

ABSTRACT

VALEIKA, KATHRYN ROBERTS. *Can These Rights Be Fulfilled?: The Planning, Participants, and Debates of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966.* (Under the direction of Dr. Blair LM Kelley.)

On June 1 and 2, 1966, the White House sponsored the “To Fulfill These Rights Conference” in Washington, D.C. Following a year of planning by a council of civil rights activists, government officials, and big business and labor leaders, roughly 2500 people from diverse backgrounds and civil rights experiences attended the conference. Previously neglected by other historians, the conference and its planning reveal two important and related dynamics of the movement: the shifting alliances among civil rights leaders and the re-examination of civil rights goals and strategies. In particular, debates over the conference’s list of invitees, format, and procedures capture disagreements between established civil rights leaders, the White House, and labor and business leaders over who would, or could, direct the next phase of the civil rights movement. Secondly, conference debates on the reach of federal power, affirmative action, Vietnam, the expansion of the movement, fears of imminent violence, and the emergence of Black Power reveal the conflicting ideas that would create deep divisions between activists, liberals, and the federal government in the late 1960s and years to come.

Can These Rights Be Fulfilled?: The Planning, Participants, and Debates of the
To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966

by
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the men and women who have fought, and continue to fight, for civil rights for all Americans.

BIOGRAPHY

Kathryn Roberts Valeika earned her B.A. in history and her M.A. in German from Middlebury College and her J.D. from the University of North Carolina School of Law. After practicing employment law, she enrolled in the Masters of History program at North Carolina State University to pursue her interest in United States history.

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INTRODUCTION

June 1, 1966. The day dawned cloudy and cool in Washington, D.C. On the sidewalks outside the Sheraton Park and Shoreham Hotels, groups of protestors held pickets boasting, “Save us from our colored leaders,” “\$25,000 for White House Conference booze, \$8 per day for poor,” and “Self-determination for Vietnam and for the ghetto.”¹ Inside the hotels’ banquet halls, roughly 2500 people dressed in their Sunday best advanced their own civil rights agendas, debating the future of the movement in committees with panels of experts, disrupting those meetings with side conversations, and clogging the hallways with impromptu discussions on civil rights issues.² In one heated exchange on affirmative action, Charles Valentine—a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and associate professor at Washington University in St. Louis—argued that conference delegates must “face finally the necessity of more than equal opportunity, of preferential priorities, of special rights for Negroes and other non-whites,” meeting with applause.³ Cenoria Johnson, a member of the National Urban League, immediately countered, “Wherever Whitney Young is, he is trembling . . . We don’t want preferential treatment . . . [we] cannot afford it . . . it is

¹ Ronald Schwartz, “Outside there were pickets,” Washington Afro-American 4 June 1966, in Steven F. Lawson, ed., Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969: A Collection from the Holdings of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, Part IV (Fredericksburg, MD: University Publications of America, 1987): Reel 20, Microfilm 38.

² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 11; Richard H. Rovere, “Letter from Washington,” The New Yorker 18 June 1966: 126.

³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 36.

not politically feasible,” she said, also receiving applause.⁴ Down the hall, delegates argued over who should, or could, control the movement—the federal government, existing civil rights organizations, or another group entirely? “The question is whether a Government can ever finance its own revolution?” asserted delegate Reverend Bedit.⁵ Other discussions addressed the role of civil disobedience and public demonstrations in the movement’s future. According to Jack Young, of Jackson, Mississippi, “We do not come here to make any recommendations but to get some answers. What can we as individuals do other than going out into the streets?”⁶ Purportedly neutral, expert panelists found themselves defending the federal government’s actions. In one tense exchange, Willard Brown, president of the Charleston, West Virginia, Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), wondered, “Whether we can expect aid and assistance from the federal government to allow these human beings . . . to be admitted to these housing projects?” Panelist Morton Schussheim of the Housing and Urban Development Department interrupted Brown and curtailed his remarks, interjecting, “[I] want to respond to that question calmly, but I must say that those of you who have come here to find the federal government at fault in all of these affairs . . . have perhaps to choose some better tactic.”⁷

⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 36.

⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm, 48.

⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 22.

⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 132-33.

Despite the protests outside the hotels and the emotional debates inside, one journalist described the conference as uneventful. For reporters who had covered earlier civil rights events, he wrote, such as the sit-ins, Freedom Rides, or march from Selma to Montgomery, the conference was nearly humdrum. “There wasn’t any action . . . [the] seminars might have been regional sales meetings,” he explained.⁸ Indeed, in the years and months leading up to the conference, the country had witnessed some of the bloodiest civil rights confrontations in the movement’s history.

A year-and-a-half earlier, on January 2, 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., announced his plans to lead a voting registration drive in Selma, Alabama. “We will seek to arouse the federal government by marching by the thousands [to] the places of registration,” he proclaimed.⁹ For the next two-and-a-half-months, King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—who had begun their own voting registration projects in Selma even before King arrived—and citizens of Selma marched, held protests, and were arrested and beaten as they attempted to enforce their voting rights.¹⁰ As the campaign continued, tensions strained between SNCC and SCLC.

Following King’s imprisonment after one of the protests, and in an effort to retain its influence on the voting registration drive, SNCC invited Malcolm X to speak to a crowd

⁸ James J. Kilpatrick, “The New Rights Reality: Pervasive Compulsion,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 7 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 33.

⁹ Juan Williams, Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965 (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987) 258.

¹⁰ Williams, 258, 261.

gathered at Brown's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the same church at which King had announced the Selma campaign a month earlier. "The white people should thank Dr. King for holding people in check, for there are other [black leaders] who do not believe in these [nonviolent] measures," Malcolm told the crowd of hundreds.¹¹ A few weeks later, on February 21, Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem.

In Selma, the murder of activist Jimmie Lee Johnson during one nighttime march prompted James Bevel to call for a march from Selma to Montgomery to deliver a list of voting demands to Governor George Wallace in the state capital. On March 7, Hosea Williams of the SCLC and John Lewis of SNCC led 600 people out of Brown's Chapel to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, spanning the Alabama River en route to Montgomery. Dozens of Alabama state troopers, some on horseback, waited for the marchers on the other side of the bridge, brandishing billy clubs and gas masks. When the marchers refused to retreat, they were charged on horseback, beaten with billy clubs, and overwhelmed with tear gas. Video footage of "Bloody Sunday" immediately reached television sets across the country, sparking national outrage.

As their numbers swelled with supporters from around the nation, King (who had not marched on Bloody Sunday) led a second group of marchers over the Edmund Pettus Bridge again on March 9, in violation of a federal court order to postpone another march. When they were again confronted by a band of state troopers, King prayed with the marchers and decided to lead them back to the church. King's decision to return to Selma further strained tensions between SNCC and the SCLC. As SNCC executive secretary James Forman later

¹¹ Williams, 262.

recalled, the Selma campaign had exposed “disagreement on such key issues as concepts of leadership, working methods, and organizing voters.”¹² A few days later, Unitarian minister James Reeb, a volunteer from Boston, was returning to Brown’s Chapel late one evening when he was killed by a group of angry white segregationists. In response to the Selma violence, Johnson announced to Congress and a television audience of over 70 million his intention to send voting rights legislation to Congress, claiming that the cause of African Americans must “be our cause, too.”¹³

Finally, on March 21, following approval from the federal court, 4000 people began the 54-mile march to Montgomery, with nearly 25,000 making the final steps to the state capital five days later, presenting a petition to Governor Wallace’s office demanding the removal of all barriers to voting. Hours later, Viola Liuzzo, a visiting housewife from Michigan who had volunteered to drive marchers back to Selma, was shot and killed by a group of Klansmen.¹⁴

The violence of the Selma campaign—three deaths, hundreds of arrests, countless brutal beatings—helped push the Voting Rights Act through Congress. Signed into law on August 6, President Johnson called the bill “one of the most monumental laws in the entire history of American Freedom.”¹⁵

¹² Clayborne Carson, et al., eds., The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader (New York: Penguin, 1991) 217, 221.

¹³ Taylor Branch, At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006) 114.

¹⁴ Branch, At Canaan’s Edge, 174.

¹⁵ Williams, 285.

Another outcome of the Selma campaign was the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). Inspired by the Selma campaign, the residents of Lowndes County—situated between Selma and Montgomery—began their own registration drive. Of the county’s 5122 African American residents, not a one was registered to vote. In late March, following the march to Montgomery, Stokely Carmichael and others from SNCC joined the Lowndes movement.¹⁶ Following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, residents established the LCFO, an independent political party. The LCFO adopted a black panther as its symbol—a symbol that would later be co-opted by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, who formed the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, in the fall of 1966.¹⁷

As the Selma campaign gained momentum, so did U.S involvement in Vietnam. The president ordered “Operation Rolling Thunder” in February, beginning a sustained bombing campaign on North Vietnam that would continue for the next three years. The first units of Marines were deployed to South Vietnam a few weeks later.¹⁸ King made his first public anti-Vietnam comment on March 2 at Howard University, announcing at Convocation, “The war in Vietnam is accomplishing nothing.”¹⁹ By the end of 1965, over 200,000 U.S. troops had been deployed to Vietnam. Growing awareness of and opposition to the war was marked by the first teach-in, held on March 24 and 25 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

¹⁶ Hasan Kwame Jeffries, “Organizing for More than the Vote: The Political Radicalization of Local People in Lowndes County, Alabama, 1965-1966,” Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America, eds. Jeanne Theoharis, et al. (New York: New York UP, 2005) 140-41.

¹⁷ Jeffries, 142.

¹⁸ Branch, At Canaan’s Edge, 40.

¹⁹ Branch, At Canaan’s Edge, 23.

Amid the Vietnam escalation and the debates on voting rights legislation, President Johnson delivered the commencement address at Howard University on June 4, 1965. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 one year earlier, which had outlawed discrimination in employment and public accommodations, and the proposed legislation to guarantee voting rights, President Johnson believed that more than equal opportunity legislation was required to rectify, in his words, the “devastating heritage of long years of slavery . . . and a century of oppression, hatred and injustice.”²⁰ To begin to overcome these hurdles, he called for a White House sponsored conference to be held one year later, a conference that would be titled “To Fulfill These Rights.”²¹ The conference’s title recalled President Truman’s 1947 report, “To Secure These Rights,” in which a Truman-appointed committee had proposed several civil rights measures, including federal desegregation, fair employment practices, the end of voting discrimination, and a greater role for the Department of Justice in prosecuting civil rights violations.²² Nearly two decades later, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the pending Voting Rights Act had indeed secured many of these “rights” . . . on paper. Now President Johnson was determined to influence the next phase of the civil rights movement, a phase that would see new strategies, priorities, and leadership.

Johnson recognized that he had a narrow window in which to make civil rights gains. On the morning after he had been sworn into office following President Kennedy’s

²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” Commencement Address, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 4 June 1965.

²¹ Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights.”

²² Steven F. Lawson, “Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation,” Debating the Civil Rights Movement, eds. Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) 7-8.

assassination on November 22, 1963, Johnson told his closest advisors, “The first priority is passage of the civil rights act.”²³ Johnson knew he had a brief moment to capitalize on the momentum the movement had built through the summer of 1963—culminating in the march on Washington in August—and on the growing national support for civil rights, support buoyed by the nation’s grief for their murdered president. Accordingly, Johnson declared to a joint-session of Congress on November 27, “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long.”²⁴ Even southern Congressmen joined in the standing ovation at close of Johnson’s speech.²⁵ Bolstered by Johnson’s high approval ratings, sympathy for the civil rights movement, and the continued mourning for Kennedy, the Civil Rights Act was passed in the summer of 1964, with polls showing that more than sixty percent of Americans approved of the legislation.²⁶

The 1964 elections earned Johnson robust support in Congress. Democrats gained two seats in the Senate, providing a 68 to 32 majority. In the House of Representatives, Democrats gained 36 seats, creating a 295 to 140 majority. Johnson also won the election handily, carrying 44 states, plus the District of Columbia, and earning 486 electoral votes, leaving opponent Barry Goldwater with a scant 52. The Democrats’ tremendous success at

²³ Robert Mann, When Freedom Would Triumph: The Civil Rights Struggle in Congress, 1954-1968 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007) 168.

²⁴ Mann, 169.

²⁵ Mann, 169.

²⁶ Mann, 172.

the polls led Johnson to declare, “We can pass it all now.”²⁷ As significant as the numbers at the polls, however, was the seismic shift in the political landscape. Numbers showed that Democrats were losing white southern voters, and if they hoped to win in the South again, they would need the votes of African Americans, adding fire to Johnson’s drive to pass voting rights legislation.²⁸

Johnson’s journey to civil rights advocate had many turns and twists. While some trace his commitment to his roots as a schoolteacher of poor Mexican Americans in Texas, his record in Congress was inconsistent. While he supported the 1957 Civil Rights Act, he had also been responsible for diluting it to appease his fellow Southerners. Arnold Aronson, secretary of the largest national coalition of pro-civil rights organizations in the country, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, recalled, “Johnson was our enemy all of the years that he was Senate majority leader. He cut the heart out of the [1957 civil rights] bill.”²⁹

Johnson’s interest in and public to commitment to civil rights had grown once Kennedy chose him as vice president and appointed him chair of the Committee on Equal Opportunity. According to Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, “I began to see the first real change in Johnson when he was Vice President.”³⁰ As Kennedy began to formulate a comprehensive civil rights bill, Johnson was instrumental in planning the legislative and southern strategy essential to the bill’s success.³¹ Johnson’s fears of unrest

²⁷ Mark Stern, Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1992) 210-11.

²⁸ Stern, 211.

²⁹ Stern, 161.

³⁰ Stern, 153.

³¹ Stern, 159.

and for the future of the South fostered his commitment to real civil rights change. At the time, Johnson explained, “The biggest danger to American stability is the politics of principle which brings out the masses in irrational fights for unlimited goals, for once the masses begin to move then the whole thing begins to explode.”³² His concern for the South also contributed to this shift. As Johnson stated, “I want the ordeals to end and the South to stand as the full and honored part of a proud and united land.”³³ Once Kennedy was assassinated, Johnson also latched on to civil rights as a political issue. In winning the 1960 election, Kennedy’s base had been the liberal vote. “I knew,” Johnson recounted, “that if I didn’t get out in front on this issue [the liberals] would get me.”³⁴ Yet despite his political motivations, Johnson did believe in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, telling Wilkins, “I want that bill passed,” even if it meant losing the coming election.³⁵

Johnson’s strategy greatly differed from that of the Kennedy administration. When Kennedy won the 1960 election, he had done so with the strong support of African Americans and civil rights activists.³⁶ Yet early on in his presidency, Kennedy was slow to pursue civil rights measures. After Kennedy’s election, Wilkins stated, “If you ask me who, of all the men in political life, I would trust to do the most about civil rights as a president, it would be Lyndon Johnson.”³⁷ In the few efforts he did make, Kennedy chose to work through the executive, as opposed to legislative, branch, fearing that he would alienate

³² Stern, 163.

³³ Stern, 162.

³⁴ Stern, 161.

³⁵ Stern, 164.

³⁶ Mann, 88.

³⁷ Mann, 88.

southern committee leaders and voting blocs.³⁸ Kennedy merged the President's Committee on Government Contract and Government Employment Policy into the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), naming Johnson as its chair. The EEO Committee was charged with fighting discriminatory hiring by federal contractors. Kennedy also pushed the Justice Department to file more civil rights suits.³⁹

Following the 1961 Freedom Rides, Kennedy decided not to issue a civil rights transportation bill, choosing rather to have the Justice Department pressure the Interstate Commerce Commission to desegregate bus terminals.⁴⁰ In fact, at the close of 1961, only one civil rights measure had passed—a bill allowing the United States Civil Rights Commission to continue for two more years. When the constitutional amendment outlawing the poll tax was passed in 1962, it had done so only with very little help from the president.⁴¹ While Kennedy did issue an executive order in 1962 banning housing discrimination, it was limited to federally funded, owned, operated, or insured housing.⁴²

Kennedy's failure to pursue civil rights more directly and aggressively frustrated many African Americans and civil rights activists.⁴³ According to King, Kennedy may have been doing more than either Presidents Truman or Eisenhower had done for civil rights, "but that didn't mean that [Kennedy] was giving the kind of leadership at that time that the

³⁸ Mann, 108-09.

³⁹ Mann, 110, 112.

⁴⁰ Mann, 118.

⁴¹ Mann, 124.

⁴² Mann, 133.

⁴³ Mann, 113.

enormity of the problem demanded.”⁴⁴ It was only in 1963 that Kennedy truly began to move on civil rights issues, finally formulating legislation that would eventually be passed as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Previously kept at a distance by the president’s office, Johnson became deeply involved with developing a legislative strategy to guide the bill through Congress.

As president, Johnson appointed many African Americans to several high positions, including Thurgood Marshall first to Solicitor General and later to Associate Supreme Court Justice and naming 18 African Americans to the federal bench. He chose Clifford Alexander as White House Deputy Counsel and later as head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). He also promoted Robert Weaver as secretary of the Housing and Urban Development Department. Roger Wilkins, nephew of Roy Wilkins, was named director of the Community Relations service.⁴⁵ Johnson would rely heavily on these men to plan the To Fulfill These Rights Conference.

It was in this context that Johnson worked to carry civil rights further than any of his predecessors. In light of his majorities in Congress, his popularity, and the growing support among whites for civil rights measures, Johnson suggested the To Fulfill These Rights Conference. The event, he hoped, would usher in a new phase of civil rights designed to target root causes of inequality like education, housing, justice, and jobs, a mission that complemented his Great Society programs.

⁴⁴ Mann, 133.

⁴⁵ Mann, 254.

It took one year of contentious planning for the conference to materialize, however, and in that time, significant developments influenced the context of that planning and the final event. On July 2, 1965, the EEOC finally opened its doors, following its charter one year earlier in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund promptly filed 476 complaints of discrimination with the agency. Of the over 14,000 complaints filed in the next 18 months, only 110 would be settled by the EEOC, which lacked the manpower and resources to tackle its overwhelming caseload, frustrating those who believed in legal strategies to achieve civil rights change.⁴⁶

Compounding these frustrations with inadequate federal programs, the Watts riots erupted on August 11, just days after the Voting Rights Act was signed into law. A suburb of Los Angeles, Watts had seen tensions between police and citizens escalate over several weeks, relations stretched thin following a series of assaults and rapes by policemen arresting African Americans. Tensions exploded following a traffic stop of Ronald Frye, an African American suspected of drunk driving. Frye, recently discharged from the Air Force, passed the sobriety test to the chagrin of the police officer. As a growing crowd taunted the white officer, police drew their guns and arrested Frye and two of his family members. Protest and chaos ensued. Over the course of six days, looting, fighting, and vandalism ravaged the suburb. Police and firefighters were challenged and shot at as they attempted to restore order, and the National Guard was dispatched to quell the violence. In the wake of the riots, 34 lay dead; thousands had been beaten and arrested; city blocks smoldered, many burned to the ground. The Watts riots stunned King, opening his eyes anew to the depth of poverty and

⁴⁶ Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 247.

desperation among many poor African Americans. Walking through Watts, speaking with its frustrated citizens, he worried, “We as Negro leaders—and I include myself—have failed to take the civil rights movement to the masses of the people.”⁴⁷ In the wake of the riots, Johnson asked King to reinforce Johnson’s civil rights commitment to the media, asking him to “refer to that Howard University Speech. Nobody ever publicized that.”⁴⁸ That same month, Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, which continues to require federal contractors to abide by equal employment opportunity laws and to take affirmative actions—such as recruiting and training programs—to assure that minorities are not underrepresented in their workforces.

The year 1966 began with bloody retaliation as African Americans put the Voting Rights Act to the test. On January 10, a bomb fatally wounded Vernon Dahmer, president of the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, NAACP, after he exhorted African Americans to register to vote in a radio broadcast, offering to pay poll taxes for anyone who could not afford them. He died two days later.⁴⁹ In the meantime, King and the SCLC were turning their attentions northwards, beginning a campaign in Chicago that would focus on open housing and education. As these battles unfolded at home, U.S. involvement in Vietnam became more entrenched and bloody, and the public’s awareness of the country’s commitment there grew.

These battles, successes, and failures set the tone for the conference in June 1966. While the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act held great promise, bloody

⁴⁷ Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge*, 298.

⁴⁸ Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge*, 307.

⁴⁹ Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition in Mississippi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 398.

battles on the streets and in voting registration lines were required to implement them. As civil rights advocates grew unsatisfied and frustrated with this progress—illustrated by divisions between the SCLC and SNCC, the riots in Watts, and King’s own changing priorities—civil rights activists found themselves at a turning point, a turning point complicated by the investment of Johnson’s attention and U.S. dollars in Vietnam. While it was clear to both civil rights activists and the White House that the movement had not reached its conclusion with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act, there were disagreements over the next set of goals and strategies. Because the planning of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference and the conference itself transpired as these questions were unfolding, they set a stage to understand the issues, tensions, anxieties, and disjunctions that characterized the following years of the civil rights movement.

By analyzing the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, my research captures two important and related dynamics of the movement: the shifting alliances among civil rights leaders and the re-examination of civil rights goals and strategies. In particular, debates over the conference’s list of invitees, format, and procedures capture disagreements among established civil rights leaders, the White House, and labor and business leaders over who would, or could, direct the next phase of civil rights activism. Secondly, conference debates on the expansion of federal power, affirmative action, Vietnam, the growth of the movement, fears of imminent violence, and the rise of Black Power reveal the conflicting ideas that would create deep divisions between activists, liberals, and the federal government in the late 1960s and years to come.

Chapter One describes discussions of who would plan and attend the conference, analyzing the November planning session, the make-up and work of the Planning Council, and discussions about the list of invitees to the conference. Chapter Two considers how decisions were made regarding the conference's format, its committee meeting structure, and its resolutions procedures. Chapter Three examines the setting of the conference's agenda and the choice of economic security and welfare, education, housing, administration of justice, and health as the major topics of discussion.

Chapter Four explores the broad themes that emerged during conference meetings, highlighting discussions on the proper role of federal versus state and local power; the desire for and parameters of affirmative action programs; the relationship of U.S. involvement in Vietnam to the civil rights movement; the expansion of the civil rights movement by advancing it out of the South, including other minorities, and recruiting uncommitted Americans; and the fears that the conference's failure would fuel violence, riots, and the growth of the Black Power movement. Chapter Five analyzes the response to the conference by delegates, the media, and protestors.

Understanding the conference builds a bridge from civil rights work of the early 1960s to the shifting priorities and new personalities of the late 1960s and early 1970s, illuminating in particular the expansion of civil rights goals beyond desegregation and voting, the divisiveness of Vietnam, and the growth of the Black Power movement. Analyzing the intersection of national and local forces at the conference provides an opportunity to examine the demands and expectations that each camp placed on the other. Studying the conference also reveals the ways that the civil rights movement transformed,

rather than declined, post-1965, combating declension myths. The conference debates show how alliances, issues, and strategies were changing, not dissolving.

One writer studying the Mississippi River has noted that the river is not just one stream of water. It is like a rope with many threads, some pulling against the other, making the river dynamic and layered.⁵⁰ Studying the historiography of the civil rights movement is like studying the Mississippi: diverse currents in research and analysis emerge, each influencing one another as they surge forward. These currents can be broadly grouped into several streams: those offering an insider's perspective, those that chiefly provide a top-down approach, those that offer a local perspective, those that offer a biographical approach, those that use labor relations as an analytical paradigm, those that use policy developments as a framework, and those that shift the paradigm completely, offering a longer and more complicated vision of the civil rights movement.

“Historical” accounts from participants in the movement fall into the category of insider histories.⁵¹ While these works offer valuable perspectives on an individual's experiences and personal investment in the movement, they are limited by their inability to separate biases from historical coverage.

⁵⁰ John M. Barry, Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998) 20.

⁵¹ Charles W. Eagles, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,” The Journal of Southern History 66 (Nov. 2000): 817-18. Falling into this category are works by participants deeply committed to and concerned about the movement's success. See, for example, James Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart (New York: Arbor House, 1985); Mary King, Freedom Song (New York: William Morrow, 1987). James Farmer offers a moving account of his tumultuous, and often brutal, civil rights experiences. Similarly, Mary King's emotional description of her involvement with SNCC also offers an insider's perspective on the movement in the 1960s.

Even when professional historians enter the scholarly fray, they too, can encounter challenges when writing objective histories. As Charles Eagles has noted, some professional historians have had trouble separating their biases from their analyses “because of their profound and justifiable moral commitment to the aims of the civil rights movement,” suggesting that he, too, wrestled with his interest in the movement’s success and his role as an objective historian.⁵² Further complicating the task is the fact that many American historians did engage in the civil rights movement.⁵³

One of the most popular approaches to civil rights history is through biography. This wave of histories focuses on a single well-known person’s civil rights experience and the evolution of that individual’s relationship to the civil rights movement, highlighting figures with a national presence, like King and Johnson. Many biographical historians have been drawn to these men and to the non-violent aspects of the movement.⁵⁴ While these are

⁵² Eagles, 815.

⁵³ Eagles, 820. Indeed, notes Eagles, “[P]rofessional interest in the movement grew in large part out of personal involvement with the campaign for civil rights.” Eagles, 821. For example, Harvard Sitkoff has noted that his “perspective derives from association and identification with the movement in the early sixties” and that he “felt compelled to write of the stirrings and sufferings of these battles.” Harvard Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008) viii.

⁵⁴ Adam Fairclough, “Historians and the Civil Rights Movement,” Journal of American Studies 24 (1990): 391-92; David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: William Morrow, 1986); Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Taylor Branch, Pillar of Fire, America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); Branch, At Canaan’s Edge. Garrow’s work and Branch’s three-volume collection are the most extensive histories of King’s life and participation in the movement. Historical works on Johnson include Joseph Califano, The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Robert A. Divine, ed., The Johnson Years (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1987); and Johnson’s own autobiography, Lyndon

valuable works, they eclipse the contributions of others and of the role that violence and self-defense did in fact play in the movement.

Other important biographies shifted their focus to a more diverse set of leaders, those whose power emanated from a local level. For example, biographies of Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker focus on the roles these women played in the movement and the movement's impact on them, introducing new discussions of race, class and sex into movement histories.⁵⁵ They also explore new ideas about the civil rights experience, showing how local activists could be transformed into leaders and describing homegrown approaches to organizing. Although these works focus on a different kind of leadership, they take a similar approach to works on King. Specifically, these biographies focus on a single, prominent person and follow their trajectory and development through the civil rights movement. Indeed, noted one historian, "biographical works have proved, from the beginning and throughout the 1990s, perhaps the most popular form of study of the civil rights movement."⁵⁶

Alongside biographies, and often overlapping with that stream of research, another significant and dominant analytical current among professional histories employs a top-down perspective to describe the civil rights movement. These top-down histories primarily offer analyses of political and institutional developments and biographical profiles of movement

B. Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969 (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

⁵⁵ Chana Kai Lee, For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Joanne Grant, Ella Baker: Freedom Bound (New York: Wiley, 1998); Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Eagles, 825.

leaders. This approach omits the perspectives of lesser-known individuals who engaged in civil rights work in different ways depending on their location and economic situation.⁵⁷

Another common feature of these top-down histories is their emphasis on the federal presence and its indispensability to the success of the movement, as opposed to recognizing the role played by both national and local civil rights activists.⁵⁸ For example, historian Steven Lawson claims that without the efforts of Johnson, Congress, and the Supreme Court, the southern civil rights movement “would have lacked the power and authority to defeat state governments.”⁵⁹ Generally, top-down works offer political histories, focusing on legislative and judicial successes, like the *Brown* decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as changes in electoral politics.⁶⁰ Another theme of these works is their focus on events that can be characterized as community mobilizing, i.e., mobilizing the community for large-scale protests, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, and the march to Montgomery. These events drew the media’s attention, eclipsing the quotidian work on the ground of registering voters and developing community networks, events best described as community organizing.⁶¹ Likewise, most top-down histories also narrowed the movement’s scope by portraying it as one pursuing

⁵⁷ Eagles, 822.

⁵⁸ Steven F. Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,” *American Historical Review* 96 (Apr. 1991): 456; Eagles, 816; Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, 3.

⁵⁹ Steven Lawson, “Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation,” 3.

⁶⁰ Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 456; Eagles, 822-24.

⁶¹ Eagles, 826; Charles Payne, “Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches,” *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) 115.

primarily non-economic goals, like desegregation in education and public accommodations and the right to vote.⁶²

Another common feature of top-down histories is the use of a foreshortened timeline for the movement, situating its inception in the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and its conclusion in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or in the 1968 assassination of King.⁶³ More recent studies have connected this phase of the civil rights movement with efforts extending back not only to the return of African American veterans from World War II and that war's Double V campaign (a campaign in pursuit of victory at home and abroad), but even earlier to the 1920s and 1930s, tracing connections to the infrapolitics and resourceful expressions of black resistance, alliances with the American Communist Party, and New Deal coalitions between African Americans and liberal reformers.⁶⁴ Thus, this stream of top-down civil rights histories generally characterized the movement as one that was directed by a few nationally recognized figures; was supported by the federal government; pursued non-violent, non-economic change; and lasted from 1955 until the late 1960s.

⁶² Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," The Journal of American History 91 (March 2005): 2-3, 16. According to Hall, the "struggle for economic justice has been erased altogether" by the dominant civil rights narrative. Hall, 16.

⁶³ Fairclough, 3, 387-398; Hall, 2, 3.

⁶⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," Journal of American History, 80 (1993): 105; Jeff Woods, Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2004); Eagles, 817; Hall, 8, 13, 14 (noting that "earlier labor struggles were important predecessors").

Challenging the focus and conclusions of these top-down histories are local histories researching the development of civil rights movements in specific cities and counties and in organizations, such as CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC. This stream of local histories lends depth to the movement by considering a broader group of participants and analyzing the varied approaches to civil rights change.⁶⁵ For example, organizational histories focus on the groups' emergence, climax and dissolution, charting their changes in philosophies, tactics and goals. These organizational histories emphasize their roles in making civil rights a national issue.

Localized community histories focus on previously ignored people on the ground and the evolution of civil rights policy, bringing a deeper exploration of the civil rights experience. In part, these works were spurred on by the growing interest in social history during the 1970s.⁶⁶ These local histories concentrate on unearthing the perspectives of people who had previously eluded the attention both of contemporary media and subsequent historians. By highlighting community-driven, grass roots efforts, these histories offer a more intimate picture of what it meant to be involved in the civil rights movement outside the

⁶⁵ Eagles, 824; Lawson, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation," 3; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981). Meier and Rudwick's history of CORE gives particular attention to local affiliates and their work. In his seminal work on SNCC, Carson addressed the progression of the radical within the group. Meier and Rudwick and Carson relied chiefly on oral histories and primary resources like staff meeting transcripts and position papers. Comprehensive histories of the National Urban League and the NAACP remain unwritten, although Patricia Sullivan is developing a history of the NAACP.

⁶⁶ Eagles, 826.

media's spotlight.⁶⁷ Such works unearth the ways that local conditions and personalities uniquely shaped different counties' and towns' experiences. They also focus on community organizing geared towards long-term goals—like voter registration and economic change—as opposed to focusing on the single-event mobilizing activities—like marches and protests—that earlier works had been drawn to.⁶⁸

In part, this stream of histories is influenced by the rising volume of conservative discourse on race, poverty, and civil rights. By highlighting the movement's "universal humanism," works by Charles Payne and others counter this growing negative and blame-laden rhetoric.⁶⁹ As Payne notes, it is important to talk about local actions and local people in order to show the "complexity of historical process."⁷⁰ Typical of—and problematic with—the top-down approach, claimed Payne, is its exclusive focus on national figures (who were generally male) and organizations, its belief that discrimination was simply a moral issue, its claim that the civil rights movement comprised one period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, its emphasis on interracial cooperation, and its characterization of the radicalization of the movement as unpredictable and illogical.⁷¹ Approaching the movement from the bottom-

⁶⁷ Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 457.

⁶⁸ Eagles, 828.

⁶⁹ Kevin Gaines, "Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality Since 1945," A Companion to Post-1945 America, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) 222.

⁷⁰ Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches," 115.

⁷¹ Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches," 115. For example, as William Chafe noted in his seminal study on civil rights activism in Greensboro, North Carolina, without the efforts of local black activists, legal change, like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), was an empty promise that could be delayed indefinitely by the whites in power. William Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom (New York: Oxford UP, 1981) 65.

up challenges this paradigm. Local histories reveal the ways that local people should be recognized not only as historical agents, but also as elements of a more complete picture that explains the roots and continuity of the civil right movement, particularly regarding community organizing, the evolution of Black Power, and complex ideas about non-violence and self-defense.⁷² Other community studies reached out of the South, providing histories of activists in Boston, Brooklyn, Milwaukee, and Oakland, and showcasing the diversity of local movement participants, strategies, and goals.⁷³ These community histories offer new perspectives on the interactions between white and black activists.⁷⁴ They also show that many movements were geared towards economic change, offering an antidote to earlier histories that ignored the economic goals of the movement.⁷⁵

This current of bottom-up histories has had several impacts on the historiography of the civil rights movement. First, these works give agency to African Americans in a way that top-down approaches ignore. Secondly, they include women in a fuller way than previously recognized. Finally, they connect the dots between the non-violent, relatively unified period

⁷² John Ditmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). Ditmer in particular reveals changing ideas about the use of violence for self-protection. Building on Ditmer's work, Payne's study of the civil rights movement in Greenwood, Mississippi, considered how "ordinary" people could be transformed into civil rights activists. He also documented the rise of the community organizing tradition and the development of long-term community goals. Payne, I've Got the Light of Freedom, 2-5.

⁷³ Jeanne Theoharis, et al., eds, Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America (New York: New York UP, 2005).

⁷⁴ Fairclough, 393; Payne, I've Got the Light of Freedom.

⁷⁵ J. Todd Moyer, Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 23. Moyer's study of Sunflower County, Mississippi, from the 1950s through the 1980s and based largely on oral histories, focuses on this drive for economic opportunity.

of early-1960s and the splintering of these alliances and rise of Black Power in the late 1960s, showing continuity rather than an abrupt break.⁷⁶ They also wed the work of the 1960s to earlier activism, including pre-World War II labor struggles and post-World War II veteran engagement.⁷⁷

Complementing works that offer the perspective of unknown African Americans and their civil rights experience are works exploring how unknown white people reacted to the movement. These histories provide insight into the ways that sympathetic and politically moderate whites interacted with civil rights activists, exploring how black activists widened divisions between segregationist and more liberal whites to bring support to their initiatives, dispelling the notion of a unified white south.⁷⁸ Newer works are also cracking the top-down paradigm that focused solely on white segregationist leaders by explaining how white southern segregationists responded to the civil rights movement and developed a new language of conservatism, one grounded in words like freedom and individualism to advance their segregationist agenda.⁷⁹

Another stream of movement histories has attempted to connect these two branches—emphasizing the ways that national leaders and organizations interacted with local people and groups and the ways that these tensions and relationships shaped policy and compromises. In

⁷⁶ Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 464; Gaines, 213.

⁷⁷ Thomas C. Holt, “African-American History,” The New American History, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997) 329; Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 463.

⁷⁸ David L. Chappell, Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) xxi-xxii.

⁷⁹ Eagles, 816; Kevin M. Kruse, White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005) 6-7. Kruse attempts to fill this omission, studying white reaction to the civil rights movement in Atlanta from the 1940s to the 1970s.

his historiography of the movement, Steven Lawson suggests that “the image of overlapping spheres sharing a common segment might more accurately reflect the shape of the struggle.”⁸⁰ In this way, he suggests, we can see how primary spheres of influence—the federal government, national leaders, and local grass roots efforts—and their “shared zone of cooperation expanded or contracted according to pressures from below and political considerations from above.”⁸¹ The To Fulfill These Rights Conference falls within this shared zone of influence, creating an opportunity to examine the intersection of politics and policy, the national and the local, and the known and unknown figures who participated in the movement. Analyzing conference discussions shows how black and white citizens representing a wide range of political and social perspectives worked together for two days in June of 1966, generating extensive conversations on the future of the civil rights movement.

In histories of the movement, the conference receives scant, if any, attention. It appears most commonly in a paragraph or two in works addressing Johnson’s civil rights legacy. In his memoir, Joseph Califano, a top aide to Johnson on domestic affairs, briefly mentions the conference, but focuses primarily on the November planning session that preceded the June conference.⁸² Steven Lawson’s work, *In Pursuit of Power*, focusing on the

⁸⁰ Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 471.

⁸¹ Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 471. As Adam Fairclough notes in his historiography of the movement, “Local struggles had a state, regional and national context, and these intersected in complex ways.” Fairclough, 394. See also Meier, “Epilogue: Toward a Synthesis of Civil Rights Histories,” *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, eds. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1991) 211.

⁸² Califano, 58. One interesting contribution from Califano is his interview with Berl Bernhard, one of the conference planners. According to Bernhard’s recollection, Johnson compared the excitement he hoped the Conference would generate to that of “quivering” cows awaiting the bull entrance to the pasture in springtime. Johnson explained, “Well, I

efforts of African Americans to secure political power via the ballot and the use of federal power, also briefly mentions the conference. Writing just a few pages on the conference, Lawson claims that the White House's goal in holding the event was to reaffirm its commitment to draw in new civil rights partners from the business sector and state and local governments.⁸³ He chronicles some of the delegates' demands on the federal government, but does not delve more deeply into conference discussions or the deeper significance of the event.⁸⁴

Works on King also mention the conference, but again only fleetingly. They explain that while King attended the event, he remained in his room, making scarcely an appearance at any conference meetings.⁸⁵ What these works neglect is that roughly 2500 people other than King and Johnson attended the event, an event that received both comprehensive national and local media attention at the time and which helps explain the shifts in the civil rights movement that unfolded in the wake of the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the Watts Riots.

One contemporary report situates the conference in the context of the Moynihan Report. In 1967, Lee Rainwater and William Yancey published *The Moynihan Report and*

want a quivering conference . . . I want every damn delegate quivering with excitement and anticipation about the future of civil rights and their future opportunities in this country.” Califano, 58.

⁸³ Steven F. Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965-1982* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 44.

⁸⁴ Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power*, 46.

⁸⁵ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 470. For example, Branch notes that King went to the conference, but Branch focuses on the protests outside of the hotels. Garrow also mentions the conference, but again does so only briefly to explain King's limited role there. Garrow, 473. According to Garrow, King was not invited to speak at the conference because of his cooling relationship with Johnson, due in part to disagreements over the war.

the Politics of Controversy.⁸⁶ This work documented the development of the Moynihan Report and its public reception and included sections on the conference. The Moynihan Report, which had caused an uproar when it was issued in March 1965, had blamed the disintegration of poor, urban African American families for many of their current problems, rather than focusing on the ways that structural inequities and discrimination fed both those problems as well as the collapse of those families. Rainwater and Yancey emphasized the impact that Moynihan's report had on the conference, highlighting the decision not to include "family" as a headline topic. In the words of Clifford Alexander, White House deputy counsel and later chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the "family" was "not an action topic for a can-do conference," referring, apparently to the wide disagreement about Moynihan's findings.⁸⁷ According to Rainwater and Yancey, the White House did not convene the conference to bring many people into the civil rights discussion, but rather to tighten the federal government's control over the civil rights movement.⁸⁸

To date, only one article has examined the To Fulfill these Rights Conference in any depth whatsoever. This work, "The 1966 White House Conference on Civil Rights," by Kevin Yuill of the University of Nottingham, provides valuable insight into the conference.⁸⁹ For example, Yuill notes that Johnson neglects to include the conference in his autobiography, suggesting at the very least that Johnson felt ambivalent about the

⁸⁶ Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967).

⁸⁷ Rainwater and Yancey, 272.

⁸⁸ Rainwater and Yancey, 277, 291.

⁸⁹ Kevin L. Yuill, "The 1966 White House Conference on Civil Rights," The Historical Journal 41 (1998): 259-82.

conference.⁹⁰ He also helpfully notes that for the most part, historians have likewise ignored the conference.⁹¹

Yet Yuill's work also has its shortcomings. First, he sees the conference as part of Johnson's efforts to solidify his liberal base in an effort to strengthen his 1968 presidential bid.⁹² Accordingly, Yuill approaches the conference from a top-down perspective, neglecting the experience and the goals of the 2500 other people who attended and failing to acknowledge that the conference was actually planned by a non-White House coalition of civil rights and business leaders.

Yuill concentrates on the planning of the conference and on the divisiveness of the event. For example, he focuses on the conflicts that characterized the planning stages—in particular, furious reaction to Moynihan's report and Johnson's growing frustration with civil rights leaders and activists and disinterest in a June event. Likewise, he claims that the conference was strangled by administrative control, calling it “an entirely orchestrated affair, designed not to resolve or even meaningfully discuss problems but to maintain the illusion of progress.” This characterization forgets that the conference was to be planned by a wide array of people, including administration outsiders like John Lewis. He also neglects to include Floyd McKissick's impact on the conference by demanding that attendees be permitted to vote on resolutions, contrary to previously established protocol. Yuill claims that Johnson tried to eliminate controversy, but this is countered by the invitations to

⁹⁰ Yuill, 260. Yuill also notes that many biographers of Johnson also omit the conference. See Yuill, 260, fn 2.

⁹¹ Yuill, 260.

⁹² Yuill, 265.

McKissick and to SNCC representatives who were known to be on the outs with Johnson. He also claims that the meetings lacked interchange and debate.⁹³ While it is true that most sessions saw periods of disjointed suggestions and complaints, they were also laden with substantive debates, particularly regarding the role of the federal government, affirmative action, and Vietnam. Yuill also ignores the opinions of conference-goers who considered the conference a success and of the many cries for similar conferences at the state and local level, as well as annual national conferences.

Finally, Yuill fails to situate his research within the context of civil rights scholarship and to explore the contemporary and historical significance of the conference. He fails to see the important ways that the conference expanded debates on issues like Vietnam, affirmative action, and housing. Thus, while Yuill's article is helpful, it leaves room for a much closer look at the June conference and at the many shared concerns of the participants.

Capturing the conference, its planning, procedures, and debates, builds on existing research to provide insight into the changing dynamics of civil rights leadership, strategies, and priorities in June 1966 in a way that explains the shifting alliances among civil rights organizations and fracturing relationships with the White House and white liberals.

⁹³ Yuill, 278.

CHAPTER ONE: Who Will Fulfill These Rights?

Analyzing the backgrounds of the men and women appointed to organize the conference, the internal debates surrounding the selection of invitees to the conference, and the final list of the invitees agreed upon by these men and women reveals the struggles over who would control where the civil rights movement went next.

When Johnson announced the conference in June 1965, he envisioned a “conference of scholars, and experts, and outstanding Negro leaders—men of both races—and officials of Government at every level.”⁹⁴ The conference, which would convene one year later on June 1 and 2, 1966, was the result of months of contentious preparation. A two-day planning session was held in November 1965 at which over 200 representatives from the White House, major civil rights organizations, and big business met to discuss the conference’s agenda and to propose a set of recommendations for conference participants to evaluate. Later, this group of November participants was winnowed down to a thirty-member Planning Council to oversee the policies and organization of the conference. Based on discussions at the November session, the Planning Council determined that the conference should address five topics: economic security and welfare, education, housing, administration of justice, and health care.

Heading the fall planning was Berl Bernhard, appointed as executive director of the November planning session. At the time, Bernhard, a private attorney, was serving as executive director of the Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights, a committee that had been

⁹⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” Commencement Address, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 4 June 1965.

established at Johnson's behest. Under President Kennedy, Bernhard had served as the Staff Director of the United States Commission on Human Rights.⁹⁵ Bernhard, then, was a man with connections both to the White House and to civil rights initiatives outside of the White House. Taking over for Bernhard after November was Ben Heineman, Sr., who was appointed chairman of the conference. Heineman was chairman of the Chicago North and Western Railway and represented the conference's goal of uniting civil rights and business leaders. Though Heineman assumed the chief titular position, Bernhard continued to be deeply involved with the planning of the conference.⁹⁶

Other key figures included vice chairmen Reverend Walter Fauntroy, Jr., and Morris B. Abram. Of these four leaders, Fauntroy was the only African American appointed to a chair position. At the time, Fauntroy was also heading the Washington bureau of the SCLC and was thus the only member of a major civil rights group sitting as conference chair. Like Bernhard, Abram was also an attorney and was serving as the U.S. Representative to the United Nation's Commission on Human Rights.⁹⁷

Overseeing this group was A. Philip Randolph, the conference's honorary chairman. Randolph had once stood at odds with the federal government: His long civil rights career

⁹⁵ Berl I. Bernhard, Resume, December 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 15; White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Progress Report on November Civil Rights Conference, Press Release, 23 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

⁹⁶ Biographical Sketch of Ben Heineman, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 15.

⁹⁷ Biographical Sketch of Rev. Walter Fauntroy, Jr., in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration, Reel 15; Biographical Sketch of Morris B. Abram, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration, Reel 15; Bayard Rustin, memo to John Morsell et al., 18 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

included organizing the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and threatening a march of 50,000 on Washington in 1941 if President Roosevelt did not end discriminatory hiring by the federal government, a threat that led to Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, prohibiting government contractors, such as defense industries, from engaging in discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin, and creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee to investigate violations of the order. Randolph, now 76, had demonstrated his ability to unify various forces of the movement, bringing them together for the March on Washington in 1963 and holding the March together when John Lewis of SNCC had threatened to pull his organization out over threats that his speech would be censored.⁹⁸ Randolph's acumen at uniting warring factions was demonstrated again at the November planning session, when a group of delegates, led by Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, objected to procedural rules preventing them from passing resolutions. This protocol had been adopted in hopes of minimizing debates while still allowing as many proposals as possible to be raised. When Mitchell and his followers protested this procedure, Randolph was able to smooth over the dissent, allowing the planning session to conclude peacefully. According to Baltimore's newspaper, *The Sun*, "The conference atmosphere remained polite but strained, kept in check largely by the general respect felt for [Randolph]."⁹⁹

In 1964, Randolph had founded the A. Philip Randolph Institute to cement his long-standing goal of uniting labor and civil rights interests. He named Bayard Rustin executive

⁹⁸ John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998) 203-04.

⁹⁹ Adam Clymer, "Rights Leaders See Discontent: Block Demand for Federal Protection of Workers," The Sun 19 Nov. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 15.

director, and asked Wilkins and Lewis, among others, to serve on its board.¹⁰⁰ Randolph believed that only by collaborating with labor interests would civil rights succeed. Though white workers feared losing jobs to African Americans and were uncomfortable with integrated neighborhoods, Randolph believed that in the long run, both groups shared interests in employment equality and economic opportunity. He explained, “Political alliances are not based on love. They are based on mutual interest.” Only by working with a coalition of labor, religious, and civic groups would African Americans achieve economic equality; the civil rights movement working in isolation would fail, Randolph believed.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, Randolph’s appointment as honorary chair of the conference was not only a way to unify civil rights groups, but it also furthered Randolph’s and Johnson’s desire to involve other sectors—like labor—more deeply in the civil rights movement. In preparation for the conference, and building on work that was the heart of the institute’s mission, Randolph developed his proposal for a \$185 billion Freedom Budget, a set of programs geared towards full-employment and matching workers with better training and jobs.¹⁰²

The diverse backgrounds of these men and of those who would be called to the November planning meeting created room for confrontation. Speaking at the planning session, Ben Segal, who presided over a job training and economics panel, alluded to the potential for outbursts at the meeting, telling participants, “[W]e are here to work together,

¹⁰⁰ Paula A. Pfeffer, A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990) 281-82.

¹⁰¹ Pfeffer, 283.

¹⁰² Pfeffer, 283.

not to . . . score points or try to grind our own private axes.”¹⁰³ Indeed, the coalition of business, labor, civil rights, indigent and government representatives would make the planning session and the June conference the most diverse civil rights events ever organized.

While preparing for the November planning session, the chairmen were interested in including a broad spectrum of civil rights organizations, including those deemed the “militant contingent.”¹⁰⁴ Yet by bringing together such a diverse group of people to plan the conference, some within the federal government worried that tensions might become unmanageable. Bertram Levine, one of the first members of the newly created Community Relations Service division of the Department of Justice, wrote Bernhard that because “[m]any of the participants will come to the meeting with recollections of past personal or ideological clashes with other participants,” Bernhard should consider “a skillful group dynamics specialist who may also have good credentials in the substantive areas of our concern.”¹⁰⁵ This suggestion reflects not only past rifts between civil rights groups and the federal government, but also the deepening fissures within the civil rights movement at this moment, fissures highlighted by the conflict between the SCLC and SNCC during the march

¹⁰³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Planning Session, Nov. 17, 1965: Panel No. 1-A: Job Training and Economic Security, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 6.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony G. Amsterdam, letter to William T. Coleman, Jr., Esq., 15 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16. Unfortunately, while the letter states that it is attaching a list of the “more or less militant grass-roots Negro civil rights leaders across the country” to be considered for invitation to the planning session, this list is missing.

¹⁰⁵ Bertram Levine, memo to Berl I. Bernhard, 27 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

to Selma and by growing support in SNCC and CORE for the removal of whites from leadership positions in those organizations.

The goal of the November planning session, according to President Johnson, should be to gather “a small group of ‘men and women with long experience in the fields of housing, employment, education, social welfare and the like’ to ‘point the way toward new efforts to include the Negro American more fully in society.’”¹⁰⁶ Yet protests outside the hotel where the planning session was held indicated that not all civil rights activists were happy with the composition of the panels and audience. Unnamed civil rights leaders, labeled “militant” by the *Washington Post*, protested that “the panelists had been called together to be drawn into the Establishment.”¹⁰⁷ As the protests illustrate, the conference and its planning represented a turning point in the civil rights movement. On the one hand, activists had long called for greater federal intervention—intervention to protect civil rights workers, to force states to comply with the voting strictures of the Fifteenth Amendment, and to pass legislation that would desegregate public accommodations. Now, with this legislation passed and with the federal government showing a growing interest in directing the course of the movement, activists feared their movement would be co-opted and controlled by the federal government without their input. This tension between pursuing greater federal intervention while fearing federal control of the movement developed into a major topic of debate at the conference.

¹⁰⁶ White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Progress Report on November Civil Rights Conference, Press Release, 23 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹⁰⁷ Jean M. White, “Panel Asks Action Now On Rights: Tough Enforcement Asked of Curbs on Discrimination,” Washington Post 19 Nov. 1965: A1.

At the November meeting, amid this diverse gathering of voices, other participants fell noticeably silent. Former Deputy Secretary of Labor Daniel Moynihan, for one, said he “remained quiet all day.”¹⁰⁸ Moynihan’s controversial report “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” issued by the Department of Labor in March 1965, concluded that in addition to the discrimination now outlawed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, other factors also prevented full equality for poor, urban African American families. Moynihan and the other writers of the report concluded that unemployment and low wages, poor housing options, and limited welfare funds were destroying these families. With men either leaving or relying on their female partners for financial security, the disintegration of these families perpetuated cycles of poverty and lack of opportunity. Many of the report’s findings had, in fact, spurred the president’s remarks at Howard and his call for a civil rights conference. Though initially intended as an internal report, copies were leaked to the public, generating furious uproar. Many characterized the report as blaming the problems facing poor African Americans on the disintegration of the African American family, rather than blaming structural inequalities. Others lambasted its suggestions for preferential treatment and its criticism of current government programs.¹⁰⁹ Moynihan had resigned his position in July 1965, and while he attended the planning session and conference, he did not sit on any of the panels and

¹⁰⁸ Larry A. Still, “De Facto School Segregation ‘Facts’ Sought by Johnson,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 18 Nov. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 15.

¹⁰⁹ Eliot Fremont-Smith, “Books of the Times: The Family Affair,” New York Times 28 Apr. 1967: 39.

preferred to remain out of the spotlight.¹¹⁰ Roy Wilkins countered that most African Americans viewed discussions of “family” as “a diversionary matter to the real issues—housing, employment, job training and justice.”¹¹¹

After the November planning session, preparation for the conference slowed through the winter. In February, the president appointed the Planning Council, and the group held its first meeting on March 5. When Lewis arrived at the meeting, he was surprised at Johnson’s shift of focus from civil rights to consensus, a consensus Johnson wanted for the November congressional elections. Lewis recalled, “A consensus. He must have used that word a dozen times. And there was no consensus anymore. Not among his own party. Not among Americans. Not among black Americans.”¹¹²

The group expected to achieve this consensus was chaired by Randolph and Heineman and composed of 29 men and one woman, Dorothy Height of the National Negro Women’s Council. In addition to Randolph, the Planning Committee included the other

¹¹⁰ Godfrey Hodgson, The Gentleman From New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000) 108. Nonetheless, references to Moynihan’s report surfaced at the June conference, notably in Randolph’s opening address. Randolph focused his remarks on the horrific conditions of ghetto life and on “the ill effects of family life,” blaming the break-down of poor, urban African American families on past discrimination and its destruction of the African American man. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Philip A. Randolph, Opening Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 16. Moynihan’s report was rarely mentioned by name at the Conference. It did arise in one meeting, when Carl Teuber of the University of Wisconsin asserted that “the real thrust” of Moynihan’s report had been about the impact of the welfare system on families. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 130.

¹¹¹ Rainwater and Yancey, 273.

¹¹² Lewis and D’Orso, 362.

members of the “Big Six”— King of the SCLC, Lewis of SNCC, McKissick of CORE, Wilkins of the NAACP, and Young of the Urban League.

The Urban League was working to further cement its position as an activist organization and not solely as a social services agency. As executive director, Young had patiently lobbied within the Urban League to change both the public’s perception of it and its substantive role as a civil rights organization.¹¹³ Traditionally, the Urban League had been known for the social services it offered in northern urban areas, particularly to African American migrants from the South. For protest and legal change, the Urban League had relied on the NAACP. Known for its Legal Defense Fund, the NAACP, and Wilkins, preferred to work within legal channels and on the lobbying front to activate change. According to Wilkins, “I favored the quiet, patient lobbying tactics that worked best on Congress.”¹¹⁴

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the civil rights landscape had been dominated by the NAACP and the Urban League. Their foothold on this landscape was shifting dramatically in the 1960s, however, as new organizations began to attract media attention and compete for funding. CORE, though already two decades old, had been catapulted into the national spotlight following the 1961 Freedom Rides. CORE was also working in several locations throughout the South to register voters and protest police

¹¹³ Nancy J. Weiss, Whitney M. Young, Jr. and the Struggle for Civil Rights (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) 99-100.

¹¹⁴ Roy Wilkins and Tom Mathews, Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins (New York: Viking Press, 1982) 291.

brutality at the grass roots level.¹¹⁵ The SCLC, with King at its head, had become the media's darling in the wake of the dramatic images of Bull Connor's brutal retaliation to civil rights activists Birmingham and of King's moving "I Have a Dream" oratory at the March on Washington. SNCC had also captured the media's gaze beginning with its 1960 sit-ins and its 1964 Freedom Summer, registering voters in Mississippi and promoting education programs.¹¹⁶ Following his disillusionment at the March Planning Council meeting, Lewis ended his involvement with the conference.¹¹⁷ McKissick also reportedly failed to attend any of the planning sessions, allegedly because of CORE's anti-administration stance.¹¹⁸

In addition to these established and nationally recognized civil rights organizations, the Council also included representatives from labor, like George Meany of the AFL-CIO; big business, such as Heineman; government officials, such as Edward Breathitt, governor of Kentucky; federal judges such as Leon Higginbotham; the media, including Times, Inc., president James Linnen; and academics and trained experts, like Allison Davis, a social anthropologist and education professor at the University of Chicago. Like the November planning session, the diversity of this Council reflected the White House's goal of holding a conference that married the interests of civil rights, labor, and business, all the while under the advisement of trained experts. As James Booker, the Director of Information for the conference, explained, "The Council has been broadly selected as a cross-section of

¹¹⁵ Meier and Rudwick, 224.

¹¹⁶ Carson, In Struggle, 90; Lewis and D'Orso, 213.

¹¹⁷ Lewis and D'Orso, 362.

¹¹⁸ John Herbers, "Rights Parley Package: Broad and Costly Proposals Emerge from Meeting Influenced by Johnson," New York Times 4 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 70.

American society.”¹¹⁹ Despite Booker’s confidence in its diversity, however, the Council lacked representatives from the poorer sectors of society, an omission that the Council tried to amend when planning the list of invitees.

During the Council’s meetings over the next few months, one of the most important subjects of debate centered on the planned invitees to the conference. In April, as the conference neared, Young wrote to Bernhard, “Frankly, I am not happy with the allocation breakdown [of people to be invited to the conference].” In particular, Young was disgruntled over three aspects of participant selection. First, he worried that too many business and industry representatives had been invited.¹²⁰ He also believed that too many federal government officials had been included. Finally, he believed that “the number of education people for a how-to-do conference, rather than for an analysis of the problems, is far too great.” The emphasis on trained experts was typical of Johnson’s administration. As background documents for the November planning session show, the administration relied on hundreds of pages of white papers, articles, and statistics, prepared by experts on topics like the family, housing and education.¹²¹ Yet the conference was designed to create a unique environment in which the administration invited those without advanced education degrees—as well as those lacking high school diplomas—to provide insight into the state of civil

¹¹⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations to the Conference, June 1-2, 1966 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966) ii; James Booker, memo to Berl I. Bernhard, 15 Mar. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Press Conference, 24 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

¹²⁰ Whitney M. Young, letter to Berl I. Bernhard, 25 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹²¹ Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 18.

rights. Such an invitation stood in stark contrast to Johnson's long-standing reliance on highly educated experts to provide data-filled, heavily documented reports on any subject areas to be addressed.

Indeed, at the conference itself, delegates complained about the over-representation of experts both at the conference and in the administration. As one participant noted, "I am a non-professional. I would like to see non-professionals working at all levels of policy making."¹²³ These sentiments were echoed in other meetings. Participant Victoria De Lee stated, "You're just reading books and receiving big salaries, but the people out there is the ones who need it . . . I come here more to Washington, to H.E.W. and Mr. Katzenbach than I think anybody has done . . . and when I bring these people to you people with their papers all I think you must be doing is throwing them in the trashcan because I never get no consideration whatsoever."¹²⁴ De Lee's comments speak to the frustration with the federal government and its bureaucracy and the growing belief that community leaders and citizens could handle their own problems better than the federal government. Other conferees urged that responsibility be given to grass roots people, as opposed to experts, as "grass root people will have more to say how the program is carried out to do the most good for the most people."¹²⁵ Another participant echoed, "We need work, not research."¹²⁶

¹²³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 2.

¹²⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 111.

¹²⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IX, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 291.

¹²⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 81.

In the course of planning the conference, tensions between civil rights leaders and other groups were evident. For example, in December, these two camps met separately to discuss the agenda for the conference. When Council member Arnold Aronson of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council noted his concern that the groups were not meeting together, it was revealed that the meetings had been separated at the request of the civil rights organizations.¹²⁷

To determine the invitees to the conference, the Planning Council developed a list that prioritized the recommendations of different groups. Recommendations from the November planning session participants were to be given top priority. The White House and Vice President's Office ranked fifth on the list, meaning that their requests were not given as much weight as requests by those who were more involved with the planning of the conference. This deference to the planning session demonstrates that while the spring conference was proposed and sponsored by the White House, it was not a White House controlled event. Civil rights organizations were listed sixth, while business organizations came in at number eleven.¹²⁸ This ranking shows that while the conference was geared towards strengthening civil rights support in the business community, the Planning Council was also comfortable placing more control in the hands of civil rights groups than in those of businessmen to direct the course of the conference. At the same time, the Council attempted

¹²⁷ Leadership Council Conference Meeting Notes, 7 Dec. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹²⁸ Planning Council, memo re: General Instructions re: Invitations to June Conference, 14 Apr. 1966, in Lawson Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

to transcend organizational lines by inviting guests to attend not as delegates of their organization or company but as individuals.¹²⁹

Leaders of the major civil rights organizations lobbied for the broadest inclusion of their groups. Young stated that it was “mandatory that each Urban League executive be invited,” noting that they were “full-time, highly trained professionals . . . from around the country.”¹³⁰ Wilkins likewise wanted the NAACP to be strongly represented at the conference. When he found that only 45 invitations had been reserved for the NAACP, he sent a telegram to Fauntroy, vice chairman of the conference and an NAACP branch director, stating that Wilkins was “speechless” at the paltry number.¹³¹ Wilkins followed up with a letter to chairman Bernhard, writing that “there was not too much enthusiasm here for the small allotment to the NAACP. There was a feeling that we were entitled to two-thirds of whatever quota was set for civil rights organizations.”¹³² (Of the initial 2000 invitations, civil rights organizations were allotted a total of 200. See Table 1.) Wilkins’ comments reveal his views on the role of the NAACP vis-à-vis other civil rights groups: The NAACP, although it was one of the six major—and dozens of smaller—civil rights organizations, should nonetheless be entitled to more than half of the civil rights invitations. In protest, Wilkins

¹²⁹ White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Press Conference, 24 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

¹³⁰ Whitney M. Young, letter to Berl I. Bernhard, 25 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹³¹ Roy Wilkins, telegram to Walter E. Fauntroy, 26 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹³² Roy Wilkins, letter to Berl I. Bernhard, 4 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

attached to his letter a list that included many more than 45 names of NAACP staffers whom he believed should be invited to the conference.

Table 1. Planned Allocation of Invitations to the June Conference.¹³³

Category	Invitations Allocated
Arts, Sports, and Entertainment	30
Business and Industry	300
Civil Rights Organizations	200
Communications	80
Education	110
Federal Government Officials	200
Foundations	30
Fraternal, Service, and Women's Groups	100
Human Relations and Public Interest Groups	100
Labor	100
Poor and Grass Roots Organizations	150
Religion	100
State and Local Officials	400
Miscellaneous	100
TOTAL	2000

The insistence of Young and Wilkins that their organizations be widely represented at the conference suggests that they wanted control of the conference to be in the hands of their

¹³³ Berl I. Bernhard, letter to A. Philip Randolph, 19 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

mainstream civil rights organizations and not in those of federal officials or businessmen or even of more radical civil rights groups like SNCC or CORE. More importantly, their outbursts reveal the significance that they placed on the conference and its potential to impact the course of the movement.

Civil rights leaders were not alone in hoping to control the list of invitees. Dozens of letters from business organizations, media companies, and labor unions, like the AFL-CIO, poured in, requesting that certain individuals be invited to the conference. In a letter to Randolph in late April, Bernhard noted the frustration of many groups with the selection process, writing, “There were many sighs over the limited number of invitees in the various categories . . . I know you understand that even at this moment we have more names than could ever be invited.”¹³⁴ Again, this interest demonstrates that the conference was judged a significant event at the time, an event at which many different groups wanted their voices heard.

A letter from the president’s office of North Carolina State University suggests two other sectors of society hoping for representation at the conference: grass roots civil rights workers and the indigent. The university submitted a list of four people from North Carolina who sat on the North Carolina Good Neighbor Council, a group founded in 1963 that preceded the North Carolina Human Relations Commission. Two of these individuals—Samuel Ne Smith, a pastor from Temple Methodist Church in Raleigh, and W. Judson King

¹³⁴ Berl I. Bernhard, letter to A. Philip Randolph, 19 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

from the Franklinton Center in Bricks—were from the “poor and grass roots category” and would therefore “need their expenses paid.” Both men made the final list of invitees.¹³⁵

James Farmer and George Wiley of CORE appear to have been the initial catalysts for including grassroots organizations at the planning session and the conference. Hoping to counter the federal government’s tendency to rely on experts and academics, Farmer raised the importance of including “‘grassroots’ persons who can bring to the Conference the truth of their own expressions and knowledge, a due leavening from vicarious speculation and secondary generalizations.” Bernhard agreed, noting that the planning session “should not restrict panelists to middle class professionals, removed from the problems of the people.” For example, Bernhard, in an attempt to diversify the panelists, proposed that Melvin B. Davis—an African American counselor at the Center for Youth and Community Studies at Howard—be included on the panel on urban slums. Davis had not completed high school and would be a balancing counterpoint to the degreed experts sitting on the panels. Ultimately, Davis was not selected as a panelist, perhaps because he had a criminal record.¹³⁶

These comments of Farmer and Bernhard are significant because they show that while debates regarding the conference revolved around who would be invited to the event—as opposed to who would sit on the panels—the debates surrounding the planning session focused largely on the panels. This shift in focus may have arisen because the planning

¹³⁵ James G. Maddox, letter to Berl I. Bernhard, 22 Apr. 1966, in Lawson Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16; White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, List of Participants, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 18.

¹³⁶ James Farmer and George Wiley, memo to Morris Abram et al., 21 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16; Berl I. Bernhard, memo to Lee White et al., 6 Nov. 1965, in Lawson Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

session was charged with developing an agenda for the conference, while the conference was to present and analyze that agenda. The shift may also have been due, however, to the White House's concerns over bad publicity at the conference. According to Director of Information Booker, who met with assistant to the president George Reedy, Reedy felt that the conference might encounter "one major press problem," which would fall "in the area of who is invited as grassroots or indigenous participants. It was [his] feeling that [the Council] should be very careful to try to get as truly a representative cross section as possible and he hoped that [the Council] would pay particular attention to this area to avoid any possible press problems."¹³⁷ Indeed, representation of the poor—one of the groups that the conference was hoping to help—was a priority for the conference planners. Of the 2000 invitations expected to be issued, the category "poor and grass roots" were allocated 150 invitations. (See Table 1.)

In addition to spreading the invitations across these categories, the conference attempted to balance the geographic representation of the participants. Despite the concentration of half of the African American population in the South, the Council decided to "deemphasize the South" in order to ensure that all regions were represented. This decision shows that although the goal was to improve the lives of African Americans, the Planning Council was also focused on securing broad national support for the proposals generated by the conference, as well as serving the needs of African Americans outside of the

¹³⁷ James Booker, memo to Clifford Alexander et al., 18 Mar. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

South.¹³⁸ Continuing to expand the civil rights movement out of the South emerged as one of the major themes at the conference.

The distribution of invitations also reveals the sectors of society into which the Planning Council hoped to spread and strengthen the movement through the conference. The Council was interested in including not only established civil rights and grass roots organizations, but also in recruiting industry support to the movement. While a combined 350 invitations were to be mailed to civil rights organizations and poor and grass roots organizations, 300 were to be sent to business and industry representatives. (See Table 1.) The allocation to state and local officials is also significant: their 400 invitations show the Planning Council's interest in expanding the movement at these state and local, as opposed to merely federal, levels. Indeed, according to Bernhard, one of the goals of the conference was to recruit "new allies." While "those identified with civil rights, religious and labor organizations have played the major role thus far in awakening the nation's conscience," he explained, "leadership must now include the representatives of local business and labor unions, civic and veterans associations, neighborhood groups . . . including organizations of men, women, and youth."¹³⁹ Thus, in addition to gathering feedback on specific proposals about economic security and welfare, education, housing, and the administration of justice, the conference was also designed to broaden support of the civil rights movement. As Walter

¹³⁸ Berl I. Bernhard, letter to A. Philip Randolph, 19 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16; Berl I. Bernhard and Robert B. Natalie, memo to Council, 19 Mar. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹³⁹ Berl I. Bernhard and Ronald B. Natalie, memo to Council, 7 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

Reuther explained at the conference, pointing the finger at business leaders like executives at GM, “Unless you mobilize that power structure and you commit that power structure to this task, you are going through only an academic exercise.”¹⁴⁰

At the conference, however, delegates complained of “the conspicuous absence” of industry representatives.¹⁴¹ Bill Russell, star of the Boston Celtics and conference attendee, lamented the absence of big business at the conference, as they are, he said, “where opinion is formed . . . These are the people that control our economy.”¹⁴²

The 80 invitations to be given to those in the communications industry—television, radio, newspapers and magazines—show the Council’s awareness that the media’s attention and sympathy to the movement had been key to its successes and would be instrumental in securing national backing for any recommendations that would emerge from the conference.¹⁴³ At the same time, from the perspective of the White House, relations with the media had been strained. On the day of the conference, President Johnson rebuked reporters at his weekly press conference, accusing them of inflating rifts between the federal

¹⁴⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 35.

¹⁴¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference “To Fulfill Thee Rights,” June 1-2, 1966 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966) 159.

¹⁴² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 62.

¹⁴³ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 97.

government and civil rights leaders. “[W]e always have differences,” he said. “I think maybe you are inclined not to overlook these differences.”¹⁴⁴

The president was not the only one concerned with the media’s interpretation of the conference. At the conference, Dr. James R. Oliver, president of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations and Dean of the Graduate School at Southwestern University of Louisiana, said, “We have experiences of radio and television stations, licensed by the Federal Government, absolutely refusing to carry programs and even news items dealing favorably with various Federal projects while at the same time carrying vigorous anti-propaganda and unfavorable . . . publicity.”¹⁴⁵ One unnamed participant from Watts Hill, North Carolina, revealed his lack of faith in the media, noting that despite the “excellent” quality of newspapers in his state, “I am sure the coverage of this particular meeting will be somewhat sadly lacking and they will get a distorted version of what goes on here today, and they need to get it at the local level.”¹⁴⁶

Margaret Young—wife of Whitney Young—also saw the importance of using the media to further civil rights. She explained, the federal government must initiate a public education program to combat racism, using “its access to mass media and literature for creating such a spirit of what being an American really means.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ “Transcript of President’s News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Affairs,” New York Times 2 June 1966: A20.

¹⁴⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 16.

¹⁴⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 72.

¹⁴⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 362.

The final participants at the conference totaled over 2400 invitees, a considerable increase from the initially projected 2000. Even this number, wrote Bernhard, was difficult to maintain, noting “significant external pressures” to include certain individuals.¹⁴⁸ The Planning Council had to assure itself and the public that although not everyone could attend the event, everyone’s interests would be represented. Ultimately, the conference was intended to “bring together those who have the capacity to achieve certain goals previously analyzed by the Council and the staff.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, the Council had targeted participants they believed could implement the Council’s recommendations. Beyond deciding which individuals should be included, then, there were also debates over the types of people to be invited.

In determining whom to invite to the conference, the Planning Council debated which individuals would be the most effective at implementing the conference’s ideas in the long run. On the one hand, the Council considered inviting the leaders of various organizations. The advantage of choosing leaders, as opposed to staffers, was that they would be the ones to decide whether to implement conference policies. On the other hand, inviting staffers familiar with day-to-day needs and realities would ensure that the leaders of the organizations took action. Ultimately, concluded the Council, “we could do both.” For example, when deciding whom to include from the civil rights organizations, the Council concluded that “every effort should be made to select those who will be able to return home

¹⁴⁸ Berl I. Bernhard and Ronald B. Natalie, memo to Council, 7 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹⁴⁹ Berl I. Bernhard and Ronald B. Natalie, memo to Council, 7 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

and implement the policies developed by the Conference, as distinguished from ‘letterhead’ personalities.”¹⁵⁰

Certain groups were deliberately excluded from the Council, to the disappointment of many. For example, the Council decided that based on the president’s mandate in the Howard Commencement address, the conference must be geared towards the problems of African Americans, not to the problems of other minorities in the United States. Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, and other minorities were neither invited to nor represented at the conference. This decision was made early on in the conference planning. Including other minority groups, determined Randolph, should be “rejected since such a course would make an orderly conference . . . difficult, if not impossible.”¹⁵¹ As the conference approached, numerous letters arrived, including those from senators and congressmen, requesting that other minority groups be included. Despite these pleas, the conference planners adhered to the president’s initial mandate. Nonetheless, they responded, the conference’s “decisions and actions will have a decided effect on all minorities in this country.”¹⁵²

Also left off the guest list were white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils. In addition, the Nation of Islam was excluded. Heineman explained that while the Council had tried to include “every shade of opinion,”

¹⁵⁰ Berl I. Bernhard and Robert B. Natalie, memo to Council, 19 Mar. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹⁵¹ Bayard Rustin, memo to John Morsell et al., 18 Oct. 1965, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

¹⁵² Don Edwards, letter to Benjamin Heineman, 1 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16; Berl Bernhard, letter to Don Edwards, 7 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 16.

these organizations' aims were "inconsistent" with the goals of a conference designed to "fulfill these rights."¹⁵³

The final composition of the conference guest list reveals both on whom the Planning Council placed its hopes for the implementation of its goals and on whom it relied to direct the future of the movement. Alongside established leaders and renowned figures like King, Wilkins, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Rosa Parks, sat those who remained outside the media's spotlight but who were nonetheless working in their communities for change. Joanne Ross, for example, a mother living in Boston public housing and receiving welfare checks to raise her family, was included. Ross, a tenant group organizer, was described as "forceful and articulate." Likewise, Mary Henry, a poor, widowed mother of four who worked at a community center in Watts, was invited. People like Ross and Henry, who could not afford to travel to and attend the conference, had their expenses paid by donors who wished to remain anonymous. This funding ensured that the conference would include a broad cross-section of African Americans, and not just those who had connections to the White House or established civil rights or business organizations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Press Conference, 24 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

¹⁵⁴ White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, List of Participants, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 18; Office of Economic Opportunity, letter to Joan T. Thornell, 29 Apr. 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Press Conference, 24 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

All organizations invited to participate in the conference attended, and, indeed, had scrambled for the maximum number of invitations available . . . with one exception.¹⁵⁵ SNCC, although its executive director Lewis was a member of the Planning Council, ultimately decided to boycott the conference. Earlier in the fall of 1965, the conference planning had ignited divisions in SNCC, with some arguing that SNCC needed to publicly speak out against Johnson's Vietnam policy and that supporting the conference would undermine that position. SNCC's disapproval of Lewis' role on the Planning Council continued into the spring, even though Lewis had stopped attending planning meetings. Indeed, during SNCC's May 1966 elections, Lewis's support of the conference was used against him by those who questioned whether Lewis could represent SNCC's evolving focus, a focus bent on separatism, increased militancy, and the establishment of an international movement.¹⁵⁶

As a result of the shift in SNCC's perception of Lewis and of its mission as an organization, Stokely Carmichael defeated Lewis in his bid for executive director. Carmichael's election underscored SNCC's recent moves towards Black Power. Lewis did retain a leadership role, gaining a seat on SNCC's newly created Central Committee. Nonetheless, on May 23, the Central Committee held a press conference, announcing that SNCC would no longer participate in the conference. SNCC's statement to the press announced that it viewed the conference as an effort "to shift responsibility from the degrading position in which blacks now find themselves away from the oppressor to the

¹⁵⁵ White House To Fulfill These Rights Conference, Press Conference, 24 May 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

¹⁵⁶ Carson, In Struggle, 187, 203-04.

oppressed.” Lewis, though present at the press conference, remained silent.¹⁵⁷ A SNCC publication issued in June explained that the group had boycotted the conference because it was “overstructured . . . [and] censored against controversy.” In particular, SNCC complained that “there is a grass-roots movement in America that is about to turn this country upside down . . . [and] the White House Conference completely missed that point.”¹⁵⁸ SNCC’s barbs seemed contradicted by the conference’s decision to include over 150 representatives from grass roots organizations and its invitation to SNCC. Prior to the conference, Carmichael appeared on the *Today Show*, criticizing the White House’s use of the conference as a tool to pacify civil rights advocates. According to Carmichael, the “Conference is just a guise, a cloak—the government is not serious. To prove a point, there are less than 50 registrars in the South enforcing the Negroes’ right to vote.”¹⁵⁹

Associated Community Teams (ACT), a group described as a militant organization by the press, and other organizations picketed the conference to protest the “lack of ghettos’ representation.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, despite the Planning Council’s best efforts, some sectors of the civil rights movement complained that the federal government had yet again pushed them aside. According to one account, ACT protestors came from only one city. Some were allowed into the conference even without an invitation in order to avoid the appearance of more conflict. In fact, many delegates were unaware of the outside protest until they

¹⁵⁷ Carson, *In Struggle*, 187, 203-04.

¹⁵⁸ Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Movement: 1964-1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 133.

¹⁵⁹ Thelma Hunt Shirley, “Confetti,” *Chicago Defender* 7 June 1966, in Lawson, *Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration*: Reel 20, Microfilm 376.

¹⁶⁰ John Herbers, “Rights Conference to Vote on Criticism of U.S. Policy,” *New York Times* 2 June 1966: A1.

watched it on television later that evening.¹⁶¹ The administration's desire for consensus, and the Planning Council's desire for inclusion, appeared satisfied, at least on the surface.

¹⁶¹ Rainwater and Yancey, 277, 283.

CHAPTER TWO: Hatching a Plan

On June 1, 1966, roughly 2500 delegates and dozens of panelists filed into the lavish lobbies of the Sheraton-Park and Shoreham Hotels, hotels that, noted one newspaper, “until hardly more than a decade ago, were wholly closed to any Negroes but servants.”¹⁶² One estimate from a white businessman described attendance at the conference as 70% African American, 30% white.¹⁶³ Some delegates wore leis passed out by delegates from Hawaii.¹⁶⁴ The lavish setting stood in sharp contrast to a photography exhibit documenting the squalid living conditions of slum life, an exhibit that had been arranged for the conference.¹⁶⁵

The plan for the conference was simple. Attendees were divided into twelve committees, with roughly 200 persons per committee. Over the course of two days, each committee would convene four times, one for each pre-chosen topic—economic security and welfare, education, housing and administration of justice. An additional topic—health—had been initially proposed but later abandoned, due to the lack of time.¹⁶⁶ Stenographers would

¹⁶² “Civil Rights and Beyond,” Washington Post 3 June 1966: A23.

¹⁶³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 40.

¹⁶⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 10.

¹⁶⁵ “CORE Seeks New Agenda For Rights Talks Today,” New York Times 1 June 1966.

¹⁶⁶ The conference planners recognized that health issues—including inadequate health care services, high infant mortality and short life expectancy, and the shortage of African American healthcare professionals—likely overlapped with issues to be addressed at the conference. They noted, however, that it would “not be possible to deal adequately with this in our two-day meeting.” As a result, a future meeting focusing solely with health issues was proposed. White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 155.

record every meeting discussion, and all transcripts would be made available to the president.¹⁶⁷

A panel of chosen experts and resource people would helm each meeting, although these experts often disagreed about the role of the panel once the meetings began. The panel of experts, described as “resource people,” would attempt to answer questions and facilitate the meetings.¹⁶⁸ Each panel was composed of a diverse collection of representatives in the field being discussed, from federal and local government officials to academics to civil rights, business, and labor leaders. At various times, panelists expressed discomfort with their role. As Frank Pohlhaus, counsel for the Washington Bureau of the NAACP explained, sitting as a panelist “does not necessarily mean we of the panel support or defend these recommendations . . . [We] are merely presenting them as the beginning of a discussion.”¹⁶⁹ Some panelists embraced the Council’s report; others disclaimed any responsibility for it. For example, when a panel finally did include a member of the Council’s task force on housing, the meeting’s chairman announced, “We at last have a Panel that is willing to accept the responsibility for the items in the Report,” meeting great applause.¹⁷⁰ Some panelists

¹⁶⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 2.

¹⁶⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 12.

¹⁶⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 96.

¹⁷⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 3.

expressly disavowed their involvement in the report, claiming that their role was simply to mediate the discussion.¹⁷¹

From time to time, attendees criticized the role of these resource people as the conference unfolded. Robert Lucas of CORE complained that it “seems to me the members of the panel, in due respect, are commenting too long and too much . . . people out here are frustrated because they can’t get their point of view across . . . commenting should be a bit more brief and not quite so legal.”¹⁷²

Committee meetings followed a common structure. After the chairman called the committee to order and introduced the panel of experts, a member of that panel would summarize the Council’s report on the topic of that particular meeting, even though attendees had been provided with the Council’s report in advance and were expected to be familiar with its recommendations. Following an opportunity for comments, with each individual limited to just a few minutes to speak, resolutions would be presented for voting either at the end of that meeting or at the committee’s final session.¹⁷⁴ After the conference, a summary would be drawn up and presented to the president.

These procedures were a departure from earlier plans. The Planning Council had initially decided that attendees would discuss the report but that neither the report nor any

¹⁷¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 81.

¹⁷² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 245.

¹⁷⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 2-3.

other proposed resolutions would be voted on.¹⁷⁵ Instead, all of the discussions and suggestions would be summarized and forwarded to the president. They reasoned that instituting voting procedures would be both time consuming and intimidating to those unfamiliar with parliamentary rules of procedure. In addition to the logistics of voting protocol, it appears that the Council was also worried that voting would exacerbate an already “controversial and competitive atmosphere.”¹⁷⁶ This decision reveals three important preconceptions of the Planning Council. First, it shows that the Council wanted to make the meeting discussions as all-inclusive as possible, making sure that those unfamiliar with formal committee procedures would be encouraged to participate. Secondly, it suggests that the Council anticipated that an undercurrent of conflict would color meeting discussions. Most importantly, it shows a complete disregard of the importance of voting and the ballot—a federally protected right only recently won by many at the conference.

The subsequent disagreement that erupted over the resolutions procedure suggests that Council Planners were correct in their assessment of potential conflict. At the opening meeting, before any of the substantive committees even met, Chairman Heineman announced that these procedures had been abandoned. “It has come to the Council’s attention that there are a substantial number of invitees who feel that a resolution and voting process is a

¹⁷⁵ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 96.

¹⁷⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Opening Meeting, Introductory Remarks by Chairman Ben Heineman, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9.

desirable and necessary part of a conference such as this.”¹⁷⁷ Floyd McKissick of CORE had driven the campaign for this change.

The Council’s failure to anticipate this response to a ban on voting reveals that it misread the tone of the conference. That the attendees so fervently demanded a vote shows that they believed the conference to be a significant event at which they wanted their voices heard and counted. Their demands also show that attendees did not view the conference as a White House controlled event, but rather one that they embraced as their own. Accordingly, the Council met on the evening before the conference and decided that the Rules of Procedure would be changed so that both the report and new proposals raised in the committees could indeed be voted upon. The Planning Council’s willingness to change its protocol at the last minute suggests that it was willing to let attendees shape the course of the conference, showing faith in a movement that was not controlled from the top down. Accepting these changes also suggests that the Council was wary of the media characterizing the conference as a haven of dissent. Accepting the new voting procedures may have been a way to pacify the detractors and minimize negative media coverage. Ultimately, the media reported that “resolutions were arranged for only to prove that the conference was not ‘rigged’ by White House officials.”¹⁷⁸

Yet the commitment to flexibility was accepted by the committee chairs, regardless of the planners’ motives. In one session, participants asked to break into even smaller groups to

¹⁷⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Opening Meeting, Introductory Remarks by Chairman Ben Heineman, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9.

¹⁷⁸ Seville B. Davis, “President gets ‘rights’ ball,” Christian Science Monitor 4 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 41.

discuss issues within a case-study format, and the meeting's chair noted that would be possible because the planners did "permit us to change our format."¹⁷⁹ Another Chairman suggested that his committee break into smaller groups, grumbling, "I know there is something better than this."¹⁸⁰ In other meetings, however, attendees seemed to be "quite happy," noted the chair, with the conference's structure.¹⁸¹ In the hopes of making the meetings user-friendly and inclusive, some moderators expressly disavowed following Robert's Rules of Order.¹⁸² Ultimately, thousands of pages of transcripts were boiled down into a few dozen pages that went to the president for review. This final report included both the initial report prepared by the Council and a summary of conference discussions and resolutions.

¹⁷⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 2. Ultimately, the participants in this meeting elected to use the conference's proposed format. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 45.

¹⁸⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IX, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 234.

¹⁸¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 2.

¹⁸² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IX, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 234. Instead, says Judge Higginbotham, he will follow "Higginbotham's' Rules of Order."

CHAPTER THREE: Making A Wish List

Economic security and welfare was a priority for the conference planners and attendees. According to the Planning Council, the economic situation facing African Americans was an “ugly and urgent crisis.”¹⁸³ The conference planners proposed several recommendations in the realm of economics: (1) the creation of job councils in metropolitan areas; (2) the creation of job task forces in rural areas; (3) the creation of a human resources program; (4) the creation of government-financed employment programs; (5) the creation of programs to foster employment for younger African Americans; (6) the recommendation of “affirmative actions” by both private and public employers and labor organizations to “provide more and better jobs” for African Americans; (7) the setting of income maintenance and labor standards; and (8) the reorganization of public assistance and welfare programs. In drafting these proposals, the Council recognized several unique characteristics of the African American labor force. It noted that African Americans were typically underemployed, meaning that not only were they underpaid, but also that they were more likely to be employed on a part-time basis and also given jobs that were beneath their skill levels and education.¹⁸⁴ Accordingly, the report called for “a fundamental alteration in the occupational structure of the Negro labor force.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 5.

¹⁸⁴ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 6.

¹⁸⁵ The White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 7.

Examining these proposals shows how broadly the Planning Council conceived of these problems. For example, job councils in metropolitan and rural areas would focus not only on finding jobs for African American workers, but also on finding jobs with greater security and income. Focusing on available jobs, as well as broader factors like transportation and educational opportunities, would improve the employment situation, they proposed. The makeup of these job councils should be diverse, drafters explained, incorporating both whites and African Americans, as well as business, government, and civil rights representatives.¹⁸⁶ The job task forces and councils were envisioned as complementing, not usurping, organizations already meeting these needs, such as the Urban League.¹⁸⁷ In conference discussions, attendees raised concerns about the rural jobs task force's mission to ease migration to the cities. They worried that these proposals could be construed as advocating the "exportation of Southern Negroes to the city, the effort to retain the status quo by eliminating Negroes from their home areas, and a side-stepping of equal

¹⁸⁶ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 16-22.

¹⁸⁷ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," Council's Report and Recommendations, 11. Naturally, some conferees worried about duplication of efforts. As one noted, because many of the recommendations resembled current Urban League programs, "the Urban league or some such agency already in existence take care of the proposals here" with the help of federal funds. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 17. This suggestion shows a desire to avoid federal control and utilize existing civil rights agencies. At least one panelist and government official agreed. As EEOC Commissioner Aileen Hernandez explained, "The point here is to stimulate the local leadership." Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 17.

treatment among Southern farm people.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, conference delegates instead called for a greater focus on increasing financial assistance to small farmers and on creating more rural area jobs.¹⁸⁹

The third economic recommendation to the conference—a human resources program—would collect information on the employment of African American workers and identify solutions to employment problems by spurring legislation, programs, and cooperation with local officials.¹⁹⁰ Government-financed employment programs could provide jobs via public works and services for those who could not find regular employment—essentially developing a “guaranteed employment” plan.¹⁹¹ This was an interesting proposal for two reasons. First, it was based on the belief that natural market forces would not eliminate high unemployment for African Americans because of an inherited inferior education system and historical institutional discrimination. Secondly, it imagined a full-employment economy supported by public works, a dramatic reconceptualization of the job market that harkened back to Depression Era programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The next recommendation—year-round employment, training, and counseling for young African Americans—addressed the high unemployment of this demographic. The

¹⁸⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 42.

¹⁸⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 42.

¹⁹⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 22-23.

¹⁹¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 24.

metropolitan and rural job councils as well as the human resource program would guide these efforts.¹⁹² At the conference, attendees expressed urgency in improving conditions for young African Americans. In these discussions, attendees emphasized the improvement of job opportunities and training programs, fearing that the “social tensions and disorganization evidenced in such areas as Watts” would explode elsewhere, too.¹⁹³ Fears of imminent violence affected many conference discussions.

The Planning Council’s proposals on affirmative action proposals also spurred intense debate at the conference. These proposals were guided by three goals: To “generate more and better jobs for Negroes, assure access to existing jobs . . . and to eliminate discrimination.”¹⁹⁴ According to the introduction to this section, affirmative action appears to have meant “active and deliberate efforts to increase and improve jobs for Negroes.”¹⁹⁵ The planners included several specific proposals. First, they called for a campaign to better inform African Americans about the kinds of discrimination prohibited by the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Secondly, they hoped to encourage African Americans to apply for jobs at all levels, in part by rooting out job qualifications and tests containing subtle or hidden biases. They also called for the evaluation of all African American workers and job opportunities to encourage the promotion of employees into jobs that matched their abilities. The Council

¹⁹² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 26-28.

¹⁹³ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 46.

¹⁹⁴ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 28.

¹⁹⁵ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 28.

acknowledged that this might require the revision of some collective bargaining agreements in which seniority and transfer policies were based on discriminatory systems. In addition, the plan also called for the recruitment of more African American workers into skilled crafts; the development of equal employment opportunity programs; and the promotion of African Americans into policy and management positions.¹⁹⁶

Creating jobs for African Americans, the Council recommended, “should involve the acceptance by each employer for definite targets for employing and upgrading Negro workers.”¹⁹⁷ Finally, employers should hire suppliers and contractors who did not discriminate, should have training programs to help their African American employees advance, and should help develop internal training programs for other employers based on their own successful models. In addition to affirmative action by private employers, the conference planners called for labor unions, community organizations, and the federal government to incorporate similar efforts.¹⁹⁸ Thus, these proposals called for a variety of approaches—ones that included African American employees in existing programs and ones that created new training and recruitment programs specifically for African American workers.

The Planning Council anticipated that affirmative action plans would involve two prongs. The first envisioned “local merit employment councils, vocational and counseling

¹⁹⁶ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 28-30.

¹⁹⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 12.

¹⁹⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 28-30.

services, and motivational programs,” i.e., efforts to match African American workers to available jobs.¹⁹⁹ The second prong aimed to “make seniority more flexible, widen the doors of apprenticeship training, and renegotiate discriminatory contracts . . . [and promote] qualified Negro members to responsible positions.”²⁰⁰ This second prong, then, imagined creating new jobs and changing existing discriminatory systems to make room for African American workers. The debate among the conference attendees, however, re-conceptualized what affirmative action should encompass.

In addition to the affirmative action proposals, other significant economic recommendations included strengthening income maintenance and labor standards programs. These would improve income levels and job security and at the same time reduce dependence on welfare by expanding federal minimum wage and labor standards and extending collective bargaining into more job sectors.²⁰¹

Finally, in addition to the metropolitan and rural job councils, the human resources program, and the affirmative action plans, the conference planners also called for the creation and strengthening of existing supportive services for employees—such as child care, counseling, transportation, and welfare services.²⁰² In conference discussions on welfare, the most common issue raised centered on the public assistance proposals, noting that the

¹⁹⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 96.

²⁰⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 96-97.

²⁰¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 34.

²⁰² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 31-33, 35-39.

regulations should be revised so that welfare payments were not automatically barred when a jobless male resided with the family.²⁰³ This concern had been raised in the Moynihan Report, though the report had not been explicitly named in the recommendations.

Perhaps as a lure to big business, the Planning Council's report concluded that the ultimate goal should be a "healthy, growing full employment economy."²⁰⁴ Indeed, noted the report, if employment and productivity of African Americans matched that of white workers, then the gross national product would increase by \$22 billion.²⁰⁵ The continuation of a robust economy was integral to the proposals at the conference, since they called for massive federal spending. Yet the money the proposals needed was available, planners thought, and was "infinitely more than any of the recommendations that we have in here except for the guaranteed minimum," said Panelist Mitchell Ginsberg, Commissioner of Welfare for New York City.²⁰⁶ Ginsberg's perspective shows the importance of a growing economy to the success of both conference proposals and the civil rights movement. Others echoed Ginsberg's view. Panelist Leonard Lesser, of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, asserted, "We do have enough money, and we should not accept the proposition that we cannot provide the money for the defense, the space, and also for the domestic programs that are necessary."

²⁰³ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 52.

²⁰⁴ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 10.

²⁰⁵ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 11.

²⁰⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 134G (sic; the page numbering of this transcript included some numbered and lettered pages).

The conference noted the unique problems facing African Americans, unique because those economic problems were “compounded . . . by the continuing widespread presence of racial segregation and racial discrimination.”²⁰⁹ These problems were therefore more severe than those faced by other minorities, concluded the report. Accordingly, while the conference planners had worked to assure other minority leaders that the conference would address the needs of all minorities, the report’s position was that the needs of minorities could not be addressed with one colorblind solution. At the conference, however, attendees lamented the exclusion of other minorities.²¹⁰ Many committees resolved that the conference recommendations be expanded to work toward equal opportunity for all minorities.²¹¹

The Planning Council’s report and recommendations also included some proposals addressing the problems of working women. Yet while the report acknowledged that “Negro working women are the poorest of the working poor,” their representation at the conference was limited.²¹² Most of the conference attendees were male, and only one woman—Dorothy

²⁰⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 9.

²¹⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 40.

²¹¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 159. In one meeting, a Reverend King calls for investigations into the employment of African Americans in public works programs and into apprenticeship training programs for young African Americans. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 22. It is possible that these remarks came from Martin Luther King, Jr., but the speaker’s identity cannot be definitively determined.

²¹² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 6.

Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women—sat on the Planning Council. Indeed, attendees at the conference complained about this sole appointment.²¹³

One gaping hole in the invitations to women was the failure to include many early welfare rights activists. The 1960s gave birth to the National Welfare Rights Movement, a large protest movement generally made of up African American women. In August 1963, Johnnie Tillmon, an African American single mother in Los Angeles, had created the organization “Aid to Needy Children in Watts.” Frustrated with the poverty and lack of opportunity she saw and lived every day, Tillmon wanted to improve the living, educational, and political standards of the poor, especially of poor women and children. Tillmon’s efforts served as a precursor to the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), formally established in August 1966, two months after the conference.²¹⁴ Tillmon would go on to serve as the NWRO’s first chairwoman.

Tillmon, unfortunately, had not been invited to the conference, nor were other early NWRO leaders and active members, such as Mildred Calvert, Ethel Dotson, Frank Espada, Faith Evans, Frankie Jeter, Marion Kidd, or Beulah Sanders.²¹⁵ George Wiley, founder of the NWRO, however, had been invited. Wiley had left CORE in January 1966, after losing his

²¹³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 56.

²¹⁴ Guida West, The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women (New York: Praeger, 1981) 22; Premilla Nadasen, Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Routledge, 2005) 19, 42.

²¹⁵ Frank Espada organized the Brooklyn-based welfare collation, Welfare Recipients League; Ethel Dotson was a member of the Richmond, Virginia, Welfare Rights Organization; Mildred Calvert served as chairman of the Northside Welfare Rights Organization in Milwaukee. Nadasen, 24, 25, 28, 30. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 18, List of Participants.

bid for executive director to Floyd McKissick, due in part to disagreements over integration and the participation of white volunteers in CORE. Wiley went on to create the Poverty Rights Action Center in Washington, D.C., and his invitation to the conference was addressed to that organization. Richard Cloward, professor of social work at Columbia University, had also been invited to the conference. In early 1966, Cloward and fellow professor Frances Fox Piven had concluded that if everyone entitled to welfare benefits actually applied for and received them, they would create a crisis in the welfare system, spurring much-needed change. Cloward and Piven's research was embraced by the NWRO.

That Wiley and Cloward were invited to the conference, while the scores of women working in grass roots organizations at the local level were not, suggests that this mass movement of black women was too diffuse to land on the radar of conference planners. They were not attached to any one civil rights organization, though their interests overlapped with them, and in years to come, the NWRO would collaborate with organizations like the Urban League, SCLC, and CORE.²¹⁶ Yet in June 1966, even though welfare rights was a major topic of discussion, these women—who had been organizing as far back as the March on Washington—were overlooked. Those plugged into the system, on the other hand, like Wiley, a long time civil rights organizer known to many of the planners, and Cloward, a published university professor, were higher profile and secured invitations.

Despite the absence of many women—and in particular women organizers—at the conference, invitees raised many issues about the welfare and rights of women that were not addressed in the reports and recommendations, and they criticized the lack of attention to

²¹⁶ West, 215, 217, 224.

special problems facing African American women. Some called for more women to be appointed to the Planning Council and to all White House committees “where their interests are involved.”²¹⁷ Limiting their participation to groups in which “their interests are involved” suggests that they could only be seen as women, and not as people who might have contributions to any topic. At the same time, other resolutions asserted that “discrimination on account of sex is as important as discrimination on account of race.”²¹⁸ Accordingly, other resolutions demanded that education, counseling, and employment opportunities for women be afforded “special attention.”²¹⁹

Resolutions also called for federal and state subsidies for daycare, thus strengthening job security; improved wage and labor standards for household service workers; and for wider availability of birth control.²²⁰ Conferees also demanded increased attention to educating and counseling African American girls, providing more training for women, creating municipal nurseries, and offering maternity leave job protection.²²¹ Thus, while the

²¹⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 159; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 221.

²¹⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 160.

²¹⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 162.

²²⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 40, 51, 163, 165.

²²¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 214; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 24; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 19, 23, 62.

report may have been narrow in its coverage of issues specifically affecting women, the conference meetings broadened this discussion considerably. Analyzing these proposals, as well as the comprehensive economic and welfare recommendations in the report, offers a way to “debunk the notion that the movement’s goals and results were merely improvements in the lives of middle class blacks,” an approach for which Julian Bond has faulted other civil rights histories.²²²

Following its recommendations on economic security and welfare, the Planning Council produced a number of proposals on education. The education report was divided into three sections: “equalizing educational investment,” scaling back “racial concentration,” and improving education as a whole. Noting that more than ninety percent of children currently attended segregated schools, the recommendations largely blamed the federal government for failing to enforce desegregation, although some of the blame was directed at the states, too. As with proposals on economic security and welfare, proposals on education noted an urgent need to address these problems, fearing that failure to desegregate schools was creating a “growing danger” of violence.²²⁸

To bring the money spent on schools into parity, the recommendations called for more action from the federal government, noting, “Only Federal aid can make a difference.”

Some of these suggestions came from New York state legislator Shirley Chisholm and Laura Fox of the National Council of Negro Women.

²²² Julian Bond, “The Politics of Civil Rights History,” New Directions in Civil Rights Studies, eds. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1991) 15; Gaines, 213 (noting that “many of these new studies seek to . . . recover the movement’s most far-reaching political and economic challenges to American society”).

²²⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 55-56.

At the same time, the report also called for states to relinquish more control to local governments. In particular, the federal government should reassert that it was committed to a national policy of desegregation. The report declared that its ultimate goal was a “colorblind society,” even though desegregation measures would initially call for a “consciousness of race” when collecting statistics on schools.²²⁹ Thus, the report evidences a rethinking of earlier dogma that called for race to be ignored when making school decisions; it shows that while the goal was still a society in which race did not matter, it would take a strategy based on racial consciousness to get there. Indeed, this approach mirrors those found in the economic security and welfare job proposals on affirmative action.

Finally, to eliminate segregation, the report called for an expansion of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the creation of model schools showcasing the success of desegregation, the addition of more teachers and staff, the construction of more schools, and harsher penalties for failures to desegregate. To achieve all of these goals, the recommendations called for coordinated federal action through strengthened agencies and legislation.²³⁰

To improve the quality of education for all students—the third goal of the education proposals—the recommendations called for a variety of measures. They ranged from improving school-community relations and the diversity of school boards to establishing school food programs to expanding preschool and vocational education programs. One proposal also called for more encompassing textbooks—ones that included the history of

²²⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 62.

²³⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 62-64.

African Americans and of the civil rights movement, for example.²³¹ At the conference, attendees also demanded that attention be given to the culture gaps between white and black middle class teachers attempting to teach students of different racial and economic backgrounds.²³²

Finally, the Planning Council's proposals called for more support for African American colleges—"at least as a transitional measure"—as those schools moved towards integration.²³³ These strategies echo the other policies requiring race conscious measures to achieve a colorblind society. The fate of African American colleges emerged as a hot button issue at the conference. Specifically, noted the summary report, attendees disagreed about whether integration should even be a goal for these schools. Preserving their status as African American schools might be important to preserving an African American identity in the long run, noted some attendees.²³⁴ Others saw the future of these schools as limited. Nabrit, for example, said, "Every Negro college I know would like to work itself out of existence by becoming simply a first-rate institution, providing opportunities for satisfying the educational needs of all students."²³⁵ Thus, these discussions show that attendees were

²³¹ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 65-67.

²³² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 23, 25-26.

²³³ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 67.

²³⁴ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 92.

²³⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 232.

beginning to debate whether a fully-integrated society should be an ultimate goal of the movement.

In closing its education recommendations, the report noted that while federal and state action would be important in achieving all of the outlined goals, ultimate success would depend on having a commitment from all sectors, including business, civic, religious and community organizations.²³⁶ This all-encompassing strategy, however, was rejected by the conference attendees. According to the official summary report, the “dominant view of the conferees was that state and local failures in education have been so prevalent that solutions must be found in increasing use of national authority.” Some of the demands for national action focused on the use of national standards for per student budgets and national accreditations systems that determined curriculums, training of teachers, and facility standards.²³⁷ While the conference attendees put their hopes in federal action, they also expressed a continuing distrust of the commitment of the federal government to enforcing desegregation legislation. As the report noted, the “credibility of the Federal Government is still regarded as in question” on educational desegregation.²³⁸ One panelist, Ruby Martin of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, bemoaned the lack of federal funding for desegregation legislation, noting, “that we have two thousand Dorchester Counties, I

²³⁶ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 72.

²³⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 79.

²³⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 85.

suppose. We have less than two hundred people at the office of Education to deal with it.”²³⁹

Dorchester County, South Carolina, was infamous for its flagrant disregard of desegregation orders.

The next set of proposals in the report focused on housing issues. The Planning Council noted that for over 15 million African Americans—“because of their race—congested slums have constituted their homes and ghettoed isolation has been their environment.”²⁴⁰ These desperate conditions were chronicled in the photography exhibit outside the meeting halls. To alleviate these circumstances, the housing report recommended opening the market, increasing low and moderate income housing supplies, discussing the implications of the growing suburbs, and revitalizing and integrating ghetto areas. While the Planning Council noted that the expanse of its recommendations was “staggering,” the report continued, “they are not larger than America’s space ventures, the demands for defense, or the tremendous growth of the American economy.”²⁴¹ Like the importance of a booming economy for economic security proposals such as full employment and affirmative action programs, a strong economy was also important for these housing programs, too. As one attendee noted, an “American economy that can turn out ten million automobiles ought to be able to produce two million houses.”²⁴² The war and its competition for federal dollars was

²³⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 61.

²⁴⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 93.

²⁴¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 94.

²⁴² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 119.

at the forefront of the Council's thinking when drafting the report, even though many at the conference insisted that Vietnam involvement was at best tangential to the civil rights movement.

As did proposals on economic security and education, the housing recommendations also called for more federal help. At the time of the conference, open housing legislation— included in the Civil Rights Act of 1966—was pending before Congress. The four-part bill would give the Attorney General greater power to initiate school desegregation suits, improve the fairness of the jury selection process in state and federal courts, permit civil rights workers to file suit in federal court for civil rights interference, and outlaw housing discrimination. Indeed, according to Wilkins, one of the most important jobs of the conferees was to generate support for the legislation.²⁴³ While the Planning Council and most attendees supported this legislation, it was agreed that the bill needed strengthening. In particular, the recommendations called for a more expansive bill by including a stronger administrative housing agency.²⁴⁴ In addition to federal measures, the report also called for state and private action. In particular, it asked for state licensing boards to require documentation from brokers and builders that they were not using discriminatory practices and they asked for private associations, like the National Association of Real Estate Brokers and National Homebuilders Association, to confirm their commitment to eliminating

²⁴³ “White House Conferees Urged to Work for New Civil Rights Laws,” Louisiana Weekly 11 June 1966: Section 1, 7.

²⁴⁴ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 96.

discrimination. Citizens, too, were called to action, through the formation of watchdog councils and housing information and advocacy centers.²⁴⁵

To increase the housing supply for the low and moderate income brackets, the report called for the federal government to take charge by adopting legislation to provide rent supplements as well as guarantee a minimum number of new housing units for these families each year.²⁴⁶ Likewise, the federal government should also helm initiatives to open suburban communities to African Americans. Proposals included denying federal assistance to local governments that lacked desegregation and low-income housing plans.²⁴⁷

Finally, the Council made recommendations on revitalizing and integrating ghetto areas. When framing its proposals, the Council considered a ghetto “an involuntary ethnic slum.”²⁴⁸ On the one hand, the Council noted the importance of preserving the “cultural and ethnic ties” of these neighborhoods; on the other hand, it noted that these neighborhoods were overcrowded, impoverished, and often dangerous. These proposals included decentralizing public housing, requiring urban renewal plans to include desegregation components, and supporting the Demonstration Cities program, a program in which cities could receive federal money by adopting plans to rebuild slums.²⁴⁹ Again, while there were

²⁴⁵ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 96-98.

²⁴⁶ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 99-101.

²⁴⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 104.

²⁴⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 107.

²⁴⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 108-09.

some suggestions for local and citizen action, most of the proposals called for federal intervention.

The housing recommendations were positively received at the conference. As with responses to other subjects, attendees pointed the finger at the federal government, asserting that “initiative, incentive and more financial leadership must come from the Federal Government.” The attendees also raised issues that the Council’s recommendations had failed to address. Specifically, many of the attendees were concerned about the power of slumlords, and called for tenant unions, lawsuits, and rent strikes.²⁵⁰ In this respect, the conference was helpful for bringing issues to national attention that had been missed.

States, too, were called to task, and conferees noted that the recommendations had failed to include the request for state fair housing laws.²⁵² There were also complaints about the lack of suggestions on desegregating the suburbs. As the summary report noted, “inaccessibility of white suburbia was accented by the paucity of suggestions on how to break down the barriers of race and income.”²⁵³

While some conferees claimed that that the school system would be easier to change than the housing system, others countered that changing the housing picture was essential to

²⁵⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 115, 125.

²⁵² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 117-118.

²⁵³ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 123.

amending the school system because of busing.²⁵⁴ Such debates show the inseparability of issues facing the conference.

The final set of recommendations issued by the Planning Council concerned the administration of justice. These proposals addressed three areas: ending intimidation of African Americans and civil rights activists; securing equality under the law; and improving relationships between police departments and African American communities. To achieve all of these goals, the recommendations called for the support of the Civil Rights Act of 1966, which would create criminal penalties for civil rights interference, encourage federal criminal prosecutions, and institute further measures for eliminating discrimination in jury selection. Yet the recommendations also called for the bill's expansion, suggesting that it include provisions allowing the filing of individual suits, the pursuit of administrative complaints, and the removal of civil rights cases from state to federal court. The recommendations also supported the president's recent request for more federal agents to effectively enforce civil rights laws already on the book.²⁵⁶ In addition to calling for federal efforts, the Planning Council asked for law schools and bar associations to affirm their commitment to civil rights, calling for programs to provide competent legal representation in civil rights cases.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 19, 27A (sic; some transcripts included both numbered and lettered pages).

²⁵⁶ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 133-40.

²⁵⁷ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 141.

Finally, in addition to these civil rights and equal justice measures, the recommendations addressed the urgency for improved police-community relations. In step with other proposals, the Council recommended that the federal government assist in improving police-community relations, despite the intrinsically local nature of these relationships. In particular, the report recommended federal standards for the recruitment, testing, selection, training, and pay of policemen. Despite these federal measures, the report did note that the “major burden for improving police-community relations rests on the local governments.”²⁵⁸ Locally, the measures called for campaigns to recruit and hire more African Americans, the creation of police department community relations units, and the implementation of improved complaint procedures.²⁵⁹

As with other topics, once the Planning Council’s proposals on the administration of justice were discussed at the conference, attendees revealed a “strong sense of urgency in calling for Federal, rather than state, action.”²⁶⁰ More than any other topic, the administration of justice meetings brought forth harsh criticism of the federal government’s failures in curbing violence towards African Americans and civil rights workers. Emotional reports of police violence surfaced in every meeting, accompanied by stories of federal agents standing by passively. While attendees believed that the proposed civil rights act would further empower federal agents to intervene, they called for even more drastic measures. For

²⁵⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 143.

²⁵⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 142-44.

²⁶⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 147.

example, some wanted the federal government to assume complete responsibility for local law enforcement.²⁶¹ Thus, where the recommendations had envision a stratified effort among federal and local governments, the conferees instead chose the federal government to shoulder the bulk of responsibility for improving the legal system and police departments. At the same time, the federal government was repeatedly lambasted for its failure to enforce existing laws and especially for the passive attitudes of FBI agents. Some, in fact, blamed this lack of federal support on recent legislative success. As L. Joseph Overton of the National Negro Labor Council said, “We have also seen that the civil rights revolution is beginning to take a slower pace because of the bills that have been passed by Congress thus far.”²⁶² Their lack of enforcement measures, he argued, decreased their impact. Complaints about the enforcement of these laws arose in all panels.²⁶³

Tepid enforcement was closely tied to tepid citizen support. As one panelist—professor of political science Eugene Feingold—noted in a housing discussion, laws “have not been supported by citizen opinion, and therefore in part they have not been enforced.”²⁶⁴ Thus, again, while the federal government was deemed both responsible for and capable of initiating changes, this view was not based on the federal government’s past performance. In fact, in a majority of meetings, attendees harshly criticized J. Edgar Hoover and called for his

²⁶¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 148-49.

²⁶² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 338.

²⁶³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 172.

²⁶⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 21.

dismissal.²⁶⁵ In some meetings, however, calls for Hoover's termination were tabled, evidencing an unwillingness of a majority of conferees to take such drastic steps.²⁶⁶

Administration of justice discussions raised several matters that the Planning Council's report had omitted. First, it criticized the report for failing to adequately document the exclusion of African Americans in both the enforcement and administration sides of the justice system, an exclusion they saw as endemic in both the North and South, and at both federal and state levels. They also called for the employment provisions in Title VII to be extended to state and local government jobs. In addition, they wanted to be sure that African American policemen were being assigned to neighborhoods other than African American areas.²⁶⁷

Furthermore, policemen needed to be better informed of life in the ghetto to reach a better understanding of the perspective of people who lived there, said participants.²⁶⁸ These suggestions had not been raised in the initial report of the Council, and therefore suggest that those who lived in the ghetto felt a greater isolation than the drafters of the report realized.

²⁶⁵ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 170. In one meeting, Arnold Trebach, Director of the Human Rights Program at Howard University, criticized Hoover as an outdated "folk hero." Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 9.

²⁶⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 232.

²⁶⁷ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 154.

²⁶⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 169. One of the suggestions that the police be better educated about the citizens in their community came from C.J. Williams, a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party from Courtland, Mississippi.

In addition to these four areas—economic security and welfare, education, housing, and administration of justice—the Planning Council drafted several proposals on health. These recommendations addressed infant mortality and the short life expectancy for poor African Americans, the need to improve the delivery of health care services to African Americans, and the importance of recruiting more African American health care workers. Initially these issues were to be addressed at the conference. During its preparations, however, the Planning Council determined that there would not be enough time to discuss all of these subjects at the two-day event. Thus, a future conference that focused solely on health issues was recommended.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 155.

CHAPTER FOUR: Talking It Out

In the roughly 140 cumulative hours of meetings, participants raised countless issues. Indeed, one goal of the conference was to provide a forum for as many voices as possible. As committee chairman Benjamin E. Mays explained at the beginning of one conference meeting, “We would like all who have an idea to have your chance to have your say.”²⁷⁰ In this respect, the conference was a success. Never before had such a large and diverse collection of people had the ear of the president on civil rights. Out of these debates and conversations, five major themes emerged: (1) the proper role for the federal government; (2) the desire for and parameters of affirmative action programs; (3) the relationship of U.S. involvement in Vietnam to civil rights; (4) the expansion of the civil rights movement; and (5) the intense worry that the conference’s failure would fuel violent protest, riots, and the growth of the Black Power movement. Analyzing the comments of panelists and participants provides a rich and nuanced picture of the state of the civil rights movement in June 1966, the varied visions of its future, and the role that the conference could play at the movement’s crossroads, as articulated by an extraordinarily diverse group of people.

On the evening of June 1, at the close conference’s first day, President Johnson unexpectedly arrived in the Sheraton Hotel’s large banquet halls. In light of the day’s controversy over resolutions and numerous anti-Vietnam proposals, Johnson had decided to make a surprise appearance.²⁷¹ Nonetheless, according to Berl Bernhard, “Johnson didn’t

²⁷⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 197.

²⁷¹ “CORE Rebuffed In Effort To Make War Racial Issue,” Durham Morning Herald 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 66.

want to attend unless he was assured of a quiet, respectful reception.”²⁷² Louis Martin, veteran civil rights advocate and journalist, and Elizabeth Reeves, Howard University Professor and wife of veteran civil rights attorney Frank Reeves, had a solution. At their suggestion, Bernhard arranged for cheerleaders from Howard to attend the evening banquet where, according to Bernhard, “they served everyone liquor and wine and distracted everybody exceedingly well.”²⁷³ When Johnson took the podium, reported one paper, he “was warmly received,” receiving seventeen standing ovations.²⁷⁴

In his speech, Johnson outlined his vision for the future of the civil rights movement as one in which responsibilities would be shared not only by the federal government and civil rights leaders, but also with labor and business leaders and state and local governments. Civil rights, he said, were an “issue . . . beyond the master of one man or one group of men.”²⁷⁵

Shunning well-established protocol, Johnson then bolstered his goodwill by introducing Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall as the evening’s keynote speaker, as opposed to claiming that spotlight for himself. In contrast to Johnson, Marshall implied that not only was the federal government responsible for civil rights change, but that it was also the body most capable of achieving that change. “There is very little truth in the old refrain

²⁷² Phillipa Sturm, ed., Civil Rights, Politics, and the Law: Three Civil Rights Lawyers Reminisce (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006) 6.

²⁷³ Sturm, 6.

²⁷⁴ “CORE Rebuffed In Effort To Make War Racial Issue,” Durham Morning Herald 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 66; Branch, At Canaan’s Edge, 472.

²⁷⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of President Johnson, Banquet Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 2.

that one cannot legislate equality,” he said, recounting decades of laws that had gradually granted civil rights to African Americans. Marshall concluded that “what is striking to me is the importance of law in determining the condition of the Negro.”²⁷⁶ Unlike Johnson, Marshall placed more trust in the federal legislative and judicial process than in individuals, communities, or businesses.

This disagreement between Johnson and Marshall was replayed in committee debates over the proper role for the federal government. In its recommendations, the Planning Council had asserted that the primary problem facing the civil rights movement was that “the national government’s response . . . has not been matched by state and local government, by business and labor, the housing industry, educational institutions, and the wide spectrum of voluntary organizations who, through united effort, have the power to improve our society.”²⁷⁷ Thus, the Council’s goal was to lift the burden of change from the federal government and shift it to many different sectors.

With few exceptions, conference attendees emphatically resisted this shift. In fact, the final report to the White House summarizing the conference noted that the “overwhelming majority were convinced that the primary burden and the best hope for solution to economic problems and social tensions rested with the Federal Government.”²⁷⁸

Yet as participants debated the scope of this federal role, four concerns emerged: (1)

²⁷⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Thurgood Marshall, Banquet Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, pages 52-53.

²⁷⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” Council’s Report and Recommendations, 96.

²⁷⁸ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 2-3.

disappointment with the federal government's failure to enforce civil rights laws; (2) reluctance to increase the power of the federal government; (3) worries that while federal pressure was required, it would usurp civil rights leadership and goals; and (4) fears that federal control would diminish a sense of responsibility for civil rights change among African Americans. These concerns reveal the growing divisions between the federal government and civil rights activists, divisions with roots in the government's failure to investigate civil rights violations in the South and the Democratic National Party's abandonment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in the summer of 1964. These fears also explain the rising discord among civil rights activists that led to the ouster of white workers from SNCC and the rise of the Black Power movement by the close of 1966 as African American activists sought to retain control over the movement and assert their identity.

Despite its position as host, the federal government received heavy criticism at the conference as delegates criticized the government's failure to enforce civil rights laws. As a representative from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, explained, he had shown the Council's report to civil rights workers back home. Those workers responded that while the Report looked "nice," "we don't believe in Washington any more—we don't see Washington, we don't even think it exists."²⁷⁹ Discussions in administration of justice meetings also highlighted disappointment with federal efforts, condemning the inertia of the FBI and the negligence of

²⁷⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, *Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration*: Reel 9, Microfilm 90.

Edgar Hoover.²⁸⁰ Joseph Rauh of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and Aaron Henry of the Clarksdale, Mississippi, NAACP, both chastised the FBI for its inaction and criticized the Planning Council's failure to criticize the FBI in its report.²⁸¹ Numerous delegates called for Hoover's resignation. Though some laughed at that suggestion, many conferees did endorse other resolutions revamping the FBI, from conducting internal investigations about the hiring of African American agents to limiting the amount of time FBI agents could be assigned to a specific Southern location (thereby reducing the feared impact of local racist customs).²⁸² Many participants believed that only usurpation of power by federal authorities could counteract local discrimination by police.²⁸³

Participants also acknowledged widely held fears of increasing federal power, claiming that some proposals expanding federal control over education sounded "like we are going to have a dictatorship."²⁸⁴ One editorial reported that if conference proposals were enacted, "they will result in a degree of federal control few men have dreamed of," postulating that many proposals threatened to dissolve the Constitution by conceding too

²⁸⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 15-16.

²⁸¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 18, 22.

²⁸² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IX, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 233, 274. This call for Hoover's resignation was made by Mark Israel, who identified himself as a member of the Tennessee Commission on Human Relations.

²⁸³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 80. This comment was made by Faye Bennett of the National Sharecroppers Fund.

²⁸⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 16.

much power to the federal government.²⁸⁵ Indeed, reported another paper, the “general public will find [the conference report] radical in several features,” particularly regarding the expansion of the federal government through public work programs, full employment, post-high school education subsidies, and rent subsidies.²⁸⁶

Rather than foster such fears, one participant suggested, local control over education should be tried first, and that failing, national control could then be pursued. This combination of suspicion and acquiescence to federal control were common in an age of ever-growing federal power. In particular, Johnson’s vision for a Great Society led to measures that grew and strengthened the reach of the federal government, introducing legislation like the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Social Security Act of 1965, and calling for over \$3 billion in funding for these programs over the next three years. Despite this federal growth, one participant explained, concerns about usurpation of local rights were overrated because “we ain’t got no local right in too many places that we need fear the Federal Government.”²⁸⁷

Others reasoned that federal power could be balanced with local control by having the federal government bankroll the movement while civil rights organizations controlled strategies and priorities. For example, participants clamored for federal funding for civil

²⁸⁵ James J. Kilpatrick, “The New Rights Reality: Pervasive Compulsion,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 7 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 33.

²⁸⁶ Charles Bartlett, “LBJ Faces Bigger Negro Demands,” Salt Lake Tribune 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 54.

²⁸⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 274. Interestingly, a minister from New York—not from the South—made this comment.

rights groups to improve education. Organizations like CORE, the SCLC, and SNCC, noted some, had not received any significant federal funds for education. “Now these are the organizations that have the ear of the common people,” said C.T. Vivian, longtime civil right activist, SCLC leader, and head of the Urban Training Center in Chicago.²⁸⁸ These groups, Vivian reasoned, therefore should have more control over education than the federal government.

Others also believed that more federal spending was crucial. Expressing disappointment with the Council’s report, Dean of the Boston College School of Law Robert Dirnan stated that the report appeared to “avoid all the hard questions” and showed “no creative thinking.”²⁸⁹ For example, Dirnan criticized the use of job councils, since they were based on the well-worn—and often unsuccessful—principle of using foundations to get money. On the other hand, he urged the federalization of the Employment Service, which would provide the same services, yet with federal funding.

Another common concern was that federal control would usurp the leadership and agenda of the movement at the expense of control by civil rights and grassroots organizations. As Leroy D. Clark of the NAACP Legal and Educational Defense Fund asserted, “This conference must be concerned with the creative and orderly shift of power to the poor . . . one of the things which concerns me about the conference is there is not enough suspiciousness about the kinds of people and institutions who are going to have to carry out

²⁸⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 24.

²⁸⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 20.

some of the goals which the conference is concerned with.”²⁹⁰ His comments suggest a fear that the movement would not only be co-opted, but also diluted, if its leadership were removed from civil rights and grass roots organizations.

Others refused to have the Planning Council or White House set their agenda. As participant Irene Smith explained, “President Johnson does not tell civil rights organizations what to do.”²⁹¹ Rejecting a CORE proposal to establish priorities and timetables for conference resolutions, another conferee said, “I’m not ready to give to the council any responsibility to establish my priorities.”²⁹² This sentiment, voiced by others, suggests a reluctance to have distant authorities set local agendas. Allowing civil rights organizations to set their own agendas stands in contrast to the many demands placed on the federal government in these meetings. It suggests that the conferees wanted federal legislation, enforcement, and funding, while retaining local control over strategies and priorities.

In fact, participants were seeking more control by attending the conference. Veteran civil rights worker Septima Clark—SCLC director of education and teaching, Highlander Folk School teacher, and Citizenship School founder—also sought answers from the conference. She wondered, “I would like to know who is going to bring pressure on authorities in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana . . . and in Georgia . . . Can you give me

²⁹⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 53.

²⁹¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 345.

²⁹² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 169.

something that I can take back to Selma, Alabama?”²⁹³ Clark’s question, in light of her long activist history, speaks to the crossroads faced by many leaders in the wake of the passage of legislation like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act that remained to be forcefully implemented.

Other conferees hesitated to place too much power in the hands of the federal government, fearing that it would diminish a sense of responsibility for change among African Americans. One participant identified as Reverend Benedit said that he disagreed with the “tone” of the report, explaining “through this document I get the feeling that ‘Big Dad’ is going to do it for you . . . the question is whether a Government can ever finance its own revolution.”²⁹⁴ In response to Reverend Benedit’s comments, Dr. Garth L. Magnum, an economist for the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, countered that “these kinds of programs . . . are not enough in and of themselves to produce human dignity, but they provide the economic base upon which dignity can be built.”²⁹⁵ Magnum was willing to place responsibility for change in the hands of the people, with foundational support from the federal government.

Other participants looked to state—as opposed to federal—government for change. SCLC leader Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, who introduced himself as being from “Birmingham, Alabama and Cincinnati, Ohio, and several jail houses around about,” said

²⁹³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 41.

²⁹⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 48.

²⁹⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 52.

that he was primarily interested in state government action, since the only African American state employees, he said, were janitors. State governments, as opposed to federal government or business or labor, should lead the way in promoting equal employment opportunity, he explained.²⁹⁶ Yet local control created problems, too. One problem with local control, said Raymond Bolden of the Joliet, Illinois, branch of the NAACP, was the lack of local initiative and money. For these reasons, he said, the federal government must exert “direct control” over desegregation.²⁹⁷

Indeed, many newspapers characterized the conference as an effort by Washington to tighten its control over the course and pace of the civil rights movement. According to the *Washington Post*, the “conference itself was good evidence of the degree to which the [civil rights movement] had been absorbed into the national power structure.”²⁹⁸ And, according to some views, this control was welcome. Reported one paper, the “conference represented a vote of confidence in the Administration. With support from the leading civil rights, labor, religious, and other groups committed to Negro progress, it assured that the major thrust of the organized civil-rights effort will continue to be directed within the traditional framework of American politics and economics—an implicit repudiation of the go-it-alone course recently charted by [SNCC].”²⁹⁹ Thus, despite criticisms of the federal government and

²⁹⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 85.

²⁹⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 14.

²⁹⁸ “Civil Rights and Beyond,” Washington Post 3 June 1966: A23, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 6.

²⁹⁹ “At Civil-Rights Talks: Who Listens Now?,” New York Amsterdam News 4 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 13.

worries about its expanding role, nearly all conference participants believed that federal funding and enforcement were keys to future civil rights success.

Affirmative action emerged as another major idea vetted at the conference. Though affirmative action was not a new concept in the 1960s, it was gaining national attention. Protests against federally-assisted construction projects in 1963, including demands for hiring formulas, showed that ideas about affirmative action were changing and becoming more prominent.³⁰⁰ The 1964 Civil Rights Act, however, specifically stated that it did not require “preferential treatment.”³⁰¹ In the fall of 1965, Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 required federal contractors to take “affirmative actions” to ensure that minorities were recruited and trained. EO 11246, however, failed to define “affirmative action” or explain how such programs should be implemented. In this context, conference conversations about affirmative action are important because they mark some of its earliest debates, debates that unfolded amid an unusually diverse crowd of labor, business, civil rights, and government representatives.

As a term, “affirmative action” appeared numerous times in the Planning Council’s report and in committee meetings. Yet its context and meaning varied. On the one hand, it could refer to demands for immediate and proactive action, as in the recommendation that “government departments take more affirmative action to cut off funds from institutions that

³⁰⁰ Robert J. Weiss, “Affirmative Action: A Brief History,” The Era of Integration and Civil Rights, 1930-1990, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland, 1992) 604-05.

³⁰¹ 42 U.S.C. § 703(j).

discriminate.”³⁰² Likewise, when summarizing the Council’s economic security and welfare recommendations, Nat Goldfinger, Director of Research for the AFL-CIO, described all of the provisions of Title VII and EO 11246 as mandating “affirmative action,” meaning “not by merely penalizing discriminatory activity, but through positive action leading to equality of opportunity.”³⁰³

At the same time, the Council also used “affirmative action” to describe potential hiring and training policies in the employment context. In a section entitled, “Affirmative Actions to Provide Jobs,” the Council’s recommendations called for a wide variety of programs, including more measures to end discrimination, to encourage the federal government to contract with equal opportunity contractors, to adopt programs to “get Negroes into business ownership and management,” for the extension of Title VII to state and local government workers, and for programs to advance the skills of African American workers “to compensate for deficient training under segregation,” for “more opportunity to those with ability but lesser grammatical skills,” for “special programs to bring Negroes into upper echelons of corporate enterprise,” and for specific companies known to discriminate to be investigated.³⁰⁴ Thus, in the Council’s report, “affirmative action” was broadly construed to include efforts to prohibit discrimination as well as to remedy past discrimination through policy changes and lawsuits.

³⁰² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 158.

³⁰³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 9.

³⁰⁴ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 162-63.

At the conference itself, the meetings acted as a proving ground for affirmative action discussions, with participants raising issues that continue to be debated today. As Aileen Hernandez, a director at the EEOC noted, “One of the major questions before agencies operating in the field is going to be, to what extent can you redress past discrimination?”³⁰⁵ Later in the meeting she asked, “Is it really fair to treat everyone equally as of now?, or is there a necessity to make some consideration of the fact that there are past inequities that make it impossible to apply standards across the board to everybody and be fair?”³⁰⁶ Hernandez’s comments reflected the debates in many committee meetings. Conference discussions on affirmative action centered on three themes: the use of quotas, the need for special training and educational programs, and the meaning of the term “preferential treatment.”

In economic security and welfare discussions, debates centered around the use of quotas and race conscious training and promotion programs. A proposal for “immediate attention” on the “recruiting, selection, training, and placement of trained Negro [and other minority] social workers” into Department of Health, Education, and Welfare programs passed without opposition.³⁰⁷ Others supported training and education to incorporate “the young under-educated into professional positions,” as opposed to implementing quotas.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 70.

³⁰⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 90.

³⁰⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 359.

³⁰⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 323.

Yet other participants advocated the use of quotas. Reverend Havenwaller of Brooklyn advocated that the federal government be “integrated one-third, one-third, one-third—black, white, nationalities of all races sitting in on policy.”³⁰⁹ Similarly, in another meeting, participant Roy Dallas Lowe, Sr., of Keysville, Virginia, proposed a resolution that would promote African Americans into government positions in direct proportion to their percentage of the population. Others countered that any such promotions must be based on merit and not simply on numbers. Lowe’s proposal ultimately passed in his committee once it was amended to allow race to be used as a preferential factor but without regard to any numbers’ quotas.³¹⁰

In housing discussions, debates also called for the use of race conscious policies. For example, one resolution called for the Federal Home Loan Board to appoint an African American “competent and experienced in housing” so that the Board would “always be conscious of the need and of the situation of the minority groups and particularly Negroes.”³¹¹ Another conferee suggested that public housing be proportionally integrated based on racial percentages in surrounding populations. This proposal passed.³¹²

Other affirmative action proposals called for special training and education programs. In one education meeting, a participant said that in terms of education, equality was not

³⁰⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 44.

³¹⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 58-61.

³¹¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 18. This comment was made by Washington, D.C., attorney Bethel Stalling.

³¹² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 99.

enough. Like special programs for physically handicapped students, special programs were also needed to help those who had been “educationally deprived or handicapped,” proposed one attendee.³¹³ And these programs should be directed not towards African Americans, but rather towards all students who had been educationally deprived, including, for example, white students from Appalachia, she explained. As another participant stated, “Was any consideration given to unequalizing in order to give advantage to the deprived and disadvantaged?”³¹⁴ Nabrit supported such a move, noting “there is no question that a compensatory type of support is necessary if we are to overcome the severe lag.”³¹⁵

In administration of justice committee meetings, many proposals related to the recruitment and promotion of African Americans in all legal sectors—from police positions to court clerks to judges.³¹⁶ Again, in these discussions, the use of the word “qualified” to describe African Americans being appointed to these positions was debated, with those arguing that the word was redundant dominating the discussion.³¹⁷ Others suggested that qualifications for these positions in fact be revisited, noting that discriminatory treatment by

³¹³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 82-83.

³¹⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 268.

³¹⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 268.

³¹⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 62C (sic; the page numbering of this transcript included some numbered and lettered pages); Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 68.

³¹⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm p. 62-E (sic; the page numbering of this transcript included some numbered and lettered pages).

police and engaging in civil rights activities left many African Americans with criminal records that prevented them from attaining many jobs.³¹⁸ The consideration of race as a factor also arose in discussions about jury selection. Committees debated whether laws should require African Americans to sit on juries if African Americans were on trial, or whether color blind jury selection procedures should be adopted.³¹⁹

Throughout the meetings, participants sometimes used the term “preferential treatment.” For example, one resolution proposed that “Negroes be given preferential treatment in rural post office jobs and all other government agencies because of previous discrimination.”³²⁰ Likewise, Charles Valentine of St. Louis, a member of CORE, thought that the conference needed to generate broader affirmative actions, directed at “the necessity of more than equal opportunity, of preferential priorities, of special rights for Negroes, and other non-whites.”³²¹ Valentine’s comments met with applause. Yet they were immediately challenged by Cenoria Johnson, of the Urban League, who said, “Wherever Whitney Young is, he is trembling,” implying that Young would bristle at the idea of preferential treatment. Johnson continued, “We don’t want preferential treatment . . . [we] cannot afford it . . . it is

³¹⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 61. This comment was made by Ollie Leads of Brooklyn, a member of the national board of CORE.

³¹⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 425.

³²⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 161.

³²¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 36.

not politically feasible.”³²² Johnson’s comments also met with applause. Howard Jenkins, a member of the National Labor Relations Board, attempted to mediate this debate, saying, “I don’t think any of us would disagree with Miss Johnson that we are not looking for preferential treatment . . . I would focus on the need for, not preferential, but an end to discriminatory treatment.”³²³

While no consensus over the meaning or scope of “affirmative action” was reached at the conference, these discussions show that numerous proposals passed that would be considered affirmative action measures today. The conference then, provided an opportunity for early conversations addressing ways that past discrimination in employment, housing, administration of justice, and education should be rectified.

Another area of heated debate at the conference revolved around U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In the months leading up to the conference, the United States was becoming more entrenched in Vietnam. In 1964, African Americans represented approximately thirteen percent of the U.S. population and less than nine percent of the military. In contrast, by 1968, African Americans composed approximately twelve percent of the U.S. military personnel. At the same time, they represented nearly twenty percent of all combat-related deaths in Vietnam between 1961 and 1966.³²⁴

³²² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 42.

³²³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 48-50.

³²⁴ David Coffey, “African American Personnel in U.S. Forces in Vietnam,” in Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 3-4.

As the nation's involvement in Vietnam deepened, so did King's opposition to the war. Though King had apologized to President Johnson for anti-Vietnam comments he had made in June 1965, by August 1965 King was publicly declaring, "Few events in my lifetime have stirred by conscience and pained my heart as the present conflict which is raging in Vietnam."³²⁵ Johnson also felt torn between civil rights and Vietnam, lamenting the sending of more troops while at the same time refusing to accept defeat.³²⁶

In this context, vigorous debates on Vietnam unfolded at the conference. CORE had arrived at the conference prepared to confront the issue. In every committee meeting, it presented a resolution calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, reasoning that federal money devoted to Vietnam missions was money that should be spent instead on civil rights initiatives. In addition, delegates who were not affiliated with CORE also presented resolutions that highlighted the relationship between Vietnam engagement and the civil rights movement. Debates centered around three themes: balancing the use of the country's resources, prioritizing Vietnam versus civil rights, and drawing a connection between the fight for civil rights at home and the fight for democracy abroad.

Discussions linking civil rights and Vietnam arose most commonly in the economic security and welfare meetings as participants debated the best use of the country's financial resources. McKissick called for withdrawal from Vietnam because "this nation has not yet demonstrated its ability and willingness to afford both 'guns and butter.'"³²⁷ Comments from

³²⁵ Branch, At Canaan's Edge, 254-55, 287, 324-29.

³²⁶ Branch, At Canaan's Edge, 243.

³²⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 57.

delegate Homer Jaffe, of the Universalist Unitarian Association, suggested that many other delegates were concerned about the use of limited resources, too, noting, “There has . . . been much talk in the corridors about guns versus butter, about Vietnam versus Watts.”³²⁸ Jaffe subsequently presented a motion asking the president to bring an “honorable end” to the conflict in Vietnam, a motion that passed in his committee.³²⁹

Similarly, in another panel, Jerome Bennett, a participant from Chicago, stated, “It seems to me we ought to be realistic enough at the conference to have some kind of recommendations to the President, about how drastically military expenditures affect the employment picture of the American Negro and the minority.”³³⁰ According to one participant, some delegates feared that the “ruse of defense expenditures” was being used to delay civil rights.³³¹ In one meeting, a “Mr. King” proposed a resolution prioritizing civil rights over U.S. involvement in Vietnam.³³² It is possible that Martin Luther King, Jr., made this comment as it is consistent with his anti-Vietnam stance at the time, but it cannot be definitively attributed to him. A subsequent editorial claimed that King had not been invited

³²⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 53.

³²⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 54.

³³⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 147.

³³¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 448.

³³² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 71.

to speak formally at the conference “out of the realistic fear that he would eloquently invoke opposition to Vietnam.”³³³

Beyond budgetary concerns, other Vietnam proposals suggested the more complex ways in which Vietnam related to “basic civil rights questions” and not merely financial ones. As delegate Isaiah Robinson asked, what was more important, the moon, Vietnam, or the “well-being of people in Watts?”³³⁴ Likewise, others wondered why the federal government gave African Americans the “opportunity” to fight in Vietnam while denying them the “opportunity to go to college where he may pass a deferment test.”³³⁵

In addition, reasoned participants, even if the use of resources in Vietnam were not cut, their use demonstrated the reach of the federal government, a reach that could be explored nationally to end segregation. “If we can send these troops to Vietnam . . . we can send [them] to Dorchester County and see that things are taken care of,” said J. Herbert Nelson, president of the South Carolina branch of the NAACP.³³⁶

Foreign relations experts at the conference also connected Vietnam and the civil rights movement, acknowledging the hypocrisy of promoting democracy abroad while denying it at home. Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg, U.S. Representative to the United

³³³ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Inside Report: ‘Better Than Nothing,’” Washington Post 7 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 34.

³³⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 33.

³³⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 67. This comment was made by Isaiah Robinson.

³³⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 94.

Nations, saw the conference as inextricably linked to foreign policy, explaining that “the best part of our country’s foreign policy is to put our domestic house in order.”³³⁷

In a similar vein, others suggested that rather than urge withdrawal from Vietnam, civil rights advocates should use the war to show that African Americans fighting abroad deserved freedom back home, a strategy that recalled the Double V campaign for victory at home and abroad of World War II.³³⁸ As Robert Castle of CORE asserted, such themes were in fact “very much germane to our whole question here and to our total concern for self-determination and for freedom.”³³⁹

Nabrit, as committee chairman, opposed anti-Vietnam proposals from Jaffe and McKissick, saying that discussions of Vietnam would put “an albatross around the civil rights movement,” detracting from its focus and threatening further internal discord. Following Nabrit’s comments, CORE’s proposal calling for an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam was defeated.³⁴⁰ Likewise, in a meeting chaired by the Honorable Carl B. Stokes, Stokes rejected a proposal denouncing U.S. involvement in Vietnam, viewing it as a purely monetary issue. He explained, “There is support to raise sufficient funds to meet the

³³⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 21.

³³⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 60.

³³⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 201.

³⁴⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 58-60.

domestic needs of the United States without getting into the question of the propriety or the politics of the Vietnam conflict.”³⁴¹

In other meetings, resolutions calling for a pullout from Vietnam failed because delegates objected to raising this issue at a civil rights conference.³⁴² As one committee chairman, Jack T. Conway, executive director of the Industrial Union Department, explained, “the guns and butter theme . . . is not germane to this conference.”³⁴³ James Meredith also saw Vietnam and civil rights as separate issues. The “conference should have nothing to do with Viet Nam,” he said, explaining that he was “disturbed by the efforts to drag the war into these deliberations. This will only hurt the Negro cause.”³⁴⁴ Walter Reuther agreed, asserting that the “conference should not involve itself with foreign policy” and that it “would be a disservice” to the civil rights fight.³⁴⁵

Despite the concerted effort by CORE and the numerous anti-Vietnam proposals of other non-CORE conferees, the summary of the conference given to the president claimed that conferees “demonstrated their unwillingness to consider any matter which was not a

³⁴¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 185.

³⁴² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 143.

³⁴³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 200.

³⁴⁴ Mohammed Rauf, “War Debate Outflanked,” Washington Daily News 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 46. The paper also reported that Meredith had announced that his march south would begin on June 5.

³⁴⁵ Mohammed Rauf, “War Debate Outflanked,” Washington Daily News 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 46.

basic civil rights question.”³⁴⁶ The summary to the president did note that a majority of panels resolved that the “President be urged to intensify his efforts to bring the Viet Nam conflict to an honorable end so that a greater amount of Federal funds can be devoted to fulfilling these rights.”³⁴⁷ Yet the summary also framed these debates in terms of budgetary concerns and did not fully describe the complexity of discussions connecting battles for democracy abroad with battles for civil rights at home.

While it is true that anti-Vietnam proposals were defeated in some of the meetings, they did generate heated debate and did succeed in some meetings, results that were downplayed in the summary report to the president. On the one hand, drafters of the summary may have chosen to minimize Vietnam’s impact on the conference so that the president would not bristle at conference recommendations, making him more amenable to the final report. On the other, the summary’s characterization of Vietnam as not a “basic civil rights question” may suggest that its drafters viewed the civil rights movement more narrowly than did many conference participants.

Johnson’s unscheduled appearance at the conference was in fact designed to contain anti-Vietnam sentiment.³⁴⁸ At least one newspaper judged this move a success, noting that the “White House won its main objectives in the conference and apparently stopped, at least

³⁴⁶ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 3.

³⁴⁷ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 158.

³⁴⁸ “Rights Conference to Vote On Criticism of U.S. Policy” New York Times 2 June 1966.

for the time being, a drift toward an anti-administration foreign policy in the [civil rights movement].”³⁴⁹

As the war continued, the connection between the civil rights movement and discriminatory drafting and military policies would become clearer. Recruiting and drafting policies meant the most underprivileged men were the most likely to be recruited and drafted. Deferments available primarily to students, the Selective Service System, and military admission policies favored the upper and middle classes. The availability of other exemptions, such as those for medical conditions, was also most likely to be known to the middle and upper classes. High unemployment and the apparent lack of other opportunities for advancement also spurred many African American men to enlist.

Compounding the overrepresentation of African Americans was the launch of Project 100,000 in August 1966. Project 100,000 lowered Army and Marines admission test standards and admitted the most underprivileged to the army under the guise of providing them with opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them. In fact, the Selective Service exam and its testing standards were “severely criticized as discriminating against the educationally deprived youth,” at the conference, summarized the final report.³⁵⁰ Sadly, this finding was one of the few proposals to receive prompt federal attention. Forty-one percent of those recruited under Project 100,000 were African American. Tragically, due to combat

³⁴⁹ “Moderates Retain Control: Viet Critics Lose Rights Parley Bid,” Boston Herald 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 3.

³⁵⁰ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 89.

decisions, casualty rates were twice as high for men recruited under Project 100,000 compared to those recruited through other routes.³⁵¹

In addition to expanding the civil rights debate to explore connections with U.S. foreign policy, conferees also advocated the movement's expansion in other directions. Specifically, they called for its expansion northwards, expansion to include other minorities, expansion to work through the framework of class—and not merely race, and expansion to include previously uncommitted Americans.

First, attendees emphasized that civil rights were being denied across the nation and not just in the South. For example, in discussions on providing legal representation to civil rights workers and African Americans, some attendees felt the report focused too much on the problems in the South.³⁵² Conferees also complained that the report failed to adequately address police and judicial discrimination in the North.³⁵³ As one Chicago attorney complained, “Implicit in this report is that the problem of unequal administration of justice is

³⁵¹ Christian G. Appy, Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) 29-34, 45, 49, 58, 83; David Coffey, “Project 100,000” in Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 338.

³⁵² White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 150, 152-53.

³⁵³ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 150, 152-53; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 42; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 21.

a southern phenomena. Nothing could be farther from the truth.”³⁵⁴ Southern civil rights organizations were already moving in this direction. In the August 1965, following riots in Chicago over integrating a firehouse, the SCLC and the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations launched the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM). The CFM was designed to create an “open city,” targeting the city’s housing segregation. Ending discriminatory arrests were also part of this campaign.³⁵⁵

In education meetings, discussions also focused on national, not Southern, segregation. Panelist Ruby Martin, an attorney for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, said, “Everybody assumes that [de facto segregation] is a Northern and Western problem, when really it isn’t. It is an urban problem,” she said, that faced cities like Chicago and San Francisco just as it did Atlanta, Houston, and New Orleans.³⁵⁶

In addition to expanding the geographic boundaries of the movement, conferees also called for the inclusion of other minorities. Despite the conference planners’ insistence that the it be focused primarily on African American interests, some delegates tied the fate of African Americans to the nation’s other minorities. Many voted for the conference’s

³⁵⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 24. This comment was made by William R. Ming, Jr.

³⁵⁵ James R. Ralph, Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993).

³⁵⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 19. Martin’s explanation was a response to complaints by the vice president of the Berkley, California, Board of Education, John Miller, about the absence of de facto segregation in the Council’s report.

proposals to be expanded to include all minorities.³⁵⁷ Others saw the long-term benefit of translating the conference's ideas to programs for all minorities, explaining, "Form your alliances. That is how you gain political control."³⁵⁸ In fact, at least one resolution focusing on improving education for African Americans was tabled because it excluded non-African Americans.³⁵⁹

Other proposals focused on the role that poverty—as opposed to race—played in systematic oppression. For example, conferees suggested resolutions calling for more job training of the poor, as opposed to merely African Americans.³⁶⁰ Others recognized that not only race, but the broader issue of poverty, prevented equality in the courts, with only those who could afford quality legal assistance receiving a fair trial.³⁶¹ In a similar vein, some conferees complained of the absence of poor people at the conference, since those are the "people whom we are talking about."³⁶² Recognizing the connections between poverty and

³⁵⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 86; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 80-85, 119; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 125.

³⁵⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 187.

³⁵⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 313-15.

³⁶⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IX, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 291.

³⁶¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 66.

³⁶² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 102.

discrimination, King had moved his family into a slum apartment in Chicago earlier that year as part of the CFM.

Finally, conferees called for the expansion of the support base of the movement, recruiting previously uncommitted Americans to the fight.³⁶³ Some suggested a massive public relations campaign. As one participant stated, all programs coming out the conference must have components geared towards “chang[ing] public opinion and public attitude.”³⁶⁴ Other delegates passed resolutions advocating federal public relations campaigns to advertise the benefits of integrated residential communities.³⁶⁵ “Why can’t the Federal Government put a lot of money encouraging the maximum effort, to popularize the values of integrated living?” wondered a participant from Evanston, Illinois.³⁶⁶ Others hoped a public relations campaign funded by the federal government would help inform the country of the “evils of discrimination, loss of national human resources, and manpower.”³⁶⁷ Indeed, the importance

³⁶³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 176; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 94.

³⁶⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 28.

³⁶⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 217; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 64.

³⁶⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 49. This comment was echoed in other meetings, with one participant calling for a mass media campaign by the federal government to promote fair housing laws. Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 194.

³⁶⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 49.

of using the media as part of this public relations campaign had led conference planners to invite media moguls and journalists to the conference in the first place. The conference, then, provided a forum for delegates to discuss growing the movement at a time when many activists were reassessing their strategies and priorities.

Amid discussions of movement expansion, delegates also raised fears of the movement's disintegration into separatism, militancy, and violence. At the time of the conference, some civil rights activists were exploring ideas about Black Power. As early as the spring of 1965, a SNCC position paper had questioned the role of white workers in the organization and focused on energizing racial consciousness among African Americans.³⁶⁸ Just days after the conference, during the March Against Fear launched by James Meredith, Stokely Carmichael would rally a crowd with calls for "Black Power," replacing the movement's long-standing motto of "Freedom Now." While Carmichael would later explain that Black Power was a call for political and economic power and pride in African American identity and history, many critics interpreted Black Power as a call for violence and separatism.³⁶⁹

At the conference, many conversations developed on the fear of both imminent violence and the rise of militancy and separatism in the movement. As Dr. John L.S.

³⁶⁸ Carson, In Struggle, 196.

³⁶⁹ Carson, In Struggle, 216; Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want," New York Review of Books Sept 22, 1966.

Holloman, president-elect of the National Medical Association, said, “Speaker after speaker has sounded a warning of the growing mood for militant action and violence.”³⁷⁰

Fears of repeated riots—like those in Watts the previous summer—created a sense of urgency in conference meetings. As participant Rayburn Johnson, Director of the Los Angeles Development Agency, warned, “I expect in August that the roof will blow off [Watts],” if concrete plans did not emerge from the conference.³⁷¹ It was not only Watts that was in danger. Louis Black of Brownsboro, Alabama, field representative for Rural Advancement and member of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, vented his exasperation with the lack of progress. “You can’t hardly win in these courts. And it looks like you are not going to win coming to these conferences. And it just looks like we are going to get into the streets and raise hell until we get what we are talking about,” he said.³⁷²

There was a sense among delegates that the threat of violence was national and not limited to Watts or the South. “We hear the ticking of the clock . . . August is coming on again . . . we suspect that there are Watts’ in every major city of the nation,” said the executive director of Southern California’s American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Asa Monroe.³⁷³ As even the restrained tone of the conference summary acknowledged, there was a widespread “conviction that . . . the ugly racial crisis facing the nation was quickening in

³⁷⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 61.

³⁷¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 16.

³⁷² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 23.

³⁷³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 93.

momentum.”³⁷⁴ This conviction lent urgency to the conference, especially in conversations about the administration of justice.³⁷⁵ As one unidentified voice proclaimed, there will be more riots “this summer unless something is done about this basic thing of police brutality.”³⁷⁶

During his welcome address to the conference, Randolph also conveyed a fear of imminent and widespread violence from “those whose anger becomes a social force of mass proportions.”³⁷⁷ In addition to immediate physical and economic damages, he also worried that such continued violence would imperil the movement’s future. Similarly, speaking at the opening session of the conference, Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s calls for “Freedom Now,” were fueled by his fears of further riots. He explained, “Today there are other Americans who see in the struggle for freedom and equality a license for irresponsibility and violence.”³⁷⁸

Many participants suggested that if the conference failed to achieve progress, they would be forced into the streets. While these statements suggest frustration with the state of

³⁷⁴ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 2-3.

³⁷⁵ In one committee, proposals urged President Johnson to call a conference with police officers lest “a fomented crisis of confidence could erupt into violence and destruction on a scale which would undermine all we seek to accomplish.” Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 131.

³⁷⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 73.

³⁷⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Philip A. Randolph, Opening Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 18.

³⁷⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Opening Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 32.

civil rights, they also suggest that many participants viewed the conference as a last chance for non-violent change. Morris Goswell, president of New York Chapter of the Negro American Labor Council, warned, “Unless something is done and some legislation drawn up that will give protection to the black people of America . . . there will not be any alternative for some groups to rise up in this country as they have risen up in other countries . . . and mete out justice in their own methods . . . we may as well face the issue before it’s too late.”³⁷⁹

Others, especially those who planned the conference, feared the growth of militancy and separatism among some civil rights sectors. In his speech to delegates, President Johnson cautioned against those “who counsel the Negro to refuse a share in society . . . to go it alone, to seek and acquire power independently, so he may owe nothing to others.”³⁸⁰ Johnson saw a splintering in the leadership of the movement and hoped its future would be guided by those who were invested in the spirit of collaboration that drove the conference.

President Johnson was referring to the rising popularity of the language and philosophy of the Black Power movement. Even those who had previously embraced non-violence were growing impatient with that strategy. As SCLC leader Hosea Williams noted, many African Americans were losing faith in the federal government based on its “failure to enforce existing measures,” explaining that “Southern Negroes have largely begun to turn to black nationalism and are losing faith in democracy and non-violence due to their local, State

³⁷⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 53-54.

³⁸⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of President Johnson, Banquet Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 2.

and National governments' failure to hold free elections."³⁸¹ Indeed, the government's growing awareness—and fear—of the rise of Black Power had shaped the convening of the conference, leading to Johnson's calls for consensus at the Planning Council meeting in March. Participant Reverend J.H. Jackson emphasized the importance of holding the conference at this time in light of the "tensions that are confronting us."³⁸² Shuttlesworth, too, argued that "the civil rights leaders, particularly if they develop any militancy could not be expected to bring much progress into this."³⁸³

Similarly, Wilkins, in his closing remarks to the conference, explained that—like Johnson—he wanted the civil rights movement to be led by those who attended the conference and not by those adopting separatist policies, likely alluding CORE and SNCC. The movement, he said, "cannot be left solely to the doctrinaire conformists who brook no dissent and who, lately, have begun to classify believers by the color of their skin."³⁸⁴

These comments suggest that some saw the conference as a last-ditch effort to ward off a usurpation of the civil rights movement by black nationalists. They accurately sensed the growing appeal of Black Power rhetoric and strategies, which would immediately gain

³⁸¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 67.

³⁸² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 30.

³⁸³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 44-45.

³⁸⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Roy Wilkins, Closing Session, June 2, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, page 64.

popularity during the Meredith March Against Fear on June 17.³⁸⁵ It would take only a few months for Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to found the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, in October 1966. In addition to calling for self-determination, their Ten Point Platform and Program called for improvements in economic opportunity, housing, education, the administration of justice and health care—the same issues that had been on the conference’s agenda. Thus, while conference planners had correctly anticipated the concerns of Black Power supporters, their approach did not satisfy those who wanted change and power now.

As discussions on the role of the federal government, affirmative action, Vietnam, expansion of the movement, violence, and militancy show, conference debates richly prefaced the debates that would divide and guide the movement in the late 1960s and 1970s.

³⁸⁵ Meredith began his March Against Fear on June 5. On June 16, during a rally of march supporters, Carmichael incited the crowd with a cry of “Black Power,” replacing the well-worn slogan of “Freedom Now” (a battle-cry so accepted that it was repeatedly employed by Vice President Humphrey in his speech at the conference). Garrow, 481; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Speech of Vice President Humphrey, Opening Session, June 1, 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9.

CHAPTER FIVE: Where Do We Go From Here?

Most attendees agreed that the conference had been a success, as evidenced by their unanimous general endorsement of the Council's report and in their calls for future conferences modeled on the To Fulfill These Rights Conference.³⁸⁶ Conference planners and attendees envisioned the To Fulfill These Rights Conference as a stepping stone to regular federal conferences and local conferences. Should states refuse to sponsor these conferences, then the Council urged that the Federal Government do so.³⁸⁷

Despite its criticism, the report of the Council was endorsed in each of the meetings.³⁸⁸ All committees praised the work of the Council and President Johnson's initiative in invoking the conference.³⁸⁹ In response to resolutions calling for specific timetables and budgets, participant Donald Frey of Evanston, Illinois, rejected the resolution, saying, "I think it breaks faith with the format of this Conference. Any vote in favor of this resolution would be a vote indicating that we do not feel that this Conference has produced a

³⁸⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 317-18; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 456.

³⁸⁷ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 158; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 42 (Jack Crum of the North Carolina Council of Churches suggesting future state conferences); Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 102 (Julia Lewis of CORE suggesting a future federal conference).

³⁸⁸ White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 158.

³⁸⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 348.

tremendous amount of additional insights and values and exchange of opinions.”³⁹⁰ Calls for the Planning Council to remain on staff to track the implementation of the recommendations, to hold another conference in one year to analyze the progress of the report, and to send conferees written answers from the federal government about its plan to implement their recommendations all show the immediate perceived success of the event.³⁹¹ According to one newspaper, the “general atmosphere of the conference seemed to be hopeful.”³⁹²

Across the country, dozens of groups launched local efforts based on the conference’s agenda and recommendations. Local conferences were proposed and local initiatives like Project Equality—in which businesses agreed to contract only with suppliers who supported equal opportunity—were implemented.³⁹³ At the federal level, the Public Service Training

³⁹⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 54.

³⁹¹ White House Conference “To Fulfill These Rights,” The Report of the White House Conference, 159.

³⁹² “Sense of Urgency, Hope Permeate Rights Talks,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 2 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 58.

³⁹³ Mabel Norris Chesley, “Fall Conference to Examine Florida Civil Rights Picture,” Dayton Journal 29 June 1966: 3, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; “YWCA Joins Struggle for Equal Rights,” Chicago Defender 2 July 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; “Project Equality Statewide,” National Catholic Reporter 15 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; Kenneth D. Nordin, “‘Rights’ Spark: School-graduation incident ignites Negro action,” Christian Science Monitor 23 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; “Seize the Initiative,” Durham News & Observer 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14; Esther Gwynne, “San Diegans Talk About Civil Rights Here at Home,” San Diego Tribune 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

Fund was created, again based on a conference recommendation, in an effort to provide jobs to the chronically unemployed.³⁹⁴

Roy Wilkins proposed that the “real value [of the conference] is that it has brought people together and refired them, so to speak, to go back home and do things that must be done on the state and local level.”³⁹⁵ In terms of the conference’s lasting success, Wilkins took a wait-and-see approach, saying, “Well, let’s wait till next fall.”³⁹⁶

Others lauded the conference’s attempts at diversity. Exemplifying that diversity, James Meredith shared a conference room with Mississippi governor Paul Johnson, the man who had prevented him from entering Ole Miss.³⁹⁷ Panelist Emory Via of the Southern Regional Council noted, “The council itself is not made up of just wild liberals or just civil rights types or anything else. It is quite a cross-section on that Council, and I think it’s significant that that group has gone as far as it has in all of these recommendations.”³⁹⁸ His comments speak to the perception of the Council as diverse and also to the uniqueness of the report the Council produced.

Other participants used the conference to draw attention to specific problems they were facing back home. Jeffrey L. Hawkins, a self-described “father of 11 children . . . [a]

³⁹⁴ Robert S. Boyd, “U.S. Begins Jobs-for-All Pilot Projects,” Washington Post 30 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

³⁹⁵ James C. Millstone, “Immediate Lobbying Campaign For Rights Legislation Urged As White House Sessions End,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 49.

³⁹⁶ Joseph E. Mohbat, “Behind the Rights Conference,” News Times (Danbury, CT) 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 295.

³⁹⁷ Branch, At Canaan’s Edge, 472.

³⁹⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 168-69.

symbol of what you all call the slum area” rose to protest the lack of federal funding for civil rights initiatives.³⁹⁹ Geneva Tracy of Dorchester, South Carolina, specifically asked the federal government to come into her county to tackle the discrimination rampant there.⁴⁰⁰ Other conferees highlighted the discrimination policies at the Seward Luggage Company in Virginia and were successful in having its committee censure that company.⁴⁰¹

As these comments show, voices emerged that had not previously been heard on such a national scale. The acknowledgement and airing of these diverse, unknown voices makes the conference unique when compared to previous national civil rights events—like the March on Washington—at which only renowned civil rights leaders stood at the podium.

Amid these calls for action, other voices remained silent, notably those of the well-known civil rights leaders who attended. In meeting transcripts, it is clear that Height, Randolph, and Wilkins attended based on various chairmen’s greeting to them, but they did not speak out.⁴⁰² Nor do there appear to be any comments from Young. On the one hand, the silence of these leaders could indicate their desire to let those who had not had a platform for their concerns take advantage of this forum. This may be particularly true for leaders like

³⁹⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee II, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 69.

⁴⁰⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 96.

⁴⁰¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee I, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 9, Microfilm 69-76.

⁴⁰² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 166; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 51; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 45, 60.

Randolph and Wilkins who were given the opportunity to present formal speeches at the conference. According to one report, the conversations in the hallways outside the meetings were dynamic and produced fruitful discussions, and it was in these informal settings that civil rights leaders spent their time.⁴⁰³

On the other hand, the silence of these figures may indicate their disappointment with the conference. According to numerous news reports, King spent at least some of the conference “sulking upstairs.”⁴⁰⁴ Some papers attributed this absence to his disappointment over Thurgood Marshall’s failure to discuss the importance of protest in his speech to conference delegates and because King’s “arch-rival” Wilkins was “the only representative of the civil rights movement to address the banquet session.”⁴⁰⁵

In contrast, other attendees saw the conference as a moment of historic importance. As the chair of one committee—the Honorable Louis H. Pollack—proclaimed happily following the passing of sweeping resolutions on economic security, “We are remaking the face of America.”⁴⁰⁶ Many participants viewed the speeches of Johnson and Marshall as the

⁴⁰³ Rainwater and Yancey, 281-82.

⁴⁰⁴ James J. Kilpatrick, “The New Rights Reality: Pervasive Compulsion,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 7 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 33.

⁴⁰⁵ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Inside Report: ‘Better Than Nothing’,” Washington Post 7 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 34. Another paper corroborated this report, stating that King was apparently “in his hotel room, perturbed because the speech delivered by Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall on Wednesday night ignored the importance of demonstrations and direct action by Negroes in forcing progress in the civil rights field.” Robert E. Baker and Williams Chapman, “Rights Parley Kills Viet Pullout Plea,” Denver Post 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee IV, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 442.

pinnacle of the conference. Attendees “agreed that the President’s appearance boosted the morale of the participants and saved the conference from becoming dull and drab,” reported *Jet*.⁴⁰⁷ As Chairman Benjamin E. Mays noted when convening his committee the following morning, “I think last night the climax was reached, some feel, and some of the people have taken off.”⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, according to one account, attendance at the conference diminished as the days wore on.⁴⁰⁹

Waning attendance evidenced the frustration with talking, rather than doing. Attendees bemoaned the impact such a conference could generate. According to Robert Hicks, a paper worker from Bogalusa, Louisiana, “The Negro people in Bogalusa will be peeved . . . They spent \$500 to send me to this big show, this come-on, this waste of time. I hoped I could come back and tell them some kind of action would be taken immediately.” Bogalusa was home to one of the earliest chapters of the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an armed African American self-protection group. According to Hicks, he had always cautioned restraint among the Deacons. In light of the failure of the conference to achieve any immediate goals, Hicks said, he could no longer guarantee peaceful protest. According to Hicks, “The Deacons . . . are growing . . . Maybe violence is the only way to awaken people’s consciences, but I hope not.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Ragni Lantz, “‘Righteous Anger’ Need Not Be,” *Jet* 16 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 85.

⁴⁰⁸ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 182.

⁴⁰⁹ Rainwater and Yancey, 278.

⁴¹⁰ Nicholas von Hoffman, “A ‘Come-On,’ Said Bogalusa Man,” *Washington Post* 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 160.

Likewise, Bernice Miller, of Bolivar, Tennessee, president of the Hardeman County Improvement Association, echoed Hicks' comments. According to Miller, "We have all kinds of problems down where I come from. And I don't think that any kind of conference will really hit the spot."⁴¹¹ Delegates repeatedly complained that the report's failure to "set priorities, a timetable, a budget," and other specific goals made it a useless document.⁴¹²

Describing dire conditions at home—growing high school drop out rates, teen pregnancy, broken homes and poor police-community relations—participant John Scott of Watts, lamented, "When I go home and tell these people what I heard, all I can say is that they . . . gave promises, which was understood from the beginning. And at this point they ask how about us, I am just going to look at them for once and say, 'I didn't hear a word, I didn't hear a word.'"⁴¹³ Scott's frustration reflects the lack of faith that conferences could bring change, and his comments were echoed in other meetings. "Folks are getting tired of discussion and tired of theory," said Hosea Williams.⁴¹⁴ Don Benedict, of the Chicago Missionary Association, called instead for a "display of a demonstration" like a march.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ "Delegates give views on conference," Washington Afro-American 4 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 116.

⁴¹² White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," The Report of the White House Conference, 158.

⁴¹³ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 112. Many people in the meeting were moved by the details of John Scott's narrative, which colored the rest of the committee's discussion on issues such as police harassment, ghetto life, and grass roots efforts.

⁴¹⁴ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee V, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 20.

⁴¹⁵ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee III, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 10, Microfilm 220. This comment was made by Don Benedict of the Chicago Missionary Association.

Floyd McKissick, head of CORE, was one of the conference's loudest critics. Having initially elected to boycott the conference, McKissick later changed his mind, saying that CORE would attend "in order that the militant can bring forth ideas which otherwise would not be brought forth."⁴¹⁶ At the conference, CORE members were vocal participants, presenting prepared resolutions in nearly all committee meetings. In addition to their anti-Vietnam proposals, CORE also introduced resolutions on welfare and maximum feasible participation in federal programs, improving police-community relations, and hiring African Americans in law enforcement.⁴¹⁷ No other civil rights group presented such a prepared and organized position at the conference. Despite CORE's coordinated and at least marginally successful proposals and despite his success in altering the resolution procedures, McKissick held a press conference in his hotel room, announcing his opinion "no longer that the conference is rigged, but that it is in reality a hoax."⁴¹⁸

CORE member Reverend Elton B. Cox, of High Point, North Carolina, explained, "The trouble with this entire conference is that too many of us are middle class Negroes and Whites here, and we think that there is something immoral about hitting the streets."⁴¹⁹ In addition to suggesting that most conferees were perceived as middle class, Cox's comment

⁴¹⁶ "CORE Seeks New Agenda For Rights Talks Today," New York Times 1 June 1966.

⁴¹⁷ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VII, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 12, Microfilm 201, 205; Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 166.

⁴¹⁸ John Herbers, "Rights Conference Averts Showdown on War Policy," New York Times 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 77.

⁴¹⁹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 185.

also shows that even those who were uncomfortable with public protest believed that it was still needed. Charles Duncan, General Counsel to the Equal Opportunities program, had responded to people complaining about the methods suggested in the report, “If the methods which we have mentioned don’t work, and you suggest they don’t, then you have to take it to the streets.”⁴²⁰ Likewise, panelist Charles Morgan, Director of the ACLU, chimed in, “I just want to caution against what I think I constantly sort of sense, and that is the day of the streets is over. When the day of the streets is over in this country for any minority, that is the day this country is over, and that is the day we will stop moving.”⁴²¹ Morgan’s comments met with applause. Thus, conferees like Duncan, Cox, Morgan and those who applauded these remarks believed that committee meetings and reports held limited potential, even if that meant leaving their comfort zone. To carry the movement further more public protests were needed.

Just three days later, James Meredith would answer their calls for a demonstration and launch his March Against Fear. At the conference, Meredith had grumbled, “It seems to me that I ought to participate and say something, but I don’t know what the purpose of having us here is.”⁴²² Shortly thereafter he called a press conference in the lobby of the Sheraton to announce his plans for the march.⁴²³ Accordingly, Meredith began to walk from

⁴²⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 142.

⁴²¹ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee XI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 189-90.

⁴²² Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee VI, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 11, Microfilm 123.

⁴²³ Richard H. Rovere, “Letter from Washington,” The New Yorker 18 June 1966: 128; “Local Delegates Find White House Conference Difficult to Evaluate,” The Michigan

Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, showing that he was not afraid to cross the South and encouraging others to conquer their fears of registering to vote and asserting their civil rights. On the second day of his 220-mile walk, he was shot by a sniper. King, Carmichael, McKissick, and scores of others rushed to complete the March. It was during this march, following arrests and intimidation by local police, that Carmichael unleashed his cries for “Black Power.” Immediately after the conference, Carmichael had stated, “I guess everybody can see what that conference is good for now,” he said laughingly, judging that the meetings had produced no worthwhile results.⁴²⁴ On the contrary, the conference paved the way for Meredith’s march and Carmichael’s opportunity to carry his message of Black Power to an enthusiastic crowd.

A few days after Carmichael’s calls for Black Power, King published a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* denouncing the use of “Black Power” as a rallying cry. Randolph, Wilkins, and Young also released a joint announcement condemning the slogan. These men reasoned that the “Black Power” concept undermined the moral appeal of the movement.⁴²⁵ Randolph, once a unifying figure for the movement, lost the support of young militants and long-time supporters in CORE.⁴²⁶ Recalling the time period between the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the close of 1966, Wilkins remembered, “It sometimes seemed as if the roof had caved in and the floor was about to give way, too. A new

Chronicle, 11 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 846.

⁴²⁴ Nicholas von Hoffman, “A ‘Come-On,’ Said Bogalusa Man,” Washington Post 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 160.

⁴²⁵ Pfeffer, 276.

⁴²⁶ Pfeffer, 278.

generation short on history and long on spleen chased after me and the NAACP day and night. Some said we were just too old, others that we were playing Uncle Tom.”⁴²⁷

Debates over the philosophy, strategies, and usefulness of Black Power divided civil rights groups at a time when many in the movement were looking for unity, a unity some had searched for, and failed to find, at the To Fulfill These Rights Conference. According to Cecil B. Moore, chairman of the Philadelphia Chapter of the NAACP, he and others decided to join the Meredith March to “try to right the wrongs of moderation that were started at the White House Conference on Civil Rights, and restore the pride and unity and desire we had in 1963.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Wilkins and Mathews, 314.

⁴²⁸ “Moore Flies to Memphis,” Philadelphia Inquirer, 12 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 850.

CONCLUSION

“The President, in short, came through the conference without a scratch,” judged one paper. “There was nothing that was said or done in the two days which offered serious proof against the growing sentiment that he has become the real leader of the civil rights movement,” it continued.⁴²⁹ Thus, the media judged that the conference had been a success in creating the perception that that the White House could and would control the future of the civil rights movement. This perception was backed by the majority of voices at the conference pushing for greater federal leadership, intervention and enforcement.

Civil rights leaders, businessmen, labor leaders, government officials, and grass roots representatives came together for two days in June for a conversation on how to solve the most dire problems facing African Americans—problems like endemic employment discrimination, unequal education, limited housing opportunities, and injustice before the law. Their meeting—a meeting to which thousands clamored to be invited—shows that there was great hope that commonalities and solutions could be found. One panelist told fellow conferees that “much of what the federal establishment indeed will do this fall, this year, next year can be influenced by what you here today help decide.”⁴³⁰ While it may be difficult to measure the conference’s impact quantitatively, this sense that it was a pivotal and historic event captures the feeling of the hope and urgency at the time, a sense that forces were

⁴²⁹ Mary McGrory, “A ‘Real Peaceful’ Session,” Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) 3 June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 56.

⁴³⁰ Proceedings of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference, June 1-2, 1966: Committee X, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 13, Microfilm 28. This comment was made by Professor G.W. Foster of the Wisconsin School of Law.

shifting and that the conference presented a unique and fleeting opportunity to shape the next phase of the movement.

Indeed, many state officials called for similar local conferences. Connecticut held a Conference on Human Rights inspired by the To Fulfill These Rights Conference in April 1967, proposing legislation designed to eliminate de facto school segregation, create police review boards, and expand state welfare programs.⁴³¹

On August 25, nearly three months after the conference, President Johnson created an interdepartmental committee to analyze the recommendations generated by the event. The group, headed by Harry McPherson, special counsel to the president, and Clifford Alexander, deputy special counsel, was charged with delivering a report to the president within 30 days.⁴³²

Following the conference, the White House ambiguously reported that President Johnson would not support all of the conference proposals or recommendations, but failed to identify any specific objections to them. When Johnson first announced the creation of the study committee, he said, "It is important that the recommendations of the council and conference receive serious attention by local, state, and Federal Government officials." He continued, "And much more than official action is involved here," emphasizing the roles for labor, business, religious and civic groups identified at the conference.⁴³³ Thus, where the conferees had pushed the onus of action to the federal government, Johnson turned the tables and resituated that burden on the private sector. The feeble endorsement led many to believe

⁴³¹ William Borders, "Connecticut Gets Rights Proposals," New York Times 2 Apr. 1967: 64.

⁴³² John Herbers, "President Names Rights Study Unit," New York Times 26 Aug. 1966: 17.

⁴³³ Herbers, "President Names Rights Study Unit," 17.

that President Johnson was disappointed by the conference.⁴³⁴ Indeed, Johnson completely ignored the conference, its announcement, and its planning in his autobiography.

Randolph submitted his Freedom Budget to the administration in November 1966. The Freedom Budget advocated full-employment and jobs programs and included many other proposals generated by the conference, such as expanded welfare programs, improved housing conditions, and better educational opportunities.⁴³⁵ Calling for a budget of \$185 billion, the proposal asserted that this cost was less than one-eighth of the revenue that would be generated by a full employment economy.⁴³⁶ The president ignored the budget proposal. Though Randolph refused to denounce Johnson's involvement in Vietnam, and declared that the Freedom Budget posed no threat to military spending, he lambasted Johnson's abandonment of civil rights and the war on poverty before a senate committee hearing in December.⁴³⁷

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 would not have happened without Johnson's brilliance as a legislative strategist and without the nation's grief in the wake of Kennedy's assassination. Yet the passage of these laws was simplified because they targeted what McPherson had once described as "observable cruelties,"—i.e., job discrimination, voting prohibitions, and access to public accommodations. In contrast, the issues raised at the conference, and indeed, the issues that

⁴³⁴ Herbers, "President Names Rights Study Unit," 17.

⁴³⁵ Thomas A. Johnson, "10-Year Plan Aims to End Poverty," New York Times 27 Oct. 1966: 1.

⁴³⁶ Daniel Levine, Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000) 188.

⁴³⁷ Pfeffer, 287.

civil rights activists prepared to confront in 1966, were murkier—poverty, access to welfare, housing disparities, unemployment, unequal and inadequate education, and fractured police-citizen relations.⁴³⁸ The “observable cruelties” prohibited by the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act could be addressed without discussing the roots of poverty, the role of preferential treatment, affirmative action programs, or the state of the African American family.

Just a few months after the conference, national enthusiasm for civil rights was fading. According to a September front-page article in the *New York Times*, “Public support for the Negro and his problems is waning, white opposition is growing, and the civil rights movement is falling into increasing disarray.”⁴³⁹ According to the paper, white liberals were shifting their interest to anti-Vietnam protests, disturbed by the summer’s rioting, and uncomfortable with increased demands for housing desegregation. Further undermining their interest, said the *Times*, was the discord among civil rights organizations—particularly over ideas on white participation—and the more complicated problems on the table, echoing the sentiments of McPherson.

By 1966, the window of opportunity created by national grief over Kennedy’s murder, Johnson’s high approval ratings, and sympathy for the civil rights movement had closed. In the mid-term elections, Republicans gained a net of three seats in the Senate and 47 seats in the House, eclipsing the net gain of 38 congressional seats that Democrats had taken in the 1964 election. The Republican surge was bolstered by registration drives for

⁴³⁸ Mann, 252.

⁴³⁹ Gene Roberts, “Civil Rights: A Turning Point,” *New York Times* 19 Sept. 1966: 1.

white voters in the South.⁴⁴⁰ In its 1966 pre-election coverage, *Newsweek* described the tone of the times in an article, “Politics: The White Backlash of 1966.” According to *Newsweek*, not since the early 1960s had so many white voters believed the administration was “pushing civil rights too fast.”⁴⁴¹ A Gallup Poll taken in late 1966 revealed that over half of white Americans thought that President Johnson was pursuing racial integration too aggressively.⁴⁴² The 1966 Civil Rights Act fell victim to this growing white backlash. While the bill passed in the House, it failed in the Senate, lacking enough votes to break cloture.⁴⁴³ The failure of the legislation marks a failure of the conference, for, according to Roy Wilkins, one of the purposes of the conference had been to garner support for the bill.⁴⁴⁴ The window of opportunity was closed further by the eruption of widespread rioting in the summer of 1967, in Newark, Detroit, and other cities. By this time, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had also begun to monitor, disrupt, and foster divisions in civil rights organizations through COINTELPRO, his Counterintelligence Program.

Indeed, the retreating tide of support for the civil rights movement was expressed in the findings of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, established to study the origins of recent explosive, wide-scale urban riots, like those in Detroit and Newark in July 1967. According to Senator Frank Harris, a member of the Commission, the To Fulfill These Rights Conference had failed to have an

⁴⁴⁰ Stern 229; Mann, 253.

⁴⁴¹ Stern, 229.

⁴⁴² Mann, 252-53.

⁴⁴³ Mann, 253.

⁴⁴⁴ “White House Conferees Urged to Work for New Civil Rights Laws,” Louisiana Weekly 11 June 1966: Section 1, page 7, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 20, Microfilm 842.

impact because the majority of Americans were not interested in programs helping disadvantaged minorities.⁴⁴⁵ Daniel Moynihan would later attribute the failure of the conference and the failure to seize this moment for change to the divisions created by his report on the “Negro Family.”⁴⁴⁶

Yet the findings of the conference would resurface again and again in the years to come. Both the Kerner Commission and the 1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence—reporting on internal and external threats to United States security—reiterated the recommendations of the conference. Both the Kerner Commission and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence—also known as the Eisenhower Commission—recommended increasing welfare spending, expanding housing options, and creating more job opportunities.⁴⁴⁷ Yet in contrast to the pessimistic conclusions of the Kerner Commission, the Eisenhower Commission judged that reports like that coming out of the conference, while failing to impact national policy, nonetheless had influenced national opinion.⁴⁴⁸

In February 1967, in his message to Congress asking for an open housing law, Johnson would also echo many of the recommendations of the conference. He called for expanded job training programs, a ban on discrimination in housing sales and rentals, fair jury selection procedures, and enhanced powers for the EEOC. While Johnson referenced

⁴⁴⁵ John Herbers, “Riot Study is Said to Express Alarm,” New York Times 18 Feb. 1968: 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas A. Johnson, “Lost Opportunity for Rights Cited,” New York Times 9 Feb. 1967: 26.

⁴⁴⁷ John Herbers, “After the Riot Report,” New York Times 2 Mar. 1968: 28; John Herbers, “Violence Panel Bids U.S. Combat Causes of Unrest,” New York Times 12 Dec. 1969: 1.

⁴⁴⁸ John Herbers, “Violence Panel Bids U.S. Combat Causes of Unrest,” 1.

his 1965 Howard University commencement address in his remarks to Congress, he did not mention the conference itself.⁴⁴⁹ Eventually, the 1968 Civil Rights Act would pass, banning discrimination in all real estate sales and rentals, with the exception of sales without an agent by private homeowners. The legislation also contained provisions imposing penalties for interfering with the exercise of civil rights.⁴⁵⁰

While the conference was certainly a failure in aiding the passage of the 1966 Civil Rights Act and in sowing unity among civil rights leaders, it was a success in highlighting the divisions between civil rights leaders, the White House, and among liberals in general. In that sense the conference gave birth to the next phase of the civil rights movement and of liberal politics in the United States. As whites were ejected or retreated from the civil rights movement, they found new homes in the anti-war and women's movements.

Prior to the conference, liberal support for the civil rights movement had helped elect Kennedy, leading to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the programs of the Great Society and, indeed, the convening of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference. Later, King would recall, "The decade of 1955 to 1965, with its constructive elements, misled us . . . Everyone underestimated the amount of rage Negroes were suppressing, and the amount of bigotry the white majority was disguising."⁴⁵¹ The shooting of James Meredith three days after the conference, the angry mobs that King encountered later that summer during the Chicago campaign, and the riots of Detroit and Newark in the

⁴⁴⁹ "Text of President's Civil Rights Message to Congress Asking for Open Housing Law," New York Times 16 Feb. 1967: 28.

⁴⁵⁰ Mann, 260.

⁴⁵¹ Garrow, 581.

summer of 1967 ended that so-called “constructive” era. The conference stands as one of the last gasps of 1960s liberalism. The slumping economy of the late 1960s, Johnson’s further entrenchment of the nation in Vietnam, the difficulty of developing consensus on issues like affirmative action, housing, and education, and Johnson’s decision to abandon the 1968 election fueled a social pessimism that sounded a death knell for the liberalism that had triumphed earlier in the decade.⁴⁵²

Examining how the national interacted with the local and how these interactions influenced discussions on the status and future of civil rights strategies and policies provides a fuller understanding of the civil rights movement in June of 1966 and in the years to come. Historians have yet to fully explore the development and role of disunity in the civil rights movement. As Jacquelyn Hall has noted, stories that the movement disintegrated into identity politics in the late 1960s obscure the way that the movement’s goals and methods were evolving.⁴⁵³ Contrary to those who locate the disintegration of the liberal civil rights consensus in divisive Black Power rhetoric, conference transcripts showed divisions emerging outside of the Black Power dialogue, on issues like federal intervention, affirmative action, and Vietnam.

Conversations during conference planning and debates at the conference also elaborate the existing history on the shifting alliances of civil rights leaders and organizations in 1966. Within the Big Six, disagreements over leadership and strategy continued. As a

⁴⁵² Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1984) 187, 395-96, 439.

⁴⁵³ Hall, 13. Meier also calls for a better understanding of the ways that the civil rights struggle transformed, as opposed to failed or declined, post-1965. Meier, 223.

CORE position statement written at the time of the To Fulfill These Rights Conference explained, “We cannot rely in all communities on the coalition of power responsible for recent civil rights legislation [to challenge the status quo]. Within those coalition forces there are growing distinctions based on class and resulting differences in priorities for action.”⁴⁵⁴

Analyzing the conference also combats another pitfall of the traditionally accepted narrative of the civil rights movement—i.e., that it was about a colorblind search for equality, one that rested on the belief that individual merit was the only requirement of success.⁴⁵⁵ The myth of the goal of a colorblind society is one that has been perpetuated by the New Right and conservative revisionists eager to limit the civil rights movement and bolster the conception of the American Dream as one that requires only individual merit.⁴⁵⁶ Rather, as committee discussions show, many civil rights activists were beginning to question whether equality under the law was the only answer to resolving entrenched racism and racist policies. As discussions on affirmative action, employment and education show, many wondered whether a system of ratios, quotas, or other non-colorblind promotion and training measures might be necessary to truly fulfill the rights now guaranteed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Following his speech on the first night of the conference, Johnson approached Berl Bernhard. Bernhard remembered, “I spent six months as director and counsel of that White

⁴⁵⁴ Congress of Racial Equality Statement of Position, White House Conference To Fulfill These Rights, June 1966, in Lawson, Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: Reel 14.

⁴⁵⁵ Hall, 4.

⁴⁵⁶ Gaines, 211; Hall, 2-3, 18.

House conference. I worked my tail off and thought I had been brilliant. The night of the conference Johnson came over as he was leaving. We had had a lot of controversy and I thought he was going to tell me what a remarkably wonderful fellow I was. As he walked past me, however, he leaned over and said, ‘You couldn’t find your ass with both hands.’⁴⁵⁷

While Johnson was disappointed by the controversy that arose at the conference, the debates and disagreements were valuable signals of the coming shifts in the civil rights movement. Seeking ratification of his civil rights record, Johnson had found angry rebuke. Searching for unity, he encountered discord over economic, education, and housing policies, and Vietnam.

Adding complexity to that Mississippi River of civil rights histories, analyzing the conference provides new insight into the national and local organizations, people, and policies of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s. The To Fulfill These Rights Conference is a chapter of the civil rights movement that expands the movement’s narrative and is one that, until now, has been neglected by historians.

⁴⁵⁷ Sturm, 22.

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