup> Despite the conflict that existed between Black and Brown youth and communities, Black residents and, in particular, Mexican residents showed up in droves to the event. In turn, the Blue Rose placed 3<sup>rd</sup> whereas The Original Souls placed 1<sup>st</sup> in the competition. From the vantage point of Billy Haynes, it was not a mystery on why their communities showed up. “When they said it was largest crowd ever. It was because of the Mexican community supported

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<sup>106</sup> Yolanda Flores, *Claiming Home*, p.82.

<sup>107</sup> Billy Haynes, Interview by Daniel Rios, June 27, 2018.

<sup>108</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, “‘Original Souls’ Win Lake Ming ‘Battle of the Bands,’” July 12, 1969.

us wherever we went. Because we made them feel like something man. They had pride in us.”<sup>109</sup> This massive audience full of Black and Brown residents was a direct display of interracial cooperation and was the outcome of a decades long process of cultural exchange through the medium of music.



Figure 9: The last photo of the Original Souls taken in 1976. Shortly after, Mike Bonilla (Middle) passed away and the group disbanded.

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<sup>109</sup> Notes from Billy Haynes and Ygnacio Espinoza Interviews. Although Blue Rose wasn't mentioned in the article, Ygnacio recalled Blue Rose being placed 3<sup>rd</sup> and The Original Souls being placed 1<sup>st</sup>.

## *Conclusion*

Despite the efforts of many community organizations and residents, Black and Brown communities in East Bakersfield continued to endure the consequences of structural racism. Joblessness, poverty, policing, and educational disparities were inextricably linked to the daily experiences of working class residents in the decades since the 1960s. City officials continued to cut back city services including housing, education, and infrastructural services while law enforcement officials directed efforts to criminalize working class Black and Brown communities. Although structural racism continued to plague Black and Brown residents, there is something to be understood beneath it all. Marginalized communities should not be understood through a vacuum that posits them as apathetic subjects enduring pain and suffering. Rather, we must understand how Black and Brown residents attempted to shape their opportunities. Throughout my research, I sought out to not only showcase the inequality present in communities nor provide an overview of labor, but rather I attempted to display how marginalized people responded to racism in ways that would otherwise be overlooked, to think more critically about the meanings and definitions of labor, and to think about the community in much more complex ways.

Although Black working class residents' livelihoods were at stake, marginalized communities still attempted to secure their employment and shape their economic opportunities. Unionization efforts, speaking at city council meetings, petitioning, and community organizing were methods that residents used to fight for their communities. Boundaries of race, culture, class shaped and reshaped the experiences, opportunities, and responses of Black and Brown residents who political mobilized in their communities from the transformations of economic decline and racial segregation, but this didn't mean that racial, class, and cultural boundaries were static. For instance, Black sanitation workers, anticipating terminations and the decline of wages, did not succumb to the types of racial animosities towards Mexican workers when their departments transformed from predominately Black and became more or less mixed race. Rather, Black and Mexican sanitation workers created an interracial alliance around their own and each other's wages, livelihoods, and communities.

Working class Black and Mexican parents also organized to better the conditions of their children's schools which displayed the interracial cooperation and solidarity that existed living in the same neighborhoods and communities in spite of cultural difference. Despite the detrimental outcomes of white resistance to desegregation, these organizing efforts also show how active black and brown parents were about their children's education instead of sitting idly by waiting for change from above. Through an infrapolitical lens, we can no longer assume that the oppression in which Black and Brown peoples are situated in produces a totalized experience of oppression which prevents them from having any agency or say so over their neighborhoods and communities.

Focusing on the dance hall culture of the late 1960s highlights the ways in which youth, as population scholars tend to ignore, combated structural racism, navigated around city ordinances, and molded a cultural movement that reflected their wants, needs, and priorities. Youth were able to directly shape their economic opportunities. When the

formal economy did not offer the type of gratification they wanted or did not provide the amount of compensation needed to survive, youth, in turn, developed creative methods to make money and fill in the gaps that the formal economy couldn't provide. In spite of the cultural differences between Black and Brown, things like music and dance halls helped mitigate tensions and produce possibilities of cultural exchange and solidarity. The infrapolitics of working class Black and Brown youth did not negate the reality of inequality, and even sometimes may have exacerbated present problems. But in these moments of police confrontations, criminalization in schools, and the advent of reactionary policies from city officials, what mattered to them was a preservation of their own dignity.

Boundaries takes on a number of different meanings. Boundaries refers to the physical proximity in which people live, the municipal positioning of Black and Brown neighborhoods through processes such as redlining and suburbanization, and the ways in which people conceptualized their standards of who is a part of the community. Resistance wasn't always organized, calculated, or planned, but sometimes it was subtle, verbal, spontaneous, and mostly ephemeral. Dancing at the halls or shooting craps along the street was a way for Black and Brown youth to cope with the problems and boundaries around them. For Black and Brown youth, the relationship between race and boundaries are not only structural but also cultural.

In addition, terms like "community" cannot understood prescriptively but rather must be examined through the lens of race, gender, class, space, and labor. Youth responded to the structural demands of authorities in power as well as the social demands of their own communities. Ultimately, resistance in youth culture illustrates the ways in which Black and Brown youth created and recreated the meanings of their identities, cultural dynamics, and social relations through, among others, their clothing, labor, hair styles, and music. Examining Bakersfield's political, economic, and geographic landscape and history has yet to be fully uncovered by historians. With the focus on large industrial cities, social histories on the small rural towns throughout California's Central Valley largely have taken a backseat. Indeed, this history is about the social, economic, and cultural dynamics and boundaries that existed within a particular historical moment in a given community. But, examining these dynamics and particularly youth can force us to rethink our understandings of things like class, labor, space, and resistance.

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