

# CHICAGO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOVEMENT FOR QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1966-1971

by Dionne Danna\*

Through walkouts, boycotts, and sit-ins, black high school students in Chicago from the late 1960s until the early 1970s expressed their discontent over the inferior quality of public schooling they were receiving. Influenced by the school reform activities begun in the early part of the decade, students issued demands and manifestos to their school administrators calling for black history courses, black teachers and administrators, improvements in the school facilities, reinstatement of dismissed teachers and suspended or expelled students, and community and student involvement in decision making within the schools. Students organized walkouts at individual schools, and joined together in October 1968 to conduct three citywide school boycotts in support of their demands for educational change. Even after some demands were met, students at various schools continued their protests into the 1970s.

The historical literature on the Civil Rights Movement focuses on black students' role as participants and organizers of nonviolent direct action protests. The literature has also focused on black student activism on college campuses.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, high school activism has not been the subject of scholarly research. William H. Chafe in *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Freedom Struggle*, Clayborne Carson in *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, and William H. Exum in *Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in a White Community* argued that student activism came out of an organizing environment and was inspired by protest activities in the larger community.<sup>2</sup> Black parents, teachers, and community organizations were rallying for desegregation during the early 1960s and for community control and quality education during the latter part of the decade.<sup>3</sup> High school students were well aware of the activism taking place and some even participated in boycotts, demonstrations, rallies, and other forms of protests prior to launching their own campaign.

While high school students were aware of the organizing in their communities, they were also well aware of the inadequacies of their schools. Like the teachers, they had an intimate understanding of the poor conditions that existed at predominately black public schools and criticized those conditions, which often resulted in inadequate training and preparation. The demands that students made reflected their ideas about what it would

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take to improve their schools. Their willingness to protest reflected the seriousness of their concerns. As students protested, they in turn provided inspiration for those who had once inspired them.

The Civil Rights Movement in Chicago often centered on various groups struggling for public school desegregation in the face of opposition from school superintendent Benjamin Willis and Mayor Richard J. Daley and his political machine. Mayor Daley's power was nationally recognized and fully entrenched when in 1966 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was unable to make headway in his open housing campaign in Chicago. Superintendent Willis had the support of Daley's administration and many in the white community, and therefore would not yield to civil rights organizers' demands to desegregate the public schools. Organizers nonetheless persisted in their efforts to reform the school system and provide black students with a quality education.<sup>4</sup>

During the early 1960s, the actions of the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO), an umbrella civil rights organization leading the protests in Chicago, served as a direct influence on the 1968 student boycotts. The CCCO, the leading organization for the Chicago Freedom Movement, organized two massive citywide school boycotts in 1963 and 1964 and a smaller boycott in 1965, to protest Superintendent Willis's administration and to demand public school desegregation. Just under 225,000 and 175,000 students respectively participated in the first two school boycotts. Lawrence Landry, head of the boycott committee, had worked to organize students through a tutoring program called the Student Woodlawn Project. On school boycott days, students had also participated in "Freedom Schools" organized at churches and community centers.<sup>5</sup> Some student leaders in the latter part of the 1960s more than likely participated in the earlier boycotts. In an interview with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Harrison High School student leader Victor Adams stated that he participated in the earlier anti-Willis boycotts and also led a boycott at Hess Upper Grade Center. Adams was a student in Albert Raby's English class at Hess Upper Grade Center. Raby eventually resigned from his teaching position to become CCCO convener and organizer of the school boycotts from 1963 to 1965.<sup>6</sup> Adams and Raby's relationship provides a direct link between the two school boycott periods. The very fact that students utilized boycotts as their protest strategy, despite the earlier boycotts not achieving desegregation, also exemplifies the link between the two eras. Ideology became the fundamental difference between the two eras. The freedom movement in Chicago shifted from civil rights to Black Power in accordance with the shift among African Americans nationally between 1966 and 1968. While in both eras protesters demanded quality education for black students, the CCCO also sought desegregation while the student movement demanded community control and educational and physical improvements at the schools black students were attending.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in 1965, parents began to take a leading role in the school campaign and organized conferences and meetings and called for the ouster of the principals from several predominately black public schools. These parents claimed that the principals were "racists" in attitude and behavior and that the schools' educational programs were ineffective. Concerned Parents of Jenner Elementary School, located on the near North Side, wanted Principal Mildred Chuchut removed from her position at the 97 percent black school. Parents, with the support of some Jenner teachers who had notified them of the conditions in the first place, conducted student boycotts, rallies, and protests in an attempt

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to oust the principal. The situation at Jenner School was covered by the Chicago newspapers from late 1965 through early 1966. On January 26, 1966, the Chicago Board of Education held a closed-door hearing concerning the school.<sup>8</sup> In February 1966 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at a rally in support of the campaign to oust the Jenner School principal, and declared that, "We must emphasize that while Jenner is but a single and bitter example of the system's insensitivity and failure to educate, it is but one thread in a vast fabric of educational and administrative inadequacy, that is woven about this entire city." He insisted that this educational pattern had to change.<sup>9</sup> Principal Chuchut became ill in the midst of the school controversy and was replaced in April 1966 for six weeks by Dr. Bessie Lawrence, the director of a sex education program for the school system and a former principal.<sup>10</sup> Similar parent organizing took place at Attucks Elementary in April 1967 and Crown Elementary in 1968, where the principals were eventually removed.<sup>11</sup> Students took the lead in the ouster of principals at Harrison High School and other schools, and supported teacher and community demands for the removal of principals at Englewood and Farragut High Schools. Between 1968 and 1970 at least four principals were removed because, as student organizer Sharron Matthews noted, they could not control their students.<sup>12</sup>

Parents and community organizations sponsored a conference in May 1968 called "Judgment Day for Racism in West Side Schools." Over 500 people attended workshops dealing with community control of schools, inadequate teacher training, and the racist interpretations in the teaching of American history.<sup>13</sup> The conference and other activism on the West Side undoubtedly had an impact on West Side students, since they both attended and spoke at the conference. Harrison student leader Victor Adams was one of the scheduled keynote speakers at the event.<sup>14</sup>

Teachers led struggles at their own schools for greater control of the curriculum and against certain school administrators, and then citywide against the Chicago Teachers Union, a union many black teachers believed to be dominated by "racists." Farragut High School's black teachers served as another influence on students. These educators issued the "Black Manifesto" to the news media and to school officials in September 1968 calling for more Black History courses, black administrators, and various other school improvements. The manifesto included a set of deadlines for each demand, and teachers organized walkouts, picketed on lunch breaks, and hosted a two-day teach-in. Farragut teachers, along with students and community members, ousted the principal, and together they ran the school under "community control" for one year.<sup>15</sup> Although a principal was assigned, a committee representing teachers, community members, and students made the day-to-day decisions. In communities such as Englewood, North Lawndale, and Woodlawn, the parents, teachers, and community organizations mobilized to increase community control of local public schools; and students assisted and were inspired by their actions. Students began organizing walkouts at their individual schools and eventually came together citywide to boycott classes to protest the inadequate educational programs and facilities and to insist that specific changes be made. After the citywide efforts in 1968 ended, students continued their walkouts at individual schools, and continued issuing demands for educational changes.<sup>16</sup>

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### STUDENTS DEMAND CHANGES AT THEIR SCHOOLS

An examination of student protests at individual schools and citywide during the late 1960s and early 1970s reveals the influence of the larger black communities. The student struggle was a serious attempt by young people to improve their educational circumstances. Oftentimes, teachers, administrators, and the society at large had discounted these high school students and labeled them "uneducable," "disadvantaged," and "culturally deprived." However, these students made a difference in their own lives as well as the educational experiences of those who came after them.<sup>17</sup>

On December 13, 1965, when Marshall High School senior Clarence James arrived at the Chicago Board of Education annual budget meeting, he expected to see members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) who were to give a presentation about the conditions at Marshall. When James realized the SCLC representatives would not show up, he decided to prepare a presentation. In his statement, James pointed out that, "The first six weeks of school, I stood in every class I had. There were no seats. I sleep in half my classes because only a few teachers are trying to stimulate me intellectually."<sup>18</sup> According to James, no student had formally addressed the Chicago Board of Education before. James discussed the hardships students experienced as a result of overcrowding, uncaring teachers, and inadequate facilities. James noted that some classes had forty or more students, with some sitting on the floor or on windowsills. In his economics class, the first month was spent without a regular teacher, and the first five weeks of the 1965-1966 school year without textbooks.<sup>19</sup>

The Chicago Freedom Movement served as a model for the students. Many had attended rallies and retreats sponsored by movement organizers during the 1965-1966 school year. Clarence James recalled coming into contact with the most powerful civil rights leaders of the time, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and James Bevel, SCLC organizer. He and other students at Marshall organized the "Student Union for Better Education." SCLC and American Friends Service Committee organizers took Marshall students on retreats, and discussed the philosophy of nonviolence and the ongoing campaign to have Black History courses included in the public school curricula.<sup>20</sup>

Looking back on their high school careers Clarence James and other students were quite critical of the conditions at Marshall. According to James, teachers told black students that they were intellectually inferior to white students. His critique of teachers offers a very different perspective compared to that of Vanessa Siddle Walker. In her book *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, Walker described a southern school with a black principal and teachers who created a caring environment for children to learn despite many unfavorable conditions.<sup>21</sup> While most of Chicago's black teachers were in predominately black public schools, the majority of the teachers and administrators in these schools were white.<sup>22</sup> Black teachers, particularly those who were not fully certified and spoke out or were active in protesting the substandard conditions at the black schools, were often fired or reassigned.<sup>23</sup>

Two years after James graduated from Marshall, Patricia Smith, a leader at Marshall High School in 1968, founded the "Marshall Association for the Advancement of Black Students," and informed the *Chicago Sun-Times* newspaper about a bigoted teacher at the

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school. In September 1968, Smith stated that the teacher would "grin at us and call us nice colored boys and girls. . . . If a young man came into class with his hair natural, the teacher would give him a hard time. . . . Right in front of the whole class, the teacher would say 'man you're a dummy, you can't learn anything.'" The teacher also believed that black leaders were "communists" and that the black vote in Chicago "could be bought." When informed about Chicago Superintendent James Redmond's "sensitivity plan" for on-the-job training to try to eliminate the overt bigotry exhibited by teachers, Smith was certain it would not help and suggested that bigoted teachers be sent to white suburban schools "where they will fit right in."<sup>24</sup> Smith became one of the leaders of the 1968 citywide school boycotts. James and Smith were not alone in their accusations of racist beliefs among white teachers, and for that reason black students throughout the city wanted more black teachers to be hired. The Marshall protests were sparked not only by teacher ineffectiveness, but also the serious overcrowding that plagued many Chicago schools and increased the difficulty of learning in such environments.

Englewood High School became the scene of student, community, and teacher protests in November 1967, over the reassignment of history teacher Owen Lawson following accusations of incompetence in his administrative duties. Lawson emphasized black contributions in world history and also served as the adviser to an Afro-American History Club, which met twice a week before school began. Many community members believed that Lawson's firing had to do with the "black power overtones" in his social studies lectures, rather than administrative incompetence.<sup>25</sup> Students conducted a series of walkouts protesting his reassignment, and community members rallied and picketed in support of Lawson for well over a week.<sup>26</sup> Although Lawson was not reinstated, the Englewood struggle demonstrated for many students the need for more black control of predominately black schools.

Between November 1967 and June 1968 black students at Phillips, Parker, Farragut, DuSable, Hirsh, Tilden, and Waller High Schools issued specific demands for educational change and often organized protests. At Hirsh High School the response to one such policy illustrated the types of discipline problems students faced. On April 2, 1968, Hirsh students conducted a walkout, which resulted in closing the school for the remainder of the day, to protest a policy called "Operation Snatch" and the postponement of an "Afro-American Day." Operation Snatch was launched by administrators as a way to discipline students' loitering in the hallway. When the bell rang signaling class changes, any teachers spotting students still in the halls could snatch the students and keep them in their class until the period was over. The snatch would be considered a "cut," i.e., an unexcused absence from class. The principal met with students, teachers, and parents to discuss the problems and further protests were averted.<sup>27</sup>

Clarence James's brother Riccardo, a student leader at Austin High School in 1968, criticized teachers at his school whom he considered to be racists. Austin High School is located in the Austin community on Chicago's West Side, bordering the suburbs. The school was in transition from white to black, as increased black in-migration resulted in "white flight." As the population shifted, numerous racial clashes occurred between black and white students. Between 1963 and 1968 Austin's black student population jumped from less than one percent to 48 percent, yet there was only one black teacher assigned to the school during that period.<sup>28</sup> Riccardo James believed that many of the white teachers held racist

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attitudes toward black students. For example, James recalled that he had written and turned in a poem to a teacher who asked him from where he had gotten it, suggesting that he was incapable of writing it. On another occasion, Riccardo James mentioned to another teacher that he wanted to attend Harvard University after he graduated. The teacher suggested that was just wishful thinking on his part. Riccardo James did not bother to tell the teacher that his brother Clarence was attending Harvard at the time.<sup>29</sup> James and other students led walkouts in October 1968 demanding more black teachers and administrators. White students at Austin also walked out at the same time to protest black students' demands. Meetings between Austin principal Dorothy L. Martin and student leaders were organized by Principal Martin to end the tensions. James told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "Each of us has personal prejudices—it's inevitable. . . . What we want to do is talk about it with white students. How can you get along with someone if you don't know him?"<sup>30</sup> James and other Austin student leaders eventually became involved with the citywide school boycotts beginning October 14, 1968. James's activism led to his expulsion from Austin. Concerned Parents of Austin, a group of African American parents, met with school officials who claimed James was suspended for failing classes due to too many absences. Members of Concerned Parents countered that they believed James was suspended because he was a protest leader.<sup>31</sup> At Austin, the black and white students' inability to get along in the racially changing school led to frequent racial clashes. White students felt threatened and believed that black students were trying to "take over *their* school."<sup>32</sup>

Victor Adams and Sharron Matthews of Harrison High School caught the attention of the Chicago news media on October 7, 1968, after the police broke up a lunchroom sit-in protesting the school administration's failure to respond to their demands for change. The four-page list of demands demonstrated Harrison students' understanding of the important connection between quality education and community development. In the preamble they insisted that,

The black ghettos of our country contain the greatest untapped resource of talent that this country has ever known. However, those same ghettos have been and are being depressed and rejected to the point that hopelessness has become a byword as well as a by-product. We have observed the adult black population in our ghettos growing increasingly disillusioned and falling prey to the mesmerizing droughts of hopelessness, but from those very ashes a New Breed has developed.<sup>33</sup>

"New Breed" was the name of the student organization that drew up the manifesto and led many of the school walkouts and boycotts. Many of New Breed's demands dealt with the absence of Black History in the curriculum. New Breed members also made it clear that they wanted student and community participation in school decision making. The students requested the appointment of African American administrators and counselors, and the creation of a faculty advisory committee approved by New Breed and "Concerned People of Lawndale," a local community organization, to review disciplinary procedures at Harrison High School ranging from minor disciplinary actions to expulsion. Harrison's black students also made recommendations for improving the educational program to "develop each Harrison student to his highest potential." These recommendations included the elimination of the tracking system, maximum utilization of instructional resources,

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acquisition of additional funds through grants to support new programs, institution of an effective re-enrollment program for high school dropouts, establishment of language laboratories, creation of a follow-up program with graduates to determine student success after graduation, and the allocation of school funds for innovative projects and workshops.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning in September 1968 Harrison students conducted sit-ins in the lunchroom and auditorium until they were banned from engaging in demonstrations on school property in October 1968. They had also conducted several walkouts beginning on September 16, to protest the suspension of Adams and Matthews and the appointment of a white teacher to teach the Black History course. Matthews told a reporter from *Jet Magazine* that, "A white teacher can't stand up in a class of black students and effectively tell how her forefathers raped, sold, and subjugated their forefathers."<sup>35</sup> Black teachers met with New Breed's president and vice president, Adams and Matthews, to discuss the student's grievances.<sup>36</sup> Black teachers in turn came up with their own "manifesto," mirroring the demands of the students and teachers at Farragut High School, but also calling for additional African American department heads, the requirement that all teachers take a Black History course, and that black teachers serve on committees relating to the programming for black teachers and students.<sup>37</sup> Puerto Rican students at Harrison also issued their demands for bilingual teachers and courses and Latino assistant principals, counselors, office clerks, teaching assistants, and other personnel. Their demands reflected the language needs of Puerto Rican students and their community.<sup>38</sup>

After the lunchroom sit-in on October 7, 1968, students from Harrison High School marched to the Board of Education and met with school officials. Later that same day, teachers met with school officials; however, some walked out of the meeting protesting Principal Alexander Burke's use of the police to end the student sit-in.<sup>39</sup> On October 10, 1968, a meeting was held among school officials, students, teachers, and a number of concerned African American and Latino community groups to discuss their grievances. When the meeting ended, the students left dissatisfied with the results.<sup>40</sup> Students continued their protests and eventually joined the citywide protests.

## CITYWIDE SCHOOL BOYCOTTS ORGANIZED

Sharron Matthews recalled that Harrison students began meeting with students from other high schools in October 1968. As she and another student leader, Pemon Rami, noted, many students on the South Side were often more culturally aware and some had African names and wore traditional African garb. Although Rami graduated from Phillips High School in June 1968, he continued to stay involved in the student movement. Rami recalled that the history textbook used at Phillips High School at the time offered no indication that Africans made any contributions to world civilization. Rami stated that he would at times be kicked out of history class for decrying the absence of African achievements being presented in the text. He noted that although the history teacher was African American, she knew little about African history and civilization. Rami, his future wife, Calumet High School student leader Ronata Maséqua Meyers, and her family attended the Third International Conference on Black Power held in Philadelphia from August 30 to September

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1, 1968. Rami and Meyers were part of a black student workshop, which created a resolution calling for black control of black schools, and focused on the role of black students in that process.<sup>41</sup> Because of the training Rami and Meyers received at the Black Power conference, and as the student movements at various schools got underway in Chicago, they called student leaders together in mid-October 1968 to organize a larger movement.<sup>42</sup> Twenty-five students met on Sunday, October 13, 1968, and called for black students to boycott their schools and issued a manifesto with the following demands:

1. Complete courses in Black history.
2. Inclusion in all courses the contributions of Black persons.
3. Black administration for schools in Black communities.
4. More technical and vocational training.
5. More Black teachers.
6. Repair of school buildings in Black communities.
7. Holidays on the birthdays of such Black heroes as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, W. E. B. Du Bois and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
8. Insurance for athletes.
9. Use of Black businessmen to supply class photos and rings to Black schools.
10. Better food.
11. Military training "relevant to Black people's needs."
12. More required homework to challenge Black students.<sup>43</sup>

Those demands reflected the desire for black control of black schools and other educational improvements. It also revealed that many of the issues black students raised were actually citywide problems, such as unappetizing cafeteria food and the need for insurance for student athletes.

It was estimated that on Monday, October 14, 1968, between 27,000 and 35,000 students boycotted Chicago's high schools and held rallies in various parts of the city. Afterwards, the students decided to boycott classes every Monday until their demands were met. There were more than 20,000 students and between 500 and 700 teachers who participated in the boycott on October 21, 1968. Many teachers, who were immersed in their own struggles, saw the importance of supporting the students' demands. Various community groups announced their support of the students, including the West Side Federation, Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, the Catalyst Organization, and The Woodlawn Organization. On October 28, it was estimated that only 8,000 or 9,000 students boycotted classes. There were a number of reasons why many students did not participate in the Monday boycotts after October 21. Chicago Public School Superintendent James Redmond responded positively to many of the demands, some boycotters were failing their classes, and others felt pressure from parents to stay in school. Individual schools were also meeting some of the student demands.<sup>44</sup>

The success of the student protests can be seen in the responses of Chicago school officials. Superintendent Redmond held a press conference on October 17, 1968, and agreed to increase the number of Black History courses, to expand existing Black History courses from one semester to a year, and to purchase history textbooks that included the contributions of Africans and Latinos. Seventeen new assistant principal positions would

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be added to the existing positions to integrate the administrative staffs at predominately black high and elementary schools. More technical and vocational courses would be offered in city high schools, and more money would be allocated for building repairs. Funds budgeted for athletics were increased and the revenues from sporting events were to be used to pay for student athletic insurance. A foundation grant would be used to broadcast programming on Afro-American history for teachers on the Board of Education station WBEZ. At the press conference, Redmond asked students to return to classes, but he also issued instructions on how to deal with truant students and teachers absent without proper notification.<sup>45</sup> Unlike his predecessor Benjamin Willis, Redmond was open to suggestions from students and the public, and Mayor Daley said little publicly about the student protests since public school "desegregation" was not the primary objective. Despite these moves, Redmond's responses did not bring about the end of the student boycotts.<sup>46</sup>

After Redmond's response and two other citywide boycotts, students decided to change their strategy and scheduled sit-ins at several schools for November 4, 1968. Since administrators knew of students' plans, they closed schools early and police were called into Dunbar, Harrison, Hyde Park and Kenwood High Schools, where students attempted to sit-in. Prior to the attempted sit-in, school officials invited 70 student leaders and three teachers to an unprecedented Board of Education meeting on October 30, 1968. At the meeting, Victor Adams told board members, "The system is either going to have to be destroyed or rebuilt to include Black and Latin American people and Chinese people." Sharron Matthews declared, "You have our demands. You know in your own minds that they should have been met a long time ago." When board members reminded them of the valuable class time students were missing, Matthews responded, "My concern is not whether I graduate in June, but whether I get a good education when I'm in school. I can't achieve an education in this system." Austin High's Patricia Lane believed that the training students were receiving was "designed to subjugate Black people and produce educated Black fools."<sup>47</sup> Ora Ferguson of DuSable High School stated, "Our demands are well known. We want better washrooms, heat in school rooms, and our windows repaired."<sup>48</sup> The students quoted in the *Sun-Times* and *Chicago American* were very much in agreement that despite Superintendent Redmond's announcements, the system was failing African American and Latino students and that their demands still were not met.

## PROTESTS CONTINUE AT INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

Even after the citywide boycotts ended, students continued to organize protests at their individual schools. Beginning in November 1968 at Harrison, Harlan, Hyde Park, Parker, Chicago Vocational, Englewood, DuSable, and Calumet High Schools, student activism flared up again. Calumet High School experienced repeated protests in December 1968 where students were demanding more black teachers and administrators, and the creation of a Black Studies department within their school. On December 13 and 16, 1968, students conducted walkouts, which eventually led to the closing of the school. Calumet students wanted the school newspaper to be more reflective of African American culture, better sanitation in the bathrooms and lunchroom, exterminators brought in to deal with rodent infestation, and twenty-four other demands.<sup>49</sup>

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On December 14, 1968, Chicago Urban League officials held a conference at Dunbar Vocational High School entitled "Local Control of Schools: Pros and Cons." The participants included student activist Victor Adams, Arthur Brazier from The Woodlawn Organization, Philip Hauser, a professor from the University of Chicago, Warner Saunders of the Better Boys Foundation, and many others. Omar Aoki, student leader at Lindblom High School and one of the organizers of the citywide boycott, attended, but was highly critical. Aoki believed that the conference participants should have been working toward greater community control of public schools, not just talking about it. Aoki asked, "We just wonder why the Urban League is just now coming out and talking about community control when the students were trying to get it a while back. Where were you then? You're kind of late, don't you think? This seminar is a farce and you know it."<sup>50</sup> Aoki was not only suspicious of the Urban League's role in organizing the conference, but he also questioned the motives of those who participated. Aoki and others wanted to know where Urban League officials and other conference participants were when black students were putting their educational futures on the line during the boycotts and other protests.

In March 1969 at Parker High School, students protested police officers posing as teachers, demanded that all ineffective white teachers be dismissed, and that "Lift Every Voice and Sing" replace "The Star Spangled Banner" at school assemblies.<sup>51</sup> In November 1970 the black students at Chicago Vocational High School demanded the appointment of a black principal, better materials in shop classes, the removal of school security guards with fire arms, and a revision of the disciplinary procedures, among other things.<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Black students in Chicago's public high schools in the late 1960s were leaders in the struggle for community control and other educational reforms. Influenced locally and nationally by the civil rights and Black Power movements, students undertook their own campaigns for significant educational changes. Walkouts, sit-ins, and school boycotts became common protest strategies for Chicago high school students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The students' continued agitation at area high schools led to the acquisition of insurance for student athletes, the increase and expansion of Black History courses, the appointment of more African Americans as administrators, a Black History program for teachers on the Board of Education station WBEZ, an increase in funding for school building repairs, more technical and vocational courses, and curricular changes that reflected Africans' contributions to world history. The students' continued efforts indicate that they had strong commitment to quality education, despite the possibility of student suspension, expulsion, and even arrests.

As gallant as the student efforts were, their movement was unable to offer the fundamental changes necessary to provide quality education. While Black History courses provide an aspect of cultural relevancy for African American students, without the ability to control what is taught and who is hired, the power over these educational decisions remained in the hands of the school administrators.<sup>53</sup> As Chicago became more racially segregated and many black communities became further impoverished due to deindustrialization and disinvestment, the conditions in public schools in black neighborhoods worsened. By 1981 Secretary of Education William Bennett labeled

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Chicago's public school system the worst in the nation. Modern-day school reformers rallied to overhaul the failing system without taking into account the economic, historical, and social factors, which account for persistent school failure among African American youth.<sup>54</sup> In recent decades the political climate and agenda have shifted radically to the right and the national educational policies, such as "No Child Left Behind," and local Chicago school reform efforts have focused more on test preparation than on providing quality education for black students. The demands for educational change that came from black high school students in the late 1960s, however, reflected their awareness that quality public schooling means more than preparing pupils to take state-mandated, standardized tests.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>V. P. Franklin, "Black High School Student Activism," *Journal of Research in Education* 10 (Fall 2000), 3–8.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford, U.K., 1980); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); William H. Exum, *Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in a White University* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>Dionne Danns, "Black Student Empowerment and Chicago School Reform Efforts in 1968," *Urban Education* 37 (November 2002): 631.

<sup>4</sup>For examination of Dr. King's unsuccessful campaigns in Chicago, see David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–1965* (New York, 1998); and V. P. Franklin, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Biography* (New York, 1998).

<sup>5</sup>Jon F. Rice, *Up on Madison, Down on 75th* (Evanston, IL, 1983), 7–8. For more information on the CCCO boycotts, see Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens, 1986); James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); and John Rury, "Race, Space, and the Politics of Chicago Schools: Benjamin Willis and the Tragedy of Urban Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 39 (Summer 1999): 117–31. For more details on the connection between the CCCO and student boycotts, see Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963–1971* (New York, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>Joel Havemann, "Harrison Leader Seeks Inspiration in Dr. King," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 13 October 1968, 80.

<sup>7</sup>Danns, *Something Better for Our Children*, 61–62, 74.

<sup>8</sup>Casey Banas, "Willis Lashes Probe of Jenner: Hits Board Hearing in School Row Sets Precedent, Letter Says," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 January 1966, 1–2.

<sup>9</sup>Casey Banas, "Dr. King Backs Dissidents at Jenner School: Group to Seek Ouster of Principal," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1966, 9.

<sup>10</sup>Casey Banas, "Jenner Head Replaced for 6 Weeks," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 April 1966.

<sup>11</sup>Casey Banas, "Group Blasts Transferring of Principal," *Tribune*, 11 April 1967, sec. 1A, 2; "Concerned Parents Push For Principal's Ouster," *West Side Torch*, 15–29 March 1968, 1.

<sup>12</sup>Sharron Matthews, interviewed by author, tape recording, 15 March 2000.

<sup>13</sup>"End Racism in School Conference," *West Side Torch*, 17–31 May 1968, 8.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Danns, *Something Better for Our Children*, 99–105.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Arnold B. Cheyney, *Teaching the Culturally Disadvantaged in the Elementary School* (Columbus, OH, 1967); Harry A. Passow et al., *Education of the Disadvantaged* (New York, 1967); Sidney Turbowitz, *A Handbook for Teaching in the Ghetto School* (Chicago, IL, 1968); Paul A. Witty, ed., *The Educationally Retarded and Disadvantaged* (Chicago, IL, 1967).

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- <sup>18</sup>Clarence James, telephone interview with author, 19 August 2000; "Student Criticizes School; Applauded," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 December 1965, 3.
- <sup>19</sup>James interview.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup>Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996).
- <sup>22</sup>High schools with at least a 55 percent black student population in 1968 had an average of 55.3 percent black teachers. The percentages of black teachers at elementary schools were probably higher. Chicago Board of Education, "Student Racial Survey," September 20, 1968; Chicago Board of Education Bureau of Research, Development and Special Projects, "Racial Survey Administration and Teaching Personnel," September 20, 1968.
- <sup>23</sup>Danns, *Something Better For Our Children*, 94-99.
- <sup>24</sup>"Decentralization-integration," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 8 September 1968, 3.
- <sup>25</sup>Dave Potter, "Englewood High School Protest Expected Today," *Chicago Defender*, 20 November 1967, 5.
- <sup>26</sup>"Violence at Englewood High," *Chicago Defender*, 22 November 1967.
- <sup>27</sup>"Student Walkout Closes Hirsh High School: Principal to Meet Today to Discuss Complaints," *Chicago Defender*, 3 April 1968, 3.
- <sup>28</sup>Chicago Board of Education, "Student Racial Survey," September 20, 1968; Chicago Board of Education Bureau of Research, Development and Special Projects, "Racial Survey Administration and Teaching Personnel," September 20, 1968.
- <sup>29</sup>Riccardo James, interview with author, Chicago, IL, 13 June 2000.
- <sup>30</sup>Joel Havemann, "15 Pupils Seized in Clashes at 3 High Schools," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 8 October 1968, 30.
- <sup>31</sup>Sheryl Fitzgerald, "Austin High School Riled By Student Expulsion," *Chicago Defender*, 13 November 1968, 2.
- <sup>32</sup>Riccardo James interview.
- <sup>33</sup>New Breed, "Harrison High School Black Manifesto," October 1968.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup>"Boycott Leader Wants Quality Education," *Jet* 35 (14 November 1968), 26.
- <sup>36</sup>Matthews interview; Peter Negronida, "Nab 16 During Disorders at High Schools," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1968, 1; Havemann, "15 Pupils Seized in Clashes at 3 High Schools," 3;
- <sup>37</sup>"Black Teachers Manifesto," *West Side Torch*, 18-31 October 1968, 15.
- <sup>38</sup>"Latin-American Manifesto of Harrison High School Presented by the Students," October 1968.
- <sup>39</sup>Bob Hunter, "Black Teachers, Students in Protest: Instructor Quit Parley over 'Snub,'" *Chicago Defender*, 8 October 1968, 3.
- <sup>40</sup>Joel Havemann, "Negotiation in Harrison High Unrest Deadlocked, Other Schools Quiet," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 October 1968, 14.
- <sup>41</sup>The conference was coordinated by the Continuations Committee. The group appears to function as an organizing body of these conferences. *Black Power Conference Reports* (Harlem, NY, 1970), 3, 14-19.
- <sup>42</sup>Pemon Rami, telephone interview with author, 7 July 2000.
- <sup>43</sup>Joel Havemann, "Black Students Call a Boycott," *Chicago Defender*, 14 October 1968, 3.
- <sup>44</sup>Danns, "Black Student Empowerment," 649; Danns, *Something Better for Our Children*, 86.
- <sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*; *Proceeding Board of Education of the City of Chicago*, July 10-December 26, 1968, 700-4.
- <sup>46</sup>Danns, *Something Better for Our Children*.
- <sup>47</sup>Joel Havemann, "Tell Demands to School Board," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 31 October 1968, 3.
- <sup>48</sup>Marge Ziemer and Gene Rezwini, "Students Threaten High School Sit-In," *Chicago American*, 31, October, 1968, 1.
- <sup>49</sup>"Black Students of Calumet High School Manifesto," 1968.
- <sup>50</sup>Faith C. Christmas, "Student Leader Ridicules League Seminar," *Chicago Defender*, 19 December 1968, 12.

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<sup>51</sup>Students and teachers believed that officers from the Chicago Police Department often posed as substitute teachers in order to keep an eye on black activism in Chicago's public schools. The Intelligence Division known as the Red Squad kept surveillance on the organizing efforts of various groups in Chicago.

<sup>52</sup>The Parker struggle was also influenced by parents and the Chicago Urban League. "Student Demands to the Faculty of Parker High School," [source confidential] March 1968; "Chicago Vocational High School Manifesto" [source confidential], November 1970.

<sup>53</sup>Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco, CA, 1994), 17.

<sup>54</sup>Pauline Lipman, "Cracking Down: Chicago School Policy and the Regulation of Black and Latino Youth," unpublished manuscript; see also Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, Fourth Edition (Boston, MA, 2003).