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Pedagogy of the Block: The Aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and the Negation of the old
American Dream

By

Hodari Arisi Touré

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair

Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir

Professor Carolyn Finney

Spring, 2011

Pedagogy of the Block: The Aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and the Negation of the old
American Dream

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Abstract

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Hodari Arisi Toure'

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair

The constraining role of racial, social, and economic stratification on the lives and education of African American males has been argued both theoretically and empirically (Massey, 2007; MacLeod, 1987; Noguera, 2001). Some have argued that one important mechanism is the perception of limited opportunity structures (Noguera, 2004; Ogbu, 1987). This dissertation explored how real and perceived opportunity structures were shaped by political, social, and economic forces in an urban neighborhood. Specifically, this study focused on a core group of Black males in a bounded historical time and geographic locale and explored how life pathways were identified, conveyed, and chosen. This study was historically situated in the period starting with the inception of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966, until the time of the death of its co-founder, Huey P. Newton in 1989. This study argued that the complex interplay of competing ideologies that arose during that time period was at the crux of redefining Black life pathways to achieving the American Dream, also conveying the outcomes from that pursuit. This study took place in Oakland, California as this was the birthplace of the Black Panthers and it focused on the Oak Knoll neighborhood. I explored the ways in which the Black Power movement, the burgeoning drug epidemic, and State suppression in post-industrial Oakland informed how a cohort of over 40 Black males made sense of their societal positionality and how that 'sense making' influenced their choice of pathways and life outcomes. I will draw on Critical Race Theory in order to examine the ways in which race and power were central in the choices youth perceived, communicated, and enacted (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Methodologically, I will utilize interviews with members of the cohort, biographical narratives, primary and secondary sources, with the dissertation taking the form of an autoethnography of the block cohort. Primary and secondary sources will be employed to give a historical context to the time period and to contextualize the differing pathways. Interviews with cohort members and the development of autoethnographical narratives will focus on what I am calling 'block pedagogy', which I define as the organic community discourse that reflects the constant negotiation of identity, power and privileged knowledge, informed by the historical context. A focus on 'block pedagogy' (as remembered by informants) will be used to illuminate alternative/oppositional life pathways that were available to this cohort and how those options were developed and conveyed across the cohort through the use of privileged knowledge. Ultimately, this study will contribute to our understanding of the ways in which the multiple

spheres of societal contact—with the power structure, Black radicalism, and criminality—resulted in identity-shaping knowledge. In doing so, it will document the ever-changing nature of oppression and community response to it: both in ways that subvert and reproduce existing oppressive social structures.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Gus Brown, who transitioned on March 29, 2007. I miss you every day, but I feel your presence in everything that I do. I want to thank you now and I wished I would have thanked you when you were here for giving me the foundation to build on, even though I didn't recognize or appreciate it while growing up. Your examples, both good and bad, allowed for me to be a better father and a better man when I finally decided to come of age. Your grandchildren miss you and I will tell stories of you often.

I love and miss you.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction.....	vi
Chapter 1.....	1
Background to the Study.....	4
Theoretical Grounding.....	5
Autoethnography.....	6
Organization of the Dissertation.....	7
Chapter 2.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Deficit and Pathology Models.....	9
Critical Race Theory.....	11
Collective Identity.....	12
Theorizing White Supremacy and Minoritization.....	14
What Is It to Be “Human”.....	17
Forms of “Death”.....	18
Black Masculinity.....	20
Ideology and Hegemony.....	23
Chapter 3.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Minoritized Space, Inventing the ‘Block’.....	27
The Battle Over Place and Space.....	28
WWII Migration-Exodus West.....	31
Minoritized Space.....	33
Conclusion.....	37
Chapter 4: Pathways- Multiple Ways of Being.....	40
Prologue.....	40
Introduction.....	41
Black Panther Party for Self-Defensive.....	42
Black Guerrilla Family.....	44
The MOB.....	48
The Rise of the Drug Cliques and the Fall of the Street Gangs.....	52
The Death of a Revolutionary.....	54
Conclusion.....	56

Chapter 5: Privileged Knowledge: The Training of the Block	58
Introduction.....	58
The Training of the Block: 1975.....	60
1980... King Estates.....	64
1982... Smoke.....	65
1984... Training the next Cohort.....	67
1985... The Golf Course.....	68
1986... Everything I learned, I learned from the streets.....	71
Smoke Reduex.....	72
Institutional Death.....	73
1989... The beginning of the end.....	76
Conclusion.....	88
Conclusion	90
Armoring.....	90
Privileged Knowledge.....	90
American Dream.....	92
Black Life.....	93
Ways of Knowing.....	94
Expanding Pathways.....	95
Epilogue: Reconciliation- a letter to my father	96
References	100
Appendix A	106
Appendix B	107
Appendix C	108
Appendix D	109
Appendix E	111

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I want to give a big thank you to Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, my unofficial member, and one of my biggest supporters. Ingrid has been a staunch ally and friend through my ups and downs as a graduate student and I am truly indebted to her for her unwavering support—both as a mentor and friend.

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Mom, I cannot thank you enough for all the support and all of the free room and board on the occasions when I needed it! I know you consistently asked, “When will you be done with this paper?”. Well, I’m done now! Thank you for putting up with my mood swings and impoverished life choices (don’t really know if that will change now).

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Dak, you are my hero and one of the strongest people I know. As a child you have beaten the odds and made anything that I came up against pale in comparison. The fact that you were able to survive AND thrive after your ordeal is nothing short of miraculous. I would love to take credit for gifting you your strength, but in fact it is the other way around; you have provided me my strength in finishing this little task—thank you son, I love you.

Nyla, you are the youngest of my children and you are the center of our lives. You have come into this world and taken firm hold of our lives, love and respect. You are an amazing little girl and I can’t wait to get to witness you grow and bloom into your power. Just remember to use it for good — Daddy loves you very much!

Thank you Alai for giving me three intelligent, strong, and beautiful seeds. They have been my guiding light and inspiration; for that, I will always appreciate and be indebted to you. I love you.

Finally, I would like to thank the woman who has made this possible for me, as she has stood with me, by me, in back of me, and when need be, in front of me to guide, support, and encourage me on this journey. Shy, I don’t know where I would be without your love and support these many long years. Thank you for all you’ve done and I am so thankful to have you here beside me. I love you and I hope to reciprocate for you one day!

Introduction

A loud roar is heard on a serene, tree-lined street. The neighborhood is situated on a horseshoe-shaped hill, only accessible from Golf Links Road. The houses are all three plus bedrooms with two car garages, usually filled with more than their allotment of vehicles. Some of the residents are outside washing their cars or tending to their yards as the roar becomes louder, however no one pays attention. This idyllic community, filled with 1950s tract homes, sits just above a seminary college, which is ensconced off Golf Links in a valley, sandwiched between disparate neighborhoods, but not really a part of any.

If you take the Fountaine Street exit off the 580 freeway and drive a quarter of a mile up a slight incline, past old King Estates Junior High School, continue west up the hill on Fountaine. There sits Charles P. Howard elementary school, and across the street, is Our Savior's Church that houses a pre-school. All three of these schools are in walking distance of my house. Both of the hill schools sit at the apex of Fountaine hill, and from this vantage point emerges a breathtaking 160-degree panoramic view of the Bay Area. Fountaine terminates into Golf Links, a half-mile downhill, but upon deeper inspection—if you stand at the intersection of Fountaine and Crest—more than just a beautiful bay view is revealed.

On both sides of Fountaine are open protected parklands. King and Howard both sit on this parkland on the north side, with Our Savior's on the southeast. Fountaine is scarred from eroded by landslides from periods of heavy rainfall. Looking out to the horizon on a clear day, San Francisco is visible as well as two bridges. Scaling back, you see the Oakland Airport and the near-by Coliseum sporting complex. Scaling back further, you will notice a ridge of hills peaking up from the East Oakland flatlands, rising from a valley. On the south side of that ridge — 98th Avenue — is Bishop O'Dowd High School, a Catholic feeder school for UC Berkeley. There are houses that dot the ridgeline, sitting precariously on the edge with walls of concrete supporting them. As you visually follow the ridgeline from south to north, you see the houses fade in and out of thick pine trees that soon give way again to the hustle of the city. If you look too fast you will miss what looks like sunken buildings left behind by some cataclysmic event. These grayish-blue rooftops seemingly spring out of nowhere and are jarringly out of place in this scenic view. The valley that the ridgeline soars out of is home to disparate entities: a parochial college and a meandering complex of low-income housing — the Avingroom projects.

Trapped between the rolling hills of the open parkland and the valley floor of the San Leandro creek is my neighborhood. On Fountaine, there are seven houses on the south side of the street that start at Golf Links and end at the alleyway and the #46 bus stop. The alleyway connects Fountaine to my street— Blandon Road— providing easier access to the bus line. On the other side of the alleyway is the last house on the south side of the street. There are no more houses on this side and there are no houses on the north side until you pass King Estates Junior High. The hills demarcate micro-neighborhoods on both sides of Fountaine and provide a scenic landscape and a huge playground.

Golf Links Road twists from 82nd Avenue, the north border of this neighborhood, a mile and a quarter to 98th Avenue, which forms the southern border. The college forms the western border with the neighborhood's eastern border less easily defined. The ride from the gritty intersection of 82nd and Macarthur, which is one block below Golf Links to 98th, is like driving on a country road where you are precariously balanced on a winding two lanes, dotted with intermittent guard rails where the victims to its instability have broken through and fallen off the cliff into the college or the San Leandro river 'creek' that runs parallel to Golf Links, before it

ducks underneath the college. The college grounds are fenced off on all sides. The fence is 12 feet high at the rear of the campus where it neighbors the projects. While both the college and the projects are virtually invisible from Golf Links Road, both occupy spheres of the imagination for the neighborhood children — the accessibility of the projects and its signifying poverty versus the unknown of the barricaded college with the vicious dogs that patrol its grounds and keep the unwanted (i.e., neighborhood kids) out. Also, because of the illusion of remoteness, this area has been a favorite dumping site for waste, large appliances, and, particularly, bodies.

It is the summer of '87, the sun is blazing but the Bay breeze keeps the temperature mild. Over the horizon, the source of the noise appears: it is a '69 burnt orange Camaro, windows tinted, music bumping, Deadman is driving it. He pulls over and parks at the top of the street where it levels out, he hops out of the car; engine turned off but the music still playing. Meanwhile, a loud go-cart with a modified Chevy Vega engine comes roaring up the other side of the street. Derrick is driving the supped-up cart, and he fakes like he is going to hit Deadman, who mocks jumping out of the way. Derrick zig-zags down the street in an exaggerated manner, leaning in and out of the cart and attempting to make it do donuts. Derrick is the one of the oldest of our clique but acts like a big kid. He is the baby boy in his family and still seems as if he is competing for admiration from his parents. He talks in an affected manner, as to draw attention to himself, but also to emphasize his questionable wisdom. Derrick makes a few more passes while waiting for everyone to arrive.

Deadman is a multiple gunshot survivor who lost his best friend in an ambush two years earlier. He got his name from that ambush—he survived 12 shots to the body as his friend lay dying next to him. Derrick, who was a friend to both men and a part of a larger, loosely knit drug organization, adopted Deadman afterwards and brought him into our neighborhood to recuperate and rediscover a sense of belonging.

Deadman and Mike L (the departed friend) were once a part of the Funktown organization, based around 9th and 11th Avenues. They decided to break away after finding some success being middlemen and enforcers...of which Funktown had plenty. There was no shortage of young brothers willing to inflict pain or carry out a hit for Big Harvey, the leader of Funktown; but Deadman excelled over all others.

Mike L was a quasi-mythological figure who told everyone to go to hell. He was going to be independent, set his own prices, and sell to whomever he wanted regardless of past affiliations or locations...which ultimately got him killed. Mike L was 6'2, with a slight build, light-brown complexion, and green eyes. He was good with his hands and he would prove it over and over again whenever the mood struck him or the situation called for it.

Deadman wasn't the fighter Mike L had been, but was slowly growing into a local legend. He had the same attitude of independence, but with an aura of being almost impossible to kill. He was a stocky 5'11 ex-wrestler who LOVED to inflict pain on those he deemed worthy of being "touched". He had an indecipherable speech pattern, where you could only catch every other word. His speech was a low muttering that usually ended with a higher, more emphasized last word or two. Derrick seemed to understand him best, or at least acted like he could. The third member of their outlaw crew was Quinton, a short, well-built bulldog of a man who resembled a miniature version of bow-legged Lou from the R&B group, Full Force. Quinton slid into the role Deadman had played for Mike L before his death. He was the enforcer of the enforcer and just as loyal as the bulldog he favored. Quinton is in the passenger seat of the Camaro, quiet as usual, but very attentive to all that is going on.

Woodie is already here in his tricked-out red Nissan Sentra (who ever thought a Sentra could be tricked out?). He has a custom kit on it with some low profile rims and tires, an inserted panel on the dash with a TV, and a zap board to control the 700-watt amp that runs to the 15” subwoofers in the trunk. Lil Sean (Donkey Kong or Donk for short) is in the passenger seat of the Sentra, surveying the growing assemblage. I’ve known Woodie since pre-school (we attended Our Savior’s) and we grew to be as tight as brothers. Donk is new to the crew, we’ve only known him three or four years at this point, but he is quickly becoming close, at least close to Woodie. Derrick zips up and down the street a few more times just because he has a need to have all eyes on him and he can’t help but try to grab attention whenever he can. Woodie is like a project to Derrick, who serves as his mentor/tormentor and many years later, his burden. After the greetings are all finished and the pleasantries done, we get down to business. Deadman is going to front us 4 zips (ounces) of soft (powdered cocaine) at a grand each. The three of us, Woodie, Donk, and I, are responsible for coming up with the four grand. Smoke and (big) Boog will teach us how to cook it and help set up the spot, while Sterlin, Mookie, and Kimani will help with distribution and soldiers. We have a growing network of friends who are making the same choices as us, but who don’t have the connect; we would supply them too.

A quarter pound of raw cocaine is a lot for three kids who have little to no experience with drugs. I had never even seen coke at this point in my life. I’d made conscious choices as a kid to stay away from all things illegal or addicting. It is made clear to us that no matter how cool we are with D’ or Quinton, if we fuck up, there will be swift consequences and Derrick will not be able to save us. D’ is known for jumping out of the car and beating the shit out of people who owe him money with a baseball bat. Quinton will kill anybody that D’ tells him to, without question. We thought we were smarter than everyone else so we weighed the risks with the alternatives, which for us were working at a fast-food restaurant or at a UPS-type job, and we told ourselves that there really weren’t any alternatives at all.

Quinton hops out of the Camaro and goes into the trunk to grab what looks like an ordinary bat and returns to the passenger seat where Woodie slides into the driver’s seat. Deadman stays outside talking to the rest of us, not even bothering to look at what is going on in his car. The bat has been semi-hollowed out and if you grip it just right, you can screw off the top to reveal whatever is inside. Quinton pours out four plastic bags, each containing an ounce of soft, and hands them to Woodie. Woodie looks the bags over like he knows what he is doing (but really he has no idea what he is looking at) and then tucks them into his waistband and jumps out the car. All of this takes place in front of my parent’s home, where the three of us retreat when the meeting is over. We go to my room to map out our future. We call a meeting of our crew to pass out assignments and to divide up responsibilities. For the next few hours, people come and go with a new purpose as our plans crystallize—we finally had (il)legitimate uses for our pagers.

Chapter 1

The life choices my friends and I made as kids were so antithetical to how we were raised and so contrary to the role models we saw everyday inside our homes and neighborhood that they beg for examination. Growing up in a predominantly working middle class community, we saw the fruits of our parent's labor and we were largely isolated against the struggles of day-to-day survival that less-well-off kids had to undergo. We benefited from having a cohesive community in which the parents knew each other and we operated as a large extended family, replete with sleepovers, dinners, and punishment shared amongst the parents as we were groomed collectively to take the next step up the economic ladder. Our parents were not doctors and lawyers but they had good jobs with the government, were middle-management employees, or had long-term stable employment in the civil sector. We chose something different, a different way of being, a different way of living, and a different "American Dream."

Our parent's version of the American Dream had steered us to the presumed safety of middle classdom. We were supposed to become white-collar professionals, but somewhere that part of the dream got lost. Somewhere, instead of climbing up the economic/social position ladder, we jumped off! We knew the life-altering decisions we made went against our parent's values and how we were raised, but we didn't care. We also didn't care about the expected violence or the looming specter of jail. We knew we would have to get dirty and all of us seemingly embraced that and even looked forward to it. We were ignorant of what that really meant and how that process fundamentally changes you...changes you to the point that your family doesn't recognize you anymore...to the point where friends and neighbors are afraid of you. How we came to ignore those real and meaningful consequences and repudiate our upbringing, how we came to embrace the high-risk lifestyles of street entrepreneurship is at the crux of this study as I focus on the life pathways that we saw as viable options and how we came to make, then enact, those choices on the block and in society at large.

To get at those processes, first I have to unpack how my family came to the Block and what were the family dynamics that informed my childhood and the negative view of my father's pathway to the American Dream. I have a clear(er) vantage point today to view my life trajectory now that the dust has settled and the pain has abated. I am the youngest (by ten years) in a house with three siblings—one brother and two sisters. Family conflicts brought on by decades of old scars always trickled down to me in the form of abuse or neglect. Consequently, I internalized my mounting frustration until I lost a passion for life and ended up hating everybody, including myself. Unaware of any deeper societal stressors on the family in general, or on my father in particular, I chalked his bitterness up to that of an old man who couldn't find happiness in his life choices. The reasoning of an emotionally immature teenage mixed with an apathetic household led to major meltdown in guise of educational burnout. This malaise didn't just start in high school but some 30 years earlier, in the Third ward of Houston, Texas.

My father, Gus Ervin Brown II, was born to Alice and Gus Brown Sr., a Baptist minister and stern disciplinarian. He was an exceptionally bright young man who attended Texas Southern University (TSU) while working at the post office so he could help his parents. At TSU, he courted a co-ed, Winnie Deloris Hendrix, whom he finally wore down and convinced to marry him. Born only ten days apart, they both were stubborn and intent on doing it their way. So against strong family reservations, they married in their junior year, January 1, 1955. Immediately following, Winnie was pregnant with their first born, my sister Anika. This

somewhat of an unplanned pregnancy forced both parents to abandon their individual dreams, which then (re)defined the rest of their lives.

My father, a hard-drinking, uncompassionate man, now had to work full time to support his new wife and newer child. As the constant reminders came from his parents about their forewarning of the dangers of rushing to get married, more children came. He started slipping down the slope of chronic alcoholism. After Anika came Winnie Jr. (Sandy), then supposedly their last child, Gus III.

Lost dreams take a heavy toll upon the soul. My mother, like so many other strong Black women of her time, suffered in silence. Sensitive Anika suffered right along with her, doing the best she could to protect the rest from my father's rage. Anika's sensitivity led her to feel her mother's pain when Gus would come home, tired from work, ranting and raving about seemingly nothing whatsoever. Then with the kids almost teenagers, the unthinkable happens—a new baby is on the way: me.

At the age of thirty-five, the last thing they wanted was a new child. On August 26, 1968, I was welcomed into this world somewhere in rural Pennsylvania. By this time my father had a 'good job' working for the Department Of Labor, which caused him to frequently uproot his family and move cross-country. Three year later, after stops in New York and Washington D.C., we arrived in Oakland, California.

The years up to high school were filled with father-son clashes as he increasingly turned to the bottle. At this point I had no context to analyze his behavior, whatever the problem was, it didn't matter. His escalating hostility at the world in general, and at us in particular, set the stage for Anika to follow him down the road of addiction, but with cocaine instead of alcohol.

School had no meaning for me. I couldn't see past my hand, so college was not even a consideration. In the back of my mind, I faintly heard a voice telling me to use college to get away from the madness, but the omnipresent arguing and fighting quickly downed it out. High school became a whirlwind of parties and sporting events, with little to no real attention paid to actual learning. Christmas break senior year came around and any hope of me graduating come June was shot out window by my first semester grades. The realization that my life was being flushed down the drain started to slowly sink in...but I didn't care.

Due to limited finances, Sandy had to come home for the holidays and we had a long talk about what is important in life and how education is the key to getting more. Unbeknownst to the rest of us, she was fighting her own demons and she was using college to escape them and our family. At this point, I still thought I knew everything, but out of love and respect, I listened anyway. Something must have crept in because I got serious the last semester but it was too little too late for graduation. In March, I sensed that the only way to get my degree on time, was to drop out and register at an adult school. That April, I took and passed the GED test and received my degree ahead of schedule.

After school, I seriously considered the armed forces, even going so far as taking the test and going to an interview. But I still wasn't in the right place mentally. I turned down promises for quick advancement to officer's school and constant calls from all branches of the armed services. Instead, I got a job at a temp service with the dream of getting out of the house before the situation there became any worse. My mother, the rock of the family for so long, finally started to show signs of cracking. She seemed to be at the end of her rope, fed up with everyone including me. To appease her, I enrolled in Chabot community college. At this point in my life, I had no intention of pursuing this any further. I dropped out after one semester, taking only one class. I then got a job at UPS...that lasted four months.

Late one night after another party, I was giving a friend's cousin a ride home from the Oakland hills. A brown station wagon weaved alongside of us and what looked like a very big gun was stuck out of the window. I looked over and wondered what the hell...red and yellow fire exploded from the barrel and the canyon area resounded with the boom the .44 caliber handgun made. I didn't think that this was real until my foot felt like it was just hit with a white hot sledgehammer and a piece of metal broke off and lodged in my foot, searing the flesh around it. I quickly doubled over letting go of the steering wheel and prayed that they wouldn't shoot again. Lucky for me they didn't— yeah lucky me.

Red, a lifelong friend I'd known since pre-school, grabbed me and somehow threw me into the passenger seat as he hopped into the driver's seat. Never before and never since have I experienced pain like that. My mother said God was watching over me. Because of the angle the bullet took after it ricocheted off the driver side tire. It would have most definitely hit me in the chest if my foot wasn't in the way. I never believed in God so instead of looking at this as a blessing in disguise, I saw it as punishment for something I had no part in. Old habits are hard to break.

The friend's cousin had gotten into an argument at the party, and thinking the problem was resolved, I had agreed to give him a ride home. I took a bullet that some idiot fired from a moving car, at another moving car, shooting at the person in the back seat. The shooter either had watched too many old westerns with people making impossible shots from impossible angles, or he just didn't give a damn; it was most likely both. That incident crystallized how fleeting life is and how quickly it can be taken from you. I was in bed for two weeks as I recuperated and rehabilitated my foot. It was nothing like the movies where people are shot and are fully functional within minutes. My foot swelled up and I couldn't put any pressure on it for days. Well-wishers came in streams, as it became cool to come to see me and hang out.

I dwelled on the irony of how one street had changed the course of two brothers' lives, ten years apart. Poncho (Gus III), my older brother, was driving down Keller Ave., coming home from a party in the Oakland Hills and got into a race with some girls who were coming from the same party. He lost control and crashed, almost losing his life in the process. His pinky was severed and the open wound got infected from the gravel and oil; the infection spread and he was touch and go for a week or so.

He lost more than his pinky in the crash. He had a promising future as a basketball player—the crash ended that dream. He, like the rest of my siblings, turned to drugs to soothe his pain and hide from the world. He became sullen and angrier than usual as he slid head first into a full on depression. I watched all of them (not) deal with their demons and I saw firsthand how that almost destroyed each of them. My family was being ravaged by an unseen, non-interrogated force, and I could not do anything about it but try not to follow any of their examples, including those of my parents.

At the young age of seven, I made a conscious choice to stay away from drugs and alcohol, as that was the only commonality I saw between them and their despair. I refused to fall victim to the same forces; however, my worldview was severely underdeveloped and my knowledge base consisted of my friends who were experiencing their own arrested development. As I grew older, my distance from my family and my estrangement from school intersected with a strong backlash against those institutions from my peers. The choices I would make next were a long time coming and built on a childhood of pain, turned apathy.

Background to the Study

More than forty years after the end of Jim Crow, Black males are still at the bottom of the social/economic ladder, with most economic indicators pointing to no change in sight. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the subsequent affirmative action programs, this balance remained persistent and only narrowed slightly, with Black women making the largest strides in income.¹ The minimal gains made by the few have not translated to the masses. How has this level of oppression been structured and maintained for so long?

There have been multiple ways of trying to explain the constraining role of racial, social, and economic stratification on the lives and education of Black males. The one constant in these varied approaches has been that the social economic status (SES) of most of the studied populations has been the underclass and the working-class poor. It is my contention that *over focusing* on this segment of the population misses significant factors, as the dominant discourse is repressive to Black males at all levels of SES attainment. The overrepresentation of Black males in low paying jobs, prisons,² and mental care facilities, are indicators of how they have been excluded from full participation in society.

Black males, in masses, have been systematically left out of the American Dream. The reward for working hard, holding an unquestioning loyalty to the country, and playing by the rules is supposed to be a house with a white-picket fence, a dog, a wife, and 2.5 kids. This is the ideology of the old American Dream; it is an achievement ideology that maps out the way to a better life by delaying gratification and accepting personal responsibility for your lot in life. This version of the American Dream is a repackaged Protestant work ethic, holding to a narrative about personal responsibility and egalitarianism on the surface, and repeating one about moral fealty and individualism on closer inspection. The core of this ideology is that anyone can achieve by the application of certain traits; coincidentally, if you fail, then the fault resides with you and not any abstract group identity politics or State suppression. This is the master narrative spun about achievement, or lack of achievement, for different groups, including Black males.

This dissertation focuses on a core group of Black males in an urban neighborhood and explores how real and perceived opportunities were shaped by political, social, and economic forces. It interrogates how life pathways were identified, conveyed, and enacted on the “Block.” The conveying or teaching of “privileged knowledge” inside the cohort seemingly undermined the acceptance of societal norms that the parents of these males held and taught them. Their resulting accumulation of certain kinds of capital, both cultural and material, had the deleterious effect of positioning the cohort outside of acceptable societal norms. Implicit in challenging these norms was the negation of the old American Dream ideology, which repositioned the cohort in relation to the dominant structures.

This dissertation explains how this repositioning happens by looking at how life choices are shaped on a micro level and contextualizing them within macro level policies and dominant ideology. These life choices have been previously framed as deficit models, mere social reproduction, or structural violence victimization, but typically the Black working class has been

¹ See Appendix A.

² As of June 30, 2007, the incarceration rate in state or federal prison or jail for men was 1,406 per 100,000 residents, for women 136 per 100,000 residents. The rate for white men was 773 per 100,000, for black men 4,618 per 100,000, for Hispanic men 1,747 per 100,000. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/pim07.pdf>

the studied group. This study expands the conversation to look at a group of young men in an understudied group: middle-class Black men. This group has typically been studied in college situations or in relation to moving up to higher SES, but they are seldom discussed in terms of downward mobility. By broadening the conversation in framing how life choices are made, this study will look to recast Black males as conscious actors who are making hard decisions in a weighted game.

Block pedagogy is a complete reconceptualization of out of school education, which has often been thought about and theorized as an addendum to in-school education (Mahiri, 2004). Out of school education stems from the expansion of the term ‘literacy events’ (Dyson, 1997; Mahiri, 2004; Street, 2000). Shirley Brice Heath has described literacy events as the interaction between the participants’ writing that informs their interpretive practices (1983). While focusing on the pieces or specific interaction around a text is useful, this dissertation will take the expanded approach to look at pedagogy in varying levels of interaction.

Block pedagogy is used to transmit ‘ways of being’ inside of the dominant discourse and often, ways of resisting it. Block pedagogy flows from a neighborhood discourse that varies as much as the neighborhoods themselves vary from one another. The neighborhood discourse is the pervasive way the dominant discourse influences and/or structures a neighborhood. This includes the socioeconomics of the neighborhood and historical ebbs and flows of racial groupings and contestations for space. My neighborhood has been historically Black middleclass for well over three decades since white flight in the mid-70s³. This racial and socioeconomic makeup has influenced the discourse of the neighborhood and how it has interacted with the dominant discourse. Block Pedagogy is the lived experience inside of these discourses and the reaction to, and teaching of the tensions between the two and adapting to them.

This neighborhood discourse structures the way actors of differing neighborhood Blocks, interact inside of and outside of the neighborhood. For the purpose of this dissertation, the definitions of these terms are thus: a Block is situated inside of the larger neighborhood and the constituents that make up these entities define both. The Block is a subset of the larger neighborhood but is independent in actions and in thought. There is some unity around the self identification of belonging to the greater neighborhood so Blocks can and do act in unison but also recognizes their sovereignty inside of that larger setting. The neighborhood is the larger collection of Blocks that can have its roots in the traditional geographical defined neighborhoods named by the city. But those boundaries aren’t respected and the constituents define their own borders. The neighborhood that this study was based on is located in the East Oakland lower hills area. It is bounded by 82nd Avenue to the north, and 98th Avenue to the south. Golf Links road is the west border; the east is the surrounding, undeveloped hills. Inside of this geography is three Blocks that comprise the Ney Street Block, the Blandon road Block, and the Castlewood Block. Each of these Blocks is named after the main street, but is encompasses some side streets.

As this dissertation is an autoethnography, my primary block, the Blandon road Block will be the epicenter of this study, but the participants will come from all three Blocks. These neighborhood residents referred to themselves as ‘hill serpents’, but were not a gang or an organization—they were simply a loose group of young men who formed tight-knit friendships. This dissertation is focused on Black men in order to interrogate how masculinity was constructed inside of the cohort and what role masculinity played in choosing pathways and effecting outcomes. Looking at Black masculinity gives me a lens to view how the cohort

³ Discussed in more detail in Chapter 3

interacts with repressive State agents, such as the education system and the justice system. The targeting of middle SES Black males will add another layer of complexity and shine light on a previously ignored group.

Theoretical Grounding

Critical Race Theory is the framework that grounds my analysis and illuminates ‘Block Pedagogy’ from an insiders’ perspective. An insider perspective is like a Rosetta Stone to ethnography. Critical Race Theory, or CRT, allows for the positioning of the student outside of the context of school and situates them in relation to the larger societal context. It is this situated context that allows me to look at education in a broader view and release it from the constraints of an oppressive historical discourse of education as only in-school learning. CRT’s two main tenets will underscore this study. “The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America.” The second is despite oppression, Black people have and had capacity to understand and respond creatively to oppression (Crenshaw, 1995; p. iix). These two tenets change the nature of research into a project, a racial project. As a racial project, this study takes an informed subjective stance into data collection and into data analysis. CRT sees objectivity and neutrality as false stances by the very nature of engaging in them means the researcher has chosen a position. By taking a stance, the CRT researcher is freed to utilize a myriad of approaches that releases the researcher from the need to deny pre-existing bonds and directly engage with the study in a personal but reflective way.

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) explain that the central role of using counter-storytelling and counter-narratives in the method of CRT is to challenge the work of the dominant ideology by validating the experiences of people of color. Critical Race Theory’s framework utilizes counter-storytelling to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination experienced by people of color. CRT proposes that in addition to data gathered and literature reviewed, the researcher’s professional and personal experiences are important sources in developing counter-stories, “In fact, critical race educational studies view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the Student of Color’s lived experience by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, chronicles, and narratives” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473).

The narrative style of research will give insight to deeper levels of subject intentionality and provide a window into how subjects view themselves inside systems of domination. Using a CRT analytical framework to tease out hidden truths from the insiders’ vantage point, this study seeks to explicate Block narratives as a means of making visible the legacy of White supremacy in the urban environment and highlighting the re-imagined American Dream ideology. The American Dream ideology is pervasive in the Black experience and it is a confining as well as defining narrative that Blacks have adopted and passed down. I will show how this dominant discourse remains passively in the service of White Supremacy and through Block Pedagogy, gets passed down and reimagined by successive generations.

This dissertation will combine the use of personal narratives from members of the cohort with a historical approach, to contextualize the setting of the story as it takes the form of an historical autoethnography. The historical context will dictate which narratives are used to address the research themes that have been coded into the personal narratives. The Block narratives will be used to highlight the developed historical narratives.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that connects the researcher's personal self to the broader cultural context. In this study, it will take the form of a personal narrative that will examine the Block through my eyes, but ground that narrative in the group's experiences. Because of that, autoethnography is fundamentally different from ethnography, which is a qualitative research method whereby a researcher uses participant observation and interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of a group's culture (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004).

While ethnography describes human social phenomena based on fieldwork, in autoethnography the researcher becomes the primary participant/subject of the research in the process of writing personal stories and narratives (Chang, 2008). The concept of autoethnography challenges the notion of the coherent, individual self and has broader implications, as it can refer to either the ethnography of one's own group or to an autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Consequently, the combining of my personal narrative within the study of the cohort can be termed either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto) ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

An autoethnography is a reflexive account of one's own experiences with a critical eye. It is also a cultural accounting. In generating an autoethnographic work, a Critical Race Theorist will adhere most closely to the ideal of reflexivity, the idea that the researcher needs to be aware of his or her role as a researcher. The explication of personal thoughts, feelings, stories, and observations as a way of understanding the social context they are studying, makes visible the researcher's positionality inside of the study and gives the reader a chance to identify (Chang, 2008).

This is contrary to grounded research or positivist research where there is a claim of objectivity. As CRT rejects notions of objectivity, autoethnography embraces and foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity rather than placing it in background. Furthermore, by changing what and how a researcher conducts fieldwork, the product of the fieldwork changes. The types of claims made from conducting autoethnographical research inform the style of academic writing and findings to support those claims (Richardson, 2005).

As CRT embodies a racial project, autoethnography as a research method seeks resonance between researchers and readers in order to gain a cultural understanding of self in relation to others. On this basis, cross-cultural coalitions can be built between self and others (Chang, 2008; Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). As an autoethnography, this study will employ a variety of methods that include evocative writing, unearthing of local beliefs and perceptions, recording of life history (e.g., kinship, education, etc.), and in-depth interviewing. In addition, journaling, looking at archival records, both institutional and personal, interviewing one's own self, and using writing to generate a self-cultural understanding, will be used (Chang, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, & Stock, 2007).

Organization of the Dissertation

The chapters in this dissertation are organized to study the phenomena of Block pedagogy and discourse at multiple levels of analysis, starting from a macro account at the city level, to a micro account at the level of neighborhood narratives. Chapter Two will provide the theoretical framework to situate my findings and order the flow of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three focuses on the milieu of Oakland and portrays the richness of culture and history of Blacks as the backdrop to contextualize the narratives that will drive this study. It also will situate the neighborhood as a 'minoritized space' out of which these narratives grow. In

Chapter Three, I set the foundation of the oppositional/ alternative frameworks of the Black Panther party and the ‘gangsta’ or outsider archetypes. It is these two options to the White supremacist power structure that the cohort most identified with. These two oppositional ideologies undergird much of the pedagogical frames of the cohorts.

Chapter Four further develops those two thematic archetypes and gives a historical overview of each as they related to Oakland. This chapter will follow Chapter Three in its sociohistorical framework to develop the context to which the cohort came of age in and how their choice of pathway was influenced.

Chapter Five will seek to illuminate life trajectories that are developed from childhood experiences and expose ideologies. Narratives emphasizing the relationship between socializing agents such as past experiences, apprenticeships, public perceptions, and the social structure itself to these emerging identities as they struggle with uneven tensions between parental expectations and school and the needs of individuals, groups, and categories, will be put forth. These tensions often strengthen notions of difference and separation in the chosen pathways in the cohort. This chapter will also look to narratives for instances of the transmittance of ‘privileged knowledge’. The reception and the interpretation of such then begin to shape the individual’s identity inside of the larger group context. Privileged knowledge itself is the creolization of these disparate ideologies coming together to compose a road map for a new world discourse. The passing down and/or the continued discussing of this new ideology gives the cohort a tool to interact with the dominant paradigm but often leads back to reinforcing the dominant paradigm, failing to articulate a sustainable challenge to the White supremacist power structure.

The conclusion brings together three levels of analysis, from macro level analysis of space and place in Oakland, down to micro level narratives of participants in Block settings detailing their linked identity to past alternative/oppositional ideologies. Multilevel analyses and multiple analytic frames demonstrate the complex, historical, sociopolitical milieu that shaped this cohort’s pedagogical practices. The conclusion offers theoretical and practical implications of this research and also suggests further avenues of inquiry.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

The end of Jim Crow era, with the passage of Civil Rights laws forever changed the face and course of the United States of America. The new laws sought to right the centuries of long struggle, rectifying human rights abuse for the descents of enslaved Africans, which seemingly signaled the death of institutional racism and ushered in a new golden era. However, violent racial clashes continued as the Watts Riot⁴ kicked off just one day after the signing of the Voting Act of 1965 and continued for six more days. A month later, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, which mandated that the State enforce Affirmative Action laws.⁵

Just one year later, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed in response to rampant police hostility and brutality. In 1967, major riots broke out all over the country. Detroit and Newark saw nearly weeklong destruction as Blacks railed against institutional suppression. A new breed of young Black leaders saw the civil rights era as an appropriated and uncompleted movement that deferred to liberals and ultimately capitulated to the White supremacist power structure. It was amiss this conflagration that led to the Black Power Movement being literally and figuratively, birthed out of its ashes.

The Black Power Movement marked a switch from the goals and methods of the previous movement. In response, the State became more aggressive and ramped up previously proven methods of suppression and oppression. To understand what effect this cycle of hegemony and counter hegemonic forces had on Black males. I will use this chapter to examine how they have been dehumanized, *othered*, and then pushed out of schools and directly into the way of institutional processes that mark them as vulnerable to premature death. I will use Critical Race Theory to explicate how these processes do the work of White supremacy. However, first I will revisit some popular theories of urban decay and structural imbalance to show how Black males have been mis-theorized and how that theorization lack of structural critique leads to a flat analysis, with no real hope of change.

Deficit and Pathology Models

The cultural deficit model, most notably championed by the Moynihan Report⁶, has been employed to explain the cycle of poverty whereby Blacks have been ensnared since emancipation. The report correctly makes the argument that the breakdown of the Black family structure has mirrored the breakdown of the industrial cities in which an overwhelming majority of Black families reside. According to the report, the under-training of Blacks for well-paying jobs leaves them more vulnerable to shifts in the economy (Moynihan, 1966). This is especially true of the Black working class. This vulnerability is repeatedly exploited, as the Black working class is perpetually under-employed. These men and women are then locked into the “last hired,

⁴ The Watts Riot occurred in August of 1965 and lasted for six days in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. By the time it ended, 4 people had been killed, 1,032 injured, and 3,438 arrested.

⁵ It requires government contractors to "take affirmative action" toward prospective minority employees in all aspect of hiring and employment.

Read more: Civil Rights Movement Timeline (14th Amendment, 1964 Act, Human Rights Law) — Infoplease.com <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html#ixzz19oS66ZYu>

⁶ *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action* (1965)

first fired” cycle and then poverty becomes entrenched. It is then exacerbated by what the Moynihan report sees as the problem of the Black family (Moynihan, 1966).

However, the overly focusing on the political economy as a neutral force that affects everyone evenly misses the unseen hand of racism that informs how these processes are legislated, distributed and implemented on the ground. The decisions that are made that place Blacks as the bearers of the blunt of these processes are then uninterrogated and Blacks are then seen as the unfortunate recipients of bad luck or being disadvantaged because of their place in the workforce or other indicators of economic health.

The chapter of the Moynihan Report entitled *The Tangle of Pathology*, focused on the number of Black children born out-of-wedlock and the matriarchal family structure these children are born into, which leads to pathology in the Black male who is therefore overly dependent on women (Moynihan, 1966). Overall, the report is an indictment of the Black family as disorganized, dysfunctional, and pathological. It propagates racist stereotypes of Black women as overbearing, male-neutering, welfare moms who perpetuate the cycle of poverty by having too many babies (Crenshaw, 1995; Davis, 1998). It notes the higher unemployment statistics for Blacks versus Whites and identifies the Black family as an obstacle to any such effort and blames the culture of Blacks as keeping them trapped in this cycle that started from slavery (Moynihan, 1966).

William Julius Wilson⁷ combines the arguments of the culture of poverty with structural determinism to trumpet the declining significances of race. He focused on the causes of the effects Moynihan (1966) highlighted over four decades ago. Wilson’s looked at the de-investment of industry in the inner cities and the ensuing exodus of jobs that leaves the working class employee unable to follow the job flight. Moreover, the loss of jobs then leads to the breakdown of services and investment in the public good, namely education. In Wilson’s formulation, this creates a huge and permanent class of Black under-skilled laborers who can’t find gainful employment. Wilson holds the State responsible for the cyclical nature of the culture of poverty in the inner cities and he sees policies that heavily impact those neighborhoods as color blind or at least color neutral. Wilson sees the Black middle class culpable in the destruction of the inner cities (Wilson, 1980). His research lays most of his critique on the relations between economic class structures that maintain inequality and reproduce themselves.

Moynihan and Wilson both focus on the working class inside of a capitalist system. Similar approaches have argued that Black males have been cast as part of the material landscape in the battle to expand capital by manipulating laws to widen the pipeline to incarceration and feed the bulging prison-industrial complex (Appel, 2003; Davis, 1998; Gilmore, 2002). The swelling of the prison population leads to overexposure of Black males to processes that contribute to premature death (Gilmore, 2002). The State, from this perspective, plays an active role in developing and then implementing policies that will directly and negatively impact Black males. Moynihan and Wilson see the state as a passive actor in the limiting of opportunity structures in society for Black men, while Gilmore (2002), Davis (1998), and Appel (2003) see the State as a conscious actor in oppression.

A different but complementary way of explaining this cohort of boys; posits that the perceptions of limited opportunity structures have more of a detrimental impact on inner city

⁷ Dr. Wilson is one of the top authorities on race and poverty in the United States. He is a professor at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and has written several controversial and important books: *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) and *When Work Disappears* (1996).

youths (Noguera, 2004; Noguera, 2001; Ogbu, 1987). The perception of limited opportunity structures pushes Black males into the direct path of the Prison Industrial Complex and reinforces those negative perceptions (MacLeod, 1987; Noguera, 2008). In this theory, the State takes an active hand in effecting the outcomes of the life pathways of Black males.

One way the State is thought to indoctrinate is through the educational system. In this theory, the public schools are a site of the reproduction of social/economic status. The mismatch between Black males and the indoctrinating public education system typifies and echoes the relationship between those same men and the capitalist economic system (Apple, 1998; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2001; Levin, 1985; O'Conner, 2002; Willis, 1977). This 'echoing' creates a hierarchy between the dominant and subaltern groups in the educational system that mirrors the hierarchy in society (Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

In this way, Black males are seen as incompatible with society, as they fail or resist being assimilated by educational means into the dominant culture (O'Conner, 2002). This model gives a powerful critique of the capitalist system and public education's role in the replication of the hierarchical class system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; O'Connor, 2002). In this theory, the hegemonic American ideology that indoctrinates kids into a class hierarchical stratum is in the service of capital. It is important to interrogate capital's role in both the education system but also its role in the built up environment (impoverished neighborhoods) and then to go beyond that by decentering White Supremacy.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses what both Wilson's (1978) research and the Moynihan report (1965) miss. It grounds my analysis of 'Block Pedagogy' from an insider's perspective. As an insider, I have fully participated inside of this cohort in multiple roles. I have engaged in and or witnessed: illegal activity, pseudo gang behavior, street warfare and other counter societal activities. I am privy to processes that an outsider may never have and I have the tools to interpret events in their proper place, without inserting extra meaning into each event.

CRT views race as central to any case or analysis and not simply as a superstructural phenomenon. It expands the conversation, allowing me to see beyond the veil of the class paradigm, to examine oppression on the multiple levels that are missing in the above studies. In addition, CRT analyzes racism as an ideological pillar upholding American society and argues that racism has been reemployed in cultural deficit models as seen in both of the above ways of explanation (i.e., Wilson and Moynihan) (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1995).

CRT serves as the lens through which I viewed the other side of the equation that Gilmore (2002) and Davis (1998) have illuminated in their various studies on the Prison Industrial Complex. These researchers explain quite convincingly how the State has an active role in the criminalization and subsequent incarceration of Black youths, especially Black men, but they both miss how and why those men make the conscious choices to put themselves in the line of those powerful processes. I argue that CRT helped me get at those rationales.

Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law that undergird the making of the Constitution and the establishment of a White America (Delgado, 1984). CRT views race as a social construct tinged with genetic markers that impart real-world significance. Race is a lived experience that is used to distinguish groups from one another in the service of oppression and domination. Race is how society is ordered and maintained. CRT further argues that the limitations of the current multicultural, postracial and

multiracial paradigm remain mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order and views race as merely a byproduct of capitalism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT argues that segregation reified the Black/White binary through which America viewed race. The Plessy⁸ case, along with the one-drop rule⁹ further entrenched race as a marker, with Black as deviant (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1984). It also allowed other ethnic groups to assimilate to Whiteness while Blacks could not. America is a White country and those who aren't White aren't American and can therefore have their humanity questioned. CRT sees racism as a common experience of people of color in the U.S., where racism benefits both White elites (materially) and White working-class people (psychically). Race is a socially constructed system and has little to do with biology or science, but has direct-lived experiences (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1984; Du Bois, 1903/2003).

White supremacy structures address how you can and cannot talk about race and the struggle for racial justice (Bell, 1992). CRT contextualizes the Black experience inside a system of domination and oppression, with an increased awareness of how it shapes our daily lives (Hooks, 2003). Blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices. After centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America, being Black means being minimally subjected to White supremacist abuse and being part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse (Du Bois, 1903/2003; West, 2001; Woodson, 1933/2003).

CRT employs multiple research tools including explicating autobiographies, biographies, parables, stories, testimonies, and voice to situate race and racism and to produce counter-narratives that seek to expose hidden truths (Compton-Lilly, 2008). These tools produce rich, detailed narratives come from the vantage points of those who have experienced oppression (Compton-Lily, 2008). Inherent in the narrative structure are the concepts of voice and the authentication of the native speaker; stories can be told without an interlocutor and can be done so with humor and complexity (Compton-Lily, 2008; Delgado, 1984). Using these tools, I will layout the theoretical framework employed in the research and the tools I utilized in making sense of the complex issues that are at play, including how I am framing the group of Black males as a cohort.

Collective Identity

The cohort was the final step in collectively creating the Block. The Block did not imaginatively exist outside of the cohort or before the cohort. The geographic creation of the area and the space that was set aside for the filling up with the parents was the process of decade long forces. The individual members came together while still forming our identities to co-construct our environment. Critical Race Theory view of Blacks capacity to respond creatively to oppression while valuing their lived experience; allows me to give weight to the interplay of the

⁸ The 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* formally established the doctrine of, "separate but equal." This concept stated that separate public facilities of equal quality do not violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, which reads:

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

⁹ The one drop rule is a historical term, classifying any one with African ancestry as Black. It is an automatic assignment into a race, irrespective of heritage.

cohorts group formation. So as the cohort created the Block, and the much larger neighborhood, how was the cohort collectively created?

To better understand how I am defining the concept ‘cohort’, and how a cohort functions inside this study, I will turn to Gee’s (1989) description of identity and how identity is formed by membership inside a group, with rules and standards. Gee redefines the concept of discourse to show how identity and literacy are mediated through a set of filters— both acquired and learned. He defines Discourses as the Meta combinations of sayings (writings)-doing-being-valuing-believing. Connected stretches of languages that make sense, discourse (with a little ‘d’) is a part of Discourse (always more than just part of language). Discourse is a sort of identity kit that is made up with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. Discourses are a way of displaying— through words, action, values, and beliefs—membership in a particular social group or social network and also include people who associate with each other around a common set of interests, goals, and activities. Discourse creates social position (perceptions) from which people are invited (summoned) to speak, listen, act, read, write, think, feel, and believe in certain characteristics, in a historically recognizable way, combined with their own individual styles and creativity.

The collective creation of the cohort’s identity kit marked us as ‘Hill Serpents’ from the Block. We learned how to dress, talk, act and fight in a similar but distinctive manner. Our identity was always on display in both public and private settings, to us, there wasn’t any difference. We are all capable of being different kinds of beings in different Discourses. Gee (1989) goes on to say that Discourses are resistant to internal criticisms and self-scrutiny since uttering viewpoints that seriously undermines them define them as being outside them. The Discourse itself defines what acceptable criticism is. The Discourse itself defines who outsiders are and who is normal or not normal. Outsiders to the Block were typically not allowed and those who were were few and far between and usually because they shared similar interests, backgrounds or ways of seeing the world.

Discourses are defined in part, by their relations to opposite Discourses. Membership in one Discourse can marginalize viewpoints and/or tenets from another Discourse, even if a person is a member to both. Dominant Discourses are the Discourses that lead to the acquisition of social goods (i.e., money, power, status). They have the least conflict with the other discourses in the dominant group who uses them.

To Gee (1989), the individual is the meeting point of many and sometimes conflicting Discourses. It is the immersion inside of a Discourse that ensures that the learner takes on the perspective, adapts a world view, accepts a set of core values, and masters an identity, often without a great deal of critical and reflective awareness about these matters, nor indeed, about the Discourse itself.

Primary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed early in life, during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their socio-cultural setting. Primary Discourses constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we can acquire or resist other Discourses. Gee (1989) distinguishes between learned and acquired identities by the classification of Secondary Discourse.

Secondary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed in as part of their socialization, within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer group socialization (i.e., schools, gangs, office, etc.). The boundary between Primary and Secondary is in constant negotiation and contestation in society and history. The member is

still caught in a power struggle in this reconceptualization between what is valued in society and what is valued at home. This contest is played out in social cues and cultural texts used to signify membership inside a particular Discourse. Gee (1989) calls this Performance, which is a way of acting inside a Discourse.

In Gee's paradigm, he classifies acquisition as a process of acquiring something (usually subconsciously) by exposure to a model, a process of trial and error, and practice within a social group without formal teaching. He then goes on to say that learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through being taught. We perform better what we acquire, but we consciously know more of what we learn.

He defines literacy as the mastering of a Secondary Discourse. This is where the new paradigm escapes some of the failings of the old. For Gee (1989), literacy is liberating (powerful) if it is used as a meta-language or a meta-Discourse (e.g., a set of meta-words, meta-values, and/or meta-beliefs) for the critique of other literacies (dominant) and the way they constitute us as people and situate us in society.

The cohort became our primary Discourse. The cohort is what informed our daily activities and we came together every day to interpret the outside world through that lens. We also filtered our families and home lives through this prism as we largely internalized the institutional brutalization of our parents. We saw the manifestation of those brutalities in many forms but not limited to: Alcoholism, physical abuse, mental abuse, rage and others. We turned our gaze from our parents' wounds and looked to each other for support and guidance. We took cues from each other on how to engage with various institutions and agents of the State. School, as a socializing institution, was where we performed the Block and where we bumped into multiple other Discourse performances. We quickly learned that there is a price to pay for certain aspects of that performance at school. The Block unity was quickly threatened at school as we were separated into different classes according to how compatible we were to the educational indoctrination. I went into the gifted classes while most were tracked into what we called the bone head classes that were stocked with out of date textbooks, disaffected teachers and Black students who were treated as damaged humans.

Theorizing White Supremacy and Minoritization

They were herded in, two by two, pat searched and then led through a metal detector. The guards looked at them with disdain as the weary children entered the dilapidated building. Paint peeling, tiles broken, a musty smell permeated the narrow hallways as the cacophony of voices transformed an empty edifice into a living organism, breathing with a horrible energy of hate. Muffled complaints were quickly met with firm responses and sharp shoves into the hallway, framed by half-heartedly painted over graffiti-stained walls. The hallway funneled the students out into a weed-encrusted courtyard surrounded by a high chain link fence patrolled by armed guards, with two-way radios and billy clubs. A loud bell screeched and an authoritative voice rang out, "Report to your designated areas as quickly and as orderly as possible."

This setting sounds like a prison, but it is an account of walking through the doors at a junior high school summer session I tutored in East Oakland. I tutored at my former school in the old music room, repurposed as a computer training area. Early in the program, I found myself in an unfamiliar situation. One of the students was picking on a smaller student in front of the vice-principal. I was astounded by his audaciousness and general disrespect for authority. I commented that what he did wasn't the smartest thing. He took exception to my comment and thought that I was calling him stupid. I noticed out the corner of my eye that he silently signaled

to one of his friends to close the door. Then I found myself encircled by five mini humans, who no doubt thought they were going to take me by surprise and mob on me in this room. It took me a couple of seconds to compose myself and not let my ego take over and start slinging students around the room. I inhaled deeply and explained to the wounded party what the intentions were behind my words, as I maneuvered myself into a position that was not as vulnerable to a sneak attack in case there were some weapons secreted about.

After we were straight about what was said and what was meant, I marveled at how quickly the need to defend their ‘manhood’ was and the readiness to inflict harm had surfaced. There had to be a deeper level of analysis than the staid ‘urban predator’ way of explaining this, which was just an updated Staggolee¹⁰ mythos. Was this a simple case of young Black males rebelling against a perceived wrong? Or is there an alternative narrative I can employ to explain this event? Later in this chapter I will look at how a malformed understanding of Black masculinity in the adolescent boys interacts with an oppressive educational discourse, informed by a white supremacist societal structure, to frame them as predators and sociopaths.

I will first define, and then explain how dehumanization, minoritization and othering are all the direct result of a White Supremacy ideology that indirectly structured the identity of the cohort and the physical environment that that identity is constructed in. Next, I will bring a materialist perspective to bear on the topic. Building on that, I will then show how those derivatives combine with another agent of White Supremacy, the educational power;¹¹ to delimit Black student’s educational outlook while restricting them to an indoctrinating public school system. Last, I will go beyond a materialist perspective to show how the above mentioned inner-city public schools conditions are justified under White Supremacy to maintain that same styled system of domination and how the rejection of that process of indoctrination merges with the rejection of mainstream social norms, forming a new or counter norm that the cohort then uses as lens to view themselves and society through.

White supremacy.

White supremacy is:

A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

http://www.cwsworkshop.org/pdfs/WIWS/Defn_White_Supremacy.PDF

This is the working definition of White Supremacy that is used mainly by antiracist activists and prison industrial complex scholars (Appel, 2003; Davis, 1998). I feel this definition is the most encompassing, as it takes into consideration the socio-economical implication of White Supremacy and establishes a lens in which to better view the concept of Whiteness. I am arguing that it is important to understand how and why Whiteness was constructed and then hidden from view, in order to understand how Blackness is then framed in opposition. I am further arguing that conflating ‘White’ with ‘American’ is an attempt to further push Blackness to the ends of the margin further obfuscates Whiteness.

¹⁰ Staggolee (or Stagger Lee) is one of the most enduring stories from American folklore. It is a tale that comes from oral tradition and is about a man who defied White authority and was so “bad” that he could get away with it. His “badness” was admired because it put him above the White man’s law.

¹¹ I am utilizing a Foucault definition of power, which is a flowing matrix of power that circulates through a system, never static in its locale.

Whiteness was created in response to an outside stimulus, that stimulus being the other, and the need to separate and to be regarded as different. (Bonnett, 2008; Frankenberg, 2005; Hartman, 2004). Whiteness is constructed so as to better understand how Blackness is framed in opposition to it. Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas argue that the categories White and Black were created to establish a social hierarchy, with White being the normative and Black being the other (1999). Demirturk furthers that argument by stating White Supremacy dually trains Blacks to aspire to be White while conversely teaching them the impossibility of achieving that goal (2001). It is in this dual training that stems from the creation of racialized space and the empowering of that space where minoritization and othering occur.

Starting with the moment of the creation of the ‘other’, numerous cultures have found themselves cast opposite and beneath that of White Supremacy. This dogma has led to the suppression, domination, exploitation and/or eradication of the ‘other’, while the dominant group has directly benefited, “politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said, 1973, p.3). As the Europeans have gained by the managing and producing of the Orient, so too have the Euro-Americans gained by the act of classifying themselves as Americans—unhyphenated and unqualified (Said, 1973). Innate in this classification is the casting of those different from them as ‘other’, and locking them in a subaltern role with the label of savage, Native, immigrant, or minority. This is the creation of a hierarchal division of space that is maintained by the power imbalance inherent in the act of these descriptions.

For the purpose of this dissertation, space has manifested itself in terms of race and identity, with race being the social concept with its genesis in the act of creating the ‘other’, and identity being how space and race intersect to reflect the power imbalance in that creation and recreation through the merging of the two artificially created constructs.¹² Oakland has been established as the place where these abstractions were closely looked at. The Block cohort inhabited multiple identities inside of this bounded space, which I will explain later in this chapter, but first I will unpack theories that help me think about how the cohort has been historically situated in society.

On the other hand, and quite paradoxically. It also produced a supreme victory for the Euro-American majority in that citizens of color internalized their subaltern status so well that they now identified themselves as minorities. They have finally bought into the rationale of the dominant sector and recognized as a fact of life the social space that separates the Euro-American community from the minority communities. (Laguerre, 2010, p. 15)

What Laguerre is talking about is the mental erection of spatial borders that prevent groups from seeing themselves as equal to the dominant group, whether that is conscious or unconscious is irrelevant to the dominant culture.¹³ The positioning of groups in a hierarchical division of space allows for the commodification of space into a dominant/subaltern paradigm, which leads to a minority group identity. Further, it matters not if there is resistance to, only acceptance of the majority/minority paradigm. The spatial border of this damning paradigm has physically manifested itself in various guises—slavery, Jim Crows laws, grandfather clauses, separate but equal laws, and countless other racist, sexist laws.

¹² Hence, Black being the opposite of White, reflecting the creation of the race of Blacks and the space assigned to those who are different from the White dominant group as being hyphenated Americans: Black Americans.

¹³ This is not to say subaltern communities suffer from group low self- esteem or that they have given into inequality, but there is a complicitness into accepting that you are of a minority. There is a kind of group insanity in believing that things are better and will continue to get better while accepting that you are sub- alternate.

The racial discourse is formulated by the creation of space, and the acceptance and codification of laws and programs. This discourse is self-sustaining and self-replicating. To challenge this discourse, the minority group(s) has to change the perception of what it is and what it is not. Sometimes the laws are attacked directly. Sometimes it's the perception itself that is attacked. Some groups seek to assimilate to the majority, while other groups can't. The issue is that they still recognize themselves as a minority and are caught in the majority's hegemonic discourse that reinforces White Supremacy, also calling into question their 'humanness', as we shall soon see.

For young Black males that first encounter with these processes are usually in class. We saw the effects of these processes in the home on our parents but not really understand what we saw. At school, these processes took on very real characteristics and real consequences. Following, I will explicate schools as a site of dehumanization and to contextualize the cohort still developing oppositional framework to the dominant discourse. In showing how schools are used by the dominant discourse to either assimilate those who are compatible or dehumanized those who are indigestible. I will then show ways that the cohort uses to fight both assimilation and dehumanization.

Dehumanization.

Dehumanization is an inherent manifestation of the invisible discourse of White Supremacy that is implemented in its offspring—Whiteness (Demirturk, 2001; McLaren, 1997; Parker et al., 1999). Dehumanization is the work that White Supremacy does by positing Whiteness in the guise of being American, without affording a true path to achieve that goal to those who are minoritized as *other* (Demirturk, 2001; Hartman, 2004; Laguerre, 2010). Historically, the path to the full rights and privileges of American citizenship has been education. For Blacks, that pathway has been denied or constricted to the few. The denial of that traditional avenue of being American leads to alternative ways of existing inside of system of domination. Education as a site of dehumanization of Blacks-and Blacks resistant to it, leads to a 'pushing out' effect.

As a young Black male who has attended some of the same public schools that I now have taught in, I can personally attest to their deplorable conditions. To that end, I will next argue that the state of these schools can be attributed to racist educational and social policies by explaining the mechanisms that allow for the dehumanization of Blacks in general, but students in particular.

What Is It to Be "Human"

At the core of its tenants, CRT is about human rights and how Blacks have been systematically denied them. CRT argues that White Supremacy has been maintained by the consistent denial of human rights and the recasting of Blacks as subhuman and *less than* (Bell, 1992). To understand how this is done and further contextualize the sociopolitical environment the cohort grew up in, I will turn to Raymond Williams to tease out how *Humanness* gets equated to Whiteness and what happens to those who fall short of reaching that designation.

Williams (1991) posits that in the Western world, White has been equated to being a human being and that it is the humanness of the White man that is natural. He further states that if White is what being human means, then all others are naturalized underneath that rubric. White, and later, Whiteness is used to describe what is lacking in the other. It is this aspect of being *less than*, that becomes the nature of other racial groups in general, and for Blacks in

particular. Those attributes that are ascribed to Blacks are not seen as natural to humans and are therefore a deviant behavior or characteristic. In the Western paradigm of White Supremacy, this deviancy is naturalized as essential Blackness, becoming talked about in a holistic manner with direct relevance to the nature of Black people. Other groups have been naturalized in this same way— Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, and so on. Williams (1980) delves deeper by talking about White as being material instead of being an abstract concept.¹⁴ Here is the locale where we can see the clear delineation between White Supremacy as a system of domination and being White as it morphs into a material product of that system of domination. As a material commodity, White transform into Whiteness. Whiteness as a material then becomes ascribed into the educational system and is implicitly taught in class and punished when not achieved.

Cheryl Harris's (1993) article, *Whiteness as Property*, builds on Williams' concept of Whiteness as a material. Harris articulates how the abstractions Williams writes about are inscribed into American law as there had to be a legal way to separate White from Black. She begins with the institution of slavery and teases out the how the delineation of race occurred. She states that chattel slavery as a system of property facilitated the merger of White identity and property. It became crucial to be identified as White, to have the property of being White. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, and the property of free human beings (Harris, 1993). To Harris, slavery, or rather not to be enslaved, was the impetus for the merger of being White and property into Whiteness. It was protection from making the leap from indentured servitude into chattel slavery. Harris states the roots of Whiteness is based in White supremacy and that Whiteness as property is also based on White supremacy and domination over two groups: Native Americans and Blacks. "Whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus—of a right to exclude." (Harris, 1993, p.1733). It is this exclusion, what Whiteness is not, that leads to racial subjugation and continue domination of Blacks, both then and now.

Throughout history, Whites have built in and up mechanisms to ensure continued dominance and have come to take these mechanisms for granted. "Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits (public and private privileges) and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law." (Harris, 1993, p. 1733). According to Harris (1993) legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated against an unacknowledged backdrop of White Supremacy and Whiteness as property. In this view, institutions that support the continued dominance of White Supremacy are political, economic, educational and judicial. Public institutions such as schools transmit this information to Black school children, and they in turn react to that dominant discourse. Next I will look at how this dominance gets transmitted to Blacks through means of governmental acts. That will be first viewed with how William's (1980) dehumanization plays out in slavery, then advanced with what Orlando Patterson (1982) calls Social Death. The purpose of which is to recast some of the choices the cohort made not as antisocial but as a counter-hegemonic choice.

Forms of "Death"

Patterson (1982) coined the term 'Social Death' to interrogate the master/slave binary and the mind state of the slave. He states that slavery was a postponement of death, as death was always hanging over the slaves' head as an analogous suspended sentence to be carried out at any time by the slave owner. This state of nonbeing, Patterson claimed, was a social death

¹⁴ Since race itself is a concept, it follows that being White is a concept, he (Williams) moved beyond this.

because the slave had no status outside of his master. The slave was allowed to live by the grace of his master; therefore he was beholden to represent his master wherever he went. The slave could not represent him or herself because as an individual, they did not exist. The slave was socially dead and the resulting powerlessness was due to the substitution of one form of death; social death for another form, violent physical death, which hovered around 30 years old enslaved Black males (Patterson, 1982).

Patterson's concept of social death will be reemployed later in this study in order to illuminate how currently situated Black males make skewed sense of their social positioning. I will further complicate that concept with Gilmore's (2002) expansion of that notion of a state of nonbeing, with the concept of premature death. Gilmore states, "the substitution of one form of death for another is not secure but rather a pathway to and marker of vulnerability to premature physical death" (Gilmore, 2002, p. 20).

Premature death may push Patterson's work, but it also borrow from Hall's (1996) description of racism, "as the fatal coupling of power and difference" (p.17) — has neatly and succinctly summed up White Supremacy in those eight words. White Supremacy's power to create racial space in the form of racial categories is amplified by the presence of the term 'fatal'. Gilmore seized on the 'fatal' in *fatal coupling*, to advance her own thinking on racism, "Racism is the state-sanctioned and or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death" (p. 6). Racism in either of these definitions is linked with a form of death. Racism is the pathway that leads from the social death of slavery to the vulnerabilities of premature death that we shall build upon next.

Social death, or the state of being a nonbeing, is also directly related to civil death where an individual has lost his or her rights through a governmental act that criminalizes something that previously was not criminal. Gilmore uses the ex-cons who lost their jobs as airport screeners after 9/11 as examples. She says that these cons were stripped of their rights as citizens and are now analogous to Aliens, as the government declared a restriction on civil liberties to fight terrorism. These exact same forces have been historically at work on Black males in the community and in schools, as evidenced by the metal detectors and security patrols.

It is important to contextualize the above mentioned theories to highlight how Black children are dehumanized and re-cast as deviants to be housed in temporary pseudo prisons until they are old enough for the real ones, or barring that, have been assimilated into the mainstream culture (Alexander, 2011; Hewitt, Kim, & Losen, 2010). This dual training left the adolescent cohort prepared to make that segue from schools to jails but also left us with a bitter taste in our mouths in relations to school. The cohort developed an alternative/ oppositional stance in relation to the educational system, but also to their parents seeming embrace of it and wider institutional structures.

What I found best highlights this is that without fail, every single one of my participants had either a neutral or a negative attitude towards schools, ranging from "whatever" to "fuck school". This same hostility was also directed at working 9-5 jobs that many of their parents had. However, this hostility was not just directed at our parents and school but in society in general. Next is will talk about how Black masculinity has been historically framed and how it is theorized now. This will be helpful in analyzing the self-training the cohort exhibited in latter chapters and oppositional stances that lead to alternative life pathways.

Black Masculinity

The young men in the computer room were defending their perceived notions of manhood and the intrusion they thought I was making on it. The willingness to quickly respond to a perceived slight has been literally beaten into young Black males as a survival mode that ironically mimics the dominant old slave narrative of the *Mandingo* archetype, which was employed to further strip away the mental vestiges of humanity left behind by slavery (Grey, 2004). This archetype reduced slaves to animal instincts, positing that Black males were base and not ruled by intelligence; rather they reacted to emotions and instinct, driven primarily by sex. This animal instinct made them dangerous and thus they had to be controlled and carefully bred for their own good. Violence was second nature to them and it was used to attract females and to maintain dominance over females and other males.

Black masculinity has been framed in these terms ever since slavery, with only slight degrees of variation. The major turn came when it stopped being how Black males were framed, but as how Black males wanted to be seen. This was typified by the Staggolee¹⁵ mythos, which transformed the Mandingo archetype into a counter-dominance narrative of standing up to the White man and not being scared of the consequences pertaining to the act of rebelling. Staggolee was the 'big, bad negro' made incarnate. He retained the sexual prowess from the Mandingo archetype and gained an anti-establishment persona. This mythos gained a lasting hold on the Black consciousness, as it kept being re-imagined according to the time period; most notably with the Blaxploitation¹⁶ movie period of the 60's and 70's, corresponding with the rise of Black Nationalism and radicalism.

Now the 'big, bad negro' is synonymous with hip-hop culture in general, and with gansta rap in particular. The expansion of the mythos has come to be embraced as 'authentic Blackness'; men who came from socio-economical disadvantaged neighborhoods laid claim to that mythos as a type of badge of courage or resistance to the dehumanization aspect to the larger societal discourse, which then became essentialized Blackness. Children were being raised to mimic this discourse as a way to prepare them for dealing with systemic racism in adulthood; a type of armoring against White Supremacy.

In Richard Wright's (1940), Native Son, you see the effects of this mythos play out in the main character of Bigger Thomas. Thomas's fate was unavoidable, as are the fates of the other protagonist in Claude Brown's (1965) Manchild in the Promiseland, Nathan McCall's (1995) Makes Me Wanna Holla, autobiographical The Education of Sonny Carson (1974), Brent Staples' (1995) Parallel Time, Sanyika Shakur's (1992) Monster, and many others. Wright's novel was the most prominent in a long series of boys-to-men books that deal with this centralized theme. In each of these literary works, school was the backdrop and site of depowerment, always to be avoided in the characters early years. However, most of these literacy works fail to contextualize their experience in a larger historical context and instead, they revert to falling into a liberal narrative of personal responsibility gone amok, something to which this study seeks to remedy.

¹⁵ See lyrics from the song in appendix.

¹⁶ Blaxploitation: a film genre that emerged in the United States in the early 1970s when many exploitation films were made specifically (and perhaps exclusively) for an urban audience; the word itself is a portmanteau of the words "black" and "exploitation." –blaxploitation.com

The cohort developed a negative association with schools as a site of learning. School became a site to apply learned behaviors from the Block and to acquire new skills to bring back to the Block. To better understand how this disconnect grew, I will use Ferguson (2002) to take a look at how implicit racism plays out in schools and how young Black males are criminalized as ‘rule breakers’ and are cast as ‘willfully bad’. It is this labeling as willfully bad that denies the students the benefits of being “naturally naughty”, something playful to which the white males can enjoy without serious repercussions. She argues that the White male falls into two categories: a good, good boy *and* a bad, good boy, while the Black male is afforded neither (Ferguson, 2002). The young Black male is not even regarded as youth, but is instead responsible for adult behavioral characteristics, which she terms as being, “adultified” (p.587). These youths are denied the associations that come with the age and are described as being close to nature or animal like. Ferguson also points out how these children are further dehumanized by referring to the language that is used to describe them as a species. The process of adultification makes it easier for the school to punish Black students and then in turn, for the students to build up a negative association with school. This starts a vicious cycle between the students and the schools that spills over to the public and is supplemented by negative media images and stories.

Hooks (2004) states the Black males are viewed more than any other male group in society as lacking intellectual skill and “more body than mind”. By being “stereotyped via racism and sexism”, even the Black men in the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy”, who are educated and forced to make themselves appear as if they know nothing in a “world where a smart black man risks punishment” (Hooks, 2004, p. 33). They are made to believe that thinking will not help them survive in a society that only believes in patriarchal manhood (Hooks, 2004).

It begins in the Black male childhood where they are constantly miseducated and where, “the curiosity that may be deemed a sign of genius in a White male child is viewed as trouble making when expressed in black boys” (Hooks, 2004, p. 36). When the schools were segregated, Black males were expected to excel academically, yet when they were integrated, only the subordinate were allowed to be in gifted classes. The only Black males who were able to beat the system were able to do so because they had an advocate who protected them from the destructive force of the biased educational system (Hooks, 2004). Black males are groomed to feel that no matter how smart they are, they will always be rejected in an educational system. Educational systems not only fail Black males, but they are content with failing six and seven year old children who carry no blame (Hooks, 2004).

Education is worshipped even among the lowest socio-economic Black families, yet they are being trained to doubt themselves as being unteachable or to think school isn’t for them. The media does nothing to assuage these fears by portraying Black boys who enjoy reading as freaks or sissy’s, therefore influencing the image of patriarchal manhood. Unfortunately many adult Black males begin to relish reading and see it as a source of knowledge when they are imprisoned, even though reading is a skill that should have been imparted in their early educational years (Hooks, 2004).

In turn, Black men that are well-educated are taught to not be critical thinkers since they are seen as a threat within the working world. They receive unrelenting pressure from White people to affirm their Blackness, which shows in the form of Black men feeling forced to assume a hyper-masculine posture. To many Black men in predominantly white settings, this serves as a protection from “white racialized rage” but that means subjecting themselves to the racist stereotypes (ibid).

Before any Black males even act violent, they have been raised in a culture that defines “patriarchal masculinity” as “the will to do violence” and a way to gain “social control” (Hooks, 2004). Many Black males avoid confronting their issues by scapegoating the blame onto Black women, “The Man”, and racism. In order to take responsibility for their lives the issue must be confronted; however, what it means to take “responsibility” has been a contradiction. Black men have been socialized to believe in the patriarchal sense of responsibility where they must be the provider and job obtainer of the family. Due to a lack of jobs and poverty, many cannot fulfill the patriarchal responsibility and result in feeling like a failure. The majority of Black men do not attempt to challenge the racist, sexist status quo by finding a new definition of manhood, and therefore unwittingly end up giving an allegiance, which was developed in childhood, to the status quo.

In order to reinforce the patriarchal masculinity Black boys are “subjected to forms of psychological terrorism” (Hooks, 2004, p.88), such as shaming, or acts of humiliation. The few Black boys that react to the psychological terrorism by acting out in violent ways, are deemed uncivilized and are described with traits attributed to animals; White boys who act out are viewed as perhaps having a psychological disorder (which infers a cure). The soul-murdering of Black boys does not allow their self-esteem to grow, many times leading to feelings of powerlessness and chronic depression in their adult life.

Unfortunately, the demand for Black boys to give up their childhood in order to be the masculine patriarch of the family comes from a father who pushes his son to be a “man”, or a dysfunctional single mother who has had her own expectations of patriarchal masculine male disappointed. Either sends the message that the boy’s needs are less important than the families, forcing them to deal with their pain of abandonment by repressing their emotions. Repression often times leads the Black boys to become rageholics in their adult life and act out in covert and overt ways, especially since white supremacist capitalist patriarchy rage is rewarded and noticed, especially when it dehumanizes Black males.

During childhood, Black males are already surrounded by the messages disseminated by the mass media that they are only capable of failure. At a young age, many Black boys are emotionally abused inside the home and outside because of patriarchal socialization, which dictates that they must be ‘tough’ and not a ‘punk’. Not being a ‘punk’ for Black boys signifies repressing emotions, lack of empathy, and the ability to dominate, which society often mislabels as being sociopathic. While White boys also face brutalization because of patriarchal socialization, Black boys face a “double jeopardy” of not only society’s demand of patriarchal masculinity, but also the “psychohistory that represents black males as castrated, ineffectual and irresponsible” (Hooks, 2004, p.88).

Hooks further states that the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy system socializes Black males to believe that they will only reach manhood by dominating and controlling others, achieving it only through socially unacceptable means (Hooks, 2004). I will show instances where this kind of behavior was evident early in the cohorts live and how this behavior was the precursor to larger issues in adulthood.

Raymond Williams talks about the need for man to conquer nature and assert mastery over the universe; he reframes this as a need for man to define humanness visa-a-vie the conquered, while in actuality, they are moving farther from it (Williams, 1981). The difference is how each group has been positioned in history and how that struggle has played out along power relation lines. Angela Davis hinted at this when she talked about the Black man being encouraged to go back and reclaim his community, her question is, “Reclaim it from whom?” In

taking back the community, the focus is off the institutional powers and is put on the individual home where the contest becomes between the Black man and the Black woman and is played out in front of the kids (1998).

Hooks relates that transplanted African men arrived not agreeing with white men about the “nature of masculinity”, therefore they were thrown into the White-supremacist schools where they were taught patriarchal masculinity. The African men had to be taught that their status was higher than a women’s and that violence was a tool used to enforce domination. Black males were socialized by White men to believe that they needed to be “benevolent patriarchs” who sought freedom in order to protect and provide for black women. Hooks further adds that unfortunately the majority of Black men coming out of slavery sought to mimic the “dominator model” set by Whites (Hooks, 2004).

Ideology and Hegemony

The processes that underline this study and drive my research are how dominant narratives are used in the service of hegemony to further White supremacy and what counter narratives are successful in resisting dominant ideologies and which ones end up reinforcing the social paradigm. I argue in this study that a CRT framework does not have to be incompatible with a Marxist lens of analysis when looking at hegemony. The two fundamental differing frames can be successfully married as Leonardo has shown in his work (Leonardo, 2009). I am grounding the Panther/Black Criminalization pathways as counter hegemonies or alternative/oppositional narratives and seeking to understand them in this light.

Ideology has been defined as the mental frameworks—the language, the concepts, the categories, imaging of thought, and system of representation—that different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible ways that society works (Hall, 1989). Ideas arise from and reflect the material conditions and circumstances in which they are generated. This set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc, which helps to unite that bloc from the inside and maintain its dominance and leadership over society as a whole (Hall, 1986).

Because classic Marxism is so rigidly structure determined, it is reductionist of two varieties—class and economic. Althusser (1971) calls it expressive structures, which means that one practice (the economic) determines all the others in a direct way. Each effect is simply and simultaneously reproduced corresponding (i.e., expressed) on all other levels. Ideology hides and substitutes the underlying reality of the market. The binaries are too reductive: real vs. distorted, true consciousness vs. false consciousness. Capitalist production is a circuit, the circuit not only explains the production and consumption but also the reproduction—the ways in which keeping the circuit functional and moving are sustained. Sales, part of profits to labor in the form of wages, part to taxes for the state, part to buy more goods, back to sales.

If ideology is a reflection of class interest then it is a material good. One-sided explanations are always a distortion...half-truth...false consciousness is to act one way and believe that, while the truth is that you are acting against yourself, serving another purpose. No one-to-one correspondence between ruling class and ruling ideologies as Marx says. Class ascribed ideologies is the problem with Marxist ideologies. Hall (1986) remarks that Gramsci (1950s) states that common sense is constructed on historically contested terrain where ideological battles most frequently take place. Ruling ideologies are not guaranteed; dominance is coupled with ruling classes. Rather, the effective coupling of dominant ideas to the historical

bloc, which has acquired hegemonic power in a particular period, is what the process of ideological struggle is intended to secure. It is the objective of the exercise, not the playing.

Hall (1986) explains that first you need to talk about what leads to the enabling of the hegemonic state by the manufacturing of consent and its situated historical context. The Western style of government is not overtly coercive, but manipulative and dominant consensus-driven. This was termed as a war of position, as the State was not controlled in a one-to-one correspondence between base and superstructure. The many points of articulation between superstructures and base, lead to varied means of manipulation by the dominant class to influence and control the masses. This control was not absolute, but always in contestation, using active and passive means of maintaining control. Race is but one point of articulation in a many-layered web of domination and control (Hall, 1986).

Hegemony as the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group— this consent is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence), which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Lears, 2004). One site of domination is the discursive practices (i.e., vocabulary marks the boundaries of permissible discourse) and discourages the clarification of social alternatives, making it difficult for the disposed to locate the source of the unease, let alone remedy it.

Ruling groups never engineer consent with complete success. I question whether complete success is possible; if too complete then it might lead to uprising then revolution, as in the French Revolution. Lears (2004) says common sense equals conventional wisdom and good sense, empirical knowledge.

Gramsci's (1971) historical bloc's cemented ideology, possessed both cultural and economic solidarity. Historical bloc is a reimagining of Marx class solidarity that cuts across notions of owners and workers into the ideological. Not a static, closed system of ruling class domination, but rather it is a society in constant process, where the creation of counter-hegemonies remain a live option. Hegemony is of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in its degrees of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expression to develop. The power embedded in the historical bloc leads to the defining of its boundaries. Hegemony allows for space in order to better police that space (e.g., demonstrations, marches, anti-state rhetoric); oppressed groups participate in their own oppression by joining in the system.

Assimilation is one major way that complicity is structured; there is a permeable membrane between dominant and subordinate culture, not an impenetrable barrier. Contradictory consciousness, Gramsci's revolutionary commitment both energized and narrowed his vision. Dominant groups resort to force when their rule is questioned or not fully established. Culture and psychology help shape whole class interest. Counter hegemonies are necessary and a vital part to firmly establishing a hegemon. Unintended consequences are when you fight against one part of domination; you unwittingly reinforce it in how it is policed in the future— this is evident in the civil rights era and how the State redefined how they responded to the crisis, becoming better prepared for the Black Power Movement.

One of these points of articulation is education. Education is not a neutral enterprise. The educator is involved whether they know it or not (Apple, 2004). Educators can't separate their educational activity from the equally oppressive institutional arrangements and the forms of consciousness that dominant advanced industrial economies like our own project. The structuring of knowledge and the criteria and modes of education used to measure success in teaching, are

symbols in our educational institutions and are intimately related to the principles of social and cultural control in a society. The kinds of cultural resources and symbols schools select and organize are dialectically related to the kinds of normative and conceptual consciousness dictated by a hierarchical society. Schools distribute and preserve cultural capital. The implicit creation and maintenance of dominance determines a one-to-one correspondence between social consciousness and mode of production (i.e., social concepts being totally prefigured by a pre-existing set of economic conditions that control cultural activity...including schools) (Apple, 1998; McLaren, 1998).

Apple further states that there is a complex nexus of relationships, which in their final moment, are economically rooted, exerting pressure and setting limits on cultural practice, including schools (Apple, 1994). Social production seen in a post-structuralist framework means that cultural capital drives the passive social hegemony so there is no need for an active dissimulator. Thus there is a passive passing down of the dominant culture, morals, and ideology to the subaltern groups while at the same time devaluing the marginalized culture (Apple, 2004). The devaluing of the marginalized pushes them out of the academic pathway at a young age and puts them in the way of harm. This is a part of the process of dehumanization to which I am referring to as *institutional death*.

Institutional death is the State sanctioned de-powering and pre-criminalization¹⁷ of minority¹⁸ students, leaving them susceptible to extremely high mortality rates, incarceration, and under-education. This increased vulnerability to premature death is exposed by Agamben's (1995) theories on how the State deals with those they can't assimilate.

I will use Agamben to further contextualize the computer room example, and then by extension, the cohorts experience with school, as he explains how the State marginalizes minorities to exist in a perpetual state of *naked life* (Agamben, 2000). Agamben poses the questions, "What is it to be pure human and to be both subject to and subject of the State?"¹⁹ According to Agamben, naked life is being pure human. It is living under the protection of the State and as such, having all rights afforded from that State. Naked life contrasts with 'forms of life' (e.g., political power) and Agamben calls on his trinity of nation/state/territory to further parse this out by introducing the Refugee as a mediator and ultimately, an answer to the trinity.

In his examples he shows that the refugee—the stateless person— must stay in that state only temporarily. The refugee, who remains so permanently, is often destroyed by State actors. The State cannot conceive of and integrate the refugees into the controls that allow for the State's perpetuation. The State's power is based in the abdication of power from the Nation,²⁰ or more to the point, the lending of power from the Nation into the State. The Nation's willingness to do this is based on a perceived notion of sameness²¹ with the State and with each other. Consequently, any challenge to this sameness is a challenge to the power structure, as I will later discuss with the rise of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

The antithetical Refugee is the key to the State crumbling, therefore they must be resolved. The State fears the Refugee. The Refugee is ultimately unassimilatable; they cannot be

¹⁷ The looking at youth as if they are criminals before they actually commit a crime

¹⁸ For the purpose of this paper I am only talking about Blacks but Latino/as and some Asian groups could be included in this group.

¹⁹ Federal government

²⁰ The people

²¹ The sameness is not always a physically based quantitative, but can be based in religion, language but mostly in way of thinking, as in assimilating into the dominant ideology.

digested as a group by the State so the State has to resolve the Refugee. In this dissertation I will show ways that the State resolves the Refugee by the systematical exposure to premature death—either through incarceration, physical death, chemical pacification, or the mis-educating of their youth.

Chapter 3

Introduction

“Y’all can’t come in here, this club house aint fo’ babies! Now get outta here fo’ you both get yo little asses whupped!”

With that rebuke, Boog and I tucked our tails and walked off equally mad and despondent. Boog managed to toss a few curses over his shoulder when we were a good enough distance away to give us a fighting chance to avoid the rocks that were sure to come. Boog was more of the confrontational type and I would back him up. We were both equally sneaky and smart, which made for a very bad combination. As Greg, Tony, Mike and a few of the older boys held ‘meetings in the tree house’; Boog and I plotted how to get them back.

The tree house in question was constructed in an old evergreen that grew out of the pond. The water had long since dried up and only in extraordinary hard rains did the pond fill up, even then it was more like a wading pool. The whole neighborhood itself used to be a ranch and the pond was the only visible remnant of that long ago time. There was a triple white rail fence that circled the pond. This fence looked like something out of an old cowboy movie and added to the allure of the tree house. The tree house wasn’t really a tree house or even much of a clubhouse, but it was away from prying eyes and gave a feeling of seclusion and isolation. The older boys would go there to try to act older than they were, smoke cigarettes that they pilfered from their parents, or look at old playboy magazines. We only knew this because we would go in when they were not around.

Really, Tony or Greg was the only two we were concerned about; the rest were no threat and they didn’t see us as a threat. In reality we were only a few years apart but when you are 13, 12, and 10, having a bunch of eight and seven year olds, hanging around is a huge difference in age.

The pond sat at the bottom of the dirt hill, which ran behind our houses and peeked out at the intersection of Blandon and Glenly, forming the terminus of the street line of the horseshoe street. The old ranch was just a small portion of the extensive Spanish ranch and is a reminder of Oakland’s past as a conquest from the Olone’ indigenous people in the 19th century. The neighborhood was part of a planned community that was never completed and now the open land had been declared protected open parkland and could never be built on. This open space provided endless opportunities to explore and to create fantasy scenarios, including the tree house, which it became our mission to either be allowed in or destroy.

After receiving a few lumps, courtesy of some well-placed dirt rocks, we decided that we would tear down the tree house when the older kids were in summer school. Boog and I hid in a row of low growth deciduous trees that were on the adjacent hill behind the last house on Grenly, before the pond. We made sure there was no one coming in or going out. The other younger boys wanted no part in this because they feared the consequences—but we didn’t care; all we knew is that we had been wronged and that had to be addressed. Fifteen minutes went by and we

couldn't take it any longer, we ran into the tree house and begin breaking branches and displacing carefully laid out arboreal furniture. We took great glee in ransacking the whole thing and just barely stopped short of burning it down...it was an evergreen tree so it wouldn't easily catch on fire...but that didn't dim our enthusiasm one bit. We got so caught up in what we were doing that we didn't hear someone coming until it was almost too late.

The tree house was where the older kids liked to come when they cut school; today was one of those times. Luckily for us, they were loudly coming down the dirt hill instead of the street way up. We had just enough time to go out the front as they were coming up from the back. Our timing was impeccable that particular day, as we could hear their howls of anger as we laughed nonstop, running up the block, not caring about the future ass kicking that came later, as promised. We were wholly and fully living that moment of what we thought of as glorious.

Boys belonging to a club that hangs out at a tree house and excluding younger boys from hanging out is as Americana as you can get. It is reminiscent of the old *Wee Pals* comics or *The Little Rascals* TV show from a bygone era. In those shows, there was always an element of mischievous and borderline criminal behavior. Boys have always been portrayed as naughty and high-spirited and the tree house story would fit perfectly into that American narrative of childhood rambunctiousness. However, I have already shown the drastic turn some of these same 'naughty by nature' kids have made in just over ten years. How can we make sense of solidly middle class kids who would grow up to reject or reinterpret the values and norms of their parents and by extension, society?

To better understand this paradox, I will dig into broader historical issues in the founding of Oakland and the political economics that were at play in shaping Oakland, from a national perspective. Then, I will narrow the focus and look at how residents responded to and resisted politics and capital, to shape present day Oakland and the Block.

Minoritized Space, Inventing the 'Block'

The creation of the Block didn't happen overnight, nor was it an even process of economical disenfranchisement that systematically stranded Blacks in pockets of poverty or in dead-end jobs. The political economy way of explaining how whole groups of people are locked into place after a socio-economic space is created goes a long way into laying bare the story of The Block and is the best point of entry into the story.

The Block was created through a combination of racial/political/economical processes that intertwined to obscure which processes exerted the most force. To better situate the construction of the Block, I will interrogate the history of Oakland to illuminate the forces at play in its creation. It is the interplay of processes that mask the effect of the work White supremacy does in constructing an economical narrative of segregation that I will start to develop here and expand upon in the next chapter. Oakland has long been a city cast in shadows and birth in racism and stolen legacies.

Oakland was founded as a bedroom community for wealthy San Franciscans to live, play, and raise their families outside of their crowded city. The Big Three of Horace W. Carpentier, Edson Adams, and Andrew J. Moon, drove this process, as they had dreams of competing with San Francisco's wealthy elite (Bagwell, 1982). They were young lawyers from New York who saw the potential in the extensive ranches and farmland with majestic views, beautiful scenery, and perfect weather. The vast majority of this land was 'owned' by Spanish heirs whose fathers

played a major part in the cleansing of the indigenous people for the Spanish crown²² (Bagwell, 1982).

In 1820, Luis Maria Peralta had received 45,000 acres—all of present day Oakland, Berkeley, Albany, El Cerrito, Emeryville, Piedmont, and parts of San Leandro, from Pablo de Sola, the last Spanish Governor of Alta, California for service to the Spanish crown (Bagwell, 1982). He divided his land between his four sons— Hermenegildo Ignacio, José Domingo, Antonio María, and José Vicente, who eventually lost it all to the Big Three as they leased the land from the Peralta heirs, then sold the subdivisions as property of the United States. The Big Three hedged their bets on the outcome of the Mexican-American War and argued that California now belonged to America; consequently neither Spanish nor Mexican citizens had any legal land rights (Bagwell, 1982). Piece by piece, this once massive estate was restolen, as the Big Three's dreams of the playground for San Francisco's elite started to take shape.²³

After the Mexican-American War,²⁴ the Mexican government ceded 525,000 square miles to the United States in 1848. This land stretched from New Mexico in the south, up to the Canadian border in the Pacific Northwest. California was the lynchpin in this 'purchase', as the United States was in the process of realizing its mandate of 'Manifest Destiny' by expanding its borders from coast to coast. The California state legislature incorporated the town of Contra Costa²⁵ into Oakland on May 4, 1852 (Bagwell, 1982).

The founding of Oakland also served another purpose: shipping terminal and gateway for San Franciscan commerce. It became a city built on the rise and fall of its industrial relation to the nations' economy and its proximity to San Francisco's wealthy elite. Its industrial relevance was shaped at first by the transcontinental railway that terminated into what would later become the port of Oakland, and then later by the Port of Oakland itself, as international shipping became its key economic strategy. The Central (later named the Southern) Pacific railroad constructed the Oakland Long Wharf to serve as its shipping hub as goods flowed through this route; also became the key transporter of people looking for work on the docks and in the rail yard.²⁶ Key industrial factories were established in Oakland in the early 1900s as motor plants and airplane factories flourished. Food canning, meatpacking, and shipbuilding became the backbone of Oakland's economic system (Bagwell, 1982; Johnson, 1996; Self, 2002).

The population spiked several times, but most notably when it doubled after the San Francisco 1906 earthquake destroyed most of the city (Self, 2002). Oakland's borders expanded to handle its neighbors' working class citizens who couldn't afford to rebuild, by eventually annexing territories to the southeast of the wharf including Brooklyn, which is now known as East Oakland. The gritty beginnings of Oakland firmly established it as a blue-collar town entrenched in the footprint of San Francisco. As the Long Wharf evolved in the Port of Oakland,

²² Swift victory occurred against the local indigenous people. Surprised them in their village, Peralta led a full garrison from San Francisco's fort to the San Joaquin Valley, enhancing his reputation. First a sergeant, then honored as *comisionado* in charge of Pueblo, San José in 1807, he was the highest military and civilian official. He held this position until 1822, until Mexico won its independence from Spain.

²³ The Peralta heirs hired Carpentier to represent them in court against Moon and Edson, unbeknownst to them, his friends. He lost the case and as payment, he asked for and received large parts of present day Oakland.

²⁴ Mexico ceded 55% of its pre-war territory, not including Texas, for \$15 million as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the Mexican-American War.

²⁵ Literally means, "Opposite shore."

²⁶ This process was driven by the Big Four of San Francisco (Charles Crocker, Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington, and Leland Stanford), who won the bid to bring the transcontinental railroad to the west coast and had a majority ownership in the Central railroad company as well as major property holdings in San Francisco.

West Oakland became the center of Oakland's residential boon. Its eclectic mix of diverse ethnic groups would foreshadow the growing problems that racial diversity would bring, well into present-day Oakland.

The Battle over Place and Space

In the early twentieth century, corporate power, ethnic patronage, and machine politics were dominant forces affecting community life in Oakland (Rhombert, 2004). At the age of 29, Horace W. Carpentier was widely believed to have stolen the first mayoral race in Oakland (Conmy, 1961). As the first mayor, his regime instituted a strong centralized governmental power that immediately came under attack for its blatant power-grabbing and misuse of the public trust (Nicolai, 2002). Beginning with the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and continuing through WWI, the existing urban regime forged decades earlier, faced a series of structural and developmental changes that put its existence in a crisis.

By the 1920's these institutional powers began to collapse. Economic prosperity in Oakland, in the form of rapid commercial growth, led to the development of downtown businesses and to the rise of the White Protestant middle class population. These new business and middle class leaders pushed for a series of reforms in the current regime in an attempt to shift power from machine politics to more representative politics that reflected the norms and values of the new wave of Protestant ethnic migrants to the city (Rhombert, 2004; Bagwell, 1982). These two groups waged battle as the new middle class took root primarily in the new residential areas in East Oakland. This concentration led to the white middle class becoming collaborative actors who, "drew on racial, class, and moral discourses to define its own collective identity and to distinguish itself from the ethnic working class." (Rhombert, 2004, p. 50). As this group grew, its path of formation collided with the interests connected to the old regime. This conflict created the opportunities of the emergence of a white nativist movement, led by the Ku Klux Klan (Rhombert, 2004).

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) movement emerged in the 1920's. It mobilized in opposition to the machine, using a discourse of ethnic nativism, which was primarily aimed at targeting Jews, Catholics, and people of color. Rhombert points to how in earlier literature the Klan movement of the 1920's has been portrayed as a backward looking extremist movement caught in economic marginality and as the last gasp of dying rural and small town Protestantism (Rhombert, 2004.) Yet, a new vision of the KKK of the 1920's had emerged that points to how the Klan acted as a social and civic organization whose views were relatively conventional and whose movement appealed to a wide cross-section of America's white Protestant society.²⁷ Therefore, Klan members' views were not "marginal", but articulated existing white middle class protestant values and widespread nativist and racial prejudice against non-white groups.

In Oakland, as in other cities with active Klan movement, members were successful wherever native white protestants were a majority.²⁸ Oakland Klan no.9 emerged in January of 1922 and it developed into a major political actor, claiming many followers. The Klan was able to enlist such a high percentage of people in Oakland precisely because it fit the life and values of many white Protestants. As Rhombert argues, the Klan gave voice to existing sentiments of racism, anti-Semitism, or anti-Catholicism that were deeply embedded in white Protestant

²⁷ Moore, History Interrogated. p. 350-353

²⁸ Rhombert

society; these were still very much nestled within the institutions and assumptions of ordinary life of many in the majority population of Oakland, before and after the 1920's Klan.

For example, the Klan had great public credibility among white Protestants who applauded the Klan's efforts to subvert the immorality of "alien society," the immoral intentions of Catholic clergy, Jewish businessmen, and black and immigrant people, appealing to xenophobia and hatred to minorities, and thus, supported this agenda of repressive patriotism and xenophobia (Rhombert, 2004).

However, the Klan did not simply mirror the bigotry of the majority of people living in Oakland, but it provided an organizational means to transform these sentiments into political action. The Klan started to wage class warfare by invoking racial hatred. Klan leaders were able to cross over into the political mainstream because local civic issues, participation, and exclusion were already framed in ethnic and racial terms. Klan political leaders capitalized on middle class grievances against the ethnic machine engaging in advocacy on civic issues like prohibition, crime, and good government, centering on white supremacy and the white middle class population who by then, readily supported known racists.

Rhombert (2004) states that by 1924, the Oakland Klan alone enrolled at least two thousand members, including Protestant clergy, small businessmen, professionals, skilled workers, public employees, and even the son of a U.S. Congressman. The Klan received significant support from Oakland, a city whose population in 1920 was more than 90 percent white. In 1925, the Oakland Tribune reported that 8,500 Klansmen and supporters from around the country went to the Oakland auditorium to witness the swearing in of 500 members. Local Klan members quickly established their own patronage network in city hall, with Klan leaders gaining power, winning the election for county sheriff in 1926 and city commissioner of streets in 1927.

Their power was finally partially broken in a trial prosecuted by Alameda County District Attorney, Earl Warren. This led directly to a major reform of the Oakland city charter in 1930 that brought an end to commissions, creating a city-manager government. The defeat of the Klan, however, did not necessarily hinder the agenda of white middle-class Protestants as a group. The latter transferred their allegiance from the faulty vehicle of the Klan, to the more effective anti-machine reformers among the business elite. The crisis of Klan leaders' fall led to a decisive change in the city's political institutions. The Klan movement left an enduring legacy in Oakland, which bore fruit decades later and indirectly led to the creation of multiple radical Black organizations.

This resurgence of the Protestant White middle class allowed for the development of a collective self-consciousness among the Protestant middle classes in Oakland, which led not only to demands for racial, class, and moral homogeneity, but marked the boundaries of group cultural identity and articulated a sense of the rights and entitlements of first-class, White racial citizenship. That citizenship was articulated through exclusion: the exclusion of Black Oaklanders from any position of power or any upwardly mobile jobs. Blacks were also excluded from organizing by joining unions or starting their own to advocate for improved treatment and better living wages, among other essentials.

Black Oaklanders struggles mirrored the larger struggles of Blacks, nation-wide, as Jim Crow laws were put into place to reinstitutionalize a form of economic enslavement. Blacks were severely limited in terms of work opportunities and the space to advocate for change. The Civil Rights movement was birthed from the near absolute repression of Jim Crow. Oakland was no different.

In response, Blacks started to unionize and organize around common authorized gathering places such as churches, schools, community centers, and other public areas. One of the largest employers and most sought after position was with the Pullman Company as a porter. The porter position was a menial job that afforded Blacks an opportunity for full-time work, with a slim hope for career advancement and lifetime employment. However, Blacks were essentially blocked from moving up to be conductors and also blocked from joining the union. So on August 25, 1925, Black members of the Pullman porters came together to form an outlawed union in the hopes of forcing the Company to comply with their demands. The union became known as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and they quickly organized in key hub cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, and Oakland.

In Oakland, they were headed by C.L. Dellums who worked hard to unionize the marginalized Black porters and prepare them to strike in the hope of forcing the Company to recognize them as an official union; that tactic backfired on a national level. It wasn't until June 1, 1935 that it was certified; a year after the Roosevelt passed an amendment to the Railroad Labor Act allowing for the legalization of unions. Black fled the South en masse, but mostly to urban areas in the East or Midwest (e.g., Chicago, Cleveland).

The Great Depression had taken a toll on the country and added to an already volatile, racial climate. It was just a matter of time before the problems back east would make their way to Oakland, but was interrupted by the coming war crisis.

WWII Migration-Exodus West

During the initial years of WWII, the nation's economy experienced growing prosperity. Although the economy continuously improved – primarily through the expansion of shipbuilding and aircraft production, there was a disproportionate increase in Black unemployment. Despite the increasing overall labor shortage, many firms refused to hire Black workers and also failed to promote them to higher-paying, skilled positions. The federal government was reluctant to directly intercede on behalf of the Black workers by forcing companies to be in compliance with New Deal era orders, such as Executive Order 8802, which states, "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin".

The federal government was soon left with no choice; violence escalated in the crowded northern cities and in the progress resistant rural areas of the south. Black workers demanded access to jobs and challenged deeply entrenched notions of place and space, as the battle for place inside of the employment ranks collided with the battle for space outside of the redlined restricted districts where Blacks were confined to live.

The lack of a strong governmental voice equated to tacit approval of Jim Crow laws and when the government did speak out, it was with a parroting of handpicked Black leaders who were not allowed to directly advocate for their causes.²⁹ The confluence of these factors had a deleterious effect when the government was finally forced to intercede to respond to race riots in Harlem, Detroit, and Chicago. Southern defense centers were also riddled with violent racial conflicts. The White workers staged revolts at factories to protest the gains that were being made in the north; the same demands were being made in the south where Jim Crow was as strong as ever. In May of 1943, rioting occurred in Mobile, Alabama after federal authorities ordered the

²⁹ President Roosevelt appointed some prominent Black leaders to lower level cabinet posts and this group became known as the "Black Cabinet". However, as representatives of the government, they were not allowed to speak against Jim Crow and had to have their opinions vetted.

Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Corporation to promote and integrate Black shipyard workers.

As the Pacific Theater of the war picked up and the west coast ports saw a massive increase in employment opportunities, the migration patterns of Blacks changed to meet that demand. Black migration during this time mimicked the 'chain migration' patterns of European immigration. An immigrant would come to America, find work and opportunity, and encourage other members of their former European hometown to join them in the United States. This had the effect of forming ethnic enclaves, both intentionally and unintentionally. Additionally, neighboring families in an ethnic enclave may very well have been friends, neighbors, or even relatives back in the homeland. This same phenomena can be seen in the migration patterns of Blacks, as old neighbors and relatives sent word that there was work and opportunities in the west.

Blacks filled with the promise of economic, social, and educational advancement chartered cattle cars trains on the Southern Pacific railroad, which they referred to as "liberty trains" (Murch, 2007). For all their drawbacks, western cities offered a better alternative to life in the South for many Black migrants. Many migrant communities saw schooling and the chance for a better education for their children as a driving reason to come westward. The allure of upward mobility that increased educational opportunities brought was reason enough to leave behind the old South (Murch, 2002).

Between 1940 and 1945, the Black population of the Bay Area grew from 19,759 to 64,680, or by more than 227 percent. In Oakland, where the prewar Black community numbered 8,462 (2%) in 1940, the Black population expanded to 21,770 by 1944, accounting for about a third of the total Black population increase in the Bay Area. The majority came from Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, with fewer hailing from Mississippi.

Planning for World War II, national defense brought capital investment into the state (Johnson, 1996; Woodard, 2002). By the end of 1940, the federal government invested over forty billion dollars in west coast factories, military bases, and other capital improvements and hired thousands of military and civilian personnel to staff them (Komozi, 2003). The Bay Area was converted into a center of war industry, specializing in shipbuilding. Oakland's Moore Dry Dock Company expanded its ship conversion facilities into two new yards and employed more than thirty-five thousand workers at peak production (Johnson, 1996). Oakland was also a major supply and distribution center for Pacific Theater operations and manufacturing employment in Oakland rose by 166 percent, from December 1941 to a peak in August 1943. By the latter half of 1943, government prime and subcontracts exclusive of shipbuilding exceeded \$7.8 million in Alameda County (Rhomberg, 2004).

Thousands of workers found employment on the new military bases in the area. Overall, the percentage of unemployed in Oakland (those seeking work and those on emergency work) fell from 15 percent in March 1940, to less than 2 percent in April 1944. The majority of migrants came from rural backgrounds, including large numbers of Black and White workers from the central southwestern states. Almost one-fifth of all wartime migrants who came to the Bay Area were from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana, and 16 percent of Oakland war migrants lived on farms four years earlier. During the war, the Black population more than tripled in size, going from less than 3 percent of the city's total in 1940,³⁰ to almost 10 percent in 1945 (Rhomberg, 2004).

³⁰ See table 1 in Appendix A

Soon after the war, with the disappearance of Oakland's shipbuilding industry and the decline of its automobile industry, jobs became scarce. Many of the poor Blacks who had come to the city from the South decided to stay in Oakland. Longstanding Black residents complained that some of the new Southerners arrived with segregationist attitudes that disrupted the racial harmony Oaklanders had been accustomed to, prior to the war (Bagwell, 1982). As the onslaught of Southern Blacks continued, many of the city's more affluent residents, both Black and White, left the city after the war, moving to neighboring Berkeley, Albany, and El Cerrito, and to the north and to the newly developing East Bay suburbs—Orinda, Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek, and Concord (Bagwell, 1982).

Minoritized Space

With so many people migrating to the Bay area, one immediate problem became housing. Thousands of Black migrants from the Southern states settled in West Oakland (Woodard, 2002). Housing discrimination in White Oakland neighborhoods and in the nearby cities of Albany, El Cerrito, Alameda,³¹ and San Leandro, crowded Black migrants into established Black districts. Residential vacancies in Oakland fell from an already low 2 percent in April 1941, to 0.8 percent in April 1942. In September 1942 it finally reached 0.06 percent (Komozi, 2003). The impact of the housing shortage³² forced families to crowd themselves in one-room apartments, to share space with relatives, or sleep in their cars or on city streets (Rhombert, 2004). Hundreds of Blacks regularly slept outdoors in public spaces, ranging from all-night restaurants, theatres, hallways of rooming houses, to even the City Hall corridors (Johnson, 1996). Hotel owners asked permission from authorities to install extra beds in lobbies and West Oakland rooming houses and permitted workers to sleep in rented hallway chairs (Johnson, 1996).

Because the need for shelter overwhelmed the capacity of the private housing market, the government had to intervene through the provision of federally financed public housing (Rhombert, 2004). Oakland was in the process of completing its second and third New-Deal-era housing projects; the Peralta Villa in West Oakland and the Lockwood Gardens in East Oakland, yet with the war drama, all public housing was converted to the war effort and reassigned to war workers (Murch, 2007; Rhombert, 2004). Soon after, the Oakland Housing Authority refused to build any more permanent projects that might compete with the postwar private construction industry. Federal funds were used to build temporary housing for migrant war workers under the Federal Lanham Act of 1940. These legal barracks like structures were located on surplus land in the shoreline flats, near the shipyards, military bases, and industrial areas and apart from established residential neighborhoods (Rhombert, 2004).

These projects isolated the migrant and minority residential areas; blacks and whites were separated in different buildings or segregated entirely in different complexes. For example, once the war ended, Oakland operated three permanent and eleven temporary projects. Seven of these projects were all-White and were located in or near East Oakland, and three were all-Black located in West Oakland (Murch, 2007). Wartime public housing thus accelerated the racial concentration of Blacks in West Oakland.

West Oakland became home to 85 percent of Oakland's Black population. Murch (2007) notes that Blacks were systematically concentrated into West Oakland and were prevented from moving to other locales, as White property owners often refused to rent or sell to Blacks. The

³¹ Alameda as a prominent navy base, had some Black families but also had deeply established neighborhood covenants confining Blacks to a small section of the city close to the Navy base.

³² See table 2 in Appendix B

banking industry had discriminatory policies that prevented Blacks from obtaining real estate loans, and there were restrictive covenants excluding Blacks from model suburbs created by federally sponsored initiatives (Murch, 2007). Despite the racial discrimination, Black migration remained unaffected as Blacks escaping the oppressive brand of racism from the Jim Crow South steadily came westward to a better standard of living and a less violent form of racism.

WWII offered Black migrants only an unpredictable toehold in the local job market (Komozi, 2003). The thousands of Black men and women recruited to work in the wartime shipyards were laid off and did not find the conversion to civilian production easy. Black workers in nearly every sector of the economy faced job ceilings and most could only find work in semiskilled and unskilled jobs in addition to the service sector (Komozi, 2003). Groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League continued to fight discrimination in employment in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but progress was slow. Sixty percent of Black men in 1950 found work as blue-collar laborers, machine operators, or in back-of-the-house service work. Black workers were often constrained to blue-collar work that would remain a foundation of Black opportunity in the postwar decades. Black women found that their wartime employment in the shipyards did not easily translate into postwar opportunities beyond the familiar household service. Half of all Black women workers labored in 1950 as private domestics or in other kinds of service work (Komozi, 2003).

The Oakland Army Base, the U.S. Naval Supply Station, and the Naval Air Station at Alameda took on large numbers of Black workers during the war and kept them. While not entirely free of discrimination in job assignments and pay, these military installations (all three located in or near West Oakland) acted as something of a community bulwark against the more pervasive bias in the private sector and the large-scale postwar layoffs in shipbuilding (Komozi, 2003).

Rhomberg writes that in a pattern typical of Black migration to Northern U.S. Cities, White residents in Oakland reacted to the growing Black population with strong racial discrimination with a hardening of the boundaries of residential segregation. As Lemke-Santagelo (1975) points out, the war boom did not last and Black migrants faced increasing marginalization within the region's inner cities. Following the war, the economic vitality of East Bay migrant communities was severely undermined by poorly planned redevelopment and transportation projects, chronic capital flights, and persistent patterns of residential segregation and employment discrimination. The post-war "Black ghetto" began to take shape, characterized by overcrowded, substandard housing, declining employment opportunities, and a sharp rise in poverty among former migrants and their children (Lemke-Santagelo, 1975).

In 1938, West Oakland's McClymond's high school enrolled 648 White and 115 Black students, and ten years later, 797 Black students attended but only 50 Whites remained.³³ In 1940, 84 percent of the non-white population lived in the 72 census tracts located primarily in West Oakland.³⁴ By 1950, the non-white population tripled in size and its concentration increased to 90 percent residing in the 16 tracts that were available to them. As White families fled the old neighborhood, West Oakland rapidly converted to an all-Black community.

As West Oakland solidified as a Black community, the unemployment and poverty rates were at least two to three times the city average (Murch, 2007; Rhomberg, 2004). By 1947, thousands of Blacks who had been essential to the home front effort during the war, found

³³ J.M. Regal Oakland Partnership for change, p. 36-37

³⁴ See table 2 in Appendix A

themselves unemployed and roaming the streets of Oakland.³⁵ Blacks, although still a small but growing population, hovered around 10 percent of the city's total population, but made up half of the applicants for welfare (Komozi, 2003). By the 1950s, the combination of disinvestment by the federal government and the economic policies of Oakland's political machine had devastated the economic base of the inner city. Local business elites encouraged industrial development outside the city, exacerbating capital flight and White flight.

Starting in the late 1940s, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) began recruiting White officers from the South to deal with the expanding Black population and changing racial attitudes; many were openly racist and their repressive police tactics increased racial tensions. To a large segment of the Black population, this had the feel of a throwback to the days of slavery and the police officers were seen as akin to overseers. In 1950, a Crime Commission and several Black newspapers reported that there were many instances of police brutality and misconduct geared towards Blacks and changes to the police force's hiring practices and policing policies were demanded and approved soon thereafter (Komozi, 2003).

The OPD was modernized and centralized by the consolidation of power and operations of the police force headed by Oakland's new position of police chief and localized into a central headquarters. This precipitated wholesale changes including a militarized chain of command and overhauled hiring practices, in favor of better-educated, more affluent candidates. In practice, these policies created an almost exclusively white middle-class force that resided outside the city and had little understanding or connection to the neighborhoods they served. The overarching reorganizing and restructuring of the OPD reflected a national trend toward 'legalistic policing' characterized by modern equipment, formalized systems, and greater emphasis on juvenile detention (Murch, 2007).

The neglected housing combined with the flight of capital and jobs soon left the children of Oakland's Black population floundering, with little systemic support and in between the cross hairs of a police force that was charged to target them in an effort to control rising racial strife. The national civil rights movement was a stimulus for the police force to become a constant presence in people's lives. Systematic arrests of young Black males placed them in the system to be tracked and cataloged in order to keep better tabs on potential troublemakers. Once in the system, the youth were subjected to a seemingly endless stream of authoritative parental surrogates including family services, probation officers, judges, and child guidance clinics. This sped up the long process of the criminalization of Black youth and continued the long-term attack on Black families. The emphasis on juvenile detention created a hostile environment for Black youths and laid the groundwork for multiple clashes between the Black community and the police (Murch, 2007).

Post war Oakland in the 1940s and 1950s went through significant racial demographic change and the former military housing became home to thousands of newly arrived Blacks who followed the earlier migration path from the previous generations. The chain migration pattern continued as Black families came to settle by their old neighbors from the South (Johnson, 1996; Self, 2002). As opposed to the lukewarm and even hostile treatment they received, the now entrenched former migrant Black communities welcomed the new arrivals with open arms. As the population grew, the areas that were set aside for them expanded as well...just not as fast.

Just as slow was the opening up of jobs as the competition heated up between the newly arrived Blacks and the still shrinking established working class White communities. The trade

³⁵ See table 3 in Appendix C

unions were reluctant to let the Blacks into their organization and since most of the good paying jobs were unionized, the Black community formed their own unions to lobby for more inclusion and a fair representation of Blacks on the workforce. However, soon passenger train service to Oakland was put to an end, which had the dual effect of severely weakening the powerful Pullmen porter union and resulted in the loss of a traditional source of employment for Blacks. C.L. Dellums would leave the union and turn his organizing muscle into building the Oakland branch of the NAACP to continue the fight against localized poverty. By 1959, one-quarter of all families in Oakland earned less than \$4,000 a year and almost half the families in the city lived in deprivation or worse (Theoharis, 2005).

Between 1950 and 1960, approximately 100,000 white property owners moved out of Oakland. Oakland followed the national trend of disinvesting its industrial heritage and investing in freeways to connect the growing suburbs with its downtown (Katz, 1993). Across the country, in large urban cities, Black communities were being decimated and intense pockets of poverty were created as the freeway construction sparked by federal dollars from New Deal projects were built through them (Mohl, 1997).

The Nimitz Freeway, finished in 1957, divided West Oakland in half and destroyed many homes and businesses. Mirroring national trends, any housing or businesses in the path of the new freeways were given death sentences as soon as the projects were announced (Sugrue, 2005). The business had no hope of selling their property for anything close to what it was worth with the public knowledge that soon the city would foreclose on them (Sugrue, 2005). The Black residents were left without jobs or interstructural support. The freeways also siphoned from public housing as they competed for the same money pots (Mohl, 2005). Nationally, White flight continued for decades and capital flight was right on its heels.

The mass migration of Blacks to the North in the pursuit of jobs, coupled with institutional marginalization in the form of redlining, poor public schools, and substandard public housing, left millions of Blacks fighting for the basics as industry moved to the suburbs or often other far-flung locales. In the large urban cities in the West, the Second Great Migration eventually chased the Whites to the suburbs. Specifically in Oakland, as the neighborhood in the established district of West Oakland expanded, whites who didn't want the long commute or who couldn't afford the move out to the suburbs, fled to the quickly developing East Oakland. In this newly built up district, there was a growing community of cottage style homes with gardens, in the front and back yard, as opposed to the old crumbling, cramped houses in West Oakland that had minimum outdoor space (Self, 2002).

The quickly expanding Black population followed the White community eastward. However, the spillage over to East Oakland for the Black community was limited to abandoned army dorms and housing along the East 14th street corridor (Self, 2002). The former army bases became housing projects all over the city, where Blacks were funneled into and stored as the color line was constantly redrawn as the remaining Whites retreated into the more desirable neighborhoods that were located along the hills (Self, 2005). Exclusive White enclaves in Piedmont and in the Temascal area strongly resisted any racial incursions into those enclaves.

The center of Black Oakland shifted to East Oakland by the late 60s, early 70s, and the city's population stayed static at around the 330,000 mark, but the racial makeup flipped as Blacks became the statically dominant group and the small but growing Latino population made huge strides. The bedroom communities of Orinda, Pleasanton, Walnut Creek, and El Cerritos, among others, became destinations of Whites who wanted more homogeneous neighborhoods and small town feels while still being close to downtown hubs and jobs. The building of the Bay

Area Rapid Transit system, or BART, through the heart of West Oakland above ground on 7th St, destroyed that old neighborhood feel, as homes were lost to eminent domain³⁶ to the city.³⁷ Old time Black businesses were gone and the community was bifurcated by the towering transit line.

Once a haven for Blacks and Black business owners, West Oakland became an area on the downswing, as displaced Blacks needed to find housing. The converted army housing in West Oakland, Cypress Village, Campbell Village, and the Acorn housing units overflowed and the surrounding areas were flung into poverty. In East Oakland the San Antonio Village, the Tassafronga Village, and the isolated neighborhoods such as the Brookfield Village and the Sobrante Park areas were all unofficially designated Black enclaves. Geographically cut-off from the rest of the city as they were situated well below East 14th Street, and all but the San Antonio Village was below San Leandro Blvd., which is the last major artery before Oakland runs into the Bay. All of these communities were marked by limited access of having just one way in and one way out and were cut off and contained by the Nimitz freeway and the Southern Pacific rail tracks, which also cut through and demarcated the West Oakland projects as well.

Oakland Housing Authority was in charge of the maintaining and later policing of all of the public housing projects and it didn't take long before complaints of mismanagement and brutally began. The housing authority fielded a police force and employed an occupied territory style of policing. As Oakland's economic base steadily weakened, the institutional support dried up to properly maintain these projects and soon they would house some of the most notorious gangs this country had ever seen. The implications of this version of de facto redlining in the 60's had far reaching effects, as this laid the groundwork for the street gangs of the 80s and the drug cliques of the 90's.

Conclusion

Oakland was birthed in the union between necessity and opportunity— the necessity to transport goods, resources, and people to further the nation building of a nascent state. This necessity was given form by the opportunity from the Mexican war and the territories won in that conquest. These went hand in hand in the late 1800s and the early to mid 1900s. Oakland's history as a port city was built on industrial and nearly died on industrial is a well-recited tale of post-industrial American cities. The modernization of the United States and its entry into WWII created huge demands for these goods and services while Oakland's population swelled to meet these demands; so too did its social problems.

The ebb and flow of the ethnic hyphenation of the inhabitants of Oakland went hand and hand with the flow of goods and ebbs of opportunity. However, and unfortunately, those who controlled the opportunities stayed the same and the contestation of material resources was framed against a rapidly changing racial backdrop that became increasingly bitter as the decades unfolded. The KKK attempted a power grab in the 1920's as they played on existing ethnic hostilities in aligning their agenda with the recent European ethnic minority immigrants. Their attempt to seize power from the established machine politics was ultimately rebuffed and the business elite broke their fragile hold on local governance while the Bay Area Black elites, led

³⁶ Eminent domain is an exercise of the power of government or quasi-government agencies (such as airport authorities, highway commissions, community development agencies, and utility companies) to take private property for public use. Sometimes these entities may propose to use their eminent domain authority to take public housing property- <http://www.nls.gov/offices/pih/centers/sac/eminent/index.cfm>

³⁷ BART began operation in September of 1972 and it also connected the white enclaves to the business hub of downtown San Francisco without the need to drive through Oakland.

by the San Francisco Cosmos Club and the Berkeley based Appomatox Club, pushed for their place in the Bay Area political landscape (Mjagkij, 2001).

By the 1940's, Oakland was swept up in the war effort, as thousands of new jobs were created and the ensuing job rush brought in tens of thousands new migrants from the South. These new inhabitants cleared the way for the continual migration of Blacks leaving the Jim Crow south in pursuit of a better way of life and the Black version of the American Dream. However, what they found was an old established pattern of job patronage, police malfeasance, and racial hostility. Police brutality was especially common as they were on the frontlines of social control, which usually meant keeping the migrant population confined in designated corners of the city, mostly West Oakland.

At the same time, as the nation was taking a hard look at itself through the prism of race, by way of the civil rights struggle and the ensuing race riots, Oakland was in the midst of accelerated change and a power struggle as the old regime desperately tried to hold on. In the 50's this was done through the limiting of opportunities and resources of the growing Black population and by use of a strong deterrent in the police force. In response, Oakland activists launched a series of protests and demonstrations starting in the late 1950's, which was met with little or no effect, as police brutality, job opportunities, and housing all seem to worsen.

By the 1960s, continued Black population growth, along with the displacements resulting from the highway construction and urban renewal projects, pushed Blacks toward other areas of the city. There were more than twenty demonstrations protesting police violence and lack of jobs in Oakland between 1965 and 1966. By 1966 unemployment in Oakland was more than twice the national average and almost half the entire work-eligible flatland population was unemployed or sub-employed.

As a multitude of political organizations sprung up in the Bay Area during these times to address those issues, such as the Nation of Islam and the Afro-American Association, more of the Black working class population tried to lay claim to power or at least gain from it (Mjagkij, 2001). Despite the high unemployment, there was also a vibrant middle class who set sights on the levers of power. The grassroots political organizations jockeyed for leadership positions, with more established mainstream groups like the NAACP, CORE, and the Urban League inside the Black community. Lost in the political economy narrative of Oakland are the processes that drove the movement of people, especially Blacks and their reaction to the machinations of power.

Blacks started to look to alternative ways of explaining their plight and seeing their systemic marginalization. Black protests erupted from the children of migrants who didn't see themselves or their viewpoints represented in any of the established organizations. There was a call to take up an armed response to the decades of abuse and neglect and to form an organization from the ground up, with a motto of, "All power to the people". Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, October 1966 in Oakland, California.

Federal government's lack of a comprehensive social mechanism to effectively deal with the quickly changing societal landscape hastened the deterioration of post war majority Black neighborhoods. Decades of indifference and/or outright neglect, led to a deep mistrust between Black communities and the government. The federal government, finally pushed into action by the prolonged civil rights fight that was quickly giving way to the Black Power Movement, commissioned a series of studies in an attempt to finally address the issues of race and poverty.

Oakland would become a test case and later the results would help shape the new national urban social programs sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the federal government's "War on Poverty", even as the federal government discontinued New Deal programs. There were a multitude of federal programs that were birthed out the Civil Rights act of 1964. And just as many if not more agencies created to oversee that these programs were carried out and properly implemented. One such agency was The Department of Contract and Compliance, which was under the auspices of the Department of Labor. This department's main responsibility was to make sure companies that received federal funding were in full compliance with the nascent Civil Rights laws. They divided the United States into geographical regions and assigned a department head to each region. In each region, they choose a 'hot spot' to locate region offices and assigned field officers to work that area; one such area was Oakland.

In 1971, Gus Brown was offered a promotion to be a head of a regional office. The only catch was that he would have to uproot his family of six and relocate from Washington DC, where he had lived less than a year, relocating from upstate New York. It would be his fourth move in less than three years. He was a fast riser in the Department of Labor and he was itching to leave the South far behind him and permanently. He accepted the promotion without hesitation and packed his family in the large unwieldy country wagon to head west.

His wife, my mother, was also happy to relocate as her big brother already lived in Oakland with his new wife and two kids after a stint in the armed forces. The Browns looked for a home close by the brother, but ended up moving a couple miles away in the foothills of East Oakland. By this point, Oakland was ground zero for the Black revolutionary movement and a prime place to test out civil rights reforms. Oakland's long-standing antagonistic relationship with its police force made it a prime target for the feds, and by extension, my father.

In the latter part of 1971, we moved into the Oak Knoll neighborhood, a seemingly entrenched middle class area, thick with trees and rolling hills. I found a group of liked-aged kids to play with and we instantly formed lifelong bonds. However, something went amiss in our journey to solid middleclassdom, as the Block should have been the perfect entry point for our foray into the American Dream. Our parents had suffered and worked extremely hard to put us into the position we were in so the rest should have been a cakewalk if the form of that ideology held true.

We lived in a neighborhood that has a pond...a nonfunctioning pond but a pond nevertheless. This was not the ghetto nor was it some other form of a socioeconomically depressed neighborhood; this was a skewed replica of a Norman Rockwell painting. What was going on beneath the pallid surface where you can see the ticking of the proverbial bomb? Why were we so angry and destructive and what options did we have to channel that seething rage?

Chapter 4

Pathways- Multiple Ways of Being: The Panther and the Criminalization of Black Youth

Prologue

The Oakland airport is off of Hegenberger Rd.; it's a long street that runs from the hills down to the bay as it bisects the heart of East Oakland. It runs perpendicular to the major thoroughfares such as MacArthur, Bancroft, E.14th Ave., and San Leandro Blvd. Hegenberger takes local residents from the MacArthur 580 freeway, through residential Oakland, past San Leandro Blvd. and across the over-ramp to the airport business district; Hegenberger is dotted with restaurants, banks, hotels, gas stations, fast food spots, large box shopping, and the entrance to the Oakland Coliseum— before it dead ends into the Oakland International airport. On the corner of Hegenberger and Edgewater, there are a combination of hotels, motels, and restaurants that regularly change ownership; one such restaurant was the Lucky Lion.

In the '70s and '80s, the Lucky Lion was a notorious underworld hangout spot. Every kind of denizen of the night could be found there: pimps, players, macks, hustlers, drug dealers, and others whose playground was the nightlife. Silk suits, alligator shoes, wide brim hats, and colorful outfits dotted the club's interior, while the flashing lights from the disco ball illuminated the shadows of people sipping champagne and openly snorting cocaine. Drug kingpins and Black radicals often frequented this spot; it was the intersection of Black Oakland and parts of a rite of passage for young men who desired to claim 'manhood' in the streets.

One particular night in the early '80's, Felix Mitchell, head of the infamous 6-9 Mob, surrounded by his people, was in the house at the same time as Mickey Mo, head of a rival organization called 'The Family'. Somewhere in between the clouds of cigar smoke was no doubt undercover law enforcement, but also three newbie's to the scene chose this night to come: Greg, Tony and Mike Louis.

Greg, Tony, Mike and the brothers Rick and Floyd who stayed around the corner on Castlewood, were the older kids on the Block. By this time, Rick and his older brother Floyd were already involved in petty crimes and were making connections outside of the Hill. Greg, Tony, and Mike were curious to what the scene looked like and what Rick and Floyd were up too, so they readily agreed to come. The admissions at the door was based more on who you knew then how old you were and if the bouncers thought you were supposed to be there. None of them were of age but Floyd had started running with the Family so he was allowed to come in unquestioned, which gave him the nerve to invite the others along.

Besides cocaine, Oakland was famous at that time for being the birthplace of the Black Panther Party. But by the early 80's the Panther Party was all but over. Huey Newton had become a shell of his former self as he slid deeper into a debilitating coke habit. Sometime during the fall of the Panthers, Huey took to extorting drug dealers. Pushers had to pay a tax to the Party in order to operate in the city. He accepted either drugs or cash and he used the Panthers name and muscle to enforce his 'ghetto tax'. However, Huey was quickly losing respect

and the fear that came with that name on the Oakland streets. Instead of using that money to help any of the community programs, Huey used it on himself and his addiction. The major dealers took exception to this and they quickly went to war.

The Panthers always recruited from the margins of society so they had a sizeable number of members who were familiar with the street life. As their revolutionary ideology waned, the thug mentality became dominant in some chapters—the Oakland chapter was no different. Huey Newton would sometimes go looking for fights and the crowded Lucky Lion, which was usually filled with pimps and drug dealers whom he had previously extorted, would be the perfect spot. On the same evening that Tony and company went there, there was a full house. Felix Mitchell at one table, Mickey Mo at another, and then in walks Huey with one of his huge bodyguards in tow...

Introduction

The oppositional framework that developed between the multiple pathways of Black radicalism and Black criminalization are wholly framed and shaped by the White supremacy discourse on permissible ways of being inside of the State. Blacks during this time period exerted their human rights inside of an oppressive nation-state and were quickly disciplined by the power of the State through either law enforcement or State sanctioned machinations that lead to exposure to premature death. Felix Mitchell and Huey P. Newton both grew out of a climate of repressive State force that delimited the opportunities of Blacks to have the full measure of the promises made by the founding fathers so long ago and promoted in the American Dream ideology.

The mass scale introduction of drugs into the Black communities in the 1970's and 1980's caused breakdowns on every imaginable scale in those communities: family, schools, neighborhoods, employment, political, and cultural were all affected. It cannot be overstated the devastating effect that the twin evils of drugs and its sibling, the prison industrial complex, had in and on the Black community. The forming of the Black Panthers was a direct response to oppressive institutional power and their demise is equally attributable and in proportion to the threat they posed to that power. The subsequent rise of the 6-9 mob happened in the negotiation of that space between the competing ideologies of the Panthers and the State.

The false dichotomy that resulted amplified and hastened the destruction of both groups as these organizations were no longer in opposition to the hegemonic system but juxtaposed against each other. The diverting of action and attention to the common foe is a well traveled proven policy of wedge politics that the State has consistently employed against any challenges to its hegemonic powers.

The fallout from infighting is used to bring about the desired results while simultaneously keeping hands clean. This tactic is also seen in different ways including pitting minority groups against each other or can be seen historically when working class Whites were pitted against working class Blacks in the battle for menial jobs (Harris, 1993; Roediger, 1991).

However, this was different as there were no winners to lay claim to the American Dream and in fact, the Panthers were a direct repudiation of that form of indoctrination. The denial of access to large portions of the American Dream to a significant segment of the Black population, up until the Civil Rights Act, set the stage and allowed for the flourishing of these competing responses to wholesale Black marginalization.

We grew up in a time where the ramifications to the outcome of that fight were still being played out in public. The winner of the fight had long since been decided but the loser's corpse was still walking around, seemingly on display for everyone to see.

The image of a fallen Black radical icon, reduced to petty thefts and vicious felonies, made choosing one pathway over the other easy. What we couldn't see at that time and had no conception of, is that both pathways started in the same place, birthed out of the same conditions. There had always been oppression in the United States and there had always been resistance to that oppression. Criminality wasn't new and neither was radicalism. Capital and politicians have always used gangs to do their dirty work and gangs have always wanted to integrate into mainstream politics to consolidate power and legitimize wealth. In the 1920's, capital used gangs as strikebreakers and as enforcers against radicals, such as the communist and the socialist who were trying to organize and unionize the workers (Noon, 2004; Norwood, 2002). The criminals, who were mostly about money as they were anti-societal, were antithetical to the radicals. For decades, this divide between the two stayed the same; however, in Oakland all that changed.

The Black Panther Party was the first group to successfully merge; albeit briefly, the two formerly antagonistic ways of being. They acknowledged and embraced the commonality of the two pathways and used that as a recruiting tool, which led to unforeseen lasting consequences. The two former disparate pathways immediately started to inform each other, as Black radicalism became increasingly criminalized and Black criminalization became increasingly radicalized. The conflating of the pathways made it easier to sell the attempts to contain and neutralize the Panthers. While we were growing up, the media played a large part in the portrayal of them both being the same— as antisocial dregs of humanity.

On the Block, we thought we knew better. In order to better understand how we viewed these two different pathways, I will look at the history of the Black Panthers and their intersection with that of Oakland's Black underworld to tease out points of commonality and divergences, which I will explore further in chapter 5 through the use of narratives.

Black Panther Party for Self-Defensive

In 1966, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was founded by Merritt College students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale as a way to keep track of police brutality and to intercede on the behalf of those who didn't know their rights. A long history of police brutality against Blacks existed and the police force was predominantly white, as only 16 of Oakland's 661 police officers were Black³⁸. The Black Panthers birth was sparked by an upswing in the number of nationwide killings of young black boys, coupled with dissatisfaction with the nonviolent stance of traditional Civil Rights organizations (Epstein, 1971). The Panthers attracted like-minded young people who wanted the sense of “doing something” to change the conditions around them and were drawn to the concept of black people standing up for themselves (Epstein, 1971). Others were attracted by the party's ten-point plan³⁹ and program, while others were drawn in by the party's armed stance (Pearson, 1994; Seale, 1997).

Both Bobby and Huey were born in the South—Seale in Dallas, Texas and Newton in Monroe, Louisiana. Their families separately migrated to Oakland while they were young. Huey grew up in the projects of Oakland and Berkeley, where he garnered a reputation for fighting and being a natural leader. Bobby and Huey ran together in high school and were deeply aware of the

³⁸ Berkman (1969) Spouseless Motherhood, Psychological Stress, and Physical Morbidity. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. Retrieved 2007-09-25. "The "Oakland Poverty Area"

³⁹ See Appendix D.

strong sense of suffering brought on by the effects of poverty and housing disparities in the Black community. The ingrained culture of police brutality and the national fight for civil rights sparked their pursuit of relevant learning. They studied Malcolm X's advocacy of armed self-defense and Black Nationalism, as well as revolutionary theorists such as Mao Tse-tung, Frantz Fanon, and Fidel Castro. At that time, they were holding weekly meetings with like-minded youths in the Anti-Poverty Center in Merritt College, creating the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The Panthers recruited heavily from the projects and from Black students to bolster their rolls and to provide alternatives to the indoctrination that was prevalent via the channels of mass media and societal discourse.

Their ability to capture and inspire the imagination of a generation of American youth was one of their strongest attributes. The nationwide dissatisfaction with the current social order paired with the need to rebel, became a significant part of what the Black Panthers embodied; Youth flocked to their agenda. The Panthers attraction crossed racial boundaries and many multiracial groups sprung up, reflecting that ideology and the commitment to social change. The mantra of the 'personal is political', was the premise by which they remade their lives in order to reflect their view of a utopian society. To this end, the Panthers sought to expand their sphere of influence to local politics, as they staged a successful challenge to the status quo. The long held Republican base would never recover, as the Panthers in conjunction with a committed base of grassroots organizers vigorously attacked the old guard.

The methodology behind their approach was simple but dangerous, Newton and Seale would follow the police and when they attempted to arrest citizens, they would observe to make sure that the police were not breaking any laws or using excessive force. Their goal was to educate the community about its legal rights, to legitimize the idea of self-defense, and to gain the attention of Oakland's Black population. Many thought the Panthers were crazy or even suicidal by inviting certain confrontation with the trigger happy OPD. This tactic drove the police crazy as the Panthers were well versed in their legal rights, leaving the police powerless to take the guns. The community, for the most part, gradually came around to see them as a welcome sight and as a most needed buttress against the police. The Panthers would go on patrol to shadow the police, armed with shotguns and the penal code, which they would recite ad nauseam when there were any standouts with them (Pearson, 1994).

The Panthers started their own schools and initiated programs to educate outside of typical school settings. They put into place food drives, toy give-a-ways, and job training for ex-cons. The Stanford University library has chronicled 65 programs that the Black Panthers instituted for the community, and by no means is this an exhaustive list. However, it is still a decent representation of the varied ways the Black Panthers interacted with the community.⁴⁰ On that list is the well recited 'Free Breakfast Program', along with Liberation Schools, and a Free Clothing Program. All of these programs were in effect part of a socialist training ground that the Panthers were introducing to the community. It was about empowerment and about self-reliance, as some of the Panthers goals were to reeducate and feed the masses.

With the arrival of the Black Panthers in the mid 60's and their growth to national prominence in the late 60's, Oakland became ground zero for the nation's attention on race relations and the Black power movement (Acoli, 2009). This national attention also brought the attention of various groups who wanted to stunt the rising Black Nationalism and reign in the civil unrest that threatened to change the prevailing societal order. The most prominent of these

⁴⁰ Black Panther Community Programs: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/programs.shtml>

organizations fighting to upend Black Nationalism was the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Their main goal was to devise ways of bringing down this group at any cost, including infiltration, police assassination, assassination of character, incarnation of members, and some have argued, their most controversial means, the allowing and promoting of the flooding of the inner cities with drugs. In Oakland, this meant the projects in the East and West of the city. The drug importers were giving free reign to operate in Black communities.

Black Guerrilla Family

The Black Guerilla Family was founded in 1966 at the San Quentin penitentiary in California. I will refer to The Black Guerrilla Family either by *Jama*, a Swahili name meaning family, or the BGF. The BGF was a merger of two existing groups: the Revolutionary Armed Movement (RAM) founded by George Jackson and aligned with the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Black United Movement (BUM), which was founded by James “Bone” Johnson. W.L. Nolan was the third member of this group, as the new organization would be called the Black Guerrilla Family. The Black Family and the Black Vanguard were some of the names associated with Jackson and Nolan’s previous group that carried over to the BGF. This merger was done out of the necessity of increasing numbers and fostering unity for Black inmates who were consistently under attack by racist guards and other established race-based gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia.

George Jackson became a revolutionary in prison and he reached out to the Black Panther Party to become their representative as the head of a prison-based paramilitary strike group (Burton-Rose, 2010). They took the revolutionary ideology and adapted it to the brutal, racist prisons that were a destination certainty for most Black radicals during that time, and a probable destination for many Black youths.

The BGF adhered to a strict set of rules, at the core of which was Black love. They termed prisons, ‘concentration camps’ and they outlawed the raping of Black inmates by anyone, for any reason. They taught Swahili and self-protection classes to the inmates and they also outlawed drug use. They mirrored Panther ideology by outlawing the shedding of ‘Black blood’ and reeducated all their members along party political lines.

Also, like the Panthers, they immediately came under heavy attack by the FBI, and much like the Panthers, their leadership infrastructure was pretty much destroyed by the 70’s FBI director, Edgar J. Hoover, who issued a secret directive dated August 25, 1967, declaring war on the Black Panther Party and other “black nationalist organizations”⁴¹. This directive made the Black Panther Party public enemy #1 and sanctioned the use of illegal tactics to bring them down (Churchill & Vander Wall, 2001; Lazerow & Williams, 2006). As the mission of the BGF was to overthrow of the United States government, they too found themselves in the crosshairs of Hoover. In the following three years after the issuance of the directive, all the founders of the BGF were killed, save Bone Johnson. In addition, 31 members of the BPP were killed and Huey and a few other leaders were arrested. FBI sponsored propaganda cleaved a huge schism through the membership and drove members underground, as there was a nationwide round-up of the rank and file. In all told, nearly a thousand members were arrested during those three years and any U.S. Citizen deemed a racial or political threat by Hoover was targeted.

In the prison system, the executions were carried out by California correction guards. On January 13, 1970, Black Guerrilla Family co-founder W.L. Nolan, along with Cleveland

⁴¹ This was called Operation COINTELPRO, which was an acronym for **C**ounter **I**ntelligence **P**rogram.

Edwards and Alvin "Jug" Miller were shot at close range in the Soledad prison yard. Nolan had become a hero to the other Black inmates by leading a protest of the killings of two other Soledad inmates: Clarence Causey and William Powell. After Nolan and the others were shot, they were left to die in plain view of the remaining inmates and not given prompt medical relief. Two weeks later, the guards were put on trial and cleared of any wrong doing by a prison Board of Inquiry. This incited a quick reprisal by the BGF; they threw a prison guard off a top tier, sending him to his death. BGF leader George Jackson, along with Fleeta Drumgo and John Cluchette, were implicated in the guard's death, which brought them national attention as the Black Panther Party initiated an international campaign to save the 'Soledad Brothers'.

The Soledad Brothers' case solidified the BGF as a force behind the walls and strengthened their connection to the BPP. The Panthers ramped up their attempts to save them from the gas chamber and the Soledad Brothers became the cause that the National prison movement coalesced behind. Until then, there were many disparate prison reforms or abolishment movements, but nothing on a national scale. The Panthers absorbed the BGF into their movement and bestowed the title of 'Field Marshall' on George Jackson, charging him with building the prison movement from behind its walls as they attacked from without.⁴² The Black Power movement understood early that the prisons were a huge part of the disciplining and dehumanization of Black people and they made great strides in linking the prison movement into a human rights movement. As Jackson once famously stated, "We're all familiar with the function of the prison as an institution serving the needs of the totalitarian state. We've got to destroy that function; the function has to be no longer viable, in the end. It's one of the strongest institutions supporting the totalitarian state."⁴³

BPP member Angela Davis was assigned bodyguard; she was one of the point people in the 'Free the Soledad Brothers' campaign. She often visited George and was heavily involved in his defense team. She was protected by an assortment of BGF and BPP members, including George's younger brother, Jonathan Jackson. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan put into action a plan to free the Soledad Brothers. He took a courtroom in the Marin County courthouse hostage where BGF members Ruchell 'Cinque' Magee, William Christmas, and James McClain were scheduled to appear. Jonathan busted into the courtroom, and took the judge, prosecutor, and jury hostage while arming his 'comrades'. They escaped to a waiting van but were overtaken by a SWAT team.

They hoped to bargain for the release of the Soledad Brothers in exchange for the judge, prosecutor, and the jury, but instead were met by a hail of gunfire as Jackson, McClain, Christmas, and the trial judge were killed. SWAT teams also paralyzed the prosecutor for life, as only Ruchell and three wounded jurors survived the onslaught. This event added fuel to the fire and Jonathan became a martyr for the struggle. Another effect this had was to drive Angela Davis on the run, as the FBI was looking for her as the alleged supplier of the weapons Jackson used. She had legally purchased these weapons for her bodyguards.

A global-wide hunt took place and soon Angela became the next BPP member to gain international fame. Angela sightings spouted up around the world, as her distinctive large fire red afro was plastered all over the news and on posters proclaiming her most wanted. Finally, on

⁴² George Jackson, in an interview with Karen Wald and published in Cages of Steel: The Politics Of Imprisonment In The United States. (Edited by Ward Churchill and J.J. Vander Wall)

⁴³ *ibid*

October 13, 1970, Angela was apprehended in New York City and soon extradited back to California to stand trial. *Free Angela Davis* protests erupted all over the country, propelling Angela to cultural icon status. She was to be tried with Cinque but they separated the trials and eventually she was acquitted on all charges. Cinque wanted to be tried in the federal courts where Angela wanted to move the venue— out of the upper middle class Marin County, to the more socially and economically diverse city of San Jose. Cinque was acquitted of murder but was convicted on the lesser kidnapping charges; he remains imprisoned to this date.

With his little brother killed trying to secure his release, George became enraged and formed the “August 7th Movement” to commemorate his brother, also planning to avenge his death. George originally saw the BGF as the soldiers in the frontlines of the Black Liberation struggle behind bars, and then with the absorption into the BPP, as the vanguard in the prison movement. However, the BGF expected more help from the BPP, but internal disagreements within the Panthers resulted in pulling back some of their promised manpower support. This was a jumping off point for a rift developing between the two once closely aligned organizations, and had far reaching effects on both parties.

On August 21, 1971, George L. Jackson was killed during a deadly riot in San Quentin’s Adjustment Center-High Security Unit. According to Liberatore’s book, *The Road to Hell*, he was alleged to have made a break for the prison gate with fellow BPP inmate, Johnny Spain. Jackson was said to have pulled a 9-mm pistol that he secured from Bingham and hid under his afro wig, yelling, “All right Gentlemen, this is it, I’m taking over! The Dragon has come!” (Liberatore, 1996, p. 17).

After the all the shooting had stopped, a total of six people were dead, including George Jackson,⁴⁴ three guards, and two other inmates. How the gun got into the prison remains an unsolved mystery, as it is widely believed that Anderson’s tape recorder contained a secret compartment that hid the gun and was passed to him by his attorney who was a member of the *New Left*.⁴⁵

After the successive loss of their leadership and founders, the BGF went through a crisis of direction so they formed a Central Committee to mitigate against that kind of problem in the future, but the new guard reverted to self preservation and lost a lot of their early ideology. Without the powerful, charismatic leaders of the past, BGF soldiers turned from communist to capitalist, as they started to resemble the typical race-based prison gangs. No more Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the little red book. Instead, the gang’s new leader, Ruben Williams, turned the BGF towards areas of robbery, extortion, and drug trafficking. Soon the alliance they made with the Nuestra Familia prison gang in 1971, to fight the Aryan Brotherhood and Mexican Mafia, turned into a money and power grab as they took complete control of the Northern California drug trade, once dominated by those other gangs. This sharp turn from a politicized organization that was created to advocate for the powerless and for the protection of Black inmates from racist

⁴⁴ In his book “Blood in My Eye” Jackson talks about being self taught a “bastardized style of martial arts”. The book was finished just a few weeks before his death. In the third to last paragraph he prophesized, “The Dragon is coming...” pg. 12

⁴⁵ The *New Left* was a term used in the United Kingdom and United States, referring to activists, educators, agitators, and others in the 60s and 70s who sought to implement a broad range of reforms, in contrast to earlier leftist or Marxist movements that had taken a more vanguardist approach to social justice, focusing mostly on labor unionization and questions of social class. In the U.S., the *New Left* was associated with the Hippie movement and college campus protest movements. The British *New Left* sought to correct the perceived errors of the “Old Left” parties in the post-World War II period.

guards and other prisoners, was now engaged in counter-revolutionary activities that furthered the rift with the Black Panthers.

During this time, Huey had been in jail for the murder of Oakland police officer John Frey in 1967. Huey was sentenced to 15 years in the penitentiary for voluntary manslaughter in 1968, which sparked the 'Free Huey' movement. Two years later, in May of 1970, the California Appellate Court ordered a new trial based on the grounds that the jurors never had the option of convicting Newton of *involuntary* manslaughter, thereby depriving him of the right to a fair trial. The State of California tried twice more to convict him, both times ending in hung juries, so finally it dropped its case (Jones, 1998).

By now, Huey was under intense pressure and the cracks in his composure became huge fissures. He traveled to China in 1971 to meet with Chou En-Lai, who was the first Premier of the People's Republic. Upon his return, he issued an executive BPP declaration, closing all nationwide offices and consolidating power in Oakland. This was no doubt due to a series of FBI generated letters that were sent to leaders nationwide in an attempt to sow distrust and to increase tensions and factionalism within the BPP.⁴⁶ Their efforts culminated in the split between Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, who was the Minister of Information and exiled in Algeria. As a paranoid Newton continued to consolidate power, groups started to splinter off, including an excommunicated Cleaver, who seized control over a small organization that was the underground faction and "fighting apparatus" of the BPP, which became known as the Black Liberation Army (BLA). The BLA became publicly known as urban terrorists that waged war against police departments nationwide, through the use of car bombings and ambush killings.

In 1972, Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale returned back to Oakland after fighting federal charges including, 'crossing state lines to incite a riot'. He was indicted with members of the New Left organization, Youth International Party, and the founders of Students for a Democratic Society. The trial became known as the trial of the Chicago 8. Upon his return, he found a party in disarray and full of mistrust. Huey and Bobby decided to shift the focus of the Party and move back to grassroots organizing by serving the community with their free breakfasts and job training programs.

Bobby Seale also initiated a voter registration drive that culminated in his run for the mayor of Oakland in 1973. His second place showing in a crowded field of nine, shocked many political observers, demonstrating the power that the Party possessed at that time with Seale winning 40 percent of the vote. He eventually lost the runoff against John Reading, who was the incumbent white mayor, but his strong showing led BPP lieutenant Elaine Brown to run for the City Council the following year. She was also defeated, but likewise had a strong result, garnering over 34,000 votes. The Seale-Brown campaign was responsible for registering over 30,000 new voters in Oakland, but it also exposed the deep division that developed between former comrades, as Cleaver called them 'reformist instead of revolutionaries', and he demanded the ouster of the central committee (Jones, 1998).

On August 6, 1974, Newton allegedly shot and killed Kathleen Smith, a 17-year-old prostitute, and in the proceeding weeks, pistol-whipped his tailor with a .357 magnum. Huey was placed on the FBI's "Most Wanted" list for failing to show up to court for the Smith murder charges. He went on the run to Cuba, where he would remain for approximately three years. Huey would appoint Elaine Brown as the first Chairwoman of the BPP and she would work to try to reverse the Party's image of being hostile to women, by appointing women to high profile

⁴⁶ As a part of the COINTELPRO operation, the FBI forged letters from high-ranking members and sent them to various chapters and to leaders in exile, such as Eldridge Cleaver.

positions. She assumed control over the Party's day-to-day activities and she continued the political organizing and expanded the BPP education platforms, including opening up their own school, which grouped students by subject ability and not age level.

The Party kept up with voter registration and this time, decided to throw their weight behind the 1977 campaign of former judge, Lionel Wilson. The incumbent Mayor Reading decided not to run for re-election and Wilson became the city's first Black mayor. The Panthers were largely credited for paving the way for Wilson and putting him in office. He would go on to serve three consecutive terms until 1992. His term coincided with the unprecedented rise of drugs and violence, the worst that the city had ever seen. Later I will explore some reasons why this might not have been a coincidence. Right after his election, Huey, who was unhappy living in exile, decided to come home.

Huey knew he would have to face charges for the alleged killing of Kathleen Smith, but he was optimistic about his chances for acquittal. When he arrived in the U.S., he was given a hero's welcome by the local Left. Huey immediately moved to consolidate power, which led to systematically excommunicating all the former Panther leaders he felt betrayed by or could no longer trust, including Seale and Brown. The ouster of Seale and Brown, the architects of the Party's foray into electoral politics, veered the Party from electoral politics—including coalition politics with the newly-elected mayor—down dark roads that destroyed what was left of a fragmented organization.

The BPP was fast crumbling and the leadership was in turmoil. The rank and file were under attack in every city and quickly leaving the Party. The hardcore leaders were either dead, in jail, or in exile, and with the BLA attacks; the police were more determined than ever to destroy the Party. COINTELPRO was wildly successful at infiltrating and planting seeds of distrust, and Huey started battling his own demons. Simultaneously, as the Black Panthers were contending with the police, the FBI, and themselves, they were also competing for the imagination of the youth with Oakland drug gangs. Ironically, their chief rival was Felix Mitchell, a man who started off in the "Young Panthers", which was an auxiliary group of youths organized by the Panthers but were not afforded full membership. They were trained in Panther ideology and methodology for the purpose of recruitment and community building. Felix arguably learned his leadership skills from this auxiliary group and took what he learned, as he was, credited with creating the country's first large-scale, gang-controlled drug operation (Miller, Vandome, & McBrewster, 2011)

The MOB

Felix Mitchell's 6-9 mob fought with his former mentors for the hearts and bodies of Oakland's youth. The 6-9 mob was a tightly well-run gang, based out of the San Antonio Village, better known as the 69th Avenue housing projects. This was a spiraling complex that extended from 69th Avenue on one side to 66th Avenue on the other. These projects also extended to what was known as the 65th village. The gang had a hierarchy and rules that surpassed anything that was known at that time regarding the level of sophistication and organization.⁴⁷ The projects went by many names: the ville, 6-9 ville, the village—but the gang was simply called the mob.

The Mob was an acronym meaning 'My Other Brother' and this was used as a recruiting tool, as the Mob grew into a national force (Ca. Ct. App. 1987). It didn't recruit members on a

⁴⁷ Jerome H. Skolnick. Wild Pitch: 'Three Strikes, You're Out' and Other Bad Calls on Crime. *The American Prospect*, March 21, 1994.

national scale, but it set up a national drug distribution ring, reaching from coast to coast. This was ostensibly allowed by the FBI as long as they continued to open up drug markets in inner cities, while working at counter purposes to the Black Nationalist rhetoric of the Panthers and other groups. The Mob did recruit from the village in Oakland to supply their increasing need for foot soldiers to combat the formation of other drug gangs such as The Family, founded and ran by Milton “Mickey” Moore, and Funktown U.S.A., ran by ‘Big Harv’ Harvey Whisenton. Both of these extremely violent and fast growing organizations were based in East Oakland. As the drugs started flowing more freely into the Oakland streets, the animosity between all parties, including the Black Panthers, increased.

In a macabre twist on George Jackson’s ‘Bloody August’, in August of 1980 and in the span of three days, six murders were attributed to the feud between the Mob and The Family. Oakland’s continual economic stagnation provided ripe fodder for both the Black Panthers rhetoric to take hold, but also for the drug gangs to provide an alternative to the traditional avenues of employment. However, by now the Panthers had lost their allure to the local youth and Huey was more concerned with lining his pockets and feeding his habit than he was with feeding the homeless or providing free breakfast to kids. By 1980, the Panthers school was shut down. Meanwhile; Oakland lost a combined twelve thousand jobs in its traditional industries including manufacturing, transportation, communications, and utilities. This loss occurred between 1981 and 1988, all while Mayor Wilson was in office (Rhombert, 2007; Williamson, 2009).

The Panthers decided that they needed an alternative source of income and turned to tax the drug dealers who made their living off the people in the community. This of course did not go over well with the organized drug gangs (Pearson, 1994). The Panthers already had a history of animosity and violence with the local pimps, but this was different. There were several documented clashes between the two main groups that resulted in shoot-outs and high-speed chases.

The smaller, unaffiliated drug dealers didn’t have the muscle to challenge the Panthers and they had to pay to stay in business. The Panthers used this tax to fund some of their community programs, but increasingly, their members started to fall into the drug user trap. This had a deleterious effect on membership and organizational capacity, as their focus increasingly went from structural change to infighting and power struggles— both internally and externally.

As the Panthers devolved to a quasi-criminal organization, the Mob was gaining in power, prestige, and strength. The community program that the Panthers were famous for was drying up, as they were mismanaged and consequently abandoned all together. The Mob took up some of that slack by sponsoring trips to theme parks for area youths, buying groceries for poor families, and giving away turkeys and presents during the holidays... all Black Panther originated community outreach tactics. The replacing of the presence of the Black Panther Party, with the larger than life Felix Mitchell, signified a turning point for the Black community in Oakland that has not abated.

Oakland, while dealing with horrific unemployment, also had to content with a sky-high murder rate. In 1983 alone, the rate climbed to more 100 murders annually. The drug gangs were at war over the increasing drug market and the bodies stacked up as an indicator of the problem’s fierceness. By some estimates, Felix was making up to 20 thousand a day in profits selling heroin and cocaine. As the body count grew and the jobs dried up, the flight of White residents continued through the ’80s; the Black population, which had grown at a substantive rate, began to slow and finally stagnate at a high of 47 percent of the overall population. Some upper SES

Black families moved to the suburbs while less able families moved to some of the poorer Black areas, such as Richmond and Vallejo.

Felix Mitchell was finally caught in 1983, convicted in 1985, and sent to Leavenworth federal penitentiary in Kansas. One year later, he was stabbed to death—he was only thirty-two.⁴⁸ On August 29, 1986, Felix’s funeral was broadcast on the fledgling Cable News Network (CNN), live in Oakland. His funeral procession was akin to that of royalty as his body was displayed in an ornate, see through bronze and glass \$6,000 casket, in a horse drawn hearse trotting its way through the streets of Oakland. In the procession were most of the remaining Mob and other well-wishers, present in every luxury car imaginable. Undoubtedly there were also a few FBI agents and a mixed bag of other law enforcement agencies observing the spectacle. The funeral had a lasting effect on children growing up in this time period, as Felix was given the respect that seemed to be denied to ‘ordinary citizens’.⁴⁹ Felix’s death sparked what law enforcement and academics came to call the "Felix Mitchell Paradox",⁵⁰ as his enormous void sparked an all out war in the streets.

The Family and Funktown immediately rushed to fill the vacuum left by Felix. These two organizations were the most ready and able to take over, having both the means and organizational structures to do it. However, the way business was conducted and organized had significantly changed since the heydays of the 70’s. Scores of disenfranchised youths now flocked to the game and the introduction of crack around 1985 completely flipped the old business models.

Black youths were now in the position to run their own mini companies, and in a field that used to be a closed circuit, with limited room for newbies, now anybody could be a drug dealer. However with Felix gone, so was his pipeline, but somehow the cocaine increased.

Unbeknownst to the general populace, and even to most low level dealers, there was already several connected suppliers who were well hidden behind the scenes, shoring up supply lines and making distribution networks. Two of them had dubious connections and would highlight the complex nature of the problem in Oakland. In Los Angeles, a man named Rickey Ross, nicknamed ‘Freeway’, was flooding the southlands with pure cocaine, making untold millions in doing so. But the question remained, “How was a former street-level dealer all of the sudden selling tons of cocaine?” It would all come out years later that Freeway was part of an intricate multiagency plot to destabilize key Central American countries, while at the same time, pacifying Black communities in a crazy distortion of COINTELPRO operations.⁵¹ However, while this revelation explained how the gangs in Los Angeles were coming across large quantities of cocaine, it failed to fully explain how Oakland and the rest of the Bay Area came to suffer the same fate?

...Enter Rudy Henderson.

⁴⁸ His case was overturned on a technicality a year after his death.

⁴⁹ Jerome H. Skolnick | March 21, 1994

⁵⁰ With Mitchell's monopolistic pricing eliminated, competition reduced the price of crack. The main effect of Mitchell's imprisonment was to destabilize the market, lower drug prices, and increase violence as rival gang members challenged each other for market share. Drug-related drive-by shootings, street homicides, and felonious assaults increased. Jerome H. Skolnick | March 21, 1994

⁵¹ In August 1996, San Jose Mercury News reporter Gary Webb published a series titled Dark Alliance, alleging that the CIA/NSC Contras was a dominant factor in the widespread epidemic rise of crack cocaine in Oakland, California.

Rudy, or Big Rudy as he came to be known, was the Bay Area Equivalent to Freeway. Rudy was supplied by the infamous Medellin drug traffickers who were the same people who supplied Freeway; they funneled millions back to the CIA in their plan to stop the spread of socialism in Nicaragua.⁵² This had far reaching ramifications in the Bay Area, including the destroying of families, the quashing the potential of untold number of youths over three decades, and the replacing of Black Power Movement icons with one or two successful drug dealers, making them ‘hood stars’ for the youth to emulate. Big Rudy would discretely supply frontline weight dealers, while off and on supplying the next two successors of Felix’s drug empire (amongst others), until he was arrested and then sentenced to 25 years in April of 1989.⁵³

Big Rudy was an avid body builder and car enthusiast, but despite his wealth, he kept a low profile in Oakland and was worried about his safety so much so that he brought a mansion in the North Bay community of Sonoma, which was fortified with miles of wire fence and surveillance cameras. His mansion sat on top of a hill and was dubbed the ‘Sky Castle’. After his arrest it was auctioned off along with his 40 cars to offset his Internal Revenue Service (IRS) fines. Big Rudy was loosely associated with another dealer who also had deep ties, especially to the mayor’s office.

Stephen Wilson, or Lil Stevie, was another Bay Area drug dealer who hid deep behind the scenes, but had the pipeline to mass quantities of drugs from overseas, thanks to his connections to the Spatola-Gambino Mafia family out of Brooklyn, New York and the Inzerillo Palermo family out of Italy (Blumenthal, 1988). They allegedly supplied him with heroin from the golden triangle and later he would cultivate a cocaine connection with Guillermo Diaz, a Mexican travel-book publisher out of Marin County. Guillermo Diaz was the central figure in a seven-month joint FBI/DEA investigation that also targeted the Mafia. Wilson was linked by the FBI, who followed the money trail of the two mafia families. The FBI produced a chart showing the connection of Diaz to Wilson and to a Sergio Maranghi, alleged to be the leader of a San Francisco Mafia based drug ring. Maranghi was linked to the East coast Gambino family and was ultimately arrested Dec. 1, 1988, along with 76 drug suspects in the United States and 133 people in Italy.⁵⁴

What made Lil Stevie stand out was not his mafia connections, (although it was unusual for a West coast dealer to be directly connected to the Golden Triangle), but that he was Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson’s son.⁵⁵ Steve Wilson mysteriously avoided jail time, even after with being hit with multiple charges including: conspiracy, attempting to process cocaine for sale between May and December 1988, two counts of using a telephone to negotiate the acquisition of cocaine, and six tax violations.⁵⁶

⁵² The most disturbing item to come from Iran Contra was that there was another commodity being traded, namely drugs earmarked for the streets of the United States, particularly targeting the Black Communities of Los Angeles and the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Area. Lt. Col North actually kept a record of the drug transactions, and labeled them as such as found by the Kerry 1988 Congressional Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations.

⁵³ In 1989, Henderson pleaded guilty to a single charge of possession for sale of 7 kilograms (15.4 pounds) of cocaine and evasion of \$115,000 in taxes in 1984. He also agreed to forfeit his Sonoma County estate and two luxury cars. He was originally sentenced to 20 years in prison, but that was reduced on appeal.

⁵⁴ December 15, 1988|From Times Wire Services

⁵⁵ On 12/14/1988, the San Francisco Chronicle referred to Steve Wilson as a major high profile West Coast drug dealer functionary known in the inner circles as “Mr. Steve”. It also appeared that the DEA investigation was compromised by Oakland’s Interagency Drug Council (IDC) controlled by Lionel Wilson.

⁵⁶ He allegedly understated his income to avoid more than \$242,000 in federal taxes from 1986 through 1988.

Arresting agents seized \$246,856 in cash from Lil Stevie Wilson, along with a money-counting machine, but no drugs were found on Wilson or in any of the searched properties or vehicles. However, part of the seized money was found in a car parked in front of his house, but the vehicle was registered to his girlfriend.

When the FBI's assistant special agent in charge of criminal operations, Barry Mawn, was asked at a news conference about the effect Wilson's political connection had on the case, he replied that Wilson's status as the mayor's son, "has no bearing at all" on his treatment.⁵⁷

The Rise of the Drug Cliques and the fall of the Street Gangs

With the crackdown on Oakland's major drug rings from the 70's and subsequent incarceration of the heads of the major drug organizations, including Felix in 1983, Mickey Mo' in 1984 and Big Harv in 1985, the federal agencies turned to look at the supply lines in an attempt to cripple the booming underground economy. With Big Rudy and Lil Stevie in their sightlines, the Feds neglected the large street gang population that was mostly denied entry into the game in the early 80's. The Feds had lopped the heads off the beast, but to paraphrase Eldridge Cleaver, left the body armed.

Coincidentally, crack was gaining a hold of the community and of Huey Newton as well. This new smokable version of cocaine made entry in the game easier, and because of its highly addictive nature, much more profitable. Huey by now was in and out of jail on a regular basis and he became a shell of his former self, reduced to petty crimes and extortion, which was old hat to him. He extorted drugs from street level dealers and was considered untouchable for years, as Jama protected him from retaliation. BGF had become a force on the streets as members were released from jail and younger gang members knew that they would have to deal with them once they were arrested, so they were given more room to operate.

With all the older leaders of the three main drug gangs in jail, the younger generation took over but didn't follow the same code that the older generation had established. The new leaders were much more violent; because of the amount of money crack generated, they too, were much flashier in appearance. This flashiness or 'props', as they were called because they were used as a recruitment tools for clientele and membership, allowed for the broadcasting of material goods as a way to signify wealth and opportunity.

After Felix went down, his heir apparent was anything but. Most of his top lieutenants went down with him and the ones who didn't were reluctant to step into that void. With the older members staying behind the scenes, the opportunity arose for a youngster to step into the vacuum.

Darrell Reed was Felix's nephew⁵⁸ and was in high school when the mantle was passed to him. Darrell, or lil D as he was known, was the leader of the younger street gang version of the Mob (Reed, 2010). He was a short kid who attracted attention and devotions from older street hardened kids. He had a legion of followers who flocked from surrounding neighborhoods to join the village. By the time Lil D took over, he commanded the largest street gang in Oakland at that time and probably the entire Bay Area.

Lil D made alliances with other like-aged boys who were leaders of their street gangs in neighborhoods such as Sobrante Park in East Oakland, and the large Acorn gang in West Oakland, along with the prominent North Oakland gang, Bushrod (Reed, 2010). These alliances

⁵⁷ December 15, 1988|From Times Wire Services

⁵⁸ Not blood but through Felix's relationship with Darrell's auntie.

cemented his position as the most powerful youngster in the Bay Area. Anthony Flowers, who ran an organization that was an offshoot of Mickey Moore's, The Family, in a continuation of that decades old bitter feud, would later rival him.

The consolidation of the biggest gangs in Oakland along drug supply lines created built in networks of distribution in every Black neighborhood in the city. What this consolidation of power didn't do was create a super gang. Gangs in Oakland splintered with the arrival of crack. They broke down the lines of cliques and became more interested in the selling of crack and making money than the traditional gang ideologies of past eras. No more about turf and allegiance to an old gang, as Oakland became a series of 'spots'. Spots are a temporary location where certain drugs can be bought. These locations change according to police presence and/or manpower. Certain spots have been around much longer and give the appearance of a gang because of the passion of the membership representing that spot.

However, unlike traditional gangs, you can be from a spot by being accepted or appointed by whoever is running the spot, to then work the spot. You don't have to live there or have any real connections to it. Some of the newer spots you can just put down 'work' (drugs) and import members and start working it. After a new spot is established, people flock to it for work just like any other industry and they have to follow the work guidelines like any other job. The management dictates pay and hard work is rewarded. Often, the worker can work their way up the ladder and open up their own spot or move into small wholesaling. Some older gangs like 11-5 Sobrante Park, 98 Brookfield Village, or the Acorn mob, were slower to adapt to the new way of doing business because geographically, they were more isolated and it was harder, if not impossible, for outsiders to come in and set up shop.

No longer gangs, but still with strong feelings of family and community, these areas opened up to doing business with people they used to physically fight. Money transformed traditional Oakland gangs into entrepreneurial spots. Membership was fluid, as often former gang members moved from spot to spot in search of money. However, old gang allegiance was still the primary identifier as a response to the question, "Where you from?", the answer was often a two-parter, "I'm from the ville, but be on 84th", signifying old membership and where you currently work. Spots often clash with other spots, but rarely in the old ways of gang fighting or along gang lines— it was more about money and personality driven conflicts.

Because of the history of familial relationships, often spotlines will transect family lines. This means that one family can have multiple family members in varying spots across the city. This does a few things. One, it is a way that business connections are made and conflicts are mediated. Two, it extends the social networks of actors and allows for ease of entry into formerly hostile neighborhoods and spots. Three, the breakdown of gangs and the emergence of spots also lessened the threat of all-out-war between rivals on the street level. Usually, the warfare that would break out was due to a business matter or one group encroaching on another's spot and affecting business; this was capitalism on a street level and played out with direct consequences for all involved.

In the late 80s and early 90s, the violence ramped up to unimaginable levels as remnants of the Mob, now headed by Lil D, competed with the remnants of The Family, now led by Ant Flowers. Lil D was incarcerated in 1988 but that didn't stop the violence, as he ran the mob from jail with his loyal lieutenant carrying out his edicts (Reed, 2010). The Mob and The Family had a longstanding animosity that was passed down as the Mob believed that Mickey Moore was behind the assassination of Felix while he was just a year into his sentence at Leavenworth

federal prison in Pennsylvania. Moore was also in jail but his large extended family, known as the MoMos, was still in operation and going strong.

Emanuel Lacy was one of the leaders who bridged the generation gap from Mickey to Flowers.⁵⁹ Lacy was an extremely intelligent man who was rumored to be able to speak five languages. He wanted all of his people to go to college to learn how to better hide their occupation and money and to expand their empire into the legal world (Personal Communication, Anonymous). Lacy didn't believe in the showy lifestyle and instead believed in blending into the environment. Lacy, like Mickey before him, was centered in the 20's avenues of East Oakland; this area went by many names: the rollin 20s, MoMoland, the twomps, but will be most remembered as the 'murderdubs'. The educated Lacy enforced his rule with another educated man, Alphodo White, better known as P-dub.

P-dub was not the ordinary looking gangster; most thought he was very square and his speech mannerism also bespoke of college training. However, P-dub was a master at killing. He killed without compassion or remorse. He killed enemies with glee. He singlehandedly turned the rolling twenties into the murderdubs, so named after him. P-dub was The Family's biggest weapon against the Mob and they quickly turned him loose against them. To the Mob, P-dub became known as the 'terminator', and that is what he did to them.

He was the hunter of other people hunters. He murdered the top enforcer for the Mob, a man named Yogi. Yogi was a carryover from the Felix days and he had seen decades of street war and was responsible for an unknown amount of murders. P-dub caught him leaving his girlfriend's house without a gun, followed him a few blocks then unloaded after he toyed with him for awhile. The smaller spots aligned themselves not out of loyalty, but out of who could pay the most for bodies and who could give them cheaper wholesale prices on cocaine. Most wanted nothing to do with the bigger picture but a few had dreams of grandeur or wanted to settle old scores. The larger battles kicked off smaller skirmishes between spots, as manpower was farmed out. Hitters, or assassins, made 5 to 50 grand a kill depending on whom they got.

Lil D also expanded the national network into more cities and regions across the country as he fully assumed the network built by his uncle, thought to be dismantled by the FBI, after his uncle attracted too much national attention with the wars with the rival drug gangs. When Lil D went to jail just after his 20st birthday, his top lieutenant, Timothy 'Black' Bluit took over the organization and continued the war with Ant Flowers (Reed, 2010). Black was the last of the large-scale dealers who would run the old 69th Mob. His reign would last from 1988 to 1991, when he was sent to the federal penitentiary for 35 years. Soon Flowers would also be on his way with a 28-year sentence and in that time, this war would claim multiple lives on both sides—and once again leave Oakland's murder rate spiraling out of control.⁶⁰

The Death of a Revolutionary

On August 22, 1989, Huey P. Newton was murdered in West Oakland, not far from where the Black Panther Party was formed. Again, the month of August rears its head in the history of Oakland.

A drug addled Huey had become a scourge on the same streets he use to protect. Huey lived off of robbing drug dealers for product and money; after targeting members of the BGF they had finally had enough. There was a long established rift between the Black Guerilla Family

⁵⁹ SFGate Article:Oakland fugitive nabbed outside Denver stadium:/e/a/1995/09/30/NEWS1191.dtl

⁶⁰ SFGate-Article:Oakland fugitive nabbed outside Denver stadium:/e/a/1995/09/30/NEWS1191.dtl

and The Black Panthers (especially Huey) that dated back to the Jonathan Jackson murder. To compound the issue, former Black Panthers who would join the BGF in jail, felt as if Huey cut them off by not supporting them or their families. The robbing of the street level members was the final straw. Huey was still acting as if he was in charge of the organization and decades long animosity towards him reached the boiling point—and finally a hit was ordered. A low ranking member, Tyrone Robinson, decided to fulfill the contract after he had an encounter with Huey in the streets. Huey knew his days were coming to an end as he went looking for Robinson in a last act of defiance. Huey yelled, “You can kill my body but you can’t kill my soul, my soul will live forever!”, as Robinson shot him three times, point blank in the head (Pearson, 1994).

The hit on Huey was not universally agreed to inside of the BGF, as some members still saw him as an icon. The BGF was still suffering from an identity problem, for the same thing that was fueling its swelling membership was also killing its revolutionary spirit: drugs. The immediate aftermath of the Black community being drowned in the influx of mass quantities of drugs, coupled with the over building of prisons in California, led to the mass incarceration of Black and Brown young men.

The ramification of the prison industrial complex,⁶¹ or P.I.C., was a shift in the power structure of the streets and jails. No longer was the drug trade controlled by street gangs or unaffiliated large-scale suppliers. The change in business model may have been an unintended side effect of the P.I.C., but nevertheless, prisons were being filled up as new ones were being built and new laws were passed to criminalize the reported behaviors of marginalized segments of society, just as they had done right after emancipation.⁶² As a system that sits at the intersection of government and the private sector, the P.I.C. uses incarceration as a solution to the political, social, and economic problem it itself helped to create.

The ranks of the BGF swelled as well, but as the case with the Panthers, the ideology started become obscured as more and more members developed debilitating drug habits and now started selling drugs, both in jail and out on the streets, once they were released. The BGF quickly gained a reputation as dope fiends who demand drugs on the streets or just robbed you outright. The BGF became this interesting mix of old revolutionaries and young drug dealers, a blending of the two pathways that led to a corruption of it. The internal strife in the BGF led to several splits in the organization. One was an offshoot called 415, named after the area code of the Bay Area at that time. 415 was created as a result of Jama’s de-emphasis on the revolutionary ideology, and was therefore an attempt to get back to their roots without the contradiction of looking the other way regarding member drug habits.

415 became more attractive to the younger generation of drug dealers, as the Jama leaders drug use turned off would-be recruits. Young drug dealers couldn’t get over taking orders from people they had no respect for on the streets, but in jail, these drug addicts had the power.

⁶¹The total Black prison population increased only slightly during the 1960s thru 1973. By 1979, the prison population stood at 300,000, a whopping 100,000 increase within a single decade. The previous 100,000 increase (from 100,000 to 200,000), had taken 31 years (1927 to 1958). The initial increase to 100,000 had taken hundreds of years. The prison population on June 30, 1989, topped 673,000, an incredible 372,000 increase in less than a decade, causing the doubling and tripling of prison populations in 34 states.

⁶² Prisons experience an exponential growth after emancipation, as new laws were passed, making things such as looking at a white woman against the law in some states. Within five years after the end of the Civil War, the Black percentages of the prison population went from close to zero to 33 percent. Many of these prisoners were hired out to whites at less than slave wages to work in county workhouses, chain gang camps, and the plantations and factories that used prisoners as slave laborers. Overnight, prisons became the new slave quarters for many freed Blacks. This was done to control the newly freed Blacks and to re-enslave them for cheap labor.

415, now called Kumi,⁶³ was made up incarcerated youths from all over the city and had very quickly grown to be a force to contend with, both in the state system and in the federal pens, controlling governmental entities that a lot of the new generation found familiar grounds. Jama meanwhile was split [again]—this time internally— into four different subgroups that sometimes fought amongst themselves for power. This split is only visible to those inside; for all appearances, Jama looks united.

Jama and Kumi drew parallels to the wars of the 70s, between Black revolutionaries and Black street capitalists, where the lines were often blurry as to who was who, and which faction represented which ideology. Both Kumi and Jama were birthed, and are steeped in Black liberation rhetoric, and they both stray from that rhetoric in action.

Black Liberation gave way to Black street capitalism as the unemployment rate soared in spite of the Silicon Valley boom, which had little to no room for undereducated Black men. In 1989 Oakland, almost a quarter of all Black families lived below the poverty line.⁶⁴ Jama mirrored Oakland, as the plague of drugs and violence was devastating to Black communities, overwhelming much of the legacy of radical political mobilization from the '60s. Children as young as fifteen years old were joining gangs and some much younger were gaining jobs as small dealers, lookouts, or runners.

The city's unemployment rate was much higher than the national average and in 1990, it stood at 9.5 percent. However, as high as this rate was, it was even higher for the Black population where it stood at 14.5 percent. The predominantly Black West Oakland had a horrible rate of almost 20 percent of all its residents unemployed.⁶⁵ Oakland's image problem —its perception as a dangerous Black city—forced long term Mayor Wilson out of office, bringing in Elihu Harris to clean up its reputation in 1992. Unfortunately for him, the murder rate continued to climb as the crack epidemic worsened and the leaderless drug cliques fought for control. Approximately 175 people lost their lives in 1992, the worst year on record for Oakland; that works out to an average of one killing nearly every other day in a city of less than 375,000 people. It was an increase of 26 people from the previous year, but it gradually reduced the following years: 1993 with 157, 1994 with 151, and 1995 with 155, with a dramatic dip to 103 in 1996, finally reaching a thirty-year low of 68 in 1999, before rising back into the low to mid hundreds for the next ten years.⁶⁶

The year 1992 was also a major turning point for me as well. While Oakland was at its murder rate apex, that nebulous figure would have some real concrete significance to me, as I will illustrate in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As the Black radical pathway narrowed and the criminal pathway widened, the dominant societal discourse also adapted. While both options were still seen as anti-societal and monstrous by the nation at large, the Black radical was folded into irrelevance as a relic of a bygone era and shunted off to the scrap heaps of history with the other counter-cultural groups of the 60's and 70's. The narrative changed subtly from the Panthers being a part of a needed societal check, to one of—the Panthers WERE a part of American history. This move from functionality to

⁶³ Kumi is Swahili for ten, which is the sum of 4+1+5. The Bay Area's area code was split up due to population growth so Kumi dropped 415 to show unity with all of the Bay.

⁶⁴ <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>

⁶⁶ www.UrbanStrategies.org

anachronism by the nation effectively made Black radicalism a thing of the past and unnecessary, while still leaving the same problems...albeit in a different guise. The absorption of the Black radical and further marginalization of the Black youth serves the same purpose, for it absolves the State of being complicit in the need for the former to exist in the first place, and refocuses the onus back on the individual in the criminalization of the latter. As Individualism is a core tenant of the founding of this country and the ability to be a rational thinking person is what defines being an individual, then the need for group politics becomes antithetical to being a full American or being a 'human'.

Conversely and historically, Blacks have been dehumanized and struggled against the legacy of being presented as 'less than'. The late sixties brought the mentality that jobs in the mainstream or capitalist system had now replaced the plantations, as the new form of constant dominance. Some Black men took the attitude that if they would rather not work if it meant they would have to work for the White man— this had become the new form of rebellion against the White supremacy system. It no longer made sense to work within a system where the White man would always win and could dictate how one had to act, talk, and dress (Hooks, 2004). Nowhere was this more evident than in Oakland, where entrepreneurship or 'hustlin'⁶⁷ is still highly preferred in the Black community. Another way this has manifested is in crime, especially drug dealing. Black men became their own bosses and this 'job' gave them a sense of freedom and also a sense of pride and honor (Hooks, 2004).

Along with this change in rebellion tactics came an increased murder rate. As cocaine flowed in the inner cities, murders skyrocketed. The domino effect continued as the prisons filled with the spillover of street entrepreneurs who rushed to enter into the expanded workforce. This explosive growth of the prison system should have slowed the homicide rate in urban cities like Oakland according to the logic of the *War on Drugs*.

The flow of drugs into Oakland, from international drugs rings, with an assistance from various governmental agencies working at cross purposes, shows how the problem is more nuanced and complex than just struggling communities trying to find ways to earn money when the job market dries up. The complicitness of the one branch of the federal government with Rudy, or the local government collusion with Lil Stevie, strikes at something secret and calls for a deeper level of analysis in unpacking the root causes of the Oakland drug trade. There has long been community 'knowledge' that the government is in bed with international drug rings and uses disposable proxies as their community 'liaisons' in carrying out their mandates. But the question remains as to how these choices are presented to a 'Big Rudy' or a 'Lil Stevie' and why do they make the choices they do, assuming they have to know the consequence of that choice? The game is fluid and how it is played slightly changes, but the hard choices remain the same: do you risk what you have for a shot at something more while accepting the sacrifices you have to make to achieve that and accept the collateral cost to community and family?

Greg, Tony, and Mike went to the Lucky Lion to explore alternative possibilities outside of the 9-5 parental workdays. What they found was an oppositional life that their friends had chosen and the material trappings of that choice. They were intrigued but why would anyone choose to enter into a market that all but promises death and how does that choice become processed and then conveyed in a neighborhood setting?

⁶⁷ Hustlin is anything that someone does to make money fast and can be legal or illegal.

Chapter 5

Privileged Knowledge: The Training of the Block

Introduction

As a young Black man growing up in Oakland, I was consistently reminded that I would be lucky to live past the age of 25. We all heard this and we heard it everywhere – on the TV, on the radio, in the classrooms, and on billboards. Black men were an endangered species and we were killing each other off at an alarming rate. I can't say for certain, why that statistic was promoted to the extent it was; I could only speculate that it was intended to be a call to arms for our community to stop the killing and reverse the trend. However, I can say with the utmost certainty if that was the intent, then from our vantage point, the message missed its mark and had the opposite effect. What it did was reaffirm community knowledge that we were at war and we were losing.

As a young kid, who we were losing to and how this war was being fought eluded my grasp. It seemed to me that everyone was angry and I could never understand why. I just knew that the anger was palpable in the home and in the schoolyards. As long as I can remember, we were prepared for combat and that training extended out of the home and into the neighborhoods and schools. This was the tradition in Black families since slavery, as our parents would 'armor' us against the brutality of racism and the harshness of White dominated society, where the life expectancy of a slave hovered around 22 years of age.⁶⁸

That armoring didn't stop with the Emancipation Proclamation just as surely as racism didn't stop. Part of the armoring was firmly situated in being both physically and mentally tough, but with the combination of an unrelenting attack on the Black family and a justifiably bleak outlook on life, it became a rationale for young brothers to live life fast and die hard. Death always felt like it was right around the corner and time was quickly running out, so why fight it? This pronouncement of death and the freedom that came with it allowed for a flourishing of a 'what the fuck' mentality.

The mainstream media and school system tell Black males from an early age that we are destined to hustle in the streets, only to end up in prison and that those patriarchal males that do survive are those who are the most violent and the strongest (Hooks, 2004). Black male-on-male homicide shows how the value of Black life is weighed by segments of that population, also pointing to deeper issues as that level of violence becomes normalized. The rage addiction that Black males are socialized into is unchecked as long as it remains against other Black people. Also as long as there is no alternative to patriarchal manhood, the violence will continue to be seen as the only venue to assume power (Hooks, 2004).

⁶⁸ Mintz, S. (2007). The Origins and Nature of New World Slavery *Digital History*. Retrieved 2010 from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=74

To fully understand how violence becomes normalized and even promoted inside a peer group, I believe there are sets of questions that must be asked and answered, or attempted to answer before looking at the children. What role does the dehumanization of the parents play in the upbringing of the child? How do young Black males make sense of their parents' dehumanization, if in fact they can perceive it in any real sense? How does that sense-making play out in the day-to-day lives of young Black boys as they come together in the neighborhood with varying understandings of such complex processes? The toolset to develop and utilize coping mechanisms to deal with complex unacknowledged and uninterrogated socializing factors lead to poor choices in an apparent zero-sum game.⁶⁹

As teenagers, this misunderstanding was the undercurrent to our 'wonder years'. The alternative/oppositional pathways have been explicitly and implicitly taught in the cohort as ways of avoiding the workday trap to which all of our parents had willingly participated. The benefits or lack thereof have been etched in our minds through the way our parents interacted with us—especially our fathers. We saw what the world beyond our neighborhood did to them, given that they had what were considered to be good, solid middle class jobs: bus drivers, middle management in utility departments, and office jobs.

We never went without. There was always food, clothing, and housing, but something else was missing, something beyond the material goods that they provided. What we couldn't vocalize at that time was the way our parents were dehumanized at work and in society at large. They internalized and regurgitated the hate that they endured every day to provide for us, and in turn we internalized that hate and it manifested inside of us. We would never turn into them, we would never be brutalized by society that way, or be willing participants in our own subjugation...or so we thought.

In this chapter, I will use narratives culled from the Block to explicate the above-mentioned processes and to show the real life consequences of our actions. The lessons learned on and off the Block will be contextualized with the larger issues discussed in previous chapters, back grounded and so as not to be wrongly seen as isolated events. This chapter will weave the narratives taken from previous chapters and integrate the main narrative of how we came to make the choices we made in the introduction, into a larger narrative of coming of age in this time frame in this city.

I will weave narratives from the Block in chronologic order, starting in 1975, to give snapshots into our lives at various points, illustrating the scaffolding of knowledge and how our primary Discourse was developed in a slow-build to define who we were as a group and as individuals. Gee (1989) says the Primary Discourse is the socio-context you are born in and the identity you apprentice in early in life. He then makes the distinction between the Primary and the secondary, which is the Discourse you learn outside of the home and then becomes in direct conflict with your Primary Discourse.

⁶⁹ *Zero-sum* describes a situation in which a participant can only gain at the expense of another participant - or when a loss by any participant will necessarily accrue to another participant. The concept was first developed in game theory, so that zero-sum situations are often called *zero-sum games* regardless of whether the situation is a game. Zero-sum situations exist only where there is a fixed supply of a resource and a closed system of distribution. In a zero-sum situation, it is impossible for one party to advance its position without the other party suffering a corresponding loss. For example, if one side gets \$1,000 more, that means the other side gets \$1,000 less. The wins and losses add up to zero.

The problem with that model is that in a family there are always multiple Discourses competing at the same time inside of a home, as different household members bring their multiple secondary Discourses along with them. When there is a young child inside the home with older siblings, then that young child becomes the repository of the Discourse shedding off the older members who have more developed identity kits— this then becomes the primary Discourse of the young child. I will show how I absorbed the shed secondary Discourses of older siblings and how that combined with the shed Discourses of my age group as we collectively formed our Primary Discourse.

My parents were absent and I was always encouraged to play outside until the streets lights came on. The forced absence of my parents had a profound effect on my ability to connect to others adults, especially family members. The communal bonds that were formed in adolescence provided me with a base to build on as I added to my knowledge with the influences of others, in the varying socio-settings.

The building on Block knowledge, just like in a school setting, is predicated on what you have shown the requisite aptitude in and how ingrained the armoring was. The armor served as an epoxy for the attaching of the complementary shed discourses from the older siblings and also acted as a magnet to attract like-developing identities. This consistent act of defining and redefining identities resulted in a cohesive group identity that became self-perpetuating, as Gee (1989) notes when Primary Discourses are immune to outside critique. I will show through the use of selected short narratives how that process looked in our neighborhood and how that process layered until adulthood to combine with societal institutions of structured dominance to shape life outcomes.

The Training of the Block: 1975

By 75', my father was disillusioned from working with the government and went from being an attack dog against municipal agencies that were in noncompliance with federal mandated civil rights laws, to being defanged as local municipalities found ways to circumvent the laws...his position had no real teeth and this drove him mad. Time and time again employers would do the bare minimum or find ways to circumvent being in compliance altogether. It became obvious to him that his part to play in the grand narrative had been downgraded and almost written out as his supervisor repeatedly undercut his authority and even told him his job was just a token position. He got into a heated argument over this with his White boss, which eventually led to him mentally checking out and planning his escape.

Now disillusioned he was on that countdown to retirement where he would then be eligible for his pension. He rode out the last four years and retired with a company party, complete with the requisite group pictures and plaque. As he was getting ready to retire, my mother was reentering the workforce; she got a job with the Internal Revenue Service as a taxpayer specialist. This caused some contention in the family as my father was an old school southern gentleman and believed the wife's place was in the home, raising the kids, which meant me since I was the only one left that was still in elementary school. Retirement didn't last long nor was it supposed to, as it was a strategy for my father to move to a new job working for the Oakland school district. Doing the exact same thing but on a local district-wide level.

The school district was still recovering from the Symbionese Liberation Army's (SLA) assassination of school superintendent Marcus Foster in 1973. The political climate in Oakland was changing. The Black Panthers had entered into governmental politics and Blacks were coming out in record numbers to vote. My father had no real use for the Panthers, as he thought

they were just as likely to set back the gains made in the Civil Rights Era, as they were to push the agenda forward. He was by no means a radical but was a combination of Texas Black man sensibilities and post-civil rights possibilities.

My two older sisters shared one room and I shared the other room with my older brother. My brother and I slept on a bunk bed, and of course I had the top bunk. I was given explicit instructions on how to get up and down without disturbing him or harsh and swift rebuke was coming. My brother was a delinquent but never anything serious. He was into weed and beer and hanging out with his friends, causing lightweight mischief. The police would occasionally bring him home for fighting or public drinking but it was always minor and never resulted in legal action. He dressed like the street hustlers but that was the extent of it. My sisters on the other hand tended to favor the militants, especially my youngest sister who was 11 years older than me. She would date men with afros and dashikis (African shirts). I will always remember this picture she drew of this man with a large afro and some plaid bellbottoms with a thick mustache and a half raised Black power fist. She named him 'Finis', which I assumed was a play on the word 'fine'. This sketch caused some problems because it resembled a man our oldest sister was dating.

At this time, I had been on the block for almost four years and I was already ingrained into the neighborhood. Isaiah moved in this year and then Sterlin the following year. Isaiah moved into Whiteboy Mike's old house when his parents decided to get out before the whole neighborhood racially flipped, which it did. Soon after Sterlin moved in, Moochie and his younger brother Moochie moved into the house next to Isaiah. Moochie and Mookie moved into Dean's house, as the older boys' families were all moving out of the neighborhood for different reasons.

Moochie, Kimani, Woodie and I made up a subgroup of the larger clique of neighborhood boys. We were all the same age, born within four months of each other and we all shared a sense of being outsiders. For all of us but Woodie, that was largely due to choice, while Woodie was more of a misfit on the Castlewood set. He didn't fit in with the slightly older boys who were more into street life and had a different idea of what it meant to be included and accepted. They older set was more enthralled by Oakland's pervasive street culture and saw the flash of the Felix Mitchell's and Mickey Moore's as something to aspire towards. They also had extended family members already involved in organized crime and they would adapt to their way of life and bring that back to the hill.

At that point, we had no real interest in serious crime but the expressed modes of masculinity that came with that was always on full display. Woodie was consistently tested and trained by them whether he wanted to or not...which he didn't. Floyd was the leader of that group but it was really a wide age grouping and of the younger set, Derrick was one of the most vocal members.

Derrick was the youngest in a set of three with one each of an older brother and sister. He was charismatic and also deadly. He had a hair trigger temper and was rivaled only by John for leadership. John was ruthless and a bully. Floyd and Rick were his older brothers and were both gang affiliated. Floyd eventually served a 25-year term for a variety of crimes including attempted murder. John, even though he was just one grade above me, 'took up for me'; he let everybody know at school if they messed with me, he would take up the battle. Since he rarely lost fights and didn't mind if he did, most people left him and me alone. Of course I took that and ran with it until I became a bully-in-training myself.

Simulated violence was a part of our lives as we had daily combat training exercises, which usually consisted of wrestling on the lawn of the only Asian couple on the block. They lived directly across from my parent's home. They were Japanese immigrants who kept to themselves for the most part, or sometimes they interacted with the two white families that lived in the adjacent houses on the right. Al lived to the left of them. They did not like us nor did they like us playing on their grass but we didn't care. It was one of two usable yards for this important part of growing up. The wrestling matches were usually one on one, but sometimes we would have to gang up on Troy.

Troy was unusually strong but not that big. He was slightly above average height and weight for kids our age, but he had this natural strength that came out. He was also our best fighter, a natural leftie that could trade punches with the best of them. As strong and athletic Troy was, his brother Red, born one day after me, was daring. Red was skinny and could ride or drive anything with wheels. He would skate down steep hills giggling all the way. He would jump off of rooftops doing flips. He was a little crazy that way. Their father, John Henry, moved refrigerators for a living. We always assumed Troy got his strength from him. They had three sisters and one older brother, Mick, who was in and out of jail. We spent a lot of time in their downstairs room through the years, but only met Mick a few times as he was always gone.

Troy was never a bully and he never picked fights. Both brothers were a sandy red color with matching medium length hair that seemly was never combed. We would attack Troy, two, sometimes three at a time, and still lose. He would just start flinging us everywhere until finally through sheer numbers, enough of us would be able to overwhelm him. Once, John came over to challenge Troy to a wrestling match. They were two of the strongest in our neighborhood and in their grades. We all gathered around to watch, as it was a heavyweight match.

They started off locking hands and arms in a test of strength that quickly led to a takedown, as Troy was clearly the stronger and the more skillful. He had John in a series of different holds— they battled both physically and mentally. Troy was winning the mental battle too as he would lock stares with John to show domination. It was like watching two of my heroes battle and I didn't know for whom to root. John finally conceded and Troy handled it without bragging or being demeaning...which is a good thing cause it would have led to another fight. We didn't say too much after because none of us could beat John, let alone get close to beating Troy. So he got to lose with honor.

By the second grade, I was on my way to being a bully and testing my boundaries in and out of classrooms. At recess, the older boys (third graders) would run around with their right side pants leg rolled up in their socks, imitating a motorcycle rider and having play gang fights. Sort of like the group battle royals we would see on TV, but instead of wrestlers, there were 20 to 30 kids inside the ring. No real punches were thrown, just a lot of wrestling and pseudo kung fu picked up from Saturday matinees. The younger boys watched, none of us dared jump in or we would be beaten instantly. We tried mimicking them, but we had no real alliances with each other and we were all jockeying for the mythological title— King of the Little Side!

There were however, alliances between the younger kids and the older ones; think NATO vs. The Cold War Soviet Union. If you could align yourself with a superpower then you were set, but sometimes those powers cancelled each other out. I had several protectors and I acquired some protectorates. This was a status symbol as the older kids were looking for protégés and the younger kids were looking for roles models to emulate as they climbed up the food chain. The training that I received on a daily basis in the neighborhood, I applied at school. I learned how to wrestle bigger boys and how to unmercifully subdue same size or smaller boys. Being a bully

didn't have borders; everyone got it, male or female. It was then that I learned a very important life lesson about power, respect, and responsibility all wrapped up in the events of one late spring afternoon.

I decided that I had enough of Tina's mouth and slapped her to signal the end of the discussion. Tina was Demetrius's little cousin and Demetrius was one of my chief protectors. I didn't think anything of it, as surely Demetrius wouldn't be mad that I checked his cousin...but he was.

Demetrius, along with Troy and his cousin Darrell were the reigning Kings of the Little Side. Troy really didn't have any interest in the position and steered clear of playground politics, but his cousin and Demetrius were sometimes fierce rivals who staged one of the all-time greatest playground fights.

I was an ally of all three so this situation required some serious politicking and ultimately ended up in a peace treaty of sorts, which served to embolden me to make the next mistake. Later that month, I committed the same crime but with a different girl. I was quick to respond to challenges from anybody and when this 2nd grader thought I was playing by the customary rules that physical behavior against women was off limits, she too got checked. Unfortunately for me, or maybe fortunate for my future self, she had an older brother who was in the 5th grade on the Big Side.⁷⁰ Generally, 5th and 6th graders didn't concern themselves with what happened on the little side as they were getting ready for the big leagues of junior high school, so alliances meant nothing to them.

After school the next day, her brother confronted me at the bus stop in front of everyone and proceeded to beat the shit outta me. He beat me down the street and up the ice plant covered hill where he tore off a vine and started whipping me with it as I tried in vain to stay out of his reach. I was half lying on the side of the hill in the ice plants, sobbing uncontrollably from embarrassment and humiliation along with the physical pain of being whipped by a tree. Everybody was looking at me, from the bus drivers to the parents coming to pick up their kids to the teachers getting off of work. I didn't dare come down.

Finally Greg was driving by in his red 66' Mustang and noticed me stuck on the hill. He pulled over and since he was a high school student, nobody said anything to him as he got me in the car and took me home. I told him what happened and he told me that was what I got for putting my hands on a girl. I went into my garage and threw a tantrum. I was mad at everyone and I was mad at myself. I was mad at Greg for not beating the boy up and I was mad cause everyone had seen me get beat down and then get beat up, literary. I knew I couldn't tell my family because they wouldn't do anything and would probably say the same thing Greg did. It took me a while before I could calm down and assess the situation.

There was no shame in losing a fight to an older boy, but the level of that beat down was epic. I had no real recourse but to accept it and later analyze the behavior that precipitated it. I remembered that lesson well and it carried over into adulthood.

Training on the block was an exercise in explicit as well as implicit teaching. I silently watched my siblings for cues on how to approach life and my father on how life rewarded his steadfastness. I took disparate familial clues and stitched them together to form my Block persona. My father's white-hot hatred of seemingly everything ingrained a deep distrust and cynicism in me against outsiders. I had no way to process his anger so I internalized it and projected it outwardly at everything. That outward manifestation would crystallize into a

⁷⁰ The school being split into two distinct sides; K-3 on the little side and 4-6 on the big side.

hardened shell around my emotions and I would bring that baggage outside the house where the daily roughhousing with my friends would provide a relief from family tensions and give insight into the complex relationship of my friends' home life as well.

The realization that most of my friends were coming from similarly situated homes, with burnt out dads and overburdened mothers, led to greater dependence on each other for the nurturing that was missing from the home. That dependence took many forms and we looked for the older boys to model acceptable behaviors in the neighborhood context and in school. We closely watched the older boys and we absorbed how they moved on the Hill to form our own way of being and our own pedagogy. Each day was another lesson on self-sufficiency because we looked at our group as a unit, as one. In a perfect scenario, that immature modeling would have been supplemental to the modeling that we would have received from our parents and older siblings or would have been neutralized altogether. In this context, that positive modeling was absent so we took what we had and formed our own communal identities, which we then brought into adolescence and into middle school.

1980...King Estates

In junior high school, walking the hallways was always problematic; you were subject to being tested at any given moment. Even the process of greeting someone could lead to a confrontation, as typically boys greeted each other with a mild thump in the chest followed by an open palm for a handshake. What you did after that was a signal to your place in the hallway hierarchy. If you accepted the thumping and shook the hand then you were bowing down to the challenge and signaling that you were not ready to engage in what often came next. If you return the thump then that meant you were ready to start the game if the other party wanted to escalate.

The game was 'chest', and it was a test of power and pain endurance. It starts off with a quick one-two combination to the chest while the receiver holds his arms behind his back as if getting arrested. The receiver is supposed to stick out his chest as far as possible, much like a bullfrog inhaling air to puff itself up. After the first set of blows then the role switches and the combination is returned, back and forth, with more power at each switch, until finally it has turned into an all-out war with massive blows being traded with thunderous results. The winner was the one left standing or rather the loser was the first to concede by finishing with an offered handshake that ignited the contest in the first place.

There was no shame in losing (as long as you didn't cry) and each bout prepared you for the next. Sometimes you could get tested in groups where two or more would just start bombing on you to see your reaction. This usually would happen in the changing room of the gym, as it did to me in the 8th grade.

After gym class and after changing back into my regular school clothes, I was talking to Kimani and one other friend, when out the blue I got punched from around the corner. My first instinct that had been drilled into me was to return the fire, which I did, but since I didn't know who was around the corner I really didn't know what I was getting myself into. Bruce, who was one of the school bullies, decided it was my turn to get tested. He was surprised when I hit him back (oh this lil n**^&^ got heart) but to my surprise (which I shouldn't have been) he was soon joined by three other rather large 8th and 9th graders, with dripping California curls. They pinned me against a cement wall in the locker room and proceeded to literally beat the stuffing out of me as cotton flew from my coat, along with pens and pencils and whatever else was in my pockets.

At first I tried to fight back but that was no use, so I just stood there (as if I had a choice) and tried to smile and take it. Since it was 'play' fighting, all the blows were aimed at the torso

and as I was surrounded with no hope of escape, not that I would have tried— running was the worst thing you could do. A crowd gathered around to watch including, Kimani who watched and laughed along with my other friends, just thankful it wasn't them. I didn't expect any help from any of my friends I made at school but I did from Kimani...afterwards, all four boys offered their hand as a show of respect. Because I TRIED to fight back and took an ass whuppin without making a sound, I had gained their respect.

I was mad at Kimani and as he handed me the items that were beat out of me, I had to respect the fact that really what could he do other than escalate it from a test to a serious fight? Kimani would later chastise me for endangering him by participating in that game. As he saw it, I should have just recognized the danger and accepted the initial punch. A lot of ass whuppin would be handed out in the gym changing room as kids were dumped into garbage cans and toilets or the ultimate trifecta of being whupped then thrown into the dirty gym clothes hamper and then rolled into the cold-water showers.

We all came from two parent homes and in each home without exception, was a strong domineering male head of the household. Our fathers modeled behaviors that were modeled for them. We took that modeling and tried it out in our schoolyard relationships and in the neighborhood. Showing dominance or the ability to dominate other males on the block, in schoolyards, or school hallways, establishes a pecking order that young Black males take pride in and trains them for future contestations for societal roles. Parents often times encourage and reinforce these paradigms by telling the kids to 'don't back down or run from a fight', 'don't be a punk' and even threatening to whup the child if he backs down from a fight. The parents think they are armoring the child for future life lessons; but in reality they are cosigning the 'street code'.

This armor takes the form of hypermasculinity— in the schools, in the neighborhood and in the homes. The desire to not be seen as a 'punk' was paramount to any endeavor. I withstood a pounding in the boy's locker room without uttering a peep and showing any outward fear or emotions, to in effect, be accepted by the school bullies. The squarest of cohort members took great pains not to be a punk. To be a punk was to be a social outcast; our fathers took it as attack on their manhood if their sons were punks. Many times one of our fathers and even mothers would push us back out in the streets with the rebuke 'don't you run from nobody, if I catch you running from a fight then the ass whuppin Imma give you will be ten times worst'! None of us wanted to have our parents, especially our fathers be ashamed of us. Unfortunately, that would later have serious repercussions as we continually struggled with how to balance the need for respect and admiration, with common sense and within acceptable societal boundaries.

The modeling of behaviors was core to our pedagogy. We were teaching survival skills and how to react in multiple real life situations. Responding to Bruce may have been safe inside of that context but it still could have ended very poorly for me. Outside of that context and in the streets, responding like that could be deadly— which was the point Kimani was trying to make. I could endanger the whole group by making a mistake in misjudging a situation. Junior high school was full of opportunities to learn survival strategies that had nothing to do with the official curriculum; often anti-social behaviors are taught alongside history.

1982...Smoke

On one of the many days that Boog and Smoke decided junior high school was optional, they embarked on a 'home visitation' endeavor. They 'visited' a few homes in the neighborhood, collecting personal items as they went on, but one of the more interesting items was from

Smoke's own house: a high powered hunting rifle. The gun belonged to Smoke's father who was a no nonsense Vietnam vet and a hard drinking S.O.B. The reason they borrowed it was because Boog and his brother had a series of fights with Moochie and his brother and Boog's side wasn't doing too good.

Fighting was common but Boog had a bad understanding of the limits of warfare within friendship cliques. We all were brought up to understand that fight means fight and there is no such thing as a fair fight, but that usually applied to outsiders. Because Boog and Smoke were literally partners in crime, they shared a tight bond, which brought Smoke into the Hatfield/McCoy feud. Smoke and Moochie then embarked on a series of border skirmishes that led to the current plot.

The plan was for Boog to confront Moochie as he walked home and Smoke would be hiding in the bushes a little ways up the hill. When Boog gave him the signal—a raised hand—Smoke was to shoot. Earlier in the day, Smoke had been practicing by shooting out the street lamps so he was ready to aim and change everyone's life and possibly end one.

Moochie, Kimani, and I usually walked home together after clowning around after school. We would take different ways home depending on whom else was walking and if we had to get home sooner than later. More times than not, we chose to walk the Horsehill route, which provided for more opportunities to get into trouble and have fun. Horsehill was actually just one hill in the hill range but we simply referred to the entire range by that name.

By the time we got to the block, Boog was waiting for us down by the alleyway, we really didn't think anything of it but wondered why Boog kept raising his arm in that strange way. Did he have some kind of injury or physical condition? We had no idea that a hit was out on Moochie and that Smoke was having problems getting a clean line of sight on him. After repeatedly asking Boog was he ok, our attention span shifted and we were off down the hill on our way to 82nd and Bancroft to play video games at 7-11. We were too busy chatting about school nonsense and girls to give Boog a second thought.

To this day, Smoke claims that he would not have really pulled the trigger to kill, but considering that Moochie DID try to throw him off a steep mountain a week earlier...

Later that evening, Smoke came running up the street into Boog's house, covered in blood with nothing but his underwear on. He was bruised, battered, and damn near in shock. Smoke was not able to get his father's gun back in time and when his father found out, he had what Smoke later described as a Vietnam flashback. He made him strip down and stated beating him unmercifully in the basement of their house with everything he could find. Eventually working his way to a lead pipe, it was then that Smoke managed to escape and sprinted the quarter mile to Boog's house. Smoke begged Boog's parents not to call the police and he would later return to his home after a few intra-family meetings. Unfortunately, this scenario would repeat itself with far more serious results and consequences five years later.

Smoke would get beat by his father worse than anybody else on the Block. There were several of us who had it bad, but nothing close to what Smoke had to endure. He had a different understanding about the value of human life early on and he would bring that low valuation with him on the Block. His traumatic relationship with his father would slightly influence the rest of us as his experience leaked into the collective dynamic. It was the over use of force that we saw and partially internalized what was acceptable. The use of acceptable levels of force or violence was in direct relationship to the situation. Smoke bringing a rifle into a fight was way outside of what we saw as an acceptable use of force but it made us rethink that afterwards, especially when

dealing with outsiders. That incident taught us that if one of our own can do that to us, then what can an insider do?

1984...Training the next Cohort

The summer of '84 was memorable for a few things—the foothill square skating rink, getting my first job, turning sixteen, but what sticks out in my head is the annual summer trip to Lake Comanche with Red's family. They had been going for a few years and the block had started tagging along the last two. We would go up to the lake every Memorial Day weekend to swim and fish, but most of all to reconnect with a group of like-aged girls from Stockton who took the annual trip with their families. This summer was different though. This summer would be a significant turning point for us, as Moochie's younger brother Mookie, would be coming home from juvenile camp.

Mookie was the youngest of our group. There were younger boys on the block but he was too big for them and he needed us to watch him because of his ability to find trouble where none existed before. Malik, who was Mookie's age, and Kimani's younger brother, was Mookie's partner in crime much like their two older brothers were best friends. Malik never hung around us because he didn't like being around his bigger brother and treated like a little brother by 20 of us, instead of just Kimani.

The two of them stayed in trouble and they would always get into messes that didn't make sense to the rest of us; stupid shit really, like cutting school and beating up a corner store clerk. The younger brothers were almost exact opposites of their older brothers. They were quieter and more mischievous. Although big for their age, Malik and Mookie were not as big as the older brothers. Moochie was 6'2 and over 200 lbs and Kimani was 6'5, almost 6'6 and close to 220. Mookie and Malik both topped out at 6' even and were both a little stocky and not afraid to mix it up.

Mookie was gone for a year as a result of the previously mentioned stupid shit that he specialized in. Really it was lightweight mischief but it would turn serious when he hung around his two cousins; Rob and Chris. The two sets of brothers were related on both sides, as their mothers were sisters and their fathers were brothers. The boys were close enough that they might as well have all been brothers. We tried to show Mookie alternatives to the streets he loved so much, so we would snatch him up whenever possible and take him with us to parties and sporting events, giving him a different way to see the world. Malik never came with us and was more inclined to hang with his age group but Mookie we felt, needed our guidance. He was always reluctant and never volunteered to come.

Lake Comanche was a getaway spot out past Manteca and to us, in the wilderness. It seemed like a large campsite staged around a huge swimming hole. People would come from all around to celebrate the holidays and BBQ with their extended families. We went in a large RV with a few cars trailing. Somehow Mookie managed to find trouble here as well. He got into it with some kids from Vallejo who were also vacationing. We had an all-out brawl on a cliff overlooking a 40-foot drop, all because Malik decided that he didn't like one of the boys.

We never stopped trying to calm him down and redirect his energies but it became clear that he wanted to follow his own path and he had no interest in being mentored by us. He never felt comfortable with us as he and Malik saw us ironically, as extensions of their parents and they wanted no parts of that. We lost Mookie to juvenile hall so many times that we lost count and he

became institutionalized. It was an example of someone getting into the system at an early age and never being able to escape. Each time he would come home, he would come home changed and distant. Malik thankfully never followed him down that path; but soon, his choices would catch up to him too.

1985...The Golf Course

Woodie's father worked for the local municipal golf course and he would bring his son up there to encourage him to seek employment as well. Woodie eventually caught on as a range boy, where he would go and get the golf balls hit on the range between sessions. Moochie, Kimani, Sterlin, and I soon followed suit and got jobs too. Sterlin was one year ahead of us in high school and he was entering his senior year, as the rest of us were juniors. The five of us were fighting for time as range boys so we could have pocket money to spend on the weekends. The job was only a few hours out of the day so we didn't miss any valuable time hanging out with friends.

There was a hierarchy at the golf course with the range boys being at the bottom. After you showed that you were a good, hard worker...scooping up golf balls off the hitting range, you could then start parking the golf carts. Eventually, you could earn the respect of going out on golf patrols and policing the course at closing for any stragglers that were still trying to get in those last few holes...in the dark. Once you made cart boy and were put on salary, then you started eyeing the pro shop job. At one point, five of us had jobs up there and Woodie ended up assuming his father's moonlighting position as the night waterman.

Jim and Fred ran the pro shop counter. Fred was a college age white boy who just said 'frat boy' when you looked him. He had a jarhead and a stuck on, stupid smirk. He was a former high school linebacker whose career was going nowhere fast. Fred was the pro shop's assistant manager and he was in charge of us, the cart boys. Jim was the manager, he was a mid to late thirties alcoholic who had many vices. He was a gambler, a cokehead, and he just didn't give a shit about the business of the golf course. He would regularly take money out of the cash register to pay off debts or buy random shit. The pro shop was run so poorly it was a wonder to us all how it didn't go out of business. We all worked our way to being cart boys, but we were really aspiring to be pro shop workers who could sit behind the desk all day and liberate money from the register like Fred and Jim.

We noticed that Sterlin started having more money than the rest of us and we wondered where this extra money was coming from. Sterlin was very evasive about it and would tell us that he was selling weed out of the wash house on 83rd Avenue and MacArthur Blvd. He even would go as far as to walk in and talk to some people then come out and in hop in the car with us, pulling out some money like he just made it. We were fascinated of course, he was spending money every day and he would buy us food or other small items.

We all worked but none of us (besides Sterlin) had anything to show for it. We became increasing suspicious of Sterlin as he always wanted to work at certain times and we couldn't figure out when he had time to sell weed to make the kind of money he was flaunting. It got more suspect when Sterlin was fired from the golf course for unspecified reasons. He begged them to let him keep working and that he would even work for free...FREE! That is when we had to corner Sterlin and get him to admit that he was stealing from the golf course.

He had seen Jim do it so he copied the methods and because there were so many hands in the cash register, they couldn't figure out who was doing it so they just fired Sterlin to see if that made a difference. We were heated! Here he had been stealing and not telling us how and where

he got the money from. After we talked shit about how stupid and careless he had been and how if he had just told us, we could have come up with a better way so that no one would be caught and we all could get money. We did just that without Sterlin.

The pro shop had a system of putting the big bills in a metal box then putting that box in the old large combination safe underneath the counter. The safe was kept closed but unlocked during most of the day, as people were going in there to deposit money on a regular basis. We decided that taking money out of the register was too risky and was ultimately what got Sterlin fired. We needed to only take soda and food money from there like Fred. We carefully watched the procedure and figured out a way to get the money out of the box by using a paperclip. Woodie's father was a big fisherman and used to take Woodie when he was younger, so Woodie came up with straightening a paperclip just enough to hook the folded over wad of twenties and hundreds and pulled them back out of the slot. The opening was just big enough to slip the money in but not big enough to put in a finger or a pen. It has a serrated edge with a two-inch opening. Kimani played lookout, I covered the work that we were supposed to be doing. After a few times, Woodie became a pro at it. We would take enough to cover our expenses if it was a party night or if we had dates. Eventually the pro shop changed up and started putting the money in an envelope with how much was in it. We would take the envelope and change the amount and deposit it back into the safe.

They kept such shoddy records that they didn't figure that out for a while. Our success gave us courage to kick it up a notch, as Jim made the mistake of giving Woodie the responsibility of locking up one night so he could leave early to catch his bookie. We locked up and left the money alone except for a little pocket change. Woodie took the keys home and of course made duplicates. We now had one of three pieces of the puzzle. Soon Kimani would provide the second.

Closing at the golf course was the most valued time, no one wanted to open because the course opened before sunrise to get ready for those early birds who wanted to golf at the crack of dawn. But closing was relaxed. All of the golf pros were usually gone by then, the owner of the pro shop was gone and so were the old, heavysset white women who hated us and who ran things in the daytime.

Kimani was closing with Jim again and usually they would make everyone leave before they would enter the alarm code. But lately Jim had been more and more lax about certain things and he finally got to the point where he gave Kimani the code to close up, not concerned about the pro shop merchandise cause out of the five of us, Kimani was the most reliable and seemingly the most innocent and honest, which was relative because the rest of us had questionable morals. Now we had two of the three puzzle pieces and we were closing in on the third.

After we acquired the keys and the alarm code, we started having after-hours parties at the golf course. We would invite some friends and we would unlock the pen where the golf carts were kept at night, and take girls out on golf course 'dates', riding the fairways guided by the moon and the stars. We would sometimes do group dates or just go to our individual favorites spots.

We seldom would drive cars up into the course because if the police came, how would we explain why we were there? But one of us would go and get a cart and come back to pick up the rest and then we would all drive back in carts to pick up the girls. We made sure no one took anything from the pro shop because that would be too obvious; usually we kept it small and confined to our closest friends and girlfriends. Sometimes we would run into some of the local

boys who would bring their friends to the golf course to go icing. That is when they got bags of ice and slid down the hills. There was a little animosity between us because they didn't need to work at the golf courses because their families had money, but they had a sense of ownership that we impinged upon as we made the golf course our playground.

Soon, Moochie got the first number to the safe, then Woodie got the second and finally Kimani got the last. We were now ready to start going on missions to crack the golf course. We knew when the safe would be full and which days it would be empty. We watched and planned and we even timed how long it would take. We would never be greedy and take more than would be missed and we would not show that we had some extra money. Soon we had cars, albeit, old cars... Rabbits to be exact. Moochie had an 81' rabbit, Kimani had a 77', and I had 76'. Woodie was the only one to buy a new car. He bought a red Nissan Sentra, which he could explain because he worked two jobs.

Since Woodie had the keys, he went on all the missions. The four of us seldom went together and Woodie had assumed Sterlin's mentality of trying to work all the time to be able to steal more, both in the day and at night. The management loved Woodie and gave him increased responsibility; little did they know he was robbing them blind. After a while, they changed the alarm system and we could not get the code. We decided to stage one last mission.

First we needed to test the time lag from the alarm being triggered to it actually going off. We accidentally tripped the alarm one night when locking up; Jim was mad but we had the info we needed. What we didn't know was how long would it take the police to respond after it went off. The three of us, minus Moochie, decided we were going to hit the pro shop one last time in an all-out assault to emptying the safe, but we first had to test the police lag time. We came up one night and triggered the alarm and waited from a safe vantage point for the police to arrive. We parked a mile away and walked to the golf course through the back way from the hills. It was a full moon so the trails were well lit.

The police took almost 15 minutes to get there, which we figured was slow, but we also knew they had to somehow open the gate at the beginning of the long driveway before they could make their way to the pro shop, which sat a half a mile down the road that rose to a hill then slightly descended to the first hole. This would give us ample time to open the safe and to get away through the back, without being seen.

We figured they still thought we were too dumb to pull it off and we were right— they never seriously suspected us of being able to get into the pro shop and then into the safe. We nominated Kimani as the safe cracker and Woodie would try to disarm the alarm. The plan was for me to open the door and for them to run in to their stations to carry out the mission. Once the door was open, Kimani ran in first to the safe while Woodie was close behind him through the swinging three-foot door that separated behind the counter of the pro shop from the customer.

Kimani whet to work as the alarm made the warning sound to deactivate.

'EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE'

"How's it coming?"

'EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE'

"Damn! They changed the combo!"

"No they didn't... try it again!" Kimani stooped at the safe again as the warning seemingly got louder.

'EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!'

"Try it one more time, dammit!"

"Stop trippin!"

He tried, and failed again. The alarm was going off and we abandoned the mission. We turned off the lights and relocked the door and we half walked, half ran up the driveway, pissed and bitterly disappointed, yelling at Kimani until we got to the top of the hill. Suddenly we all got quiet as we left the paved road to walk on the course, just in case the police managed to get there ahead of schedule.

1986...Everything I learned, I learned from the streets

After the late hour escapades at the golf course, we retired from our brief careers as safe crackers and started to explore other avenues of maintaining the lifestyle to which we had become accustomed. We had nice cars with custom paint jobs and expensive stereo systems and clothes, but now it was gone. The money was quickly evaporating and there was no new revenue in sight. I tried to go to community college and to get a job at the local package shipping companies, but that only lasted for a few weeks.

I dropped out of all my classes but one, and quit trying to find a job that paid well. Woodie never attempted to go to school and kept his job as the night waterman at the golf course. Kimani and Moochie stayed in school and but kept their employment options open. Moochie was intent on taking his father's path, remixed with his own spin. He wouldn't go the slow middle management route, but he would use school to propel him quickly up the corporate ranks. Kimani would follow him, using school as a quick escape. It became clear to me that my window was closing at home as my father was getting impatient with the route my life was taking; my decision to drop out of high school a year earlier had started my clock rolling.

I had to make some life decisions and fast money soon. The four of us used to drive around with toy uzi water guns and jump out of cars and start spraying people in a simulated drive by. We carried these water guns with us everywhere we went and they were so lifelike, that if you just glanced at them, you would not be able to ascertain their inauthenticity. This had an unforeseen effect one day as I was riding with Woodie in his tricked out Sentra and we were making our rounds driving around Oakland. We came back to the Hill and pulled up on Castlewood. Derrick was outside talking to Craig and Mike L and a couple of other brothers we didn't know.

We got out in our 'mission' coats, which were these rain slickers that we got from the golf course. But if you wore them right, they gave the appearance of being up to no good. He had a burgundy one and mine was a deep blue. The four of us used to dress similar and go out on dates or 'missions'. So when we pulled up, people took note of Woodie's car and how much money must have been put into it. After meeting Derrick's friends, we started talking about the usual mundane BS, when Woodie went into the trunk to show off his speakers. He left the music playing after we pulled up and got out of the car; everyone wanted to see what size speakers he had and how were they installed.

After he opened the trunk, he moved some items around so everyone could have a better look. One of those items was his water gun. No one knew that it was a water gun except Derrick, and he didn't think twice about saying anything because he had seen it many times. However, to everyone else, they thought we were driving around with an uzi in the trunk! Because they ALL were into some illegal enterprise or another and were used to seeing guns, no one said anything and just made a mental note; that mental note could've gotten us killed.

At that exact moment, we went from being happy go lucky teens looking for our next adventure, to drug dealers—at least in perception. Derrick would get questioned about what we were doing and how we got our money. He thought it was funny because to him we were just a

bunch of young squares that had no real street savvy and he was right. We were squares playing at a much larger game, serendipitously falling into a position of power. Mike L got word to us that he wanted to do business but we kept putting him off. We knew that was a life-changing decision so we held out hope for a better option. We hated school, and jobs didn't pay high school drop outs that well; we were quickly running out of opportunities.

Our families were already putting pressure on us to move out and get careers, requests to which we had no real answers. There was no family business to go into, no trust funds to tap into and no built up networks to help us get jobs...it was essentially just us and we had to make some real choices soon. Troy and Red's cousin Ghoulie, had made 'a business' choice earlier and he was paying the price for it, as he was serving a year in jail. We decided that was not the life we wanted and continued to live off golf course money and hope for the best. Soon reality would strike again, as Mike L and Craig attended a meeting of local suppliers to address complaints that they were undercutting business.

They were told unceremoniously that they had to stop or else face the consequences. Mike L told them that they could sell at whatever price they wanted and that he and Craig would do the same, leaving the meeting with new enemies. There were several attempts on their lives, but in the middle of the day, at a self car wash on 101st and MacArthur, an all-out assault occurred. They had been followed and re-enforcements were called. They were attacked on all sides as gunmen jumped over neighboring fences; some came from across the streets opening fire with semi-automatic weapons.

Mike L was hit six times and Craig with hit 12. Best friends were on the ground, next to each other clinging to life. One made it; the other would be turned into a ghetto martyr. Craig spent one night in the hospital before climbing out of bed, still attached to IVs. He was concerned that the attackers would come back to finish the job. He rehabilitated at Derrick's house while plotting how to get revenge for Mike L's death. He earned his non-de plume that day as Craig died with Mike— Deadman was born in his stead. His new name took on a dual meaning as he came out of this experience a changed man. He waged war for the next decade against Mike L's killers; Jama.

Smoke Reduex

In 1986, Smoke lived on Seminary or 'Sem' as it was called, which is around a couple of corners from the 69th Village. He had long since moved off the hill to go stay with one of his older sisters. He had bounced around different high schools and he eventually ended up at Berkeley High, like so many other Oakland students: When the Oakland school district gets tired of you, you either end up there or at Hayward High like Woodie.

One of the streets that intersected Seminary was Bromley, it was a few blocks from E. 14th street and it was always busy, busy with drug activity that is. Bromley was what you thought about when you heard the catch phrase of the late 80s, 'open air drug market'. The length of that one block, from Seminary to 62nd Ave., was full of humans trying to escape from their demons or their 'lot' in life, as there was a full out onslaught of street capitalism on display. There were at least three distinct spots on the street.

The first was on the corner of Sem and Bromley; this was usually filled with the unaffiliated and/or stragglers who were looking to capitalize on the overflow of traffic from the main spot that was centered on the apartments behind the black iron fence. At the other end of the street at the corner of 62nd street was another smaller spot that was much like the other end of the block. The prize was the black fence, which we controlled.

The apartments there were little bungalow styled buildings with front doors facing a shared courtyard and a small back exit that ran along a fence. The apartments stretched from Bromley to the next street of E.17th, where there was a hole cut in the fence for a quick exit from danger or to arrive unseen. The Black fence was a prized area and hence, was highly contested. Smoke was friends with a few of the dealers in the area and he provided a parlay into the area. Deadman cleared out the competition and we had the Black fence to ourselves. We set up shop in one of the apartments of a smoker whom we entered into an arrangement with, in exchange for using her apartment as a base. As this was in the beginning of the crack epidemic, there wasn't that big of fight for the spot at that time, as the stragglers just moved elsewhere. Deadman had a lot of practice at this from when he was affiliated with Funktown. After him and Quinton would appear with bat in hand and he would calmly explain how this was his spot now and if he caught you back over here, he would have Quinton 'serve' you— most people understood what that meant and no one wanted to see Quinton jump out of the car.

We stayed on Bromley for a few months until things started to get a little crazy and the enterprise started to attract too much attention. For the most part, we didn't have any problems from any of the surrounding crews, and when we did, Deadman quickly handled them with extreme prejudice. But the added increase in traffic brought an equally added increase in police attention. Bromley was now rollin' full time and the increased police scrutiny became too much, so we branched off. Part of the now Lil D headed 69th Mob and took over the other two spots on Bromley; an old associate of Deadman, Herm Perm took over the Black fence.

We had made a little money and we decided to revamp our business plan to go to full time delivery service, utilizing our pagers. Herm Perm (named so cause he had a long straight perm) was from Funktown like Deadman, Quinton, and Mike L—and just as crazy as them. Smoke started working for Herm on Bromley soon after we left and he quickly got into trouble.

Sometime earlier that year, he developed a drug habit that rapidly got out of control. He started shaving the crack rocks down and mixing the shavings with weed to make grimmies. He was probably doing this when he was working with us but we were too stupid to know any better. Herm did. One day I got a frantic call from Smoke saying that he was coming over. I had no idea what to expect but I knew it was bad. Smoke had become a pariah but he still was my good friend, so I went outside to see what he had gotten into this time. He pulled up on the hill in his sister's early model grey Toyota hatchback and I walked over to the car to greet him. As I approached the car, I noticed he had a shirt wrapped around his head and as I got closer, his appearance was coming into sharper view and I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I wanted to throw up then run or run then throw up, I didn't know which to do first, but instead, I did neither.

His head was misshapen and his face was distorted, other than the elephant man on TV, I had only seen one other time where someone had looked like that, and that was Emmitt Till. Emmitt Till died from his beating and the Elephant man was born that way, but here was my childhood friend sitting in front of me, looking like a news story come to life. I was fascinated and repulsed at the same time. Smoke looked at me and I gasped as I asked what the fuck happened to him?!? And whatever happened, why in the hell he wasn't he the hospital getting fixed?

He said that he had stolen from Herm one too many times then he recounted the story of what happened. They lured him to an empty house and started to question him about the shaved rocks. Herm had given him a chance to work off the money Smoke had cost him and even had somebody watching him, but Smoke was too hooked and too smart to get caught red handed...unfortunately for him, it wasn't a court of law and reasonable doubt can get you killed.

Smoke tried to plead his case, but to no avail. Herm knew that Smoke could be just as dangerous as him, and since Smoke was 6'4" with long arms and good with his hands, Herm took no chances.

It was long rumored that Herm was a sherm head, which meant that he smoked pcg or angel dust usually mixed with weed or soaked in a cigarette. This made him very unstable and unpredictable. Herm had a reputation for going way beyond what was necessary in dispensing out ass whuppings; this time would be no different. Herm held a long rifle aimed at Smoke's head. Smoke said it was a .30 ought caliber (he was so much of a gun enthusiast; he admired the one that could possibly end his life). While the gun was levied at Smoke's head, Herm's associates started to 'serve' Smoke.

To serve—a verb meaning to administer a severe ass whuppin.

They started with fists while Herm repeatedly asked Smoke if he would admit to the theft; he wouldn't. Then they graduated to barrels of guns and mustards jars; anything that they could find to beat him with, they did. Smoke would still not admit to the crime. Smoke said they beat him for twenty minutes, which seemed like an eternity.

Out of all the things they hit him with, he said he remembered the lead pipe the most...Afterwards, Herm told Smoke to get into the car and he would drop him off at the hospital, Smoke had won some level of respect from Herm because of the way he took the beating so he knew he wouldn't tell the police on him. Smoke refused and told him to just drop him off at home where he went inside and to clean himself up.

As Smoke is telling me this, I was looking at him like 'why aren't you dead yet and are you about to die as you are talking to me'? I was in disbelief looking at him and marveling that he can talk let alone tell the story of what happened. He explained that after he got dropped off he went straight to the bathroom and smoked a rock straight. He said it was the first time that he had smoked straight from a pipe. But he thought he was dead anyways so he might as well try to get as high as possible before dying. I guess there was some measure of logic in that and maybe in some ways that I couldn't fathom, it saved his life. He showed me the blood soaked shirt he had on earlier and remarked how some of the swelling had gone down. I asked a few times if he should go to the hospital to get checked out in case of infection and he was against it. It slowly started to dawn on me that his drug use had now put me in a vicarious situation. All of sudden, I had loyalty issues and I had better get out in front of this or the situation could escalate.

The sherm use caused Herm to make mistakes and enemies; Smoke was not the first person to get this treatment. A week before, Herm's car was shot at in retaliation for an unnecessary serving. After talking with Woodie, Derrick, and Deadman, it was decided that they both were in the wrong and whatever happens next, everyone would stay out of it. At least that was the official policy, Herm had said he was cool with the situation and that he would let it go, so did Smoke...no one believed him but it didn't matter because a week later, Herm Perm was found in the trunk of his burning car, tortured and mutilated.

At first the attention swung to Smoke because of the viciousness of the murder; it had to be someone who had a personal grudge. Soon it came out that the brother of someone Herm had killed, took revenge. Smoke soon after went to rehab to start his yo-yo battle with addiction and recovery that would last for five years, until he got arrested and sent to the feds for the first of two- five year bids, separated by one year of freedom; it was there in the federal penitentiary that he would find a new family and join Kumi.

Smoke had been trained at an early age how to tolerate physical pain and he learned later how to dull the mental pain. He was taught extreme violence and its application; his education in

that field continued into prison. He battled those demons while trying to hang on to his sanity. We always questioned if he was really crazy or whether he was responding to years of abuse that his father's Vietnam flashbacks provided him, with a similar brand of trauma passing down from father to son? The passing down of privileged knowledge from father to son is an age old survival strategy in the Black family. The beatings were not what were transferred, but the knowledge in how to survive and respond to those beatings was. Unfortunately for Smoke, he didn't pay attention to the lesson in avoiding those beatings, as this time it almost ended in death.

Institutional Death

In the early to mid-nineties, the drug game changed again and access widened even as supply lines were squeezed. Oakland would experience periods of 'droughts' where there would be a shortage of cocaine on the streets and the prices would rise in response. Sometimes, these droughts would be orchestrated by a collection of suppliers who wanted to raise prices and fiscally hurt rivals. Often I would get a call to warn me that a drought was coming and I had better prepare. By that, they meant that I should start hoarding product and be frugal in who I sold to. In a very short time, prices could rise 300 percent if you were not in the loop; your lifestyle could soon bankrupt you, as spending habits would far outpace income. A prolonged drought could be disastrous to your reserves. One of the side effects to this was the blooming of a detrimental cottage industry, which was robbery.

Robbery used to be frowned upon and those who did it were outcasts or usually severe drug users. That changed with the glut of new dealers competing for space inside of this market. Robbery became a tool to use against rivals and to demonstrate strength. Soon crews of robbers would circulate throughout the Bay Area looking for victims and scouting the next score. However, this was still an area dominated by established groups such as the Black Guerrilla Family, and they were extremely proficient.

I began spending more time with a relative, Slick,⁷¹ who was a high-ranking officer in Jama. He began schooling me on the business of robbing drug dealers, as he was a part of a street crew who would walk or ride the bus from different spots and rob the youngsters out there hustling. They rarely encountered any resistance and if they did, none of them had any problems killing on the spot if necessary. They all had serious drug habits, which added to the hate they garnered on the streets.

People would see them coming and immediately start walking in the other direction or hiding whatever they had. It was common to see pockets getting run though at the end of a barrel or sometimes they wouldn't even have to pull out a gun. They were protected by being high-ranking members of a prison organization and by the fact that they had no compunction about taking human lives.

This particular group operated mostly in West Oakland but was also well-known in the East. Slick, a former pimp, did 12 years, starting in the mid-70s, for attempted murder. He would tell me about the foul things that went on in life behind bars, especially with the guards. We talked about the race wars and how he got initiated into The Family when he saved the leader's life when he was firebombed in his cell by the Aryan Brotherhood. Slick reached in and grabbed the firebomb and threw it out the cell—he still bears severe burn scars on his hands.

Slick told me that his crew would often be joined by Huey when they worked in the West. By the Jama laws, all of these activities were outlawed, especially drug use and the taking

⁷¹ Slick does not want to be identified. He is a close family member but I shall minimize personal info to protect his identity. As most ranking members, he has a Swahili name that he goes by in the streets and in prison.

of Black lives, but this version of the BGF was distorted so far beyond anything Comrade George saw in the beginning, that he wouldn't be able to recognize it. Some prisons were still strong in the sense that they upheld the original tenets and their political ideology hadn't devolved into a chaotic free fall. Huey P. Newton embodied this picture of chaos, as he was the walking corpse of the Revolution who defied death but defined the term *social death*, which was eerily echoed in his autobiography, Revolutionary Suicide (1973). Huey was completely destroyed and in the throes of full-fledged drug addiction, but for his stubbornness, he managed to stay alive. Huey was a marked man, and I would argue that since the time he first decided to pick up the black beret and arm himself with a shotgun, he was marked for death. The question was not who would kill him, but when. That when finally came on the day after the anniversary of George Jackson's death: August 22, 1989—and he could finally be reborn as the shining son of the revolution.

Slick indoctrinated me into another aspect of the game. He was testing me and pushing me at the same time. He would later tell me that he wanted to see what I was capable of and how I would react to different scenarios. I found that this was the case in most parts of that life, as you are constantly tested to see what your limits and capabilities are and how far you can be pushed. For Slick, he was fishing for help in some of his capers, but I was more interested in learning as much as I could from him about his way of life, not to join his crew, but to add to my knowledge base. I had no intentions of joining any group but it was helpful to have those connections and they would serve me well in the future.

1989...The beginning of the end

By 1989, the cousins Mookie, Rob, and Chris all developed bad drug habits that needed to be fed on a constant basis. They use to go on daily missions to find drugs and/or money, with Mookie always taking the lead. Sometimes these missions would turn deadly but most of the time the threat of violence was enough to get what they wanted. Mookie had been in and out of the California Youth Authority and the county jails enough times and each time he would come home big as a body builder, like he turned his drug craving into a workout addiction to get that endorphin rush.

Mookie's size was usually enough to persuade low level street dealers to turn over their products, as this had become part of a territory's risk. There were always packs of hunters out to prey on those who preyed on the addictions of others, and they came in many variations. Some like Slick and his crew were lifetime criminals who had no thoughts of trying to acclimate to mainstream society and thrived in the margins; people like Mookie and Rob tried and failed as drug dealers because of their addictions; and then there were the more organized super predators who robbed mid-level to major dealers and were often dealers themselves, but this was a way to make large sums of money quickly—and hurt the competition.

This was just another facet to the game that we quickly adapted to on the Hill. Mookie used to talk shit to Rob about his lack of aggression in these missions and how Pat was the one always doing the work. Rob would get embarrassed and feel like he was being challenged, which in a sense he was. Although Mookie was joking, the underlying message was clear: Rob was riding Mookie's reputation and his willingness to use force—if Rob didn't step up at least once, his 'gangsta' would be in question.

Your rep was everything and if people didn't know you in a small town like Oakland, then you really were a 'nobody'.

After one night of getting high and running out of product, they decided that they needed to re-up. Rob, sick of all the hazing, felt like it was now his time to show and prove. They only had one gun between the two of them since Chris was in jail in another state. Rob took the gun and they set out. Things quickly went left as they came upon their first victim...two people shot, one fatally. They moved on to another group of victims, then another. In all, after the shootings were done, nine people had been shot and three were dead.

Rob was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to die by lethal injection where he currently awaits execution on Death Row at San Quentin. Mookie was given a shorter sentence because he became an unwilling companion in this spree. The power to control and take someone's life became more intoxicating to Rob than the drugs, which initially fueled this murder spree. Rob held the power of life and death in his hands and he succumbed to madness, an insanity that resulted in three people losing their lives, with Rob being the potential fourth.

Mookie would later tell me he was powerless to stop him, but tried in vain to contain his madness. Rob is fighting for his life every day in San Quentin; one of the people he allegedly killed was Jama. Mookie and Rob became enemies for a while because of that night, as Mookie thought Rob put him in an impossible position and Rob felt like Mookie should have been more supportive during the trial.

After talking to both of them, it seems that the prosecutors played one against the other (as is their custom), with Rob getting the worst of it. He is sitting on Death Row, down to his last state-mandated allotment of appeals—his lawyer is pleading diminished capacity in order to get the death case reduced to a life in prison sentence. He is still in contact with a few of us from the Hill, and the rest of us keep tabs on him, but it is difficult.

Deadman once told me that in order to kill someone, you had to see them as a thing and not human. He asked me what I would do if a roach climbed on a wall? When I responded by saying, "Kill it," he said, "Right, you don't give a shit about the roaches family or the roaches kids, you kill it anyway." I understood what he was saying: it is extremely hard to kill a human but it is easy to kill something 'less than', to dehumanize your target or your victim while attempting to cling to your humanity by rejecting theirs.

This is a part of the training we received as youths while being indoctrinated to accepting our place in society. It's what we saw in the home and on TV and listened to on the radio. It's what we internalized from school and other institutional systems. We started to view ourselves as less than, as dehuman, as niggas. The clinging to humanity part was tough, no matter what part of the game you were in. By now, Kimani and Mookie had long abandoned the game; they got in and they got out just as quick—they were the smart ones. They realized that there was a high price to pay for this way of life and they were not willing to do what it takes to pay it. Unfortunately, both of their younger brothers took no heed. The rest of us battled on a daily basis to retain our sanity while realizing that there was nothing quick or easy about this life. We grew up fast and October 17, 1989, it was my turn to pay.

I was 'working' in Hayward with the newest member of our group, Lonnie. I had just dropped him off on Southgarden Avenue, off of 'A' street, where we had taken over a spot over there and Lonnie was running it in the daytime and others were handling it at night. Lon ask me to stay around to see how things were going and against my better judgment, I agreed. Little did I know the street was under heavy surveillance from the sheriff's office and the Hayward police. They were waiting for me to come as they had rooms up in the block's hotel and cars stationed around the back. As we were sitting on the low brick retaining wall, talking to a few of the

locals, the sheriffs pulled up from all sides. None of us bothered to run because we thought we were so much smarter than them.

We had devised a way to carry drugs in our cars in places that the police would never look for at that time, so we felt secure. Lonnie had hid some rocks in plain sight, but far enough away as to cause doubt of ownership if found by the police, therefore avoiding any drug charges. To our surprise, as soon as a couple of deputies got out, they came over to us and held us against the brick wall while the others went straight for the rocks on the ground. I was shocked, but still not worried until one grabbed my keys and went into my car, a brand new 1989 Honda Accord.

He immediately popped the hood of the car...this is when I realized that they had been watching. The deputy reached into the engine-well by the battery and pulled out my box. My heart sank and it started to dawn on me that I was going to jail—possibly for a long time. The box was a modified old metal band-aid container. On the back of it, I stuck a high-powered magnet and the whole thing was covered with heat resistant black electric tape. I could stuff almost three ounces (oz) of cocaine in each one, depending on what form it was in. I had rounds to make and other people to see after dropping Lonnie off, so I had more product than the half oz I just gave him. The box contained one oz of a solid rock bagged up and another bag contained over 50 ‘dubs’ or \$20 rocks.

The police who opened my hood and pulled out the box yelled, “Weight clause” as he held up my bags. Inside the car, there was a large briefcase-style container that I had all my cassette tapes in. Several were empty of tapes but contained money. The deputies went through that as well. The deputy yelled he found the money and they all begin to high five each other. I was dumbstruck and pissed at Lonnie for asking me to hang around for a little while, but I was more concerned about the weight clause that was passed in the recent months.

The weight clause was an enhancement clause that added time to the incarceration sentence for any drug seizure over 14 grams. All I could hear in my head was Woodie and Donkey Kong telling me over and over to not pick up strays and to leave Lonnie alone. They said he was bad luck and that he was stupid, two no-no’s in this line of work. I couldn’t really argue with them because he kinda was both of those things, but I felt sorry for him because he was an outcast with a good heart. He was also loyal and dependable so I kept him around.

Now here I was on my way to Santa Rita county jail in Dublin. Lonnie was in another sheriff’s car and he was already on probation so he had no hope of getting out anytime soon. As we rounded the bend on the 238 freeway, the car violently shook and then slowed down on its own. I wondered what the fuck was going on and hoped it was something I could use to my advantage to escape. Desperately clinging to any hope that there still was some way out of this, as the deputies were just as clueless of what was going on. They kept driving after fruitlessly coming up with no answer.

When we got to the county jail, we were told—more accurately, they were told and I was listening—that a major earthquake just hit the Bay Area and the Nimitz freeway collapsed. I had been to jail before on a petty receiving stolen goods charge, but never to Santa Rita, and never on anything remotely as serious as this. I made bail a day or so later and I went about trying piece my life back together, and as I expected, I got an earful from Woodie and Donk. I couldn’t argue and I didn’t really want to because they were right: I jeopardized my freedom and my life with my charity case. But at the same time, I grew to like Lonnie and he became a part of my inner circle, which was hard to do because I didn’t make new friends easily. Usually if I didn’t know you growing up, then I had no real interest in getting to know.

When I got back to my apartment, it was a wreck. I lived alone in a San Leandro one bedroom apartment. It was close enough to Oakland to easily travel back and forth, but far enough to give me a feeling of seclusion. The TV had fallen off the dresser, things were strewn about, but overall, the place was ok—a few minor cracks in the wall and an aftershock hit as soon as I arrived, but I was happy to be home to feel it.

As Lonnie was away, I started to drift away from Woodie and Donkey Kong, or rather they drifted away from me, like I inherited Lonnie's bad luck gene and it might be catching. I begin hanging with Isaiah's little cousin, Beaver, more and more. Beaver, or Lil Beav as we called him, was three years younger than me but still had been in the game longer. He bounced from spot to spot, Stonehurst or 10-5 Stone city to the Seminary click, to the crew on 77th. I remember him being on Bromley from time to time but he was doing his own thing and because he was so young, we didn't let him stay around too long.

But now he was 18 and that was the age we were when we made the decision to enter into the life, so I decided that I would bring him into the fold after all, as he did have ties to the Hill. Because he moved around so much, he had a lot of connections but also a lot of people who didn't like him because of that. The gangs of the past were mostly gone but their old allegiances and grudges died hard. For Lil Beav, it was really apparent. He didn't care one bit about gangs and old loyalties to them; all he cared about was making money, and make money he did. He made a lot of money through his network and we fully embraced him.

He was flashy and he showed his worth, but he wasn't super flamboyant. However, a lot of his old associates were envious and some were mad that he had left them to do his own thing and was successful in doing such. This was a bad combination. But lil Beav didn't care, he would drive around from spot to spot in his new Sterling with rims and beat. He did this to see what was going on and as a way to maintain connections, but mostly it was a way to use his car as advertisement to entice men his age, working spot to spot, excited to do busy with him.

I was stuck in a bad place. I was out on bail, I just took a loss that I really couldn't afford to take, and I had to pay for a good attorney. Drug attorneys are for the most part as bad as their clients. Most of the successful ones are scum and they feed off a group of people who are living off the miseries of others. In Oakland, there were a select number of lawyers you could go to that had good reps as far as getting their clients good deals. What most people didn't know is that meant that for most of their clients, they would be sold down the river, as they had a working relationship with the DA's office.

They would go lightly, or even in some cases, drop the weaker ones to then push a harder line on the rest. The DA's office had to keep a high conviction rate and the lawyers had to be able to say that they got so and so off with a light sentence or no time served. It is a game still played today. Occasionally, you will find an attorney who used drugs himself or had aspirations to sell weight, but you could never be sure of what you were getting unless you knew the players.

The worst kind was the self-righteous lawyers who hated drug dealers but not their money. I finally found a lawyer that I was semi-comfortable with in San Francisco, in the Pacific Heights neighborhood. He had a good reputation, wasn't a usual suspect, and he was willing to fight to make it all go away. I had heard about one or two lawyers who could make minor cases like mine disappear as long as there was a big enough payout to cover whoever they had to pay— but I didn't have that kind of money and I wasn't going to borrow it either.

The lawyer wanted a \$5,000 dollar retainer. He filed a brief to suppress the evidence of the items seized from the metal box and the judge agreed that a search warrant should have been obtained before opening it. That left the four rocks that were found in the litter on the ground,

some 30 feet away from me. Lonnie got a probation violation so they didn't bother to press charges against him for that; they just gave him a year in county.

My attorney wanted another \$5,000 to fight the rest of it. I didn't have that kind of money to give him for four rocks. I had to find a new lawyer who would take the case for half of that. I found a 'let's make a deal' lawyer, the kind that specialized in making deals for their clients and hardly ever went to trial. He would just take a bunch of cases to the DA and they would haggle over how much time each would get.

Since most of my case disappeared with the black box, I got a time served and three year probation deal. I regretted not making Lonnie cop to the rocks since they were his, thereby making this case go away, but I was happy to be free. Like a lot of young brothers, I took the deal offered to me because of the carrot of immediate freedom—but that carrot came with poisoned roots. The three year deal probation was a trap, and it was a trap that people fall into, not fully understanding that you can be in violation of your probation for any little infraction. Also, you can be charged with a crime, irrespective of its legitimacy, and not have the ability to effectively fight it because you will not be given bail and the previous felony will be used against you in front of a jury. I found this out the hard way less than two years later.

I was on the run from the police for an attempted murder and kidnapping charge. I was effectively cut off from my family and most of my friends. I was homeless and quickly running out of money. I lived by the grace of my closest friends and I felt like I was wearing out my stores of good will.

I was spending a lot of time with Smoke and we were following the path that Slick and Mookie and Rob had walked down already. Lonnie was out of jail and back to his old haunts in North Oakland, on the corner of Shattuck and 65th street. I decided that it was time to leave California and explore the country. Unfortunately, a few thousand dollars wasn't gonna get me too far. An acquaintance of mine told me he had a family home in Tacoma, Washington he would give me to settle an old debt. I quickly accepted and made arrangements to board a train headed up north.

My stay in Tacoma was short as I soon found myself longing for home, and in quick order, I was back on the train headed south to the Bay. When I got home, I immediately linked up with my crew and acted as nothing had happened. I got a legit driver's license in a different name and I felt secure in the fact that enough time had passed and my credentials were good, but that was put to the test a few months later.

Lonnie asked me to go with him to see about buying a car from an impound lot in East Oakland I reluctantly agreed, as I didn't like running errands with anyone, let alone Lonnie. It was early morning as we pulled into the car lot on 85th and San Leandro Blvd.: A & B tow company. We were walking to the entranceway as the back door opened; out poured 20 or more Oakland Police department task force officers...they used this place as a staging ground before they went on their raids. Unbeknownst to us, the towing company was actually owned by a couple police officers at that time.

I was completely caught off guard and silently cursing Lonnie, although I knew this was my fault for going against my instinct and mode of operations...again. Too late to turn around, too many of them to even think about running, so we tried to play it cool as they walked by us and we walked through them. Two of the officer stopped and asked me my name. My heart dropped and I knew this was it— my life was over as I knew it. I told them my alias and they laughed as I was quickly arrested.

After being sequestered in the back seat of one of the many task force cars that were parked just around the corner, I was repeatedly questioned as to my identity. They laughed about how they were just briefed on me as they showed a picture of me over and over again, each time it seemed to get funnier to them. At this point, I had nothing to lose so I just adamantly stuck to my story of, 'It aint me', my name is blah blah blah."

At this point it became a game, as I knew I was going back to jail and I knew nothing I could say would change that fact. All I could hear was Woodie and Donk's voice again talking about the jinx that was Lonnie. Who else had the bad luck of walking into a task force meeting where you were part of the discussion? To add insult to injury, once we left the lot, they took me along their route, as they hit spots close by with me in the back of the car. It looked like I was snitching. Of course this was done on purpose and I understood that and I also understood that I could not let them get to me.

I would look anybody in the face and I would not act guilty of telling, which was one of the worst things you could do in that life. I was paraded around from spot to spot and they would just leave me sitting in the back seat of the car and go try to arrest or harass others. Soon I was transferred to a small-ass paddy wagon underneath an over ramp that was cramped, poorly ventilated, and felt like a sauna. When I got to the station, I was shoveled into an interrogation room and the good cop/bad cop game started.

I was befriended, humanized, and then gently prodded into confessing all my sins, real or imagined. When I did neither, I was greeted by 'bad cop', who then belittled, disrespected, harangued, threatened, and then as a last resort, tried to save my 'middle class ass' from the bad men in prison. After a few hours of this and no confession forthcoming, they got frustrated and literally threw me into the holding cell. I was arraigned a couple days later and instead of being sent to Santa Rita, I was held at North County jail in downtown Oakland.

I was placed in the maximum-security house unit because of the nature of the charges; that was claustrophobia inducing. North County was located in the municipal court building and across the street from the Oakland police department. Most local inmates preferred to be housed there because it was easier on their loved ones to come and visit and going to court wasn't the ordeal as it was in Santa Rita.

After court and returning back to jail, you must be inspected before being allowed to return to your housing. The inspection (or strip search, really), is a highly intrusive process that absolutely no one, including most deputies, wants to be a part of. In the day room there were five metal, 3-foot tall partitions that were a foot off the ground. The first order of business was to strip down to your birthday suit while the deputy inspected your property, you were not allowed to bring anything to or from court other than your court documents and writing utensils, a skullcap, any approved food, and reading materials. If you had any extra clothing or linen, that was confiscated. Anything other than these items was considered contraband and taken, possibly resulting in a write up. If you were bringing court documents, then you needed a clear plastic bag to carry them.

After your personal items were inspected for weapons or any other contraband, they were put to the side. Next comes the hair inspection and then behind the ears. Afterwards its open your mouth and pull your bottom lip down, then its raise your hands and wriggle your fingers, then turn around and place your hands on the walls and show in succession the heels of both feet; right then left.

Here is where it gets really intrusive. We were then ordered to bend over and manually grab our buttocks and pull them apart while the deputy walks down the line peering into our

souls...After that, we had to squat three times while coughing on the bounce and finally turn back around and lift up our generation sac...there might be some variation to this routine depending on deputy as some were more rigorous in their quest to follow procedure while others had no desire to linger in this moment and therefore rushed through it as fast as possible.

After this round of dehumanization was over, the deputy then commanded everyone to pick up one item of clothing as he walked by to inspect it; almost always the underwear was first, followed by the t-shirt, then the pants, then the socks, then the over shirt, and finally, the sandals. This process was repeated every time you went to court or you were exposed to any areas that were not in the absolute control of the jail (or where you interacted with others who were not under the jails control).

If you were going to municipal court instead of superior court, then instead of a bus, you were lead down a series of tunnels and elevators with deputies and cameras watching your every move. The elevator of course was partitioned off so that the inmates couldn't jump the deputy in the confined spaces. Muni court was where everyone went when you are first arrested. You enter in a plea go to numerous appearances to set the trial. During these back and forths, you have to repeat the process of getting up early to be shuttled, prodded, and inspected to the point of exhaustion, which from my perspective, was no doubt the point of it.

The process wears you down to where any deal they put in front of you sounds good. If you are unable to make bail and they really want to pressure you, you can find yourself going to court on successive days and somehow always missing the first bus. I've seen many people just say 'fuck it' and take a deal because they were tired of fighting. I was in North County fighting my case of attempted murder and kidnapping; I was scared for my life because I knew people had been convicted for more with less evidence. Adding to my anxiety was the fact that I couldn't afford a decent attorney to represent me in this hearing; I had to make do with a third rate attorney and I knew the DA's office was already pissed at me because I ran.

Still young and naïve and not really understanding life but very aware of the consequences of being a Black man in this society, I was under no circumstances going to plead out for something that I did not do. The DA tried to intimidate me with a recommendation of 21 years to life if I took it to trial and lost, but I was unwilling to bargain. Part of that was due to counseling I received from a veteran in the Black Power struggle while in North County. I was in a house that was unlike any house I had ever been in before or since.

It was run by one man who had the utmost respect from both inmates and guards alike. I had never seen a man tell a whole dorm of inmates to 'shut the fuck up and act like grown men' and they did it! He had been transferred from a state penitentiary so he could go to court on one of the endless series of moves by the State to keep him incarcerated. He told me that I should never accept any deals from the State in exchange for my freedom or my personal integrity. I wish I had taken everything to heart but I was still too much caught up in my own personal hell to fully listen to some 'old head' who looked like he ain't NEVER getting out of the pen.

After a series of court dates and rejecting deal after deal, it was time to go to my preliminary hearing. This hearing dictates if the State has enough evidence to move forward against you or has to drop the case altogether. It is a mini-trial and usually the defense will not put on a case as to tip its hand regarding strategy for the real trial. I waited in a room adjacent to the trial court, ready to be called to start the hearing. I was sick to my stomach. I couldn't sit still and I couldn't calm down...after a while, I began to wonder what was taking so long, which added to my stress level. Finally the door opened and a deputy stuck his head in to inform me I was going back to my cell, the hearing was called off and all charges were dropped due to lack of

evidence. Apparently the DA was bluffing and didn't have any real evidence and was looking for anyone to take the fall and to close the books on the case. I couldn't recall being as happy as I was then and couldn't wait to go back to jail!

When I got back, I had to report to everyone what happened, the news was met by affirmations and condemnations of the State. Magee, or Cinque, his name in Jama, the 'old head' just gave me a nod and a quarter smile and went back to watching TV where everyone was lined up in a neat order, as usual. Soon I would be on my way to Santa Rita to serve out my original sentence of a year that the judge gave me for violating my probation. I didn't care at the time, I was ecstatic to have a release date and a new lease on life.

This feeling of euphoria quickly faded as the reality of spending the next eight months in jail began to sink in. After I was moved to Santa Rita, I still had a few court dates to clear up probationary issues. My inmate classification was downgraded to medium because of the charges being dropped and I was moved to a dorm.

It was loud and full of youngsters who were still trying to make a name for themselves. Each dorm had 14, two-man bunk beds. The units were still divided in quarters but the dorms were divided into lower and upper A, B, C, on one side and the same format on the other side, but lettered D, E, and F; these were called pods. In each pod, the inmates further divided themselves based on affiliation and representation. The Blacks grouped into what is called the Blackhole⁷² and that is at the end of the pod so their backs are against the wall. The Latinos⁷³ have the other end and the Woods⁷⁴ are next to them. Asians are considered 'others'⁷⁵ and they are usually lumped in the middle.

Politics⁷⁶ control the county jail and the sooner an inmate learns that, the better. As I experienced with Clinque (the 'old head') in North County, there were some dorms more geared towards politics than others. The deputies tried to group the different orgs together to cut down on problems, but it is hard with the constant flow of people coming and going; an inherent aspect of the county setting was its transitory nature. Anything over a year sentence and you are automatically sent to prison. The Blacks orgs had a good working relationship with the Nortres, as they both hated the Mexican Mafia, the ABs, and the Crips. Although there had never been any L.A.-based gang in Oakland, there were some satellites in surrounding cities. Any L.A.-based gang caught in Oakland or the county jail was targeted on sight. It was the same way with any Mexican mafia members who were referred to as 'scraps'.

The heads of each org knows who is who and whenever there is a change of head in the unit, the new head is introduced to the others immediately to cut down on intergroup conflicts. This is extremely effective, for as soon as there is a potential situation, everyone is briefed and decisions are made. The guards unofficially support this system because for the most part, the politics keep the peace and there is someone they can go to in order to address issues they may have. For inmates however, this adds another layer of rules that inmates have to follow that sometimes supersedes the formal written rules.

⁷² The Blackhole is usually run by Jama and/or Kumi, depending on numbers but anybody can be there regardless of affiliations.

⁷³ This group is know as the Northenos, or Nortres', it is a prison based structure that all Mexicans from the Northern part of California are pressured to join regardless of your street affiliation. They are bitter enemies of the Mexican Mafia, which is the Southern California base organization.

⁷⁴ The woods are a prison org that is for the protections of Whites who aren't affiliated with the Aryans or any of the outlaw biker gangs. They are not overtly racist and in fact at war with the Aryan brotherhood.

⁷⁵ Others are a loose group that comes together for protection and can be any Asian ethnicity. However, the Pacific Islanders have their own prison organization which is called the Ouzos.

⁷⁶ Politics refers to the agreements that the prison orgs have with each other in regards to have the jails are ran.

Anytime there is a problem that can't be solved through politicking, everyone is alerted and whatever is going to happen does. I have been in houses that have strong politics and houses that have weak politics and I much prefer the strong houses. In the weak houses, chaos rules, especially in the dorms.

The weak houses are usually filled with kids who aligned themselves along geographic affiliations—East, West, and North Oakland. No matter how many Chicanos there are in a particular house, they are still expected to strictly adhere to the bylaws and to go about their daily program. They know that the numbers will change wildly because of the consistent state of transition the houses are in. You can always tell how organized a house is by the possession of the phones. In each house, there are five phones on each tier and the inmates, according to power and population, divide up the phones, which often goes hand in hand. Like the bunks, the phones of the two strongest groups are at opposite ends of the pod.

Coming to jail can be a harrowing experience if you are not wise to the ways of the streets and have not been a part of that mentoring circle. We have all seen the prison movies when the new inmates walk in, wide-eyed, holding their neatly folded prison issued blanket and clothes, while the convicts yell obscenities at him, usually related to some form of forced coupling...this also happens in the county jail but it is usually just a joke and a way for the inmates to amuse themselves while hiding a deeper purpose.

When I changed houses because of being reclassified, I was moved with some first timers who just got off the bus hours before and were being housed. When I first walked through the sliding door that led to the new house, with seven other inmates, we first heard a murmur that quickly rose to a roar as we headed for our respective dorms. Even as it was 1am, the inmates jumped up to the metal mesh gates and started yelling, "Boooooootie! Newwww Bootie!"

Some would climb up to the top of the gate and swing back and forth, and others would start placing claims on certain new arrivals: "The one with the long hair is mine!" If you listen closely enough, you can hear the laughter of some of the other inmates as they lay on their beds highly entertained by the spectacle.

This was a hazing and sorting mechanism to see how you would respond. If you were new and unprepared, this could be a little unsettling, which showed— then it would get worse. But if there were just a bunch of Original Gangstas (OGs) then the catcalls are replaced by shouts of welcoming and affection, but never disrespect.

By this time I was already in the dorm meeting my new Bunkie and getting settled in. Since this wasn't my first time in jail, I was more prepared for its quirks than someone coming straight from the street. The thing that happens next usually gives you some insight to how organized or strong a house is.

After I set my belongings down, I was approached by two brothers who introduced themselves and asked if I needed anything before they went over the house rules. This was an indication that the politics were strong in this house, as a weak house would just let people walk in without introduction and ground rules being set. Usually the Nortos took care of that with any Latino or White who would come in.

The first rule was that all new dorm mates had to take a shower, no matter when you came in or where you came from— this was mandatory and non-negotiable. After showering and returning to my top bunk and settling in for the night...which at this point was to last about 2 more hours before court calls started at 4:15, I flashed back to the climbing up a different kind of bunk bed as child and wondering... 'how did I get here?'

After spending seconds pondering that question, my mind quickly progressed, shifting from, ‘how do I get out of here’, to finally, ‘how to do these next seven months or so without losing my mind?’. The answer wasn’t as readily forthcoming, but I knew one thing: I wasn’t eating the food. I would starve before I ate any of the slop they prepared and what was just as galling to me was the way that you had to go eat it. Everything in jail is regimented—from the serving of food, to the exchanging of laundry, and to the receiving of mail, there is a procedure for it all and it got tedious at first, but it soon turns into maddening, which leads to resignation and finally, acceptance.

I made a conscious decision to fight institutionalization and reject jailhouse routines as much as possible while staying out of trouble. That was harder than I thought; the key to doing your time is to do your time, meaning that you have to get into a personalized routine or you will go crazy. The stress level is enormous and you are living in a dorm with 29 other men that are in a house with over a 150 additional men. All of them have their own personal issues and are stressing just as bad or worse as you, depending on any numbers of factors including but not limited to: court cases, love life, money, and family issues. Any one of those stressors can send someone off into a rage and before you know what happened, there is a fight or an assault.

I made it a point not to get involved in other people’s business or get too close to anyone. I almost never got up for breakfast or went out for dinner. I pretty much stayed in the dorm and enjoyed the time alone while almost everyone else was out in the pod eating. Even the dining area was separated and you could start an incident if you sat in the wrong area. The BGF had their table, as did Kumi, the Norters, and the Woods. All the whites sat together no matter if you were a Wood or not. The other tables were left open and people then usually broke down in the geographic identifications or into a schoolyard mentality of cool kids sitting together.

Dinner was a socio-economic experiment in class as those who had money and were used to a certain lifestyle on the streets almost never went out for county food. Instead, we had our commissary, which was food we would order from the canteen or store. Each week you would get a list of certain items you could order, which included food, writing materials, and personal grooming items. The max you could spend was \$80 a week, to prevent hoarding and other maladies that could happen. Dinner for me usually meant jailhouse ‘gumbo’ which was made from top ramen, cheese and crackers, beef sticks, pork cracklin’, and hot sauce that was all emptied into a large plastic cup and filled with hot water from either the bathroom sink or the hot water fountain from the pod. Since neither got very hot, you had to place a lid on the cup with the wrapper from the noodles, acting as double barrier to keep the heat in then flip the cup and let it sit for about 5 minutes to ‘cook’. There were variations to this recipe, depending on what was available but this was by far and large a better option to whatever the jail was feeding you.

On special occasions, celebrations or just commissary day (when the food you ordered came), there would be spreads. A spread is when three or more people combine their resources and produce a meal. This done by designating a cook and coming up with a menu or a list of ingredients depending on how many were being fed: five top ramens, two whole beef sticks, two bags of pork cracklin’, five cheese and crackers, a bag of oysters, or any combination of various ingredients were all combined in a plastic bag, filled with hot water and massaged by the cook.

The skill of the cook was measured by if he used too much water or not enough and did he leave it in the bag too long or take it out too soon. These may sound like trivial issues, but in the jail where top ramen is currency; there can be serious repercussions if a five soup meal is destroyed. After the meal is done, a top bunk is rolled back and the bag is placed on a bed of newspapers then the plastic is split open for the cook to stir in the final ingredients and

seasoning. After he is done, the food is consumed family style, with everyone who contributed plus invited guest, standing over it with spoons at the ready. Some might say some form of grace or whatever, then the feast commences. It is bad form to stare while others are eating and it's a no-no to ask for some. It is usually a joyous time and the less fortunate in the dorm are often invited in for a couple of spoonfuls. The Norters also do it and they are required by their rules to feed every Norte, regardless if they put in or not. They have very strict rules that they are required to follow and how they eat is regulated as they are mandated to all go to breakfast and dinner no matter what, just in case something happens.

My time alternately crept by slowly and sped by dizzily, depending on surroundings. Once you have been sentenced, you are required to be productive by either working or enrolling in some kind of self-help program. I had no intentions of doing either. I didn't want to work in the kitchen, if I refuse to eat the food I definitely didn't want to prepare it! I didn't want to work in intake nor in any of the other places inmates could get jobs. That just didn't make sense to me. I could do my time with my own program, I didn't need to work FOR the jail to do my time.

Once you have a job, you have to move to the workers dorm, which was a minimum-security dorm. As long as I can stay medium security I was ok. I fought against being reclassified anyway possible, short of doing something to lose my 'good time' which was the half of a day for every real day I did; that was taken from my one year sentence. Against my earlier goals, I made fast friends who I came to trust and respect. We were all about the same age and we all were roughly into the same things on the streets. We formed a close-knit group that eventually led to trouble as we got into a couple of disagreements with other groups. But for the most part, we watched out for each other and we made the time past quickly. It is amazing how well you can get to know someone when you are confined to small spaces with them. Because we had a dorm, there was space to move and interact with different people, but after a while they stopped becoming inmates and they became friends.

It's hard to put into words the camaraderie that is developed in these intense spaces where there is nowhere to hide and nowhere to run. You are forced to be present every day, if not every second of the day, as dire consequences can be the result. Your 'cellies' become your family or you come to loathe them, but either way, you develop strong feelings towards them because of familiarity and proximity. You are forced to eat with them, share their personal tragedies, fight with them, and laugh with them. Early in my stay, a couple of faces from the Block would pop in and just as quickly, pop out. I had the chance to talk to Rob a couple of times in transit to court together. He was separated from the rest of us, but we could talk through cracks in doors or through wire fences. He was trying to stay strong as the reality of his new reality was coming into focus. He was pissed at his cousin, mainly because he needed to be pissed at something, anything to maintain his sanity. He was facing death sentences by both the courts and by Jama.

The few months he had been in, he had gained a lot of weight, which was typical of smokers (drug users who prefer to smoke crack as their drug of choice) who come to jail. They are malnourished on the streets but as soon as they hit the jails and prisons, they blow up from eating everything in sight. I would soon after have a chance to talk to Mookie while we were both sitting in the bullpen waiting to go to court on a later day. He showed me his paperwork to refute Rob's claims that he was snitching on him and to basically let me clear his name for him. I understood Rob's concern but truthfully, the District Attorney's office and the public defender played them both.

They fell for the divide and conquer strategy, hook, line, and sinker. I don't know what happened that night but I do know that I hate to see another human lose his life behind it. A few more 'hill serpents' would pass through, including Ghoulie who was on his way to the pen for a few years—by now he had earned a different non de plume as his reputation was growing on the streets; they called him Slow Motion or Slo for short because of his speech pattern. My brother-in-law would pass though on a drunk driving charge and Sterlin got arrested for brandishing a shotgun, but they were in different houses than I.

As I was settling in to my program, my whole world would change suddenly. I was out in the pod and a friend who was from roughly the same area as I was, called me over to the phones. I looked at his face and I could tell that something had happened but I didn't have a clue as to what. He had someone get the day's paper and he quickly turned to the local section— this is where every inmate looked every day to see what was going on in the streets. Whoever he was talking to on the phone told him that Kimani's brother, Malik, was shot six times last night on 82nd Ave. We both were stunned...Malik was like a little brother to both of us and we both felt an instant guilt over not being there to protect him. Of course that was nonsense, but being in jail plays with your mind in multitude of ways. One of them is the guilt associated with the feeling of abandonment. We both felt this at the same time but independent of each other. We felt we abandoned him when he needed us the most.

That was the first time, in a long time, that I openly cried. I actually sobbed and I didn't care who saw it or what they thought of it. In a way, it was a challenge to anyone, to say anything, so I could take out my pain on someone else. The house deputy saw what was going on and he immediately moved us to an empty day room so we could process the flood of raw emotions. Malik was the first of us to die violently. He was also the youngest and I couldn't make sense of it. We went through the usual progression of what we thought happened and why...all the things people do to process loss. We would later find out that someone had just got home from the pen and wanted his place back on 82nd and MacArthur, but Malik was now running that spot. They got into an altercation and Malik got the better of him. He was mad and humiliated so he retaliated way out of proportion to the ass kicking he received in a fair fight. The killer was caught and sent to jail for 14 years; he got out in seven. Malik was never coming back home. He left us on October 10, 1991.

Less than a month later, I found myself in a new house. Most of the people who I was previously rooming with were gone—either to a new house to work, or to the pen, or released back to the streets. I was laying in my bunk reading one in a series of western soft porn books, when another friend came and sat at the end of my bunk to tell me that Lil Beav was dead...WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON!?! If I felt an out of control range of emotions with the killing of Malik, with Beav, I just felt numb. I was shocked but I was resolute not to show any emotions. When I asked him what happened, he coldly told me that Beav died in a car accident as he hit a Cal Trans truck on the freeway and died instantly.

After reading the article in the jail-supplied daily paper and hearing about how his car had disintegrated on impact, I just rolled over in my bunk and shed a brief tear. Lil Beav had just bought the car: an 88' convertible Corvette from Woodie and he repainted and changed the rims on it. He was celebrating reaching a milestone by buying the car and showing off his status. Unfortunately, others took note and took exception. He had left a lot of people behind and they felt like he owed them something. We were real close and socialized a lot together, probably more than I socialized with anyone else at the time. He looked out for me while I was locked

down, as I had for him when I was out. I would later learn that he was being chased when he crashed doing a 120mph on the freeway. He passed on November 7th of that same year.

I wasn't even halfway through my sentence and already two of my family was dead. I had been five years in the game and been pretty much untouched but I guess that was too good to last. I have often heard death come in threes but never really took any stock in that and dismissed it as an old wives tale used to explain random occurrences. Well, a month later I was reminded that superstition has a base in reality, as a 17 year old boy who lived around the corner and always tried to hang with us, was found in an abandoned house, dead from a gunshot wound to the head a week after he was declared missing.

He had gotten hooked on heroin and started hanging with people who were similarly trapped. His death was a tragic on multiple levels as they all are, but I felt this deep down in ways I couldn't process at the time. He had three much older brothers and two were deeply in the game and were both widely known in the streets. Eerily, they both were gun victims in roughly two-year intervals; the 17 year old was now the third in six years. The oldest was left to bury all of his younger brothers and he turned to alcohol to drown out the pain. I couldn't fathom what it means to lose three sons to violence or to anything in such rapid succession. I had four months to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and it was a struggle to gain any real perspective, let alone gasp what was real and what was the dream.

I was released on Easter Sunday, 1992. My longtime girlfriend came to pick me up we celebrated my release with a steak dinner and massive amounts of alcohol. She could sense something in me had changed but neither of us knew what or cared really to interrogate it. I was cold and I was bitter, towards her and the world. I had retreated into myself to deal with the multiple losses while incarcerated and now I didn't know how to come back. I was stuck in self-preservation mode and there was no room for others. I lost the ability to feel or care, or rather I suppressed those emotions and my personal life was the next casualty.

I tried to make up for lost time and we took a Caribbean cruise soon after I got out. It was too little too late. I stopped caring about maintaining my relationship and I retreated further from engaging with the world. The New Year's rolled around with yet another lost: Lonnie was shot and killed on 65th and Shattuck, close to where he grew up, right after midnight. Sadly, he wasn't even the first homicide of 1992, one the bloodiest years in Oakland's history.

Conclusion

In "The Training of the Block", I used short narratives from the cohort to explicate how we came to choose alternate pathways than our parents and assume an oppositional stance to society. From an early age we were taught that you had to fight for survival and there was no place for the meek. We saw the effects the daily grind had on our parents and we wanted nothing of it. Simulated warfare was the norm and real warfare was expected. The older kids passed along modeled behaviors they learned from engaging in street activities and they schooled us on appropriate codes of conduct. We applied what we learned from them in larger societal settings and came back together to transmit what was effective and what wasn't.

The Block was dually trained. We thought we trained ourselves to see the world in an oppositional framework but in actuality, we were being trained by society to view ourselves as expendable and *less than*. This dehumanization became evident in the life choices we made as we grew older. We were trained to think of ourselves as apart from society instead of a part of the Black community and the human race. We taught each other how to steal, rob, and kill as we tacitly capitulated to the dominant discourse. Stuart Hall (1996) talks about how a hegemon can

be maintain without force and just through the passing along of ruling ideologies. The ideologies that were passed down to us encapsulated fast money and instant gratification while simultaneously telling us we wouldn't make it passed 25. The harsh perception of a bleak future combined with the glitzy glamorized life of the local street entrepreneurs made choosing one that pathway over our parent's pathway easier. Subsequently, the idea of bending the rules of society became more attractive.

We grew up in a time of heavy State suppression with its accompanying trickle down effects. The State needed to destroy the Black Power Movement and prevent any other movements from following in its footsteps. With the subsequent flooding of the inner cities with drugs in the 70's then again in the 80's, the focus for many young inner-city Black Males, (us included), shifted from the failed schools as a site of indoctrination to the neighborhood streets as a site of validation and authenticity. School became the meeting place; it was the place where you went to apply what you learned in your neighborhood and compared notes. It was a centralized battlefield with breaks of classrooms in-between, and even then, you could get a pop quiz on your manhood.

We all came from two parent homes. In each home, without exception, there was a strong domineering male head of the household. Our fathers modeled behaviors that were modeled for them. We mimicked their anachronistic hyper masculine stance as they thought they were armoring us for future life lessons, but in reality, they were cosigning the 'street code'. Unfortunately, as tactics of domination advanced, the counter tactic of armoring did not keep pace. Armor was turned against its wearer and misplaced aggression ends up reinforcing societal order, as jail time and death were often results from that mismatch.

The omnipresent specter of State power hovering over the heads of the cohort manifested in individualized ways for different members, early in life. The pains of early life lessons were hard pills to swallow. Reinforced by years of training on the Block, institutionalized death became the reality for the cohort as the State collected on that promise in multiple ways.

Conclusion

Armoring

Five men in their late thirties are milling around at the end of a 40ft driveway, watching the action unfold on this beautiful Saturday morning. More people started to pour out of their homes; curiosity peeked by the frenzy of civil service people that engulfed the normally pallid streets. There is hushed talk and muddled conversations as the neighbors tried to ascertain what happened. The group of men is soon joined by their younger sisters, nephews, mothers, fathers, and even some grandparents at the end of the driveway. The police cordon off the house directly across the street and quickly rush the owner, a widowed mother of three, out of the house and into a waiting car that quickly drive off. Soon afterwards, a Coroner's office van pulls up and our fears were confirmed— our friend, neighbor, and the youngest member of the last cohort had been murdered...his body is wheeled out fully covered by a sheet. He was shot to death in his bedroom while his mother was frozen in her room listening to him beg for his life. He was 28.

Privileged Knowledge

We had become so jaded to death that while we waited on that idyllic Saturday morning for the police to bring his body out, no one cried or showed any outward signs of hurt or pain, maybe disgust or anger, but no real pain. As the word spread, we were soon joined in my driveway by most of my core group of neighborhood friends who were still local, as the word spread rapidly. So many of us have been desensitized to murder and death that we can just go on with our lives as if Black bodies have no place in society and no intrinsic value beyond what little we have been trained to put on them. We had seen death up close too many times and in its many permutations that after while it became an old friend and a part of the cohort.

Nach was killed by three young Black men who had no respect for Black life as it was taught to them, just as surely as it was taught to us. The struggle to consistently adapt to the constant pressure of living in a society that never wanted you and shows it at almost every turn, builds up resolve to overcome that extreme alienation, while the armoring that takes place can be alternately life preserving or death embracing. I went through both of these stages, as they are not as mutually exclusive as they would appear.

But it is how that grand narrative is conveyed and passed down that has been one of the foci of this study. Black life is mainly visible in Black Death, or rather the value of Black life becomes made apparent in the frequency and casualness of the taking of Black life. This narrative is played out again and again in major cities nationwide and widely broadcast with the proliferation of the internet and of 24-hour cable news. The teaching of Black Death in a reaffirming way teaches about Black life and the survival mechanisms that we learn, adopt, and utilize to make sense of place and space inside of a White supremacist societal structure.

The passing down of privileged knowledge is always an act of negotiation between multiple parties, with different and sometimes competing conceptions of that understanding. How that information gets processed and utilized becomes the ownership of the latter but is

always contextualized by surrounding societal conditions and alternatives. The individual is in negotiations on multiple levels. This consistent negotiation is emblematic of larger issues at play as it trespasses scale from the global on down to the neighborhood, and finally to the individual body. The alternating engagement and disengagement with these levels produces multiple internalizations of self, and projected self-worth inside of a system of domination.

The global or macro context has situated the Black male as a hypermasculine caricature of the Staggerlee mythos of the Black buck who is hard drinking, hard living, hard on women, and violent towards any perceived encroachment on his masculinity. This mythos has consistently been reinvented through the ages to reflect the given historical context. Over time the mythos became self-replicating and embodied in Black bodies and in certain instances, perverted to rationalize and justify the taking of other Black lives. Black males are often portrayed as violent, hypermasculine, and natural-born predators, traits that today, are often attributed to psychopaths and sociopaths. Black males are seen as “dehumanized beasts” and the racist ideology deemed by White-supremacist subjugation becomes necessary to contain said “beasts” (Hooks, 2004). The demonization of Black males has been embraced instead of being challenged as it gets claimed as a mark of distinction, or an edge that Black males have over White males. This has resulted in the White supremacist culture further demonizing Black males, instead of holding that image up as the negative reflection in society’s mirror, thereby placing the onus in the proper direction (Hooks, 2004).

Even Black males who reject the racist sexist stereotypes are forced to deal with a world that constantly sees them as rapists, harassers, and rage-aholics in hiding (Hooks, 2004). There comes a breaking point where many Black males embrace the stereotype; they feel that if they are going to be seen as a beast, they might as well act like one (Hooks, 2004; Staples, 1994). It has been the mainstream White culture, a culture of domination, which has been rewarded by the surrendering of Black males to the stereotype. This can be seen in today’s cultural landscape, most notably in sports and in the entertainment field.

The neighborhood tells you what you are worth in terms of how productive you can be in the spheres of influence (i.e., city, Block, home, etc.). This sense of worth is mediated through a hypermasculine lens that has been informed by years of indoctrination by those global forces and passed down in a collective knowledge that the individual processes through their own, still developing, world lens. In the neighborhood, group dynamics are fluid, as leadership is always questioned and the jockeying for position inside of cohorts, amounts to training for societal roles later in life. The competition between cohort members teaches about rules of engagement and teamwork, but also what kinds of behaviors are permissible inside of structured or semi-structured discourse communities. The passing down of privileged knowledge was once the primary by-product of the family unit, but as time has unfolded, this has become one of the chief functions of liked-age cohort groups. Unfortunately, the teaching of Black Death is a part of this knowledge transfer.

How this knowledge gets filtered, then localized, varies by the individual—we all tried to make sense of our surroundings and our place in it. I was taught Black Death on multiple levels; I saw my father walk through his mid years in a perpetual drunken stupor. His spirit had been murdered years past and now he was unintentionally murdering mine. I saw Black Death in the classrooms as my friends were shuttled into the ‘bonehead’ classes where little was taught and even less was expected. I saw the death of the Black power movement and the selling of Black Death in the form of little white rocks. I saw Black Death repeatedly on the news as talk of Oakland’s high murder rate was euphemistic for Blacks killing Blacks. I was later explicitly

taught how to kill another Black man by a Black man. On the Block, we prepared ourselves every day, unknowingly to deal with this prolonged siege on Black people. We had to learn how to fight on multiple levels— from playing the dozens, what we called ‘cap sessions’, to learning how to read body language and how to pick up on when people were lying as well as learning how to tell a convincing lie ourselves. While the larger institutions were enforcing Black Death, we were learning and teaching each other about Black Life—what it meant to survive and how to do so while being systematically attacked from all ends and angles. This was not an explicit message but a very implicit, even subliminal message that we took to reinvent our parents’ idea of the American Dream.

American Dream

The American Dream is an achievement ideology that is at the core of a liberal society that postulates anyone can succeed in this country armed with nothing but the proper work ethic. The neoliberal iteration of that is anyone can make it right now as the market dictates worth. In either case, the American Dream eschews group identity politics and puts the onus squarely on the individual. We collectively made decisions that would impact the rest of our lives in the days preceding the meeting in front of my parents’ house. We came together and decided that we would reject the life paths of our parents and instead, embrace a more risky pathway— one that promised higher risk but also higher, faster returns.

To illuminate these issues, the dissertation focuses on a cohort of post Jim Crow Black males whose parents fought for and embraced the old American Dream ideology during the civil rights period, but who themselves have come to repudiate that old ideology. First, I explicate how real and perceived opportunity structures available to the cohort were shaped by political and economic forces in a middle-class urban neighborhood I call the Block. In addition, I examine how independent teaching and learning of Black youth, what I call Block Pedagogy, fostered alternative/oppositional life pathways.

As we rushed headlong into what we thought was manhood, we were simultaneously rushing headfirst into the sprung trap of societal perceptions of Black males as criminals and we were in danger of losing our humanity in the process. The rush to manhood produced a rush to acquire material things to match an underdeveloped ideal of manhood. The material equation with freedom, happiness, and adulthood has the side-effect of rationalizing any means of how these things are acquired. A steady job and an adherence to the old Protestant work ethic was the way of our parents, and those ways were no longer valued. We saw the heavy price it extracted out of our parents and we wanted none of it.

With the unrelenting attack on the Black family structure highlighted by the Moynihan report and latter buttressed by Wilson’s work, the old norms and ways were no longer passed down. They were right in that the Black family had undergone a transformation but they both missed the permanence of racism and its perpetuation by both the State and by segments of the nation. My father came from a long line of proud Black men who valued a good, hard day’s work and the resulting satisfaction of earning a hard day’s wage. He embraced that ideology and he believed in the greatness of this country, even as he was acutely aware of its flaws. He went to fight in the latter days of the Korean War partly due to that belief. He was a part of that generation of Black men who believed that through military service, a measure of equality could be achieved and that this country would show its gratitude for service in the bestowing of equal rights. When it was made apparent that they were not forthcoming, he went to work for the government in a different capacity. Eventually, his belief and optimism faltered and his attitude

trickled on down to the rest of the family. His destroyed belief manifested in a harsh cynicism and detachment from the family. That cynicism became a permanent part of my identity kit and I took it everywhere I went and even taught it to my peers. That cynicism made up a large part of my armor and we each brought to the Block, the piece of armor that served us best inside the home.

Black Life

Critical Race Theory provided me with the framework to link the hegemonic power of the State to the racialized experiences of the Block. The collective story of the Block is a story of Black survival inside of institutions in service of domination and White supremacy. The legacy of Black resistance is as old as the country and the experiences of the Block are the continuation of an age old narrative of oppression and resistance to oppression. I have situated the cohort historically in the narrative of Oakland to demonstrate how the interplay of oppression and resistance trickled down to a group of middle class kids, influencing how we viewed the world. I have showed how the cohort's pursuit of our reconceptualized version of the American Dream was our attempt at defining our place in this society and our reaction to systemic effects on our families.

Our pursuit of this stylized American Dream put us directly in the path of the disciplinary powers of the State that patrol the borders of its domination. We collectively decided that we were going to do things differently than our parents and we would not endure their slow deaths as we saw it. We were aware that societal rules were not evenly applied to all segments of society so we used that as justification to go against what our parents taught us. We took passed down, twisted ideology about the nature of society and we further distorted that through and with our collectively malformed filters. We thought we were making conscious choices to participate in illegal street entrepreneurialship. We thought of ourselves as outside of the State, existing beyond the pall of the margins. However, while our childhood prepared us for the harshness and realities of Black Death, we failed to see the larger picture about Black collectivity or Black Life.

Black Life is the manifestation of Black Love through the resistance to and the survival of oppression. We thought we had a full understanding of what we were doing, but we didn't. The wide reaching consequences for participating in those counter societal activities reached far beyond the Block. We were actively participating in our oppression by supporting and promoting the chemical destruction of our people. We had no real understanding of this as teenagers or even into our twenties. We understood that we risked death and incarceration but that is on a personal level. On a wider community level, none of us really understood what was happening and why it was happening. We heard stories of different law enforcement agencies alternately supporting this drug kingpin but the why escaped us if we believed it. The destruction of the Black family started centuries ago; now, here we were helping that same process. How could that be labeled as a 'conscious choice'?

The surviving members of the cohort eventually 'woke up' from our collective slumber at different intervals. The toll of death and substance abuse by friends and family members stimulated deep conversations about the real nature of things and our places in perpetuating them. We felt a deeper connection to the tacit struggle for the humanization of the Black community and we realized that we owed a huge debt to the community. The lessons of the Block were alternately reaffirming and destructive. Out of that we grew into men, Black men with the experience and the ability to effectively communicate to our children in ways our parents could not with us. We evolved from the fire of that time and space to have a powerful

critique of the White supremacist capitalist patriarchal system and to have the distance to reevaluate our parents as well.

The realization that I am following in my father's footsteps has left me feeling closer to him. It took many years of deep introspection and long hard looks at him as a human inside of an oppressive system to release him from the image I held of him—it was not easy. I came to understand how his actions and reactions were part of his struggles with his father and their clashes were around some of the same issues we clashed over decades later. Black families have historically been under extreme pressures and he did all he could to hold his together. He practiced self-medicating to ease the pain and stress he surely felt just as I did when I was younger. However, he fell victim to his vices as long decades of high alcohol and cigarette use caught up to him. My father died from complications of prostate cancer, but I firmly believe that racism killed him. After his death, I wrote and rewrote (multiple times) him a letter telling him how I feel, which I will include, as is, at the end of this study.

Black Life ultimately becomes about Black Love—love of self and love of people. As a kid, that love of self was missing. I didn't love me as I didn't know me. I struggled through the years as I discovered what it really meant to be a young Black man growing up in a country that has historically treated those like me, as *less than*. The Black community has responded to that dominant narrative with multiple counter narratives expressing Black Love such as during the Black Power Movement with Black is Beautiful. The ability to respond creatively to oppression is recognized by one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory and is echoed in this study.

Ways of Knowing

This dissertation is offered as an interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of African American Diaspora Studies, Education, Critical Race Theory, and Gender & Women Studies. This study transects fields and literature to illuminate how Block Pedagogy shaped the alternative/oppositional life pathways that were available to this cohort and how those options were developed and conveyed across the cohort through the use of privileged knowledge. This dissertation seeks to complicate the notion of what 'out of school literacy' is and expand notions of education to include non-formal settings as valid sites of knowledge production and reproduction. The valorization of the Block as a place of knowledge production then opens the field as to who can be considered an educator and under what auspices this brand of education transpires under.

Education does not have to be brought into the classroom to be valid nor does it have to be taught by someone who has formal credentials. In the past, scholars such as Gramsci have seen the wisdom in what he calls "organic intellectuals". Traditionally, these organic intellectuals have been activist/scholars who have used their intellectual heft to advocate for the people for the purpose of liberation. What I am proposing and what I feel has been too often overlooked is the intermediary in that journey, the interrupted scholar/activist who has not completed that path they have started on (e.g., Tupac).

Life lessons were well-earned on the schoolyards and in the school hallways. Classrooms as the traditional sites of knowledge transfer were shied away from and what we considered real education was to be had elsewhere. Instead, school was used as a networking site where new friends were made and new knowledge was formed through the coming together of different friendship cliques.

In elementary school, reputations are forged and middle school is where those identities are challenged and remade. Instead of the unilateral knowledge dump of formal education, the

Block and by extension, the school became a place for alternative educative practices. While these practices were unsuccessful in liberatory practices, they laid a foundation as to different ways to imagine the world and our place in it.

In departing from the traditional stance taken by anthropologists, who study 'others' ethnographically, this study has explored forms of self-inscription on the part of both the ethnographer and those 'others' who are studied. Informed by developments in postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminism, this is an original contribution to the growing dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. The methodology proposed here built upon recent reconsiderations of the uses and meanings of the personal narrative to examine the ways in which selves and social forms are culturally constituted through biographical genres. I have positioned myself, and by proxy this study, in a variety of cultural and political contexts, challenging societal norms and how Black communities have been thought of and talked about. This study has given insights into the construction and transformation of identities by engaging in self-reflexivity informed by a Critical Race Theory framework.

Expanding Pathways

I plan to further investigate examples of counter hegemonic community practices in different urban locations, looking for similarities and divergences, which I will include in the manuscript to more fully situate my ethnographic project in a wider national context. My long-term research agenda will be a wider study of African American neighborhoods, looking for organic instances of community resistance/reactions to larger societal issues and how they connect on a micro level. As this study is about how life pathways are identified and enacted, the next step will be to identify the other side of that equation, which is how some pathways are made more attractive than others and what causes this change over time. I will eventually develop this strand of research into multiple courses in Block Pedagogy, Privileged Knowledge, and Game Theory on educational outcomes.

Ultimately, this study will contribute to our understanding of the ways in which the multiple spheres of societal contact— with the power structure, Black radicalism, and criminality— have resulted in identity-shaping knowledge. In doing so, it will document the ever-changing nature of oppression and the community's response to it— both in ways that subvert and reproduce existing, oppressive societal structures. Moreover, the dissertation both offers an explanation of the failure of public schools to engage the intellectual energies of Black youth and a broader critique of the enduring centrality of race in American life.

The battle over authenticity and authority as to who can tell the story of oppressed groups and how those stories are constructed has become the latest ground between the static fields of inquiry and the new wave of scholars seeking place in the academy. Ethnic autobiographies, self-reflexivity in ethnographies, and native ethnographies raise provocative questions about a range of issues for the contemporary scholar: authenticity of voice, ethnographic authority, and the degree to which autoethnography constitutes resistance to hegemonic bodies of discourse. Critical Race Theory sees this as part of the larger societal dominant ideology that seeks to constrain and dictate what stories about marginalization and oppression get out, and what hidden truths remain hidden.

Epilogue

Reconciliation- A Letter to My Father

Dear dad, I have had time and distance to reflect on the ordeal of the last seven years and I have realized that I have built a house of pain, anger, and resentment on a faulty foundation. Not a day or hour goes by that I don't think about how I got to this place in my life. Long ago I made the decision to turn those feelings into positives and not linger on any negativity and instead, consciously work toward improving myself and by extension, my outlook on life and the way I view the past. This has been exceedingly difficult as I have tended to fall back into old habits of wondering "what if" instead of embracing the reality of the whole picture... meaning that I understand that even if 'this or that' event didn't happen, something else was bound to happen because of the mental and spiritual place I was in. Where I am in life is not because of a bad choice or bad luck, but in actuality, it is because of some serious flaws in my understanding of the way things worked and a fundamental disconnect in how I viewed society and people.

It's funny— in writing this letter I have learned more about myself than years of counseling and forced introspection. I have wronged many, many people over the decades and I am profoundly sorry about that. I have done things that... I have done things that I have felt like I was being punished for in a karmetic way. Being that I have been punished for things that I have not done but because of my past, I just have to shut up and accept it because one way or the other, I deserved it. But the question has always been 'why?', why have I done those things and why have I behaved like I was soulless? Why have I always had problems making real connections or even wanting to make and maintain anything deeper than causal friends? I have never had problems being a sounding board for others or advising and giving the appearance of caring when more times than not it was for my own benefit and not theirs. But that also allowed me to keep a safe distance and not engage on a personal level where I would have to expose myself.

Looking back, this was a regular pattern that I established early in life and that I mastered by the time I hit my high school years. I will always remember when your parents called me a user. I could not have been any more than 10, but I hated them for that and I never forgave them; didn't even shed a tear when they passed. What I have come to realize is that I hated them not for what they said but for seeing me for who I was: I WAS a user, I learned to use people at an early age and I never stopped. They saw me and I hated them for that... and I will always regret that but I can admit that now.

The question that naturally comes to mind is, 'how does a boy of ten learn something like that and why'? This has been the crux of my lifelong battle between my lack of compassion towards others and what I know deep down is right. I never really cared... for as long as I could remember, but now I at least understand the 'why' and I am on a quest to understand the 'how'. I also realize that I may never know the answer to that fully but I have my ideas. But first I think the answer to both the how and the why are different aspects of the same answer.

I have always sought out unconditional love, paradoxically, I never believed in it. I never believed that someone could love me unquestionably, without reservations and wholeheartedly. I would immediately put up blocks to any who claimed to love me and if they tried to push through them, I would challenge them back—usually in destructive ways to test them and if they failed that test, then I was validated and yeah, hurt but not as bad as I would be if I believed in them and THEN they left me; that would kill me. Emotionally, I never matured. I always kept my guard up and I always pushed away...all the while hoping that someone would stay no matter what. I was self-destructive to the point of being suicidal; not an active suicide but I did what I could to put myself in harm's way.

There was a point as a teenager where I practically begged a cop to shoot me. I wanted to die and right then and there. I didn't care, I was tired of living and I was tired of being alone. Death held no real fear for me; I wanted not to feel anything anymore. I believed it was freedom but I also believed suicide was a coward's way out so I lived life at top speed. I was trying to commit a slow painful death without actually pulling the trigger, but I was also looking for a rush, a feeling of being alive by challenging death. I know... another paradox.

In Oakland, as I suppose it is in any large city, there are no shortages of young brothers who feel the exact same way doing the exact same thing at the exact same time. Most of the acquaintances I had, practiced self-medicating. The very first thing in the morning upon waking up was to fire up, then get dressed or brush their teeth or eat something. Their day was spent like a documentary on urban survival—each day was a renewal of trying to escape the pain while balancing against the demands of living it...liminal life. Being stuck in-between was a commonality we shared. Freedom was thought of as the escapement of this debilitating pain that buzzed in my head every day, unfortunately I didn't realize that too often pain beget pain. It is a catch-22 that we got stuck in, trying to escape the pain created more pain, a vicious downward spiral. A cycle that for me hit bottom starting on October 10, 1991, then November 7, then December 14, and finally concluding on New Year's Eve the following year as four younger members of my extended family that I should of been protecting and schooling found that final freedom we were all unwittingly pursuing.

Deep down I knew where this was going and I started to search for other answers, another way out, a reason to live. I did what many lost teenagers did and I looked for love not in another but in progeny. I rationalized that by becoming a parent I would then have all that I was looking for— unconditional love and a reason to live. For many reasons that didn't happen and I'm not arrogant enough to try to forecast what would have been but that period in my life set the stage for the next which was falling in love and getting married.

I have always been a firm believer in having power over your emotions and what you allow yourself to be open to. Unsaid in all this and embedded in every sentence are some truths—I have purposefully left out you and mom's role in any of this not to absolve you but to claim my responsibility in my actions. I bring this up now because I made a conscious decision in my mid-twenties to allow for the possibilities of love and the risks and awards that it brings in spite of my up close view of your marriage and in its role in my upbringing.

I have a problematical relationship with mom where I feel I have to protect her but secretly resent her for not protecting any of us. I have long denied the resentment and either/or rationalized her behavior or justified it as her prerogative. In either scenario I did a huge disservice to my marriage and to my wife. Mom would consistently push the envelope because she knew that I would defend her like I always have since I was a child. My wife begged and pleaded with me and I tried to please both sides but failed everyone in the process.

I learned a lot during that time but I shied away from trying to work out the hard issues. Instead, I suppressed them deep down, so deep that to this day I still have only glimpses of my childhood. I barely remember anything that happened in that house growing up and what I do remember; isn't good. I was determined not to repeat that family dynamic just as you tried not to but inevitably you did. So many things get unintentionally passed down that it becomes like a family heirloom. The anger, the bitterness, the hurt, and the rage: I possessed all of it. And as much as I tried to hide it, defuse it or dilute it, I just couldn't let it go. I am not trying to blame you, I don't. I am just trying to accurately represent my feelings. You were trained just as surely as your father was in how to protect yourself and your family but somewhere over time, that protection went awry.

When Dakarai went to the hospital the first time and we almost lost him. I had a major breakthrough...I've watched TV shows where the main character loses a love one and later in the show that character has a scene where they breakdown and start sobbing and blame their loved one for leaving them prematurely and I would always look at that and think how outlandish that is for them to blame someone for dying and getting mad at the deceased—I thought it was disrespectful. But now I get it, I finally get where that comes from. If the character is not a fully functioning adult emotionally, then they can misconstrue death for abandonment. That is what happened to me, it didn't happen like in the movies and it wasn't an all at once thing but it was a gradual process of checking out and disconnecting.

Thinking back on it now as I write this, I think I was trying to give you the benefit of the doubt on the surface but I was really trying to reclaim and redeem you through my children. I needed you to be a grandfather to them, as I knew it was too late for me to have you raise me, I wanted my sons to have what I never had. I hated you for so long but that hate was mediated by a strong desire to have a real relationship with you. I needed my father and I wanted to forgive all the transgressions and all the pain. I guess I wanted my sons to redeem you. You were different with them, you were kind, and you were loving; and that's what I needed to see. I knew you didn't have long because how hard you lived and I needed to see a softer side to latch on to and to make it all right to forgive you.

For the most part, it worked; you were a changed man, you were more tolerant, more understanding and much more supportive than what little I remember. We made peace as did the rest of my siblings, we were supposed to move in together and I was going to take care of you as you convalesced...sadly you transitioned before that could happen. You transitioned alone in your sleep. Sandy found you the next morning as one of us three would always go over every day to be with you. I probably...no, I did learn more from you those last few years than the previous 35+ years.

After you transitioned, I didn't feel abandoned but I appreciated the time we had. My time with you sharpened the drastic chasm that was my youth because it showed me what was missing. My father was a very charming, intelligent, engaging man who had a sharp wit that I most definitely inherited and very much appreciated. I wish we could've spent more time together like that, and I regret that I didn't ask you more questions about your childhood and get to know you as a kid growing up in a difficult household.

There were many times where it may have seemed as if I was out of control and I realized too late that perception is always analyzed through a flawed lens. I knew what it felt like to be out of control and self-destructive but I have never known the feeling of viewing the world through a righteous lens, a lens that agrees with the common held beliefs of right and wrong and good and evil. I admit that I cannot stand to be controlled and that is one of my many flaws. To

this day, it is still a huge issue with me. I rebelled every chance I got and I did it over and over again. I am, however, still terrified of the future. I am terrified that history is repeating itself again and I am, despite my contestations to the counter, complicit in jeopardizing my children's mental and emotional well-being by abandoning them. I didn't volunteering abandon them but I understand through my actions that this is the end result. It matters little to them right now why Daddy's no longer around, just that daddy IS not here.

The normalcy of absence is compounded by the uncertainty of when that normalcy will be breached. I already know what to expect and I have prepared myself in how to deal with the range of emotions from anger to resentment to rejection, I know it is all coming and I am aware that as much as I prepare myself for it, it is deserved and probably more. I don't want my children's childhood to be about absence it's still not too late to do something about it. As Naiser enters into his preteens, this is the danger time— he will start to rebel, he might not know why, but he will. He is missing something he had his formative years and he doesn't know how to process it. I don't want to be right, I wish they would grow up without a care in the world however this is a harsh world for little Black babies and I made it rougher for them and for that, I am eternally sorry. I can't change the past and I can't control the future, but I can do what I set out to do.

I wish that you could respond to this letter but in truth, I wrote it for me and by extension, for my children. We miss you and I wish you were here to guide me through the next ten years of their lives. They will miss you but your influence will still be there through me and I will teach them about you, the real you, the you I have come to know and not the raging caricature of that man who wore your face during my childhood.

Love, your son

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Appendix A

Table 1 Black Population Growth in Four East Bay Cities, 1940–1950

	Black pop.			% increase		Blacks as % of total pop.		
City	1940	1944	1950	1940–44	1944–50	1940	1944	1950
Alameda	249	4,082	5,312	1,539.4	30.1	0.7	6.0	8.2
Berkeley	3,395	6,129	13,289	80.5	116.8	4.0	6.3	11.7
Oakland	8,462	21,770	47,562	157.3	118.5	2.8	6.3	12.4
Richmond	270	5,673	13,374	2,001.1	135.7	1.1	6.1	13.4

SOURCES : Commonwealth Club of California, *The Population of California* (San Francisco: Parker Printing Co., 1946), 127; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 5, "California,"

Appendix B

Table 2 Overcrowding among Black Households in West Oakland and North Richmond, 1940–1950

	1940			1950		
Census tracts	<i>Dwelling units</i>	<i>No. overcrowded*</i>	% overcrowded	Dwelling units	<i>No. overcrowded*</i>	% <i>overcrowded</i>
West Oakland						
14	237	40	16.9	1,440	416	28.9
15	357	68	19.0	1,937	628	32.4
16	599	62	10.3	1,635	474	29.0
17	224	36	16.1	1,614	442	27.4
18	98	18	18.4	772	221	28.6
21	436	73	16.7	1,626	588	36.2
Total	1,951	297	15.2	9,024	2,769	30.7
North Richmond						
CCC-3	74	6	8.1	1,111	623	56.1

SOURCES : U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Reports on Population*, vol. 7, *Supplementary Report—Statistics for Census Tracts: Population and Housing*, "Oakland-Berkeley Calif., and Adjacent Area," 40, 73; and *US. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tracts Statistics*, bulletin P-D49, "Selected Population and Housing Characteristics, San Francisco—Oakland, Calif.," 74–75.

*Overcrowded households are those with 1.01 persons or more per room.

Appendix C

**Table 3: Civilian Employment and Unemployment during World War II
(Numbers in thousands)**

		1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
All Non-institutional Civilians		99,840	99,900	98,640	94,640	93,220	94,090
Civilian Labor Force	Total	55,640	55,910	56,410	55,540	54,630	53,860
	% of Population	55.7%	56%	57.2%	58.7%	58.6%	57.2%
Employed	Total	47,520	50,350	53,750	54,470	53,960	52,820
	% of Population	47.6%	50.4%	54.5%	57.6%	57.9%	56.1%
	% of Labor Force	85.4%	90.1%	95.3%	98.1%	98.8%	98.1%
Unemployed	Total	8,120	5,560	2,660	1,070	670	1,040
	% of Population	8.1%	5.6%	2.7%	1.1%	0.7%	1.1%
	% of Labor Force	14.6%	9.9%	4.7%	1.9%	1.2%	1.9%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population, 1940 to date." Available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat1.pdf>.

Appendix D

Black Panther Ten-Point Plan

1. WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.
We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.
2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE.
We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every person employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the American businessmen will not give full employment, then the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.
3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.
We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of our fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.
4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS.
We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.
5. WE WANT DECENT EDUCATION FOR OUR PEOPLE THAT EXPOSES THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DECADENT AMERICAN SOCIETY. WE WANT EDUCATION THAT TEACHES US OUR TRUE HISTORY AND OUR ROLE IN THE PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY.
We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.
6. WE WANT COMPLETELY FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE.
We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people,

health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventive medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide our selves with proper medical attention and care.

7. **WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE, OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR, All OPPRESSED PEOPLE INSIDE THE UNITED STATES.**

We believe that the racist and fascist government of the United States uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against black people, other people of color and poor people inside the united States. We believe it is our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces and that all Black and oppressed people should be armed for self defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.

8. **WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO ALL WARS OF AGGRESSION.**

We believe that the various conflicts which exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desire of the United States ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the United States government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.

9. **WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE NOW HELD IN U. S. FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, CITY AND MILITARY PRISONS AND JAILS. WE WANT TRIALS BY A JURY OF PEERS FOR ALL PERSONS CHARGED WITH SO-CALLED CRIMES UNDER THE LAWS OF THIS COUNTRY.**

We believe that the many Black and poor oppressed people now held in United States prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the United States or by the United States military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trial.

10. **WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE, PEACE AND PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CONTROL OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY.**

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are most disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

(<http://www.blackpanther.org/TenPoint.htm>)

Appendix E

Stagolee Lyrics

Anon (USA, c. 1870)

Stagolee (also Stagalee, Staggerlee, Stacker Lee, Stack O'Lee) is one of the most famous of American ballads and exists in many different versions. Here are two of them.

Version A.

It was early, early one mornin',
When I heard my bulldog bark,
Stagolee and Billy Lyons
Was squabblin' in the dark.
Stagolee told Billy Lyons,
'What do you think of that?
You win all my money, Billy,
Now you spit in my Stetson hat.'
Stagolee, he went a-walkin'
In the red-hot, broilin' sun—
Says, 'Bring me my six-shooter,
Lawd, I wants my forty-one.'
Stagolee, he went a-walkin'
Through the mud and through the sand.
Says, 'I feel mistreated this mornin',
I could kill most any man.'
Billy Lyons told Stagolee,
Please don't take my life,
I've got three little helpless chillun
And one poor, pitiful wife.'
'Don't care nothin' about your chillun,
And nothin' about your wife,
You done mistreated me, Billy,
And I'm bound to take your life.'
He shot him three times in the shoulder,
Lawd, and three times in the side,
Well, the last time he shot him
Cause Billy Lyons to die.
Stagolee told Mrs Billy,
'You don't believe yo' man is dead;
Come into the bar-room,
See the hole I shot in his head.'
The high sheriff told the deputies,
Get your pistols and come with me.

We got to go 'rest that
Bad man Stagolee.'
The deputies took their pistols
And they laid them on the shelf—
If you want that bad man Stagolee,
Go 'rest him by yourself.'
High sheriff ask the bartender,
'Who can that bad man be?'
'Speak softly,' said the bartender,
It's that bad man Stagolee.'
He touch Stack on the shoulder,
Say, 'Stack, why don't you run?'
'I don't run, white folks,
When I got my forty-one.'
The hangman put the mask on,
Tied his hands behind his back,
Sprung the trap on Stagolee
But his neck refuse to crack.
Hangman, he got frightened,
Said, 'Chief, you see how it be—
I can't hang this man,
Better set him free.'
Three hundred dollar funeral,
Thousand dollar hearse,
Satisfaction undertaker
Put Stack six feet in the earth.
Stagolee, he told the Devil,
Says, 'Come on and have some Fun—
You stick me with your pitchfork,
I'll shoot you with my forty-one.'
Stagolee took the pitchfork,
And he laid it on the shelf.
Says, 'Stand back, Tom Devil,
I'm gonna rule Hell by myself.'

Version B.

O Mr Police Officer,
How can it be,
You arrest everybody
But cruel Staggerlee,
That bad man,
O Cruel Staggerlee.
Billy Lyons told Staggerlee
Please don't take my life
Says I gotten two little babes
And a darling loving wife.

He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
What I care about your two babes
And darling loving wife
Said you done stole my stetson hat
I bound to take your life.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
Oh Ho O Home
With a forty-four
With his eyes wide open
He's lying down on the floor
That bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
Gentlemen of the jury,
What do you think of that?
Said Staggerlee killed Billy Lyons
For a five-dollar Stetson hat.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
Standing on the gallows
Staggerlee he cursed
The judge said Let's kill him
'fore he kills some of us
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
Standing on the gallows
Hanging up high
At 12 o'clock they killed him
We was all glad to see him die.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee
O Mr Officer,
How can it be,
You can arrest everybody
But cruel Staggerlee,
That bad man,
O Cruel Staggerlee.