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Riots and Rebellions:
Memory of Newark's Long Hot Summer of 1967

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History Senior Thesis
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April 2020

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Finally, I would like to thank the potted plant I had on my thesis carrel that kept me company through long nights in the library. Unfortunately it did not survive long enough to see my thesis come to fruition as I left it on my desk in direct sunlight when we were sent home and it is certainly dead by now.

Introduction

“Memories of the past are not memories of facts but memories of your imaginings of the facts.”

– Philip Roth¹

For five days in the summer of 1967, the city of Newark, New Jersey, burned. Thousands of Newarkers took to the streets from July 12th - 17th looting stores, smashing windows, and setting buildings ablaze. When the smoke cleared, the Newark Uprising wrought more than \$10 million in property damage, hundreds of injuries, and 26 deaths. It forever changed the face of the city. For a monumental event, the Uprising arose from something ordinary: a traffic stop. On the night of July 12th, two Newark policemen pulled over John Smith, a black cabdriver. Why they stopped Smith remains in dispute. Smith either cut around a parked police cruiser, as he claimed, or tailgated the police for a block before speeding ahead of them as the police reported. But what happened next is clear. The two officers beat and arrested John Smith. Their stories again diverged as Smith maintained that he followed police instructions and did nothing to instigate a violent treatment. The officers claimed that Smith was belligerent and required the use of force to be subdued. Like most events of the next five days, no single memory of Smith’s arrest could be found even decades later. But while the traffic stop triggered the Uprising, John Smith was by no means a focal point of the event. As one protester later shouted at the police, “We don’t want to talk about Smith. We want to talk about what we see here happening every day time and time again.”²

Unfortunately, the brutal beating of a young black man by the Newark police was not out of the ordinary in 1967. The moment struck deep concern in the Newark community, which was

¹ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988), 8.

² Ronald Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark* (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 1971),

one of the most segregated cities in the nation. In 1940, the city had been 85% white. But by 1965, it was 60% black, the result of white families leaving the city for the suburbs and thousands of black families migrating north from the rural South.³ The Police Department in no way reflected the city it served. The department was more than 80% white in 1967 and there was little hope of advancement for the few black police officers.⁴ Police officers had a reputation in the city for their violent disposition to black people and the fourth precinct where Smith was taken was a notorious hotbed of this racism.⁵

In 1967, tension built for months in Newark before it reached a peak that July. On top of rampant police brutality, racial discrimination, and sub-standard housing in the city, two major events amplified the largely black Central Ward's anger to new heights. That June, an open position in Newark's Board of Education provided an opportunity for representation in a school district which had few black teachers and administrators serving a roughly 80% black student population.⁶ Central Ward community members rallied behind Wilbur Parker, New Jersey's first black certified public accountant and the city's budget director. Mayor Hugh Addonizio—later sentenced to prison for corruption—pushed instead for City Councilman James Callahan, who held only a high school diploma and less relevant experience but was a strong supporter of Mayor Addonizio's Democratic party. More than a thousand mostly black Newarkers protested loudly at a school board meeting that lasted until 3 AM. The mayor pulled back his candidate and ultimately no one was selected.⁷ At the same time as the Board of Education debacle, the city began holding “blight hearings” to discuss the clearing of more than 200 acres in the Central

³ Nathan Wright, Jr., *Ready to Riot* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), 8.

⁴ Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (Vintage Books, 1967), 15.

⁵ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 108.

⁶ Porambo, 8; Wright, Jr., *Ready to Riot*, 6.

⁷ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 7; Junius W. Williams, *Unfinished Agenda: Urban Politics in the Era of Black Power* (North Atlantic Books, 2014), 147.

Ward, land that Addonizio had promised for the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry's new campus. This project of "urban renewal" would have displaced roughly 22,000 mostly black residents of the Central Ward. As Newark activist and scholar Junius Williams described, "Black folks and our supporters said 'Hell *no*,' and flocked to a series of meetings at city hall before the Planning Board. ... There was near bedlam at the meeting."⁸ The community came together to fight these issues with greater organization and drive than was previously seen in the city. But many walked away from these meetings seeing little resolution to their issues.

The tipping point that summer came as residents of the Stella Wright Homes—one of Newark's largest public housing complexes—watched John Smith's beaten body dragged across the street into the 4th police precinct. Rumors swirled around the Central Ward and many believed that Smith had been killed by the police. Crowds gathered outside the precinct to protest the cabdriver's arrest and the police brutality. While police in riot gear surrounded the building against an increasingly agitated crowd, community members hurled insults, rocks, and bottles at the police officers. Shortly after midnight, Molotov cocktails bombarded the precinct building.⁹ As the police attempted to disperse the crowd, groups of young Newarkers spread throughout the neighborhood, smashing windows and looting stores. By the morning, the city had quieted down and many wrote it off as an isolated incident. But a protest organized that night turned violent as Newarkers clashed with police on the streets and arson spread throughout the Central Ward. This time the police had no semblance of control over the situation. A little after 2 AM, Mayor Addonizio called New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes to request assistance from the National Guard and State Police. In the morning, more than 3500 heavily armed soldiers and troopers

⁸ Williams, *Unfinished Agenda*, 148.

⁹ Kimberly Siegal, "Silent No Longer: Voices of the 1967 Newark Race Riots," *CUREJ - College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal*, July 10, 2006, 3, <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej/31>.

rolled into Newark in Jeeps and tanks to join the city's 1400 police officers.¹⁰ The law enforcement's actions over the next two days resulted in the deaths of more than 20 people, roughly 1400 arrests, and countless injuries.¹¹ By Monday July 17th the city had quieted down and Governor Hughes lifted emergency orders.

The Uprising permanently changed Newark. It led to new community organizing and brought about black control of City Hall. But it also devastated the city's economy, cut scars in the landscape, hastened the white flight which began decades before, and, in the minds of many Americans, black and white, stained the image of Newark. Since 1967, it is rare to see a published discussion of Newark's economy, safety, or politics that does not reference the Uprising, though such discussion normally using the negative terminology of "riot."¹² As one reporter states, "In the language of Newark, there is only pre-riot and post-riot."¹³

Just five days in the summer of 1967 continue to define Newark, a city of almost 300,000 people. This thesis does not delve into the minute details of the Uprising and the changes it brought the city. There are many important books that already embark on this journey.¹⁴ Instead, I explore several distinct ways the Uprising has been remembered in Newark from the first bottle thrown until today.

Scholars have argued that Newark is "a city shaped by memories," its citizens "[e]nveloped in their own memories and perceptions of what happened during the summer of

¹⁰ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 34, 37.

¹¹ Hayden, 55.

¹² Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1b349f5>.

¹³ Terry Golway, "Open Wound," *New Jersey Monthly*, December 20, 2007, https://njmonthly.com/articles/towns-schools/newark_riots_reclaiming_a_city/.

¹⁴ Some of the most seminal texts for the history of the Uprising include but are by no means limited to: Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark*; Wright, Jr., *Ready to Riot*; Max Arthur Herman, *Summer of Rage: An Oral History of the 1967 Newark and Detroit Riots* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013); Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*; Kevin J. Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007).

rage...”¹⁵ But there is not a unified vision in Newark of what the Uprising was or what it means for the city. Distinct and often conflicting memories of the event are as common today as they were when National Guard tanks rolled through the city’s streets. These markedly different memories represent and stem from divisions in the city itself. The history of Newark is inherently tied to the Uprising; it is impossible to remember those five days without also remembering the years proceeding and following them. But Newark offered radically distinct visions for people of different neighborhoods, races, and economic classes. The memories of the Uprising reflect these divisions. A divided city has produced a divided memory.

When discussing memory, this thesis—like Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford’s *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*—sees memory to be “the process by which people recall, lay claim to, understand, and represent the past.”¹⁶ The memories explored in the proceeding pages have no illusions of objectivity, but for the one remembering, each memory becomes an “essential truth.”¹⁷ These memories of the Uprising are not static and locked in the past as histories often are; they are created anew each time that the Uprising is remembered, a product of the individual’s identity and moment in time.¹⁸ For those with similar identities and experiences in Newark, “collective memories” or shared ways of understanding the Uprising have been formed. But a “consensus memory” does not yet exist for the Uprising.¹⁹ Rather, distinct memories vie for space in people’s minds, not only over what happened, but over the relevance of the event for those remembering. To reconstruct this ever-changing view of Newark, I have

¹⁵ Clement Alexander Price, “Newark Remembers the Summer of 1967, So Should We All,” *The Positive Community*, 2007, 20; Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 4.

¹⁶ Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano, “Introduction: The Struggle Over Memory,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), xiii.

¹⁷ James V. Wertsch, “Collective Memory,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126.

¹⁸ Wertsch, 126.

¹⁹ Raiford and Romano, “Introduction: The Struggle Over Memory,” xiv.

used Newarkers' books, actions, letters, speeches, memorials, and interviews. Many of these sources come from the Newark Public Library's archives, home to hard-to-find newspaper clippings, legal documents, and pictures and flyers from the period, as well as from the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library's Amiri Baraka collection, which offered countless insights into the late poet's life. In some cases, the absence of the Uprising from these sources is noted, as the omission can represent a deliberate act of suppression.

The most visible way these memories are expressed is through the terms used to describe the event. Riot, rebellion, civil disorder, uprising, urban unrest, revolution, and more are used to capture distinct understandings and memories of the Uprising. The two most widely accepted terms are "riot" and "rebellion". These names capture the dichotomy commonly present in memories of the Uprising. The late Rutgers University professor and former head of Newark's CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) chapter, Robert Curvin, describes this distinction with a modified quote from Henry Bienen's *Violence and Social Change*: "If one chooses to emphasize the [participants] in violence and to see criminality pure and simple [and label the event a riot], calls for law enforcement are in order. If one chooses to focus on conditions [and uses the term rebellion], it follows that massive attacks on the economic and social order are called for."²⁰ As a "riot", the Uprising is remembered as a senseless violent event, but as a "rebellion", it is a motivated strike against oppressive conditions. For much of the black community in Newark in particular, "rebellion" is the most commonly used term. It captures not just the motivation behind the Uprising, but the drastic political changes that were achieved in the years following.²¹

²⁰ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 103; Henry Bienen, *Violence and Social Change; a Review of Current Literature*. (Published for the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs by University of Chicago Press, 1968), 17. Curvin includes his own insertions to Bienen's words which while not noted in the original text, are marked here in brackets. The only change to the original text is the replacement of "precipitants" with "participants." It is unclear if this was intentional as either term works in its context.

²¹ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 100; Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 4.

Throughout this thesis neither “riot” nor “rebellion” are used to describe what happened and “Uprising” is used instead. This allows me to deploy the term in a political term when warranted, while maintaining some ideological separation from the deep-seeded histories behind those words. Still, “Uprising” does suggest a deliberate move against power and a focus on conditions surrounding the event similar to “rebellion.” I use it to emphasize the interplay between memory and the conditions that spawn such memory.

Issues of terminology for events like the Uprising are by no means unique to Newark, nor is the Uprising itself an entirely unique event. The United States has a long tradition of racially fired violence and unrest. However, the “riots” of the first half of the century were generally direct clashes between white and black civilians as in the case of 1943’s Detroit “riot.” From the end of World War I until the middle of the century, “riot” typically referred to this direct conflict between racial groups often instigated by whites attempting to remove black residents from their neighborhoods and cities or responding to rumors of violence against women and children.²² Events in the 1950s and 1960s mark a shift in this definition. Unrest broke out in hundreds of urban centers around the country, including Watts, CA; Buffalo, NY; Detroit, MI; and Newark. Each summer in the 1960s, violence broke out not only between groups of white and black people, but by black people against white businesses and law enforcement. This violence reached a peak in 1967—often known as the Long Hot Summer—when the two most deadly episodes of racial clash, in Newark and Detroit, occurred within little more than a week of each other. “Riot” was the most commonly used term for these outbreaks of racial violence, giving new meaning and connotations to the word. There is still conflict today over naming events of racial friction.

²² Allen D. Grimshaw, “Three Views of Urban Violence: Civil Disturbance, Racial Revolt, Class Assault,” in *Riots and Rebellion: Civil Violence in the Urban Community*, ed. Louis H. Masotti and Don R. Bowen, First (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1968), 104.

These same debates over the proper terminology were raised after racial turmoil in L.A. in 1992, Ferguson, MO in 2014, and Baltimore, MD in 2015, but no simple answer is apparent.²³

The instances of violent unrest that erupted in urban centers throughout the 1960s were by no means isolated or sporadic. Rather, they were incredibly political and motivated responses to racist systems in the country. As Peter Levy describes in his book *The Great Uprising*, these events were “a product of the long civil rights movement, the Great Migration, and the political economy of the postwar era, which raised but left unfulfilled the expectations of black migrants who expected that by changing their geographic place, ... they would change places socially and economically.”²⁴ Thousands of black families left the South throughout the 20th century expecting opportunities in Northern urban centers. But few found the prosperity that they were promised when arriving in cities like Newark. Instead they were greeted with decrepit housing in poor ghettos, dismal education for their children, and a place as second-class citizens. Even the jobs they had come north in search of were fleeing to the suburbs, following the white families that left ahead of them. Coming from the South, many had watched the Civil Rights Movement grow through the 1960s. But many saw little change to their quality of life and status in the country with the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.²⁵ These issues were not unique to Newark; they were the result of racist systems and structures in place across the country designed to subordinate black populations. What swept across the country throughout the summers of the 1960s were direct reactions against these systems in the only

²³ Karen Grigsby Bates, “Is It An ‘Uprising’ Or A ‘Riot’? Depends On Who’s Watching,” *Morning Edition* (NPR, April 30, 2015), <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/04/30/403303769/uprising-or-riot-depends-whos-watching>.

²⁴ Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America During the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11.

²⁵ Levy, 2.

ways that black people could respond—on the streets. They were, as Martin Luther King Jr. described in a 1966 interview, “the language of the unheard.”²⁶

This thesis explores how the Newark Uprising is remembered in different contexts, by different people and groups, and in different structures. Chapter One focuses on the formation of collective memories in the Uprising’s immediate aftermath. Divisions still visible today began to form before the streets were cleaned. Here the media played a large role in shifting focus from inequality and dispossession to death and violence. This shift often amplified a perception of the Uprising as a senseless event. Attention is paid to memories and perspectives of shop owners and of prominent black power figures who held the first national Black Power Conference in Newark less than a week after the Uprising.

Chapter Two looks specifically at Amiri Baraka, the late Newark poet and activist, and how his revolutionary memory of the Uprising both shifted and was maintained over the course of his life. His understanding of the Uprising as a “rebellion” was one of the most prominent in the succeeding decades. He helped share a memory entirely opposed to a “riot” and employed magical language in poetry and prose to frame the Uprising like no one else.

Chapter Three centers on the memory of Newark’s firefighters. It is largely based on two compilations of oral histories, *A View from the Firehouse: The Newark Riots* and *Riots to Renaissance*, created throughout the 1990s and early 2000s by retired firefighter Neal Stoffers. The firefighters were disconnected from the neighborhoods and communities they served at the time of the Uprising. Their memories show a struggle to reconcile their understanding of their place in the community with what they saw on the streets. Particular attention is paid to the few black firefighters in the department. While these men experienced the same struggles as their

²⁶ Lily Rothman, “What Martin Luther King Jr Really Thought About Riots,” *Time*, April 28, 2015, <https://time.com/3838515/baltimore-riots-language-unheard-quote/>.

white firefighting counterparts, they also were derided by black individuals in Newark as “Uncle Toms.”

Chapter Four examines how the Uprising has been memorialized and commemorated publicly in the more than 50 years since 1967. A monument-sized ark—destroyed in 1987—reflects the battle over an honest depiction of what the Uprising’s aftermath meant for Newark. The two smaller public monuments standing today, a stone marker and bronze plaque, show how the memory of the Uprising has been reduced and idealized to create a unified vision. These monuments also serve as annual sites of commemoration. Special attention is given to the 40th and 50th anniversaries of the Uprising, which saw increased community and local support compared to previous commemorations.

On the 40th anniversary of the Uprising, Rutgers University Professor Clement Price described how the Uprising “ended one era of Newark’s history and began a new period that we are still witnessing: Newark’s long climb out of the infamy of its contested memories.”²⁷ That climb continues today. Each of the memories discussed in the following chapters creates an understanding of what Newark needs to do to move past the Uprising. There is no easy way for Newark to rid itself of the stigma the Uprising brought the city. But if Newark ever hopes to do so, it needs to recognize the deep-seated divisions within the city that the Uprising’s divergent memories make clear.

²⁷ Price, “Newark Remembers the Summer of 1967,” 20.

Chapter 1. Losing Newark: Collective Memory in the Uprising's Aftermath

The cover pages of *Life Magazine* were designed to capture the interests and imaginations of readers. Those published in July 1967 were no exception. That month's issues featured cover stories on President Johnson's newborn child, the beginning of an acting career for Princess Lee Radziwill (the younger sister of Jackie Kennedy), and the struggle to rescue an American POW in Vietnam. The final issue on July 28th depicted something drastically different on its cover: 12-year old Joe Bass, Jr., lying unconscious in a Newark street, blood pooling around him [Figure 1.1].²⁸ Bass appeared to be dead—another lifeless body added to Newark's long list of casualties from the Uprising which only days earlier was declared over. This image became a central symbol, one of unrelenting violence, in the memory of the Uprising in the years to come.²⁹ Only careful readers, however, those who turned to the inside pages, learned about the irony embedded in the image: Bass was struck, not killed, by a stray shot from a Newark Police Officer. His body pictured on the magazine cover was actually full of life.

National and local coverage of the Uprising tended to embrace images of death and violence.³⁰ Such an emphasis proved influential. It helped individuals and communities form clear narratives of what happened. Regardless of race, religion, or class, Newarkers came to see this violence as one of the most meaningful memories of the Uprising. But the shared experience stopped there. For how this difference was remembered brought division. Did the violence represent the senseless actions of an impoverished community, or was it a rational response to a

²⁸ Bud Lee, *Cover of Life Magazine*, July 28, 1967, Photograph, July 28, 1967, <http://time.com/4848976/newark-riots-1967-photographer/>.

²⁹ Kate King and Maria Armental, "Musician Recalls Brother, Whose Beating Sparked '67 Newark Riots; John William Smith's Confrontation with Police Became One of the Symbols of Racial Troubles in Many U.S. Cities 50 Years Ago," *Wall Street Journal (Online)*; *New York, N.Y.*, July 12, 2017, sec. US. Posters featuring this image are still used today in memorial events for the Riot.

³⁰ Mumford, *Newark*, 153; Louis H. Masotti et al., *A Time to Burn? An Evaluation of the Present Crisis in Race Relations*, Rand McNally Sociology Series (USA: Rand McNally, 1969), 5.

repressive regime? This divide revealed different understandings not only of what the Uprising was, but of the kind of city Newark was to live and work in.

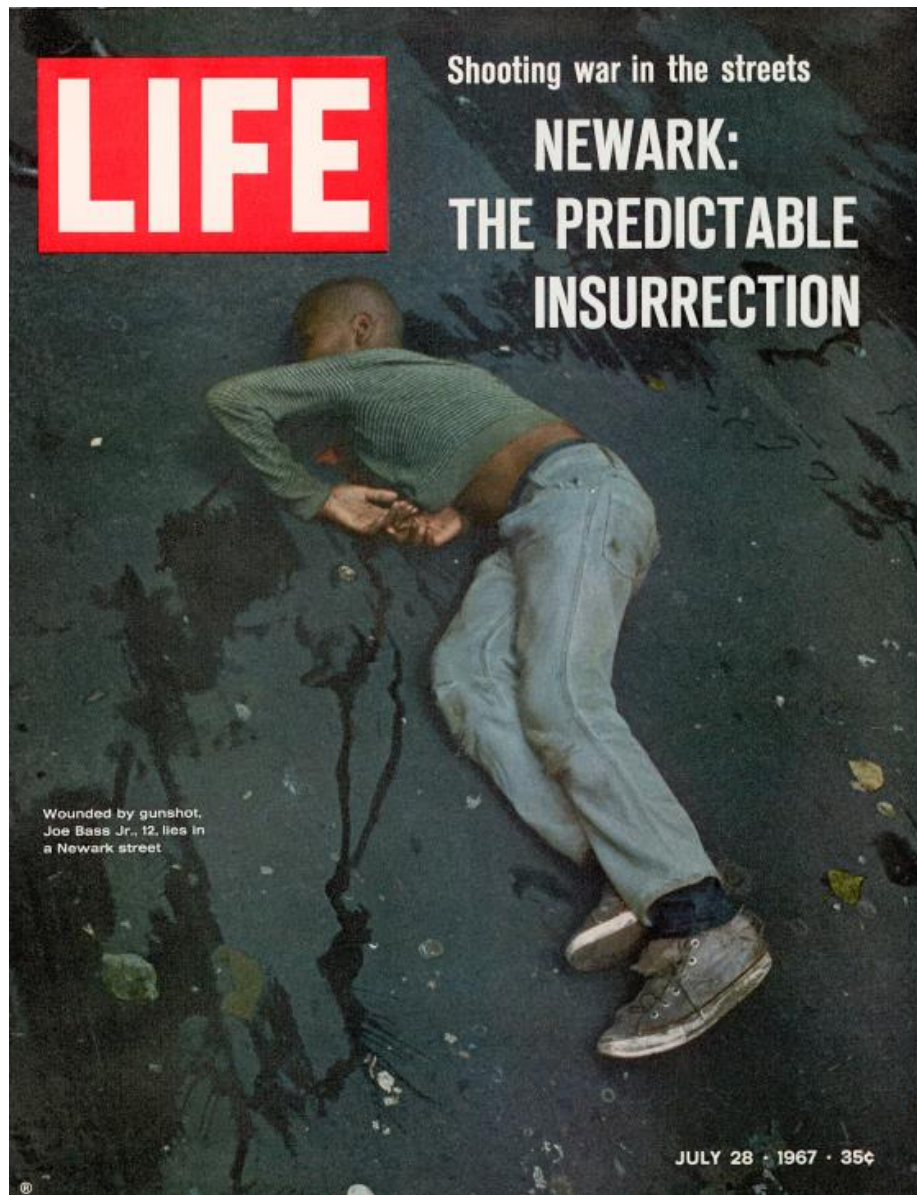


Figure 1.1 Cover of *Life Magazine* July 28, 1967. Credit: Bud Lee.

Understandings of what the Uprising was and what it meant for Newark were formed immediately in the events aftermath. In the first weeks following a major upheaval like this, people attempt to learn about and comprehend what occurred, but within a month most tend to

have set understandings created.³¹ In the time just after the Uprising two distinct memories took shape: the events as a just action or as reasonless violence. Such broad conceptions may suggest an oversimplification of the Uprising, but collective memories simplify frameworks and narratives through which individual experiences are understood. As friends and neighbors shared their stories and read the daily papers, the repeated retrieval of memories shaped a greater awareness of the entire Uprising.³² Emotion—as with most things human—steered the memory process. And the events that elicited the most emotion soon stood central to collective memories. Issues of death, looting, and changed perceptions of city life drew a range of strong responses in people as they picked up the pieces of their lives post-Uprising. Here, in these areas, the main focus of attention and discussion occurred in the weeks following the Uprising. The collective memories of the Uprising present broad understandings of what had happened and what it meant, but not every Newarker’s memory subscribed to a collective vision. Many residents would remember the Uprising as something in between—a complex and contradictory combination of personal and collective remembrance.

While Joe Bass Jr. survived the shotgun blast that hit his neck and back, 24-year-old Billy Furr—the intended target of the police officer’s shot—was less fortunate. Furr was dead within three minutes, his girlfriend weeping at his side and the officer, shotgun still in hand, standing over them. The entire scene, from Furr looting a liquor store with his friends to his untimely end, was recorded in the pages of *Life* by a reporter who watched it all unfold. In this moment Furr

³¹ James W. Pennebaker and Amy L. Gonzales, “Making History: Social and Psychological Processes Underlying Collective Memory,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 182–83.

³² Henry L. Roediger III, Franklin M. Zaromb, and Andrew C. Butler, “The Role of Repeated Retrieval in Shaping Collective Memory,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 160–61.

became one of the 26 Uprising fatalities.³³ Weeks later, this number attracted great attention from city leaders and residents. Many within the police community in particular believed that the true casualty rate was much greater, closer to 40 or 45, and formal investigations into the true number began.³⁴ For police and National Guardsmen who saw bullets flying constantly as they patrolled the streets, 26 seemed too low. They recalled a barrage of sniper fire every time they left their cars—which today is most commonly attributed to friendly fire, not snipers hidden in the tall apartment buildings—and it did not make sense that so few were dead. This belief that the Uprising had a higher cost than reported was held across the political and racial spectrum in Newark, not just by white policemen. In his book published shortly after the Uprising, Nathan Wright Jr.—the chairman of the 1967 Black Power Conference in Newark—references 28 deaths while discussing otherwise accurate data.³⁵ Memories were dominated by narratives of excessive violence and the presumed result was excessive death. On every side within Newark the Uprising was seen as having done more damage, as having taken more lives, as having been more violent than it was in reality. It did not matter if one remembered the looters or the police as the cause of this violence; death was the result in their memories.

While many saw the physical violence in the streets of Newark firsthand, countless others in the city of more than 300,000 relied on the media to form their understanding of it. Coverage of the Uprising in Newark's prominent news sources quickly focused on the loss of life and the losses of the grieving families as a defining aspect of the event. Not all the deaths were depicted equally, however. The two first responders—and only white Newarkers—killed during the Uprising, Police Detective Fred Toto and Fire Captain Michael Moran, received the most media

³³ Dale Wittner, "The Killing of Billy Furr, Caught in the Act of Looting Beer," *Life Magazine*, July 28, 1967.

³⁴ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 73-74.

³⁵ Wright Jr., *Ready to Riot*, 107.

attention. The *Star Ledger*, for example, focused on the Toto and Moran families as those whose suffering mattered. These first responders' deaths, the paper implied, were among the most important, if not *the* most important, losses in the Uprising. Soon, efforts to support their families garnered each a check for \$1000 from some of the city's most prominent businessmen. This all took place before the National Guardsmen packed up and left the community.³⁶ In contrast, the paper featured the family of only one black casualty, Eloise Spellman. Spellman was killed by a shot through her apartment window, her eleven children now orphaned. For black Newarkers, her story symbolized the Uprising's rampant and uncontrolled law enforcement response. In the white news media, the Spellman family plight was a tragedy, worthy of charity, and a clear sign of the unnecessary and obscene destruction left in the Uprising's wake.³⁷

The major newspapers in Newark functioned during the Uprising as they often do elsewhere during social conflicts: they promoted the interests and priorities of those in power in their city.³⁸ Indeed, Newark's mainstream media largely opposed attempts to frame the Uprising as an active revolt against social structures and inequalities. Its coverages of the event hardly mentioned this perspective's existence. In Newark, the interests of wealthy whites and their institutions—like the newspapers—worked against promoting narratives of the Uprising as a just revolt. Popular media “play[s] an important role in the formation and mobilization of consensus,” and papers like the *Star Ledger* published numerous stories to define the Uprising as senselessly violent.³⁹ For those who saw the Uprising largely through news reports, the

³⁶ John Soloway, “Respect, Tribute for Two Widows,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 18, 1967.

³⁷ Mumford, *Newark*. p151

³⁸ Susan M. Strohm, “The Black Press and the Black Community: The Los Angeles Sentinel's Coverage of the Watts Riot,” in *Framing Friction: Media and Social Conflict*, ed. Mary S. Mander (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 60.

³⁹ Bert Klandermans, “Framing Collective Action,” in *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present*, ed. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Erling Sivertsen, and Rolf Werenskjold, *Protest, Culture and Society* 11 (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 55.

interpretations of violence presented there became the basis of their memory of the Uprising. The images and stories that the media presented shaped this memory of the Uprising as without any real motivations or aims. To those who saw the Uprising as push-back against white and oppressive institutions, the media's portrayal was another part of society that the Uprising opposed.

Like reports on Uprising violence, mainstream presentation of the Uprising deaths often noted them as “the inevitable result of looting and lawlessness.”⁴⁰ Newark Mayor Hugh Addonizio discussed the deaths in a similar manner, though largely by omission, in a speech on the Uprising. He mentioned only the two white officers and “the mother of 11, who died in innocence and horror.”⁴¹ The *Star Ledger* also gave no real attention to Spellman's death and focused instead only on the charity fund set up for her children.⁴² This was a sharp contrast to its prominent coverage of the two white officers' deaths, which included descriptions of their last moments.⁴³ The paper even published an emotional first-person account of Fire Captain Moran's death titled, “How it Happened- Death of a fireman: ‘we all cried.’”⁴⁴ The article was written by the director of the Newark Fire Department and the article made no attempt at an objective account of Moran's death. It only discussed how devastating it was for the city to lose such a great hero. As Newarkers read story after story of the Uprising in the popular press, the most tragic deaths—those which emphasized the senselessness of the violence—were the most prominent. These accounts crafted memories that, as Ronald Porambo described in 1971, saw the Uprising largely as black people “running around burning, looting, and killing a police detective

⁴⁰ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 66.

⁴¹ “Author Louis Lomax Hits Politicians, Police,” *Newark Evening News*, October 27, 1967, 16.

⁴² “Fund Climbs for 11 Riot Orphans,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 10, 1967.

⁴³ Soloway, “Respect, Tribute for Two Widows.”

⁴⁴ John P. Caufield, “How It Happened- Death of a Fireman: ‘We All Cried,’” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 17, 1967.

and a fire captain. Twenty-one others had also been shot to death but they were black—either looters or killed by mysterious snipers.”⁴⁵ These deaths became symbols of the senseless violence that, according to the media, defined the Uprising.

In an open letter published in the *Star Ledger*, the family of Detective Toto asked: “What purpose did these deaths serve? For the rest of our lives, we, as a family will feel anguish and pain for Fred’s death, but if only some good will result from the entire unbelievable situation our loss will have a meaning.”⁴⁶ The loss of life was at the center of the Toto family’s memory of the Uprising, but their pain was a result of the Uprising’s perceived senselessness. Another anonymous Newarker reflecting on the Uprising asked, “People have been killed and injured... and for what? The violence has not contributed a single constructive measure...”⁴⁷ While other aspects of the Uprising’s violence were deemed justified by some, the deaths that it caused were never construed in this way. Regardless of one’s views on what, if anything, the Uprising was for, there were no attempts to make these deaths into anything more than unnecessary loss. Even those who saw the Uprising as a move in the right direction for Newark never attempted to approve of the deaths that it caused.⁴⁸

While the deaths were not used in a positive light, they still proved for many that their understanding of the Uprising was accurate. If one understood the Uprising to be a revolt against an oppressive system, then those who died were the system’s victims striking back. For many, the deaths were not due to the violence of the looters; they were due to the violence of the police and National Guard. The dead did not become martyrs in memories of the Uprising, but they

⁴⁵ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 24.

⁴⁶ Francis Toto Salich, Robert N. Toto, and Michael J. Toto, “From Cop’s Grieving Kin: Thanks and Hope,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 1, 1967.

⁴⁷ “A Matter of Opinion: Voices of Reason,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 28, 1967.

⁴⁸ Louis Cassels, “Rioting: Most Negroes Have Mixed Feelings about It,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 13, 1967, sec. 1.

became reminders of what the Uprising responded to. The killing of James Rutledge, a 19-year-old black man shot 39 times in the back and head by police officers, developed into a rallying point against police brutality.⁴⁹ An image of Rutledge's mutilated body circulated on flyers by a radical group in Newark named Black Survival, which called on black Newarkers to not "be caught defenseless."⁵⁰ Rutledge was not portrayed as having died for the movement against oppression, but his death—and the death of the other black Newarkers—was remembered as a sign that an aggressive response was necessary.

As much as death and violence dominated the media and personal memories, the looting and devastation of stores was just as prominent. 85% of businesses in Newark had windows broken, and with the full-on destruction of over 1,000 businesses, roughly 4,500 Newarkers were out of work.⁵¹ Even for those who did not personally lose a business or job, the damage was visible in the streets. Images of burning buildings and black families carrying goods out of stores quickly spread throughout Newark and around the country. Looting appeared in nearly every memory of the Uprising. And much like understandings of violence and death, people often imagined looting as a symbol of unjustified lawlessness or as a revolutionary act. This distinction fed Newarkers' understandings of the Uprising, but their interpretations of looting came from these same larger memories. Perceptions of looting impacted how one saw the Uprising as a whole and, in turn, how one saw the Uprising as a whole impacted perceptions of looting. The images of looting that filled newspapers were plentiful but ambiguous. Any interpretation of the

⁴⁹ Williams, *Unfinished Agenda*, 156–57. The Grand Jury in their report on the deaths resulting from the Riot took issue with the number of shots claimed to have been fired, but it remains the most commonly reported number today. For more, see: Essex County Grand Jury, "Findings and Action Taken in Their Investigation of 26 Deaths Occurring during the Civil Disturbances in Newark, July 13 through July 18, 1967" (Newark, NJ: Superior Court of New Jersey, 1968), 17.

⁵⁰ Black Survival, "Get Ready! For the Devil!," July 1967. The image, which Julius William claims was taken by Amiri Baraka, featured an image of Rutledge too graphic to include here but which also showed openings of the body made by the funeral home.

⁵¹ Mumford, *Newark*, 158.

Uprising could be seen through them. From these scenes some saw indiscriminate violence and others saw deliberate targeting of the stores. As sociologists Russell Dynes and E.L. Quarantelli later determined, looters overwhelmingly targeted grocery and consumer stores during the Uprising while leaving alone other stores, schools, and private homes.⁵² Looting focused on goods from these stores (everything ranging from food to television sets) routinely denied from black Newarkers by the stores' outright racist policies or by the larger systems in place designed to keep black Newarkers impoverished. For those who recognized this targeting by the looters, the act was often remembered as a rebellion against society or, as Tom Hayden put it, "people [voting] with their feet."⁵³ But where some saw the looting as meaningful action, others simply saw physical destruction without cause.

The sparing of black-owned businesses with the words 'soul' or 'soul brother' painted on their windows was further evidence for many of the looters' deliberateness.⁵⁴ Looters typically even left alone even grocery and consumer stores marked this way. This phenomenon has become widely acknowledged in the years since the Uprising, and Philip Roth's 1997 novel *American Pastoral* even used it a plot point.⁵⁵ But in the Uprising's immediate aftermath, it was hardly mentioned—especially by the popular press. The media's general biases against showing signs of the looters' motivations helped to ensure this, but the National Guardsmen and State Police did even more. The troopers left little evidence of this phenomenon's existence, as upon arrival in Newark they shot and smashed the windows marked 'soul.' These stories saw minimal coverage in newspapers, if they were covered at all, even though they were widely documented

⁵² E.L. Quarantelli and Russell Dynes, "Looting in Civil Disorders: An Index of Social Change," *The American Behavioral Scientist*, no. March-April (1968): 8.

⁵³ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 30.

⁵⁴ Mumford, *Newark*, 158–59.

⁵⁵ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), 161.

through sworn testimonies. None of the excessive and overtly racist violence of the National Guard was seen prominently in the media even as claims of their trigger-happy nature were made by Mayor Addonizio and Governor Hughes.⁵⁶

Stories of the National Guard's violence did not align with media narratives of black looters as the cause of the destruction and were difficult to find in the press. Few news pieces were published on troopers acting with such malice and those who shared these accounts often did so at risk to themselves. One black store owner went on national television to report his experience of targeting by the State Police and subsequently received phone calls threatening him and his family.⁵⁷ With no desire from the media to push these narratives and resistance from the community to share them, the excessive violence and cruelty of the law enforcement did not become prominent in the Uprising's aftermath. The omission of important aspects of the Uprising like the looters' exclusion of labeled stores and the National Guard's targeting of them made it easy for the media to present an image of the looters—and the Uprising as a whole—as senseless and without cause.

For those who saw the Uprising as a justified rebellion, the introduction of the State Police and National Guard on July 14th served another function: it marked a shift in the violence in Newark from the looters to the law enforcement. A former public-school teacher in Newark described this distinction, saying “essentially there were two riots in Newark. One was started by black people and one by the State Police. The first riot was over in two days. It took very few lives but a hell of a lot of property. The second riot was pure retribution on the part of the National Guard and State Police.”⁵⁸ The teacher focused on the timeline of events, noting that the

⁵⁶ Siegal, “Silent No Longer,” 101.

⁵⁷ William James Odom, “Witness Deposition” (Essex County: State of New Jersey, July 24, 1967).

⁵⁸ Mumford, *Newark*, 127.

first fatalities of the Uprising occurred when the National Guard arrived and simultaneously looting drastically decreased. As with most aspects of the Uprising, these facts could alternatively be interpreted as the National Guard putting down lawless behavior at a great cost. In this interpretation, however, the National Guard was the opposite of rioters as the teacher described—they were preventing violence from sweeping the streets of Newark.

Many storeowners, though, did not care what the reasoning—or lack thereof—was for the damage; they focused solely on cleaning it up. These Newarkers, black and white, faced a significant repair bill. Even for those who had little personal stake in businesses reopening, the cost of the violence became a prominent post-Uprising issue. At this time, the *Star Ledger* published a series of articles detailing the difficulties that these shop owners had in receiving aid from insurance companies, and the state and federal governments, for damages estimated at more than \$15 million.⁵⁹ Business owners continued to worry about recouping their losses as they saw decreased customers and profits. Areas of the city like Springfield Avenue, once a booming center of shopping and business for the Central Ward, were haunted by feelings of physical insecurity and a lack of consumer confidence that kept customers away. The Uprising made bankruptcy a real possibility for many business owners and moving outside of the downtown area became for many their best solution.⁶⁰ Often these businessmen imagined themselves as “the forgotten people of the riots,” as they saw memories of the Uprising focus on who was to blame for the damage to the city, not who had been hurt by it.

But these memories of the Uprising were still relevant for business owners even in the typically unimaginative process of receiving insurance payouts. While stores that were uninsured

⁵⁹ “The Economic Loss,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 7, 1967.

⁶⁰ “Merchant’s Plea for Confidence,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 4, 1967.

were almost guaranteed to go bankrupt,⁶¹ the majority had insurance and would be saved by their expected payouts. An air of uncertainty hung over this prospect in the weeks following the Uprising, however. Insurance companies attempted to figure out not only how to quantify the damage, but how to define the event that caused it. If the Uprising was a riot, shop owners would receive insurance payouts; if it was an insurrection, they would not. As many insurance companies feared the scale of their own losses if they had to make full payments for the damages that businesses sustained, they argued that what happened in Newark was an insurrection.⁶² The City of Newark similarly recognized that it could be held sued for negligence during a riot but not an insurrection.⁶³ Insurance companies and the city challenged the use of riot so widely in the months following the Uprising that a state judge was eventually forced to rule on the event's official term.

This question of naming stretched well beyond bureaucratic insurance regulations and was fully tied to how the Uprising was remembered. As the city and insurance companies began to call what happened an insurrection, they found themselves siding with unusual bedfellows—the black and leftist radical movements who used terms like insurrection, rebellion, and revolution. Activists and organizations such as Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) immediately labeled the event as a rebellion rather than a riot not to save money like the city, but to emphasize the narrative of the Uprising as politically and socially motivated.⁶⁴ As the head of CORE explained to a group of Newark politicians, “To be called a rioter is to be guilty of a criminal act ... It's the white man who is criminal ... it's the

⁶¹ Drew Pearson, “Drew Pearson: Riot Backlash,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 15, 1967.

⁶² Pearson.

⁶³ “City Wins Ruling on Riot Liability,” *Newark Evening News*, April 18, 1967.

⁶⁴ United Press International, “Carmichael Calls Riots ‘Rebellion,’” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 16, 1967; “‘Rebellion’ Says CORE,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 31, 1967; William A. Price, “But Revolt Stirs Pride, Unity,” *National Guardian*, July 29, 1967.

white man who is looting the black people in white-owned stores across the country.”⁶⁵ Terms like ‘riot’ and ‘rebellion’ carried these meanings since well before the Newark Uprising, so when rebellion or similar words were used by Newark officials they were placed alongside negative qualifiers such as ‘criminal’ in an attempt to separate the words from their associated meanings. New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes did just this while the Uprising was still raging, describing it as a “criminal rebellion against government and society.”⁶⁶ In the context of the Uprising, such naming devices represented specific collective memories. Those who saw senseless violence typically used ‘riot;’ those who saw motivated action used rebellion or revolution. Groups promoting distinct memories and narratives of the Uprising carefully watched the use of their terms and those of the oppositional narratives. While major news sources in Newark would occasionally use ‘rebellion,’ it was only to mention that perceived radical groups were using the term.⁶⁷

The court battles waged by insurance companies and the city over these names changed how many viewed the terms and the memories they were associated with. For the Newarkers struggling to rebuild and desperately waiting on insurance payouts, terms other than riot became associated with the economic pain that they felt. These terms also became attributed to a perceived lack of desire to rebuild Newark.⁶⁸ Many within Newark simply wanted a return to life as it was before the Uprising and to move on, but to use a term other than ‘riot’ implied an opposition to pre-Uprising Newark. With the argument over insurrection, the term already lengthened any chance that one could have of rebuilding. This image of rebuilding was prolific

⁶⁵ “‘Rebellion’ Says CORE.”

⁶⁶ Peter Farrell, Tex Novellino, and Leo Standora, “Police Battle Snipers: Seal off Riot Area; 8 More Killed,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 15, 1967, 15.

⁶⁷ United Press International, “Carmichael Calls Riots ‘Rebellion.’”

⁶⁸ “Let’s All Work to Rebuild the City,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 1, 1967.

in discussions of how Newark should move forward, used in terms of rebuilding race relations, social programs, and most literally, buildings. A number of opinion pieces and editorials were published rehashing the same argument that “it was a nice city, so why not build it up again?”⁶⁹ These calls for a return to pre-Uprising Newark reflected a memory of the city absent of its numerous problems. Many realized quickly after the Uprising that there was no going back; it would take a long time, as Mayor Addonizio described, “before the scars among us heal.”⁷⁰ For those who saw the Uprising as a movement against oppressive systems, the impossibility of full rebuilding was a good thing and many focused on trying to build a new and better Newark than the one before.

As Newarkers processed the loss of the city they knew before the Uprising, many asked themselves, how could this have happened here? They began to deny that something like the Uprising developed out of conditions in the city. Such denial reckoned with memories that did not align. For those who remembered pre-Uprising Newark without its rampant inequality, it did not make sense for people to have acted out in this way. Thus individuals ranging from Newark’s mayor to ordinary Newarkers expressed shock that violence broke out.⁷¹ Some even denied that conditions in the city were bad enough to warrant anything like the Uprising.⁷² Ignoring these causes of the Uprising was a form of self-deception, a blatant disregard for the actual conditions so that they cannot conflict with one’s recollection of the events.⁷³ This is not to say that all struggled to accept the reality of the Uprising, for as many made quite clear, an Uprising could

⁶⁹ “Let’s All Work to Rebuild the City.”

⁷⁰ “Mayor in Plea to All: Build Finer City Together,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 19, 1967, 14.

⁷¹ “Addonizio Didn’t Expect the Rioting,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 18, 1967.

⁷² Joseph Carragher, “Visits Riot-Struck Ward: Must Build for the Future, Boland Says,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 21, 1967, 9.

⁷³ Roy F. Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, “Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rime (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 290–91.

have been all but predicted in Newark by July 1967.⁷⁴ For a large collective within Newark, though, the Uprising was difficult to believe. Even for those in the Central Ward who saw the realities of police brutality and oppression, there was trouble comprehending it. As one mother of nine explained shortly afterwards, “maybe I wasn’t surprised. I don’t know of anything that could have caused it. There was no talk about it happening.”⁷⁵

The idea that the Uprising was out of place for Newark was expressed and widely accepted in a different form—in the belief that outside forces instigated the violence. This idea appeared almost immediately as reports of cars with out of state plates were discussed by the mayor on the second day of the Uprising.⁷⁶ As soon as July 21st, major politicians in Newark claimed that they had information about these outsiders and congressmen called for a probe into these claims.⁷⁷ With these accusations, an ‘other’ was created in the memories of many Newarkers. The presence of outsiders was widely asserted as a sign that Newark was not actually filled with the issues to warrant the Uprising. This idea showed a refusal to accept pre-Uprising conditions that existed before the Uprising as a reality and assuaged any guilt for the Uprising from Newarkers themselves. The claim was not local to Newark itself and was a common reaction to similar outbreaks of violence across the country. Following a detailed survey of Uprising participants in Newark, Jeffery Paige, a Ph.D. candidate and sociologist explained that:

After every major outbreak of collective racial violence, attempts have been made to attribute the trouble to people foreign to the community. The particular outsider has varied. ... The outside agitators in the 1967 series of riots were H. “Rap” Brown, Stokely Carmichael or other black militants. The basic premise of all the outside agitator theories

⁷⁴ James McHugh, “Rioting a Nightmare for the Businessman,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 16, 1967; “‘We Knew This Was Coming’: Saw Riots ‘building up,’ 2 Leaders Say,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 16, 1967; Bob Shabazian, “City Had Warning,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 19, 1967.

⁷⁵ Carragher, “Visits Riot-Struck Ward: Must Build for the Future, Boland Says,” 9.

⁷⁶ Farrell, Novellino, and Standora, “Police Battle Snipers: Seal off Riot Area; 8 More Killed,” 3.

⁷⁷ Associated Press, “Rep. Ford: ‘Outsiders’ Involved,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 20, 1967; “Charge UCC Staff Harbors Riot Inciters,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 21, 1967; “2 Congressmen to Ask Shriver for UCC Probe,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 25, 1967.

of civil disorder is that the people are basically happy with existing institutions and it is those unfamiliar with them who stir up dissatisfaction.⁷⁸

Stokely Carmichael—the black power activist and leader of the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—was a frequent target of this outsider theory throughout the Long Hot Summer and in Newark in particular. Before the Newark Uprising was even over, Carmichael was forced to deny that he had been in Newark or had any participation in the Uprising.⁷⁹ He was so closely associated with the unrest in cities across the country that a bill passed by the US House of Representatives making it illegal to cross state lines to incite violence became known as the “Anti-Carmichael Bill.”⁸⁰

It did not matter that Carmichael was not actually connected to the Uprising in Newark. He was representative of the radical outsiders who supposedly entered the city. Carmichael’s comments in the Uprising’s aftermath, “In Newark we applied war tactics of the guerillas. We are preparing groups of urban guerillas for our defense in the cities,”⁸¹ certainly did not help break this connection. Even Newark city councilmen, members of the US House of Representatives, and the head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, saw outside agitation as a real possibility in Newark.⁸² The common association between these outsiders and radical groups made this even easier for many to believe. Politicians saw radical political motivation in the ‘outsiders’ who sparked the Uprising, but they never attributed the same agency to the masses on the streets. Various politicians and their supporters heavily targeted groups such as Students for a

⁷⁸ Jeffery Mayland Paige, “Collective Violence and the Culture of Subordination: A Study of Participants in the July 1967 Riots in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit Michigan” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan, 1968), 60. For a longer history of the use of outsiders in civil disorders see pp. 60-62.

⁷⁹ “Stokely Denies Being in City,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 15, 1967; United Press International, “Carmichael Calls Riots ‘Rebellion.’”

⁸⁰ “‘Anti-Carmichael’ Bill Passes House,” *National Guardian*, July 29, 1967, 6.

⁸¹ Havana Associated Press, “Stokely: Guerrilla ‘war’ Planned,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 26, 1967.

⁸² “Councilmen Talk to House Panel on Newark Riots,” *Newark Star Ledger*, August 2, 1967; David Lawrence, “Reds and Rioting: They Help to Shape Plans,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 28, 1967.

Democratic Society (SDS) and various poverty boards in Newark like the United Community Corporation (UCC) as those behind the event.⁸³ City councilman Lee Bernstein even traveled to Washington DC to name prominent figures in these groups—including Tom Hayden, the leader of Newark’s SDS chapter—as communists during House testimonies, formally connecting the Uprising to radical social movements through their leaders.⁸⁴ While most who recalled the Uprising as an organic revolt against society did not believe these assertions of outsiders, the accusations gave some agency to the idea that there was motivation behind the Uprising. As a result of the outsider agitator theory, many Newarkers became increasingly suspicious of all leftist and radical groups in the city.⁸⁵

For those worried by the perceived role of radical groups behind the Uprising, they gained no respite from the first Black Power Conference taking place in Newark less than a week after the Uprising. Stokely Carmichael was not present, but numerous other leaders from major black organizations around the world were in attendance including Jesse Jackson, Amiri Baraka, Ron Karenga, H. Rap Brown, and more.⁸⁶ Although the conference took place on July 20th, just three days after the Uprising, participants often failed to mention recent events to the surprise of many attendees. When several white journalists were thrown out of the conference because of their recent reporting on the Uprising, however, memories of the Uprising quickly returned to people’s minds.⁸⁷ Violence once again became the media’s focus less than a week after the Uprising as reports swirled of assaulted reporters and broken camera equipment. The attendance of the white journalists at the conference reminded many of the media’s reporting on the

⁸³ Shabazian, “City Had Warning.”

⁸⁴ “Councilmen Talk to House Panel on Newark Riots.”

⁸⁵ “A Matter of Opinion: Voices of Reason.”

⁸⁶ Logan Lockwood, “1967 Newark Black Power Conference,” University, *Black Power in American Memory* (blog), April 19, 2017, <http://blackpower.web.unc.edu/2017/04/1967-newark-black-power-conference/>.

⁸⁷ Mumford, *Newark*, 126; “Black Power Delegates Chase White Newsmen,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 23, 1967.

Uprising, which largely ignored black perspectives in favor of mainstream white society's. The reaction to their presence was based on collective memories of both what the Uprising was and of how it was portrayed. The one white person allowed to stay for a workshop, Ti-Grace Atkinson, was only granted the exception because her friend Florynce Kennedy, a prominent black feminist and activist who helped create the conference, risked her own safety to allow her to stay.⁸⁸

These memories of the Uprising led to physical action at the Black Power Conference, but this only reinforced, for some, other narratives of the Uprising. Many in Newark compare the incident at the conference to the Uprising, viewing both as a "self-destructive syndrome of oppressed people."⁸⁹ The conference challenged this interpretation in its press release which announced their agreed views that "so-called riots were seen to be the inevitable results of the criminal behavior of a society which dehumanizes people and drives men to utter distraction. There was no rift between traditional moderates and militants [at the conference] in viewing the recent killings of black people in Newark by police and national guardsmen as 'public massacre.'"⁹⁰ The criminal intent behind the Uprising, attributed to looters in the media and by the government is flipped here. Society is remembered as criminal, not the looters as Governor Hughes had declared.⁹¹ This repurposing of terms was common in the narratives of the Uprising as a revolt and functioned here in the same way as the previously seen flip of 'riot' by a Newark public school teacher.

⁸⁸ Sherie Randolph, "Women's Liberation or ... Black Liberation, You're Fighting the Same Enemies": Florynce Kennedy, Black Power, and Feminism," in *Want to Start a Revolution: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 232. For more information on the role of women in the Black Power Conference, see Randolph above. For more information on the role of women in the Newark Riot and aftermath, see "The Reconstruction of Black Womanhood" in Mumford, *Newark*, 149–69.

⁸⁹ "Black Power Delegates Chase White Newsmen."

⁹⁰ "Press Release: Conference Projects New Directions," July 24, 1967.

⁹¹ Farrell, Novellino, and Standora, "Police Battle Snipers: Seal off Riot Area; 8 More Killed," 3.

Governor Hughes' use of "criminal" was a particular target of this appropriation and his descriptions were met with anger from multiple directions. In an opinion piece for the *National Guardian*—a prominent black newspaper in Newark—Jessie Stuehler described her outrage with the official reaction to the uprising saying, "'Criminal!' Governor Hughes says. A mirror of our own shortcomings, it seems to me. This is a violent society, callous about napalming non-white civilians in Vietnam. ... So maybe the Governor is right. It is just a question of whose crime!"⁹² This self-described WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) housewife from a Newark suburb captures the feelings of those who remember violence from the police, not the looters during the Uprising. The anger felt here was the same as the anger against white society understood to be the cause of the Uprising. Rather than blaming outsiders, fault is placed squarely on the oppressive and brutal police and government.

There was no one in Newark truly at ease in the weeks following the Uprising, and for many, a sense of frustration developed from the situation they found. For those hoping for progress in racial and social equality in the city, it was slow to come. Less than a month after the Uprising, Newark promoted its first black police captain, Edward Williams, but for many their situation did not seem to be improving.⁹³ Fears that the unresolved issues behind the Uprising would spark another were common in these weeks. Floyd Bixler McKissick—the leader of CORE at the time—questioned if "any man in his sane mind can say we are not in for some more days of violence ... If a woman is pregnant, she's still pregnant unless you get rid of the baby."⁹⁴ In McKissick's view, Newark's only options were either to abort the "baby" by resolving the issues that rocked Newark, or continue to carry it and be faced with the same violent symptoms

⁹² Jessie Stuehler, "Opinion: 'I Am a WASP Housewife...,'" *National Guardian*, July 29, 1967.

⁹³ Tex Novellino, "Addonizio Warns against Spread of Race Hatred," *Newark Star Ledger*, August 5, 1967.

⁹⁴ "CORE's Plan: Oust Addonizio," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 22, 1967.

that came from it. For those who saw the Uprising as without purpose or aims, the lack of visible or felt change only deepened such beliefs. One Newarker, 39-year-old James Jackson, took it into his own hands to make change in the city after deciding that the Uprising had brought no improvements and the government was not going to either. With an organization he founded named START (Society Takes Action, Rebuilds Today), Jackson began to clean up the streets of Newark with equipment loaned from the city sanitation department. He saw the Uprising as having brought only destruction to the city, having served no purpose other than to ruin lives and the image of black people. At the same time, he acknowledged that though he had wanted to create this group for two decades, it was only in the Uprising's aftermath that he was able to make it happen.⁹⁵ He remembered the Uprising as pointless, successful solely in getting people to clean up their city. Jackson recognized the need for change and that in the Uprising's aftermath there was a change, just not that it was an attempt to create this change. Remembering the Uprising as senseless and unnecessary did not negate the belief that there were issues in Newark, simply that the Uprising had been a reaction against them.

While James Jackson organized his community to aid in the post-Uprising cleanup, white business owners became increasingly vocal about the state of disrepair that the city remained in during the succeeding weeks. Dozens of local business owners in Newark complained to their congressmen of the struggles they had in repairing their stores, angry with the destruction they saw the Uprising as having caused.⁹⁶ Other Newarkers expressed similar outrage at the fact that black Newarkers rose up at all. The husband of the same WASP housewife was reported as saying, "What does the Negro want? It costs the city a lot of money to build those nice housing

⁹⁵ Bob Brown, "Central Ward Clean-up to Start," *Newark Star Ledger*, August 11, 1967.

⁹⁶ Pearson, "Drew Pearson: Riot Backlash."

projects. If they'd only be patient, wait five or ten years, things would be better..."⁹⁷ Much of the white anger regarding the Uprising was directed towards black Newarkers in general, the vast majority of whom were not involved, but who many white people automatically associated with the event. This general anger present in Newark was easily noticed by the Humor Societies of America, who attempted "to bring back happy attitudes to the city" through a 'laugh-in'.⁹⁸ Rather than lighten the mood in Newark, this offer only drew more ire from the black press in particular who published the offer in their section titled, "How crazy can you get dep[artment]".⁹⁹ The frustration with the situation was universal regardless of one's understanding of the Uprising. Newarkers looked at the state of their city and wondered what progress it brought.

As the weeks passed in Newark, the Uprising began to be featured less and less in the pages of the local newspapers. Memories of the Uprising—what it was, what it caused, and why—were solidified in these earliest weeks and little could be done to change them. The two distinct collective memories that were formed—of the Uprising as motivated by just cause or without any sense and reason—tended to stretch across the city and into every aspect of the event. These memories influenced how Newarkers approached the post-Uprising city and what they hoped to achieve in its aftermath. These larger narratives of the Uprising helped shape the significance of individual experiences. Collective memories defined the significance of the Uprising in its aftermath by focusing on death, looting, and Newarkers' perceptions of their city. But the memories of what, if anything, the violence meant were diametrically opposed. In a city that literally burned because of the divisions between its people, the memories that formed in the event's aftermath offered little sign of a change to this fractured condition.

⁹⁷ Stuehler, "Opinion: 'I Am a WASP Housewife...'"

⁹⁸ New York United Press International, "How Crazy Can You Get Dept.," *National Guardian*, July 29, 1967.

⁹⁹ New York United Press International.

Chapter 2. Amiri Baraka and Revolutionary Remembering

One City will fall to Black people, maybe, peacefully. One will fall by force of arms. One will fall because white people don't want to be there anymore and they will voluntarily leave ... I mean, things come together, they break up, they come together on a higher level, they break up—things are young, strong, they struggle, they achieve some kind of solidarity—they get comfortable, they get lazy, they die. The white man's the same way: he's like an overripe plum. There's nothing he or I can do to stop what's going to happen to him.

—Amiri Baraka, 1969¹⁰⁰

Just three days after the Uprising, the 1967 Black Power conference featured exciting moments and impressive figures. Memorable scenes, including a US flag replaced with a black nationalist one and the introduction of H. Rap Brown as the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), were shared across the nation.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless Amiri Baraka, the Newark born poet and activist, still managed to find a spotlight. Recently released from prison in connection to the Uprising, his head still bandaged from a police assault, Baraka became one of the conference's newest heroes.¹⁰² Seated between H. Rap Brown and Ron Karenga at a press conference [Figure 2.1], Baraka declared “The next time, don't break into liquor stores. Go where you can get something to protect yourself.”¹⁰³ For him, the Black Power Conference “...made the people understand that what had gone down just a few days ago was not just, uh, like they say a riot, which they keep saying and I say it's a rebellion. But it was an absolute expression ... of the will for self-determination and what the Black Power Conference did was give it an articulation, you understand what I mean? Give it a rationale.”¹⁰⁴ Baraka made

¹⁰⁰ Marvin X and Faruk, Islam and Black Art: An Interview with LeRoi Jones, Negro Digest, January 1969, 78.

¹⁰¹ Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 86.

¹⁰² Woodard, 86.

¹⁰³ Woodard, 86.

¹⁰⁴ The North, *Amiri Baraka Discusses the National Conference on Black Power in Newark, 1967*, 2016, sec. 1:09, <https://vimeo.com/183423725>.

his vision clear: what happened was a rebellion—poor black people seizing a routinely denied power.



Figure 2.1 Amiri Baraka (center) seen leading a press conference at the Spirit House during the 1967 Black Power conference. To the right is H. Rap Brown, to the left is Ron Karenga, and the woman in a black shroud to the left of Karenga is the mother of James Rutledge, one the 26 deaths from the Uprising.

Credit: Amiri Baraka Papers; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library

Amiri Baraka's prominent position as a community activist and artist helped him to spread this vision throughout Newark and across the country. Born and raised in Newark as Everett LeRoi Jones and returning there after brief stints in college, the Air Force, Greenwich Village, and Harlem, Baraka made Newark his home for most of his life. The city served as

inspiration for much of his work. Although he officially returned to Newark in 1967, just months before the Uprising started, Baraka had remained actively immersed in the black community there. For many he was one of the most prominent black figures in the city—a perception recognized even by a white paper boy during the Uprising who carried a book of Baraka’s poems to “be seen as an ally if [he] ran into any rioters.”¹⁰⁵ This association that Baraka carried, not only with Black Power ideology but with the city itself, bolstered his authority and gave him a platform from which to promote his understanding of the Uprising.

Baraka was by no means unique in describing what happened as a rebellion and agreed with countless other black nationalists and black intellectuals on its proper name.¹⁰⁶ He carried the same basic reasoning and logic for calling the Uprising a rebellion. He saw it as black people rising up to “free ourselves FOREVER from white injustice”¹⁰⁷ and the targeting of white stores by looters and arsonists proved their intent.¹⁰⁸ He vehemently opposed the use of “riot” for the Uprising as it described the violence as criminal rather than liberating. Baraka framed his rebellion narrative of the Uprising as part of a larger revolution at work. He referenced an abstract revolution, one simultaneously occurring and yet to come. Even decades later, when it was clear that no physical revolution had arisen from the Uprising, Baraka continued to share the image of a large-scale revolution at work behind it, occurring on multiple levels. Baraka was again not alone in imagining a coming revolution connected to the urban unrest across the country. As Robert Cruse explained in his 1968 book *Rebellion or Revolution*, “Winning racial

¹⁰⁵ Rick Rojas and Khorri Atkinson, “Five Days of Unrest That Shaped, and Haunted, Newark,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/nyregion/newark-riots-50-years.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (University Press, 2001), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Amiri Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark” (Draft with hand corrections, Columbia University, 1975), 110. Note that this book was never published (to the best of my knowledge) and page numbers are based on those written by Baraka over the typed numbers in the book’s draft.

¹⁰⁸ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Freundlich Books, 1984), 261.

equality in America could very well require revolutionary methods, and probably will; but then we will have to understand *why* a revolution and *how* the Negro could possibly make one.”¹⁰⁹

Baraka paid little attention to this first question—it was inevitable and he assumed that revolutions needed to occur and would—but his accounts of the Uprising explore this latter question constantly, attempting to determine what form the revolution would take and how the rebellion he described fit into it.

Baraka’s personal experiences during the Uprising were eventful and illustrated many of the issues plaguing Newark at the time. They also play only minor roles in his accounts of the event. Baraka focused instead on the event’s function as a part of the ideological movements to which he subscribed. The years following the Uprising saw Baraka struggle with his personal ideology as he transformed from Black Cultural Nationalist to a Third World Marxist. As a Black Cultural Nationalist from 1965-1973, Baraka advocated for the creation of a black state in Newark focusing solely on black and white conflict. But as a Third World Marxist from 1974 on, he understood the Uprising as a kind of guerilla warfare by the most exploited class in the United States: the black urban underclass.

His interpretation of the Uprising as a revolutionary outburst against an oppressive system remained constant through these changes in identity, though his view of that oppressive force and the larger context shifted. Baraka’s descriptions of the Uprising were not attempts to explore each detail of the actual event but to convey what he saw as its true reality.¹¹⁰ He shared not just his memory of the Uprising; he shared what he perceived as the history of the Uprising, a narrative of black history and identity that stretched beyond his personal experiences. The

¹⁰⁹ Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* (Morrow, 1968), 99.

¹¹⁰ Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 94.

revolutionary descriptions reflect not only what he understood the Uprising to be but the possibilities that he saw it create.

Entirely consistent in his descriptions of the Uprising, however, was the use of a rhetorical language that pictured the revolution occurring both culturally and physically. This rhetoric dramatized the Uprising with mystical descriptions, creating a new reality for Baraka.¹¹¹ He harnessed in his descriptions of the event what historian Robin D. G. Kelley described as the “black radical imagination.” His imagining of the Uprising places him alongside other black thinkers who “dared to talk openly of revolution and dream of a new society, sometimes creating cultural works that enable communities to envision what’s possible with collective action, personal self-transformation, and will.”¹¹² Baraka used a deliberate and repeated rhetoric in his works to show the Uprising as an essential part of larger cultural and social movements. He saw a power behind the use of rhetoric that he could use to create his narrative. As he described in an unpublished book, “In 67 rhetoric ruled heavy, and was some kind of reality, because everything could be said with absolute honesty and sincerity...”¹¹³ This power that Baraka saw allowed him to connect every aspect of the Uprising to his narrative of a larger revolution—even those parts he never saw or which did not align. It allowed him to create the image of the Uprising as a revolution occurring on both physical and cultural levels simultaneously.

For the tremendous attention it received from the public and the press, Baraka’s experience during the Uprising was relatively short-lived. His journey began where John Smith’s ended: the Newark 4th Police Precinct. There Baraka joined a growing protest against the police’s brutal arrest and beating of the young cab driver. That evening, after hearing news of violence

¹¹¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 7.

¹¹² Kelley, 7.

¹¹³ Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark,” 92.

erupting around the city, Baraka and two friends from the Spirit House—the black arts collective and community space he organized—began driving through the city to see what was going on. They saw Newarkers smash storefronts and steal goods while others laid injured on the street following run-ins with the police. Baraka and his friends brought one of these men to the nearest hospital which on the first night of the Uprising was already overwhelmed by an influx of patients. As Baraka and his friends drove through the city’s streets that night, they were pulled over by Newark police officers, thrown out of the van, beaten to the brink of unconsciousness, and arrested for possession of weapons. The three were taken first to a hospital where Baraka received stitches without anesthetics, then to the county prison where Baraka would stay for the remainder of the Uprising on a \$25,000 bail—or “ransom” as he called it.¹¹⁴

Baraka’s trial and sentencing were highly publicized across the country over the next few months. His status as a prominent figure and the irregularity of the events that unfolded ensured careful scrutiny. The trial began with an exciting start as Baraka attempted to storm out of the court room after calling the all-white panel of potential jurors his “oppressors.”¹¹⁵ Judge Leon W. Kapp—who openly endorsed and supported police action to the jury—found Baraka guilty on all counts. The sentencing is where the ordeal gained national attention, however, as Judge Kapp read aloud Baraka’s poem “Black People!” [Appendix 1] as his own evidence for Baraka’s guilt in inciting the Uprising. From this blatantly biased trial, Baraka was sentenced to three years in prison, the harshest sentence for anyone involved in the Uprising.¹¹⁶ Prominent voices from around the country including the ACLU, the New Jersey Bar Association, and the Committee on Poetry (a group made up of poets from Baraka’s time in Greenwich Village) vocally criticized

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 298–99; Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 258.

¹¹⁵ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 157.

¹¹⁶ Porambo, 158–61.

Kapp's prejudice in basing his sentence on the poem over any other evidence. With the support of these groups and more, Baraka appealed his sentencing and the vast majority of it was overturned.¹¹⁷ His own role in the Uprising itself was in reality minimal, but after these proceedings he was perceived by many across the country to have been involved in the event. Through the trial and his later outspoken publications on the entire event, Baraka became "the brother the devil blamed the riots on."¹¹⁸

Memory in the 1960s and Early 70s: The Black Cultural Revolution

The regularity of racial violent imagery in Baraka's works of the 1960s and early 1970s only amplified his connection to the Uprising in the minds of many. As a prominent figure in the Black Arts Movement, he harnessed its aesthetics and ideology for descriptions of the Uprising. The movement, co-founded by Baraka in 1965, "sought to define black literature on its own terms, to awake black people to the oppression that is blinding them and, inherently, to speak its own."¹¹⁹ It centered around the creation of art, in all its forms, by black artists, for black people. Black Art, as the movement saw, required what historian Addison Gayle Jr. refers to as "de-Americanization"—or the freeing of art, its creators, and its audience from western expectations.¹²⁰ Black artists operating in every medium were "at war with the American society as few have been throughout American history."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Porambo, 161; Francis X. Clines, "Allen Ginsberg: Intimations of Mortality," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1984, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/11/magazine/allen-ginsberg-intimations-of-mortality.html>; Joseph T. Karcher, "L'Affaire Le Roi Jones: Judges as Critics," *New Jersey State Bar Journal* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 285.

¹¹⁸ Baraka, "The Creation of the New Ark," 129.

¹¹⁹ Jennifer G. Brooks, "Amiri Baraka's Conversion to Leninist-Marxism as an Extension of the Black Arts Movement," *CLA Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010): 254.

¹²⁰ Addison Gayle Jr., *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), xxi.

¹²¹ Gayle Jr., xvii.

Often seen as a manifesto for the movement, Baraka's 1965 poem "Black Art" [Appendix 2] captured this de-Americanization as a revolutionary act in ways that would be used again in his later descriptions of the Uprising. In the poem, he called for a new black world created through radical black art. Making art became a violent act—it was the shaping of fists, daggers, and knives—the weapons to forge a revolution. In this way black art would tear down the white world and build up a new black one. Baraka's imagining of black art as violence functioned simultaneously in different forms. As one Baraka scholar puts it, "art is a substitute for literal violence. But in another sense such art might be an incentive to literal physical violence."¹²² Baraka consistently blurred the lines between physical violence and artistic or ideological violence. He used black art to call for a revolution both on material and abstract planes, freeing black people from mental and physical enslavement. "Black Art" was typical for Baraka in the 1960s and early 70s in its intensive focus on a black revolution operating on these multiple levels.

Five months after the Uprising, another poem focused on violence and revolution was published by Baraka: "Black People!" [Appendix 1]. This was the poem read aloud during Baraka's sentencing, the one that the *New York Post* called both "offensive" and Baraka's "actual crime" in their coverage of his trial.¹²³ To Judge Kapp, the poem was a literal incitement of violence, a call to action for black people to rise up and start the Newark Uprising. In the poem, Baraka directly addressed black Newarkers, calling for them to loot white-owned stores and "smash at jelly white faces."¹²⁴ He called for violence against white people and Jews, the

¹²² Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1973), 51.

¹²³ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 161.

¹²⁴ LeRoi Jones, "Three Poems," *Evergreen Review* 11, no. 50 (December 1967).

latter serving as a representation of assimilated black people.¹²⁵ The white property owners were understood to be the colonizers of the black neighborhoods and their violent removal would lead the freedom of the new black nation there. The violence was the way for black people to take what they deserve and to take control of society. Just as in “Black Art,” Baraka imagined this violence as the method to create a new black world and society; the way to not only make up for what black people were routinely denied but to completely revolutionize every aspect of life.

The violence Baraka describes is not shown as terrifying or dangerous; rather, it is depicted as beautiful and magical. The physical acts of looting and arson, and altercations with the police are imagined as what one author called a “messianic phenomenon.”¹²⁶ Baraka saw these scenes clearly in his time on the streets of Newark and described them as though they were part of a spiritual ceremony shrouded in mysticism. In “Black People!,” Baraka spoke of “magic words” and “magic actions;” “Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up!” and “smash the window at night.” He transformed the language of looting into a magic power granted to black people. Even one’s presence on the streets was captured as a beautiful ceremonial form of dance.

Baraka’s descriptions of the Uprising in “Black People!” are especially telling of his understanding of the event, as the poem was written before the event occurred. Though its depictions of looting and violence were connected to the Uprising through Baraka’s trial, the poem was first read nine months before in October of 1966.¹²⁷ The poem was not about the Newark Uprising at all; rather, Baraka described a fictional or foretold revolution. He was surely

¹²⁵ Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 199. Anti-Semitism was common especially in Baraka’s time as a black cultural nationalist (it can also be clearly seen in “Black Art”) but was an issue present throughout his life. The anti-Semitism found in his poem “Somebody Blew Up America”, took shape in a Jewish conspiracy behind 9/11 and cost him his title as New Jersey’s Poet Laureate.

¹²⁶ Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*, 26.

¹²⁷ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism,”* 201.

inspired by previous uprisings across the country that summer and in the preceding years—he moved to Harlem just months after violence broke out there in July 1964—but having neither personally seen nor explicitly mentioned any of these, here it seems he was describing an abstract ideal of a revolution. At the time of the poem’s first reading, it was seen more as an “agitational ‘lecture’” than an assessment or prediction of any real event.¹²⁸ But this ‘lecture’ shows that the narrative of the Uprising that he created the same way in his later works stems from an ideological base rather than from actual experience. Another earlier poem of Baraka’s, “Three Movements and a Coda,” created by at least 1965, offered the same depictions of looting as in “Black People!”, imagining these actions as “...the words of lovers. Of dancers, of dynamite singers These are songs if you have the music.”¹²⁹ These images of rioters as dancers clearly pre-dated their use to describe the Uprising and show artistic descriptions to capture his idea of revolution.

Images of dancers and musicians became especially prominent motifs in all of Baraka’s accounts of the Uprising. In “From: The Book of Life”, written in 1967 while Baraka sat in Essex County Jail, the actions of those in the Uprising become a dramatized and theatrical depiction of what occurred:

Pop pow pow Boom!! The flame The flame. Red shadows moving near the darkness. Devils whirling round and round, frightened that God is near and their deaths are imminent!

Our people dance in the street now! Young men and old men. Arms full. Little girls outfitting their hovels with what they’ve learned to desire on the television. Dancing In The Street!!

¹²⁸ Sollors, 201.

¹²⁹ Amiri Baraka, “Three Movements and a Coda,” in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, Second Printing (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968), 295.

Every aspect of the Uprising was described with the energy of what he names a “soft summer dancing tension.”¹³⁰ There was no sense of realism, only a mystically depicted image of those on the streets. This depiction of the Uprising come from Baraka’s 1969 collection of essays, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze*, which one critic described as “overly rhetorical,” a description certainly applicable to the exaggerated mystical language he used to create the sense of a revolution.¹³¹

The revolution that Baraka imagined the Uprising to be was the same revolution found in the Black Arts movement. His rhetoric transformed the looters and arsonists into dancers and musicians and in doing so gave them the revolutionary cultural agency to he attributed to black artists. He places these musicians into his larger understanding of black music history that he described in his 1963 book, *Blues People*. Baraka saw black music as “an exact reflection of what the Negro himself is. It will be a portrait of the Negro in America at that particular time.”¹³² The new music he described the people on the streets making was, to him, the reflection of a new reality for black Newarkers. Baraka saw the Uprising as a central part of a larger cultural history. It represented a turning point that he described through music where black people could live as their own. But for Baraka, it was not the dances of music that were significant; it was their creation. Again he used a distinction laid out in earlier writings as the lens to approach this with, focusing on the events of the Uprising as ‘verbs’ not as ‘nouns.’¹³³ To Baraka, black art did not depend on the finished product, it was the process of its creation that allowed it to function as inherently black. This “art-ing” was the way of freeing the “spiritual ‘non-Western’ essence of the black experience.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Amiri Baraka, “Newark -- Before Black Men Conquered,” in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1969), 75.

¹³¹ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism,”* 184.

¹³² Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1963), 137.

¹³³ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism,”* 81.

¹³⁴ Sollors, 81; Baraka, *Blues People*, 164–65.

The spiritual aspect of this revolution became especially prominent in Baraka's dramatization of encounters between those on the streets and police officers. They became a fully blown holy war: "Doom to the devil total death will come soon Doom Doom to the Devil. Young armies of God reformed after 400 years attacking with the most natural of weapons holding against the scourges of Satan our honor our lives our holy Blackness!"¹³⁵ The type of conflict that Baraka outlined here was present in some form in all of his accounts and displayed. At a most basic level, he understood the Uprising as a war between good and evil. He saw black people fighting against their white oppressors in any way they could. Baraka's pitting of the dancers and devils against each other made even clearer the distinction that Baraka, as a black cultural nationalist, saw between black and white people.

As the events and actions of the Uprising lost their presence as 'nouns' and became 'verbs' in their transformation into black art, the suffering they brought to the city vanished as well. Baraka's theatricalizing of the Uprising into an elaborate ceremony ignored the actual damage that it caused Newark. In none of his accounts of the Uprising did he include the physical or economic devastation the black community in Newark saw because of it. He occasionally mentioned the dead—or at least that there were dead as a result of the Uprising—but generally only as a stylized vision of death with devils shooting dancers, or in a brief description of how many were killed.¹³⁶ There are only two mentions of specific deaths from the Uprising in his accounts from the 1960s and early 70s, those of Eloise Spellman and James Rutledge. But their deaths were made out to be part of a distinct "Negro Removal" operating in Newark, not the revolution itself.¹³⁷ For Baraka, the revolution occurred in spite of this "Negro

¹³⁵ Amiri Baraka, "From: The Book of Life," in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1969), 54.

¹³⁶ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 263; Baraka, "From: The Book of Life," 54.

¹³⁷ Baraka, "Newark -- Before Black Men Conquered," 68–69.

Removal” and their deaths and the memories of their killing inspired the revolution as a response: “In this blood inquisition, we finally confess to you butcher priests that we are Heretics. Yes, we are Black and We Will be free!”¹³⁸ The deaths helped Baraka to define a black identity in his narrative. The memory of the bullet-ridden body of James Rutledge distinguished this identity for Baraka in the same way historian Adam Green describes images of Emmett Till, creating black identity not by color but by “the long memory of pain and outrage.”¹³⁹ Baraka used this “collective suffering” in a way which “stimulates the development of a collective nationality consciousness.”¹⁴⁰ In including the deaths in this way, Baraka emphasized the significance of their loss of life while not diminishing the glorification of the Uprising’s violence that he achieved with his mystical language.

This recollection of the deaths that Baraka posited here was antithetical to the dominant memories found in Newark which held death as a central focus. By showing the deaths as not tied to the Uprising but to routine violence against the black community, he displayed a black “counter-memory” of the event. This functioned on two levels, attempting to break down the society that remembered the Uprising as a senseless irregularity and to create a new memory and history for black Newarkers.¹⁴¹ Baraka’s placing the Uprising in a larger history of black subjugation in the city functioned to define an identity and culture for black Newarkers that he believed could fuel a revolution. Baraka used this memory of the Uprising as a foundation for the black cultural revolution he was trying to create. His intentions reflected Arthur Schomburg’s declaration more than 40 years earlier: “The American Negro must remake his past in order to

¹³⁸ Baraka, 69.

¹³⁹ Michael Hanchard, “Black Memory versus State Memory: Notes toward a Method,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 61.

¹⁴⁰ Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 92.

¹⁴¹ José Medina, “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla Pluralism*,” *Foucault Studies*, no. 12 (September 12, 2011): 15, <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i12.3335>.

make his future.”¹⁴² By framing the Uprising and the deaths it caused as separate aspects of history, Baraka emphasized the culture he saw as central to his revolution.

In his writings, this black cultural revolution was at the forefront of his descriptions of the Uprising, but his devotion to this cause was questioned by many after an appearance on a prominent radio and television program less than a year after the Uprising. In an attempt to preserve a fragile peace and prevent further violent unrest following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, Baraka appeared alongside Newark Police Captain Charles Kinney and Anthony Imperiale on April 12th, 1968. A noted racist who organized an armed white ‘protective force’ for his largely white neighborhood during the Uprising (called “brownshirts” by New Jersey Governor Hughes¹⁴³), Imperiale was often seen as a foil for Baraka in the following decades and who Baraka notes in his autobiography “had risen to infamy as the white counter for black rebellion.”¹⁴⁴ Baraka’s presence with these two was enough for many to challenge his image as a black radical and make his statements calling for violence against the police appear hypocritical. In the program, Baraka proceeded to completely change his interpretation of what the Uprising was. Agreeing with both Imperiale and Kinney, Baraka denounced the Uprising as ignited by white communists, saying,

We, the Black Nationals in Newark, believe that we can gain power in Newark through political means, and there are white-led so-called radical groups, leftist groups, that are exploiting the people’s desire for power, the black people’s legitimate desire for power, exploiting it and actually using the black people as a kind of shock troops to further their own designs.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² David Scott, “Introduction: On the Archaeologies of Black Memory,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): xii–xiii.

¹⁴³ David M. Halbfinger, “Anthony Imperiale, 68, Dies; Polarizing Force in Newark,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1999, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/28/nyregion/anthony-imperiale-68-dies-polarizing-force-in-newark.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 274. Kevin Mumford explores the relationship between Baraka and Imperiale in great detail in his chapter on their racial nationalism, see: Mumford, *Newark*, 170–90.

¹⁴⁵ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 196.

This was a sharp flip from how Baraka had already described the Uprising and would continue to remember it. He removed from the Uprising any influence of black power or self-determination. As Jerry Gaffio Watts describes, “Had Hayden and his colleagues claimed responsibility for the 1967 riot, [Baraka] would have been among the first to call them racists for assuming that black protests needed white instigation. But in 1968, [Baraka] presented such an argument to white racists all too eager to believe it.”¹⁴⁶ How could his other descriptions of the Uprising as a black rebellion be true if those involved were not acting of their own choosing? It was for many black nationalists and community organizers a betrayal of what the Uprising was. He went on the air declaring himself to speak for all black nationalists in Newark—a notably broad and disjointed ideology—and espoused the opposite of what most understood both black nationalism and the Uprising to be. For Baraka in the moment, however, it was a showing of his true black nationalist identity. He saw no room in the city for white community groups, and for a few minutes he threw away his principles and understanding of the Uprising to oust these groups from the city.¹⁴⁷

Baraka tried to save some face at the end of the interview when he called for the police to listen to the findings of rampant police brutality in the President’s and Governor’s reports on the Uprising, but it did little to assuage the flack that he received from many within Newark.¹⁴⁸ Speculations flew regarding Baraka’s motivations in making these claims. One magazine declared that Baraka had likely worked out a deal with the police for his appearance to get a reduced sentence for his Uprising related charges. Tom Hayden, a white community organizer

¹⁴⁶ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 308. Here, Watts uses Baraka’s original surname, “Jones” as it was the moniker he used at the time. I have replaced it with “Baraka” to limit confusion in the subject.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, 307–8.

¹⁴⁸ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 200.

who Baraka explicitly named during the show as a communist behind the Uprising, believed Baraka had made the claims to protect himself from further police prosecution.¹⁴⁹

Perceptions of a less revolutionary Baraka were commonplace in the years following the Uprising. In the 1970s, a *New York Times* reporter wrote that “the two faces of Imamu Amiri Baraka—Civic leader and revolutionary—have been sharply etched...”¹⁵⁰ a sign that for some, Baraka still had a revolutionary spirit. Others saw him as a “Mellowing Militant,” as in the title of a 1971 profile.¹⁵¹ This growing perception coincided with a shift in ideology that Baraka underwent over the next few years. In July 1967, Baraka was an avowed black cultural nationalist and understood revolutions and what they accomplished as a reflection of this ideology. He imagined that real black freedom would be reached by “destroying white people”—for him “that was the only way in which revolution could occur.”¹⁵²

Baraka at first took the Uprising to be a fulfilment of this depiction and saw the looting of white businesses as this destruction he called for. But when he failed to see a new black nation arise from the ashes of Newark his perceptions shifted. Baraka turned towards more orthodox methods of political change for creating a black nation in Newark, declaring: “Malcolm X said the ballot or the bullet. Newark is a particular situation where the ballot seems to be advantageous.”¹⁵³ and “We’ve come to the conclusion that the city is ours anyway; that we can take it with ballots.”¹⁵⁴ Working with a black community group that he helped found, the United Brothers (later the Committee for Unified Newark), Baraka worked tirelessly in support of a group of black Newark politicians in 1968 and Kenneth Gibson for Mayor in 1970. In this he

¹⁴⁹ Porambo, 201; Stephen Schneck, *Ramparts*, n.d., 16–19.

¹⁵⁰ “A Man for Two Seasons,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1972, sec. E. “Imamu” is a Swahili term for a spiritual leader, a title the Baraka used throughout the 1960s and 70s.

¹⁵¹ Peter Ainslie, “The Mellowing Militant,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, February 25, 1971.

¹⁵² Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark,” 3.

¹⁵³ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 309.

¹⁵⁴ Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 97.

was not alone among black nationalists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For Baraka, electoral politics was a method to create a “black-controlled, autonomous entity called Newark, New Jersey.”¹⁵⁵ The revolution that he imagined the Uprising to represent was still entirely real for Baraka. Now he saw the violent protest as a means to forge black culture, a culture powerful enough to take the city through electoral means.

Baraka, the United Brothers, and numerous other black-led community groups helped Kenneth Gibson defeat Hugh Addonizio and become Newark’s first black mayor in 1970. Baraka was for a short period filled with hope in the political revolution, but as Gibson made clear he was an establishment politician, uninterested in radical changes, Baraka became disillusioned with electoral politics. To him, Gibson and the black nationalist ideology that supported his campaign “served primarily the black bourgeoisie, and thus the white elite.”¹⁵⁶ Baraka began to doubt the ability of black nationalism to actually create the change and revolution that he believed in. He saw limits to black nationalist assumptions of power structures and little hope of achieving liberation through them.¹⁵⁷

Memory in the 1970s, 80s, and Beyond: Third World Marxism and Revolutionary Identity

In 1974, Baraka declared that he identified with a “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong” ideology, renounced black cultural nationalism as racist, and embraced what is typically identified as Third World Marxism.¹⁵⁸ He no longer focused on the destruction of the white state, but of the bourgeois and colonial classes. A drastic shift in ideology, Baraka upheld revolution as central to his work: “I think fundamentally my intentions are similar to those I had

¹⁵⁵ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 357.

¹⁵⁶ Watts, 420. As Watts explains, Gibson never claimed to be a black nationalist though Baraka had fashioned him as such during the campaign.

¹⁵⁷ Watts, 420–21.

¹⁵⁸ Watts, 420.

when I was a Nationalist. That might seem contradictory, but they were similar in the sense I see art as a weapon, and a weapon of revolution. It's just that now I define revolution in Marxist terms."¹⁵⁹ As a Third World Marxist, Baraka remained focused on the liberation of the black urban underclass in America, seeing them as the most exploited class.

This consistency through his ideological shift is incredibly apparent in his accounts of the Uprising in his 1976 unpublished manuscript, *The Creation of the New Ark*, and his 1984 *Autobiography*. In these works the mystical descriptions are just as present and distant from reality as they were in those from the Uprising's aftermath. Baraka compared police sirens to a song and the pace of the night to a record running at "156 rpm."¹⁶⁰ He vividly described the arsonists as "the most rhythmic, the fire people, they dug the fire cause it danced so tough, and these priests wished they could get as high and as hot as their master the Flame."¹⁶¹ The destructive acts that he described continued to function as pieces of black art advancing a revolution. Though it was then a Marxist revolution, he still emphasized that it was happening through culture, declaring that "the rebellions were the highpoint of the cultural revolution" and the Newark Uprising itself was "at its strongest ... a jazz and poetry movement."¹⁶² Identifying as a Third World Marxist rather than a traditional Marxist allowed Baraka to retain focus on the cultural elements of revolution.

Baraka's imagined revolution did begin to take on a materialist edge in his works of the late 1970s, however, diverting from the exclusive mysticism typical of the previous decade. This shift was in part due to the kinds of projects he was working on—the Uprising appeared mainly

¹⁵⁹ Amiri Baraka, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), xxviii.

¹⁶⁰ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 259–60.

¹⁶¹ Baraka, 260.

¹⁶² Baraka, "The Creation of the New Ark," 111–12.

in his non-fiction works of the period—but showed a shift in the way he was expanding his understanding of a revolution. His autobiography frequently jumped between the depictions of reality and theatrics, with “devils spraying dancers” in one paragraph, and in the next an active “war zone” in a hospital.¹⁶³ The shifting between these styles appeared in his earlier 1967 essay, “Newark—Before Black Men Conquered,” but as a black cultural nationalist at that point, the realistic and mystical elements were isolated from each other. In later works as a Marxist, they flowed into the other with little sense of their differences. The revolution Baraka imagined still had a cultural aspect, but its physical realities became an essential part as well.

Baraka similarly expanded the target of the revolution at this time from white society to capitalist and colonialist systems. He rolled back the revolution’s scale to make clear that what happened in Newark was only a part of the struggle to free working and subjected people around the world. The Uprising remained for Baraka a war of liberation and its significance was visible in how he described it playing out¹⁶⁴:

The warfare the Black community waged against white oppressive structures reached one peak in July 1967, but it was not a complete war, it was a major battle. One that, despite material loses [sic] of Black people (2[illegible hand correction] “officially” in Newark (probably more unclaimed bodies at least 50, hidden and secretly destroyed by newark police and state national guardsmen and state police), we won. Even though it was said that it was our own communities that were destroyed, and sometimes this was true...in Newark I know for a fact that what was destroyed was the petty white businessman, the closest representative of the entire oppressive structure.¹⁶⁵

The “oppressive structure” would have been seen five years earlier as the white race and its supporting structures, but now it was the white businessman and his capitalist system. Baraka focused on what was for many already one of the clearest aspects of the Uprising, the economic

¹⁶³ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 260–61.

¹⁶⁴ Baraka, 266.

¹⁶⁵ Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark,” 108. Again, this quote uses the hand corrections from Baraka’s manuscript draft which are at time difficult to read and have been interpreted by the author to the best of his judgement wherever possible.

target of the looting and arson. He became acutely aware of the aspect of class in the Uprising as he reflected on the destruction of white businesses by a mostly lower- and working-class black population. He recognized what the young sociology graduate student Jeffery Paige outlined in his dissertation the year after the Uprising: “the riots can be seen as an interaction between class and race. Working class blacks riot, but working-class whites do not. Both the black and middle class, however, oppose rioting.”¹⁶⁶ When Baraka described the Uprising in the 70s and 80s, he wrote of class struggle in Newark. It was specifically a lower-class black struggle, but for Baraka this was where the revolution could begin. He maintained that “The fire and violence destroyed the sick fairytale America that even poor negroes hold on to.”¹⁶⁷ He saw the Uprising as a destructive force only against illusions of black security and opportunity in capitalist America. This analysis of the Uprising was still coated with artistic flare but emphasized that the identity created was not just of black but of all colonized and victimized peoples.

In his accounts of the Uprising, only those centered on personal experience completely abstained from mystical or artistic description. These moments featured heavily in Baraka’s accounts from the 1970s and 1980s but remained quite distinct from his deeply socio-political writings on the Uprising. In part this highlighted the disjunction between the revolution and the man. The larger history and identity situated on black lower-class subjugation was, at times, built on a different set of community building experiences than what he himself witnessed. Though he lived through part of Newark’s police brutality and oppression, Baraka was by no means of the lower class. In this, his membership in the black intelligentsia was somewhat limiting. Indeed, some upheld that Baraka’s personal actions during the Uprising did not match the revolutionary

¹⁶⁶ Paige, “Collective Violence and the Culture of Subordination,” 54.

¹⁶⁷ Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark,” 111.

rhetoric he spread of the event. Even in his own accounts of the Uprising, Baraka as a political actor is noticeably absent whenever revolutionary acts take hold.

For many attempting to challenge Baraka's revolutionary identity, the charge he was arrested on, possession of firearms, became a focal point. Baraka adamantly denied the charge both in the immediate aftermath of the Uprising and in his later accounts, saying in his official statement that, "There weren't any guns, I don't keep guns. And I certainly wouldn't be so stupid as to carry guns into the middle of a riot."¹⁶⁸ He continued this admonition throughout his life, long after he could be charged for crimes, arguing that the police had planted the guns on him and were looking for any excuse to bring him in.¹⁶⁹ Baraka was likely telling the truth as white Newark police in 1967 frequently targeted and framed black men. But why would Baraka, who openly advocated for black people to arm themselves against the police, not carry a weapon? Baraka was a fierce defender of a physical and violent revolution in 1967 and throughout his life. Along with many black nationalists, he heavily cited Franz Fanon's views on violence—though some Baraka scholars such as Watts doubt he actually read Fanon's books.¹⁷⁰ He saw spontaneous violence—even if unsuccessful in creating immediate change—as key for nation building amongst races and classes.¹⁷¹ Yet Baraka never attempted to join this violence or show himself as a part of it. In his own self-perception he was discrete from the revolutionaries he described and called for.

No simple answers are found to these contradictions in Baraka's reasoning, even in his own descriptions of the event. Unlike his descriptions of other revolutionary activity, there was no glamorization of his arrest in his accounts. Rather, he is always shown at the mercy of the

¹⁶⁸ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 157.

¹⁶⁹ Baraka, "The Creation of the New Ark," 115.

¹⁷⁰ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 255.

¹⁷¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 130.

police department until he is saved by neighbors intervening. He does not describe himself as fighting back against the police and instead accepted his fate with a final prayer. But in 1970, he describes this preparedness to die as a revolutionary act in itself, saying “We are killed because we want to climb into the bullseye thinking we are making revolution!”¹⁷² Baraka showed his willingness to die for the cause as a sign that he was part of the revolution. He connects himself here to the image of a revolutionary, not explicitly, but by making the act of dying at the hands of the police something revolutionary.

His revolutionary identity is still heavily questioned by scholars and critics who have attempted to explain the contradictions in his actions and rhetoric in numerous ways. Some ‘Baraka apologists’ argue that he described the experiences in this way only to protect himself from further prosecution, while others question if Baraka was only ever seen as revolutionary because the government labeled him so.¹⁷³ One author refers to him as a “reformer hiding behind revolutionary rhetoric”¹⁷⁴ while another declared that “Baraka does not seek to make any sort of peace with any part of the world as it is; hence his rebellion is not only against governments, oppressive political ideologies, false prophets, and bad artists but against the present itself.”¹⁷⁵ While many may question Baraka’s personal identity as a revolutionary, he never faltered in defining the Uprising as a revolutionary moment for Newark. On his ideological changes, Baraka maintained, “I don’t think that’s so much mellowing but deepening your understanding.”¹⁷⁶ The memory of the Uprising that Baraka shares in his published and unpublished accounts is a sign of this deepening not just of his ideology but of his understanding of the Uprising’s significance.

¹⁷² Baraka, “The Creation of the New Ark,” 118.

¹⁷³ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 301; Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 200–201.

¹⁷⁴ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 302.

¹⁷⁵ Watts, 422.

¹⁷⁶ D.H. Melham, “Revolution: The Constancy of Change: An Interview with Amiri Baraka,” *Black American Literature Forum* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 93.

Baraka's continuation of mystical rhetoric and language from the Black Arts Movement while he moved through his black cultural nationalist years into an identity as a 3rd world Marxist shows the constancy with which he held the revolutionary spirit of the Uprising. His depictions of the event certainly reflected his ideology, but they were also a reflection of the need he saw in Newark for great change. While his writings still mention the Uprising after the 1980s, the frequency and detail decreased as Baraka found constancy in Marxist ideology until the end of his life in 2014. Newark was a central aspect of Baraka's life and works, and the attention given to the Uprising in his writings shows how integrally he viewed this moment for the city. Baraka's accounts of the Uprising are much more than just reflections of his memory. They represent what for him was both Newark's history and identity and show a hope, a contested hope, for a better future.

Chapter 3. The Newark Fire Department: Remembering Community

In 1997, ten years in advance of the 40th anniversary of the Uprising, the New Jersey Historical Society (NJHS) in Newark began planning a major exhibit on the 1967 event. The NJHS compiled hundreds of oral histories and scoured archives to research the Uprising and its greater historical context. The resulting exhibit, “What’s Going On: Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties,” ran for more than two years from its opening in 2007.¹⁷⁷ Some of Newark’s most prominent scholars, politicians, and activists crafted papers and speeches to coincide with the opening and other anniversary events that year. The NJHS’ exhibit alone resulted in at least two major published works: Max Arthur Herman’s book *Summer of Rage: An Oral History of the 1967 Newark and Detroit Riots* and Linda Caldwell Epps’ *From Zion to Brick City: What’s Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties*. The exhibit began with a broad depiction of life in Newark in the decades leading up to the Uprising. Though material in this first room made no explicit mention of the Uprising, the sounds of gunshots, shouted orders, and frightened yells reverberated in from the end of the exhibit space.¹⁷⁸ These sounds, heard by those on the streets during the Uprising, haunted the exhibition, reminding visitors of a contested past that continued to shape the city’s present.

The soundscape of the Uprising often dominated the memories of the hundreds of Newarkers who recorded their stories for the showcase. The published assembly of these oral histories, Herman’s *Summer of Rage*, featured a striking image on its cover [Figure 3.1]. A collage of burning buildings; shadowy figures; the words “riot,” “1967,” and “black power;” and

¹⁷⁷ Linda Caldwell Epps, “From Zion to Brick City: What’s Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties” (Doctor of Letters Dissertation, Madison, NJ, Drew University, 2010), 501.

¹⁷⁸ Mark Krasovic, “‘What’s Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties.’ New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J.,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 1 (June 1, 2009): 162, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27694738>.

easily missed in the bottom left corner, two small firefighters made up the image that captured the chaos and destruction recounted in the book. But the voices of firefighters, like their appearance on the volume's cover, do not make a central appearance in the work. Another oral history project presented with the NJHS in 2007 looked to correct this oversight.



Figure 3.1 Cover detail from *Summer of Rage* by Max Herman.

Neal Stoffers, a retired Newark firefighter, began work on his oral history project in 1991. While working on a master's degree in Asian Studies at Seton Hall University, Stoffers took a class with the former director of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office, Ronald Grele. Grele inspired him to record the stories of the men he had worked with. As Stoffers says, "... the stories that are told around the kitchen table over cups of coffee are

extraordinary. Instantly realizing that the tales (tall and otherwise) I heard from veteran firefighters, captains, and chiefs who would soon be retiring would vanish unless someone recorded them, I decided to be that person...”¹⁷⁹ What started as a class project grew over the next decade as he interviewed dozens of Newark firefighters about their experiences with the department. Stoffers first shared these oral histories in 2004 when the NJHS and Rutgers University put out a call for papers ahead of the 40th anniversary commemorations and ended up self-publishing his work in 2006 as *A View from the Firehouse: The Newark Riots*.¹⁸⁰ This was the first of eight total books that Stoffers has self-published from his own Springfield and Hunterdon Publishing Co., named for the Engine 6 fire station located in the middle of the Central Ward. The books each focus on different periods in the history of Newark firefighting, but one other, *Riots to Renaissance* (published in 2010), focuses on the Uprising.

Stoffers’ books focus on what he believed was missing from most accounts of the Uprising. To Stoffers, who was too young to have worked during the Uprising himself, these memories were essential perspectives too often pushed to the side. He saw his work as “an attempt to correct this omission.”¹⁸¹ His assessment was correct. Most accounts of the Uprising pay little attention to the role of firefighters. Even in Herman’s collection of oral histories, the only quotes from firefighters are from Stoffers’ book.¹⁸² Though firefighters dominated prominent images of the Uprising across the country [Figure 3.2], major histories seldom mention their role, which is often understood as peripheral to the police or touched on in broad discussions of the city’s response to the event. Firefighters active during the Uprising saw

¹⁷⁹ Neal Stoffers to William Tjeltveit, “Re- A View From the Firehouse Questions,” March 4, 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Neal Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse: The Newark Riots* (East Brunswick, NJ: Springfield and Hunterdon Publishing, 2006), i–ii; Stoffers to Tjeltveit, “Re- A View From the Firehouse Questions,” March 4, 2020.

¹⁸¹ Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse*, ii.

¹⁸² Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 148–50.

prominent coverage, like in *Life Magazine*, completely ignore them.¹⁸³ But the firefighters' memories of their contributions in the Uprising are far from the unassuming, modest role provided in popular accounts. These men offer vivid recollections from their unique role in the event and position in the community.



Figure 3.2 Firefighters extinguishing a fire at the corner of Prince St. and Court St. on July 15th, 1967. Today a baseball field sits on the same lot.¹⁸⁴ Credit: Marty Lederhandler/AP

In 1967, the Newark Fire Department was disconnected from the neighborhoods it served—especially in the Central Ward. The department was largely white, made up mainly of Italians from the North Ward and nearby suburbs, and did not represent the largely black city it served. The few black firefighters at the time were recent hires, the result of integration efforts made less than five years before.¹⁸⁵ In their accounts of the Uprising, some firefighters were

¹⁸³ Frederick Grehl in Neal Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, The Firehouse Fraternity: An Oral History of the Newark Fire Department 5 (East Brunswick, NJ: Springfield and Hunterdon Publishing, 2010), 12.

¹⁸⁴ “Then and Now: Newark Riots Echo in City 50 Years Later,” NBC News, July 13, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/1967-newark-riots-how-landscape-has-changed-50-years-later-n782641>.

¹⁸⁵ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 92.

quick to acknowledge how their relationships with their communities had changed in the years leading up to the event. One noted that neighbors had stopped cutting through the fire stations and chatting on their way home as they used to.¹⁸⁶ Others remembered a growth in false alarms in the years leading up to the Uprising, a sign of increasing animosity from their neighbors.¹⁸⁷ This was the fractured reality in the city heading into the summer of 1967. But in their memories of the actual event, firefighters portrayed the Uprising as an anomaly. Firefighters did not remember their departments as isolated, but rather integral parts of Newark's communities. The firefighters' memories actively differentiated between people on the streets and those they saw as real 'neighbors.' This allowed the men to blame the fear and violence that summer on outsiders, not as feelings that arose from within the communities the firefighters served. Many, including the black firefighters, took the Uprising as solely racially motivated and ignored the social and economic issues that were just as essential but would have reflected their own disconnection from the communities. And, in the end, firefighters were quick to criticize law enforcement and city officials for their responses to the Uprising but aimed few criticisms at their own department. Their memories showed firefighters as important parts of their communities, reflecting not the reality in Newark but some idealized version.

For every firefighter, the Uprising was a far cry from normal. Over the course of five days, the Newark Fire Department responded to 227 fires and 50 false alarms.¹⁸⁸ It was a near constant stream of calls for more nearly 72 hours as firefighters responded to one call after another. Every semblance of routine was lost. Many men did not return home for the entirety of

¹⁸⁶ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Redden in Stoffers, 3–4.

¹⁸⁸ John P. Caufield, "The Newark Fire Department, 1967-77: Role of the Fire Department During the 1967 Disturbances," in *From Riot to Recovery: Newark After Ten Years*, ed. Stanley B. Winters (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 293.

the Uprising, sleeping in the fire stations between long shifts.¹⁸⁹ Fire companies from surrounding suburbs were called into the city, and protocols for extinguishing fires were changed. These changes to procedure allowed the firefighters to quickly return to their stations but led to more re-lights than typical.¹⁹⁰ If this was not disruption enough for firefighters, within Newark angry crowds greeted them by hurling rocks, bottles, and insults. The insults were certainly the least dangerous of these attacks—one firefighter recalled that they never made him feel unsafe—but they reveal vocal expressions of Newarkers' feelings of disconnection.¹⁹¹ According to Deputy Chief Edward Dunn, the largely black crowds in the streets frequently derided firefighters with a variety of names. The only one he remembered decades later was 'Mr. Charlie.' The term, popularized in the 20th century, was commonly used by black Americans to refer a slave owner, or a white man who deploys abusive power.¹⁹² Dunn and other firefighters failed to recognize the disparaging nature of the name even in reflection, saying that he was still unsure "if that was derogatory or a compliment. They [the Newarkers on the street] thought it was like a joke and most of our people did."¹⁹³ While Dunn may have understood it as a joke, it almost certainly was not intended in this way. The name reflected a view of the firefighters as representative of white control in their neighborhoods, the same as the police or National Guard. The firefighters' recognition of this as a joke shows how much they struggled to imagine their relationship with the communities as anything other than jovial.

¹⁸⁹ Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse*, 12.

¹⁹⁰ For attention to techniques used to extinguish fires see, Edward Dunn in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 39–40.

¹⁹¹ Edward Dunn in Stoffers, 38.

¹⁹² Stephen Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 160–61; Jonathon Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*, 2nd ed. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), 948.

¹⁹³ Edward Dunn in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 38.

Many of the firefighters believed that the animosity they faced was simply because of their race and several believed that the few black firefighters in the department could help discourage insults and attacks. After being swarmed by crowds every time they stopped, one engine crew decided to have their two black firefighters sit prominently in the cab of the truck hoping that the prominence of black partners would be enough to merit some peace from those in the streets. But the two black firefighters were immediately greeted by an angry crowd yelling, “Get those Uncle Tom’s.”¹⁹⁴ They were seen by the crowd as sellouts to their race, siding with the oppressive forces in the city. It did not matter that they were black; to the crowd they were just as bad as the white firefighters. Another black firefighter similarly assumed that his presence could turn an angry crowd in their favor and keep them from attacking. When greeted by a group of Newarkers already throwing rocks and bottles, he took off his helmet to show his face and attempt to talk them down. But this did little to help him and the crowd continued to berate the firefighters.¹⁹⁵ There was little recognition from even the black firefighters of the Uprising as something larger than simply a racial conflict. Many throughout the entire department assumed that having black firefighters with them could reduce their risks and many tried to have black firefighters on their trucks wherever they went¹⁹⁶. What the firefighters of all races failed grasped is that what enraged the crowds was not simply the race of those coming in, but the power they represented. Thus firefighters understood the backlash against black firemen as signs of the crowds’ irrationality.

The violence that firefighters saw dominated their memories of the Uprising. Those who had recently served in Korea or Vietnam frequently compared the event to their time in active

¹⁹⁴ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 24.

¹⁹⁵ William Harris in Stoffers, 46.

¹⁹⁶ William Harris in Stoffers, 48.

war zones. As Deputy Chief Alfred Freda described, “These things brought back war experiences that had a harrowing effect on me. I had just overcome certain psychological aspects as a young kid coming out of Korea, being wounded and being the only surviving man in a company. The gunfire and tanks really took a psychological toll on me at the time.”¹⁹⁷ During the Uprising, firetrucks did not have seating for every firefighter responding to a call and many traveled through city streets hanging onto ladders on the truck’s exteriors. They were entirely exposed and vulnerable to projectiles fired at them. Even those driving or sitting in the cockpit had little real protection as the cabs were entirely open on the sides and the roof. On the ground, too, the firefighters were often left defenseless as they focused on extinguishing fires. One firefighter described the helplessness they often felt: “There was nothing we could do. We’re not police officers. We don’t have arresting authority.”¹⁹⁸ There was not always the threat of violence as one firefighter made clear, remarking “As long as they knew we weren’t bothering them or were going to stop them from looting a liquor store or something, they really didn’t care.”¹⁹⁹ But for most, the vulnerability they routinely faced only amplified their memories of fear. Though they had helmets and some personal protection, any attack was understood to be a true threat on their lives.

For many firefighters it was difficult to believe that such violence could be perpetrated against them by those in their own communities. They saw themselves fulfilling a needed public service, and it did not make sense to them that neighbors would want firefighters to leave burning buildings alone. A large proportion of the firefighters insisted that outsiders instigated the violence to preserve their understanding of the community. They were certainly not the only

¹⁹⁷ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 25.

¹⁹⁸ Frederick Grehl in Stoffers, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Edward Dunn in Stoffers, 38.

people in Newark to believe this, but even 30 years after the Uprising, most still recognized it as a valid explanation of what happened. Several distinctly remembered “people in the neighborhood who never belonged there.”²⁰⁰ They further recalled such outsiders, who would argue and insult firemen, present at fires before the Uprising. Many attributed a careful planning off the Uprising to the outsiders—and some firemen claimed to have been warned of the violence in advance. In one account, a firefighter recalled hearing that the looting would begin for the second night at exactly eight o’clock.²⁰¹ Another fireman from the fourth precinct remembered outsiders telling Newarkers during the Uprising “Take it. It’s yours. It belongs to you. You should have it.”²⁰² These outsiders were described differently by different firefighters, but their presence was consistent in firefighters’ memories. Some saw them as groups of radical young white men who moved into mostly black areas.²⁰³ This aligned with frequent charges made throughout Newark that white activists and communists (often specifically Tom Hayden or the SDS) instigated the violence. For others, the ‘outsiders’ seem to have been simply Newarkers that they did not recognize. The destruction of stores that firefighters saw as major parts of the neighborhood only emphasized feelings that outsiders were present.²⁰⁴ For many this resulted in a denial that the community they recognized could have broken out into such violence. One summed up this feeling well in his 1993 interview saying, “Who ever heard of riots? That happened in Watts. It didn’t happen in Newark.”²⁰⁵ It was easier to believe that what they saw in Newark was unnatural, that the hate they saw was not really from the citizens of the city.

²⁰⁰ James Smith in Stoffers, 4.

²⁰¹ William Carragher in Stoffers, 42.

²⁰² James Butler in Stoffers, 56.

²⁰³ Edward Dunn in Stoffers, 4–5.

²⁰⁴ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 3–4.

²⁰⁵ Joseph Garrity in Stoffers, 58.

Memories of sniper fire only emphasized the firefighters' feelings of fear. Though there is no proof of the presence of "snipers" in the Uprising, many firefighters maintained they were real and a prominent threat. The need to duck for cover after hearing bullets was common in their accounts of putting out fires near high rise buildings.²⁰⁶ Media coverage of 'snipers' as outsiders in Newark cemented perceptions of the violence coming from out of their communities for many firefighters.²⁰⁷ But nothing did more to cement the threat of the outsiders than the death of fire Captain Michael Moran. While climbing a ladder to enter a burning building, shots broke out, hitting Moran and a nearby National Guardsman. Within 10 minutes, Moran was dead, the only fatality the fire department suffered during the event. To a firefighter standing nearby it was "the worst death I ever had, the worst thing that ever happened to me on the job."²⁰⁸ Even for those not present or who did not know Moran, his death marked a permanent reality of the gunshots they heard. Moran's death symbolized for firefighters the true risk they faced during those five days. Few firefighters question the role of snipers in his death, though today it is widely believed that law enforcement shots killed Moran.²⁰⁹ As Tom Hayden reported in the Uprising's aftermath, there was little attempt by state or local governments to question the narrative of a sniper and instead they "carr[ied] the myth to 2500 angry firemen at Mike Moran's funeral, they [the government] intensified the suspicions and fears of a crucial part of the white community."²¹⁰ For many of the firefighters, it was so ingrained that a sniper killed Moran there was little need to question their larger presence in the Uprising. As Moran's son would later say while reflecting on his father's death, "I don't really want to know ... The result was that my

²⁰⁶ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 25.

²⁰⁷ Associated Press, "Rep. Ford: 'Outsiders' Involved."

²⁰⁸ David Kinnear in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 9.

²⁰⁹ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 135–38. The only firefighter who openly questions the presence of snipers in Moran's death is Alfred Freda who simply says that no one knows who shot him. See Alfred Freda in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 27.

²¹⁰ Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 88.

father died in the line of duty. The rest just doesn't make any sense, and it doesn't make any difference.²¹¹ Many did not see a need to question the factors behind one of the Uprising's most scarring moments even when new information was raised. But a few posed real questions about the presence of snipers in their memories. In recalling the bullets they frequently heard flying, some noted just how few firefighters had actually been hit even while riding on the exteriors of the trucks like sitting ducks. Others noted just how few bullet holes were on the fire trucks after the Uprising was over, suggesting that it was actually firecrackers, not bullets, popping in the air around them.²¹² Even these alternatives, however, show an antagonism against the firefighters that they could attribute to violent outsiders.

In many of the interactions with these perceived outsiders, neighbors came to the rescue. Firefighters remembered Newarkers from the neighborhoods standing between them and the angry crowds saying "If you throw anymore stuff at them, you bother them and we'll kick your butts. You will not allow our houses and our families to burn."²¹³ Firefighters quickly distinguished those who treated them with respect as real parts of their community and those who did not as outsiders. Most remembered it being a majority who gave them credit and thanks for their work while a vocal minority acted against them.²¹⁴ One firefighter distinctly remembered a black delivery man offering to drop off sandwiches for the men at one station house "Because I'm very embarrassed and I don't want you to think that all black people are involved in this."²¹⁵ Many firefighters recognized the varying respect they received as a generational difference that they struggled to understand:

²¹¹ Mark J. Bonamo, "Son of Only Newark Firefighter Killed in 1967 Riots Remembers Tragedy," News, TAP into Newark, July 13, 2017, <https://www.tapinto.net/towns/newark/sections/politics/articles/son-of-only-newark-firefighter-killed-in-1967-rio>.

²¹² Edward Dunn in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 38–39.

²¹³ William Harris in Stoffers, 46.

²¹⁴ Frederick Grehl in Stoffers, 13.

²¹⁵ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 32.

The attitudes of the majority of people forty and up did not change. They knew we were there to help them. A lot of times they would even intervene and say to the younger ones, “The firemen are our friends. Don’t hurt them. They’re here to help us, not to hurt us.” But the majority of the people below forty were out there for revenge against us, for what I don’t know.²¹⁶

They saw this respectful characterization as the view their community should have for firefighters. In the Uprising’s aftermath firefighters were widely praised and seen by many as “nothing short of heroic.”²¹⁷ Firefighters struggled to understand how any within their communities could feel otherwise, not recognizing how disconnected they were from the areas they served.

A majority of firefighters, especially those who worked in the Central Ward, did not live in the same areas they protected. For a group who frequently criticized actors in the Uprising as outsiders, most of the firefighters were technically outsiders themselves. So many came from outside the Central Ward or Newark itself that the city created a shuttle system to bring firefighters in and out of the city during the Uprising. While much planning and thought went into bringing the firefighters into the city, none was given to helping the (mostly black) firefighters who lived in the city.²¹⁸ These firefighters had to risk driving from inside areas of the city in which the Uprising was occurring to make it to their stations. Many firefighters looked down on these areas and those that the Uprising was occurring in. At one point during the five days they were ordered to stay away from the high rise projects whenever possible.²¹⁹ These areas, though essential parts of the Central Ward community, were seen by firefighters as separate and often inferior to what they saw as the ‘real’ neighborhood and by extension, their residents, typically poor black Newarkers, were often not seen as ‘real’ neighbors. One

²¹⁶ Frederick Charpentier in Stoffers, 72.

²¹⁷ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 121.

²¹⁸ William Harris in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 47.

²¹⁹ Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse*, 13.

firefighter questioned how the black families in the public housing projects could live with such general disregard for their building.²²⁰ Many took the conditions that they saw these Newarkers living in and blamed the residents themselves. There was no connection in the memories of the firefighters that this could be what people were so upset about. Even still, they believed that they were integral parts of the community and as such should have seen only respect.

The firefighters did not see the looters and arsonists as the only outsiders in Newark. Many were fervent critics of the National Guard and State Police brought in from around the state on the second day of the Uprising. The law enforcement coming from outside of the city was typically remembered as openly violent and racist with quick trigger fingers. This was especially true of the National Guardsmen, the majority of whom were young men from rural New Jersey who had no training or experience dealing with anything like the Uprising. Many of the firefighters suspected that most guardsmen had never seen a black person before their arrival in Newark as they were entirely out of their element coming into the Central Ward.²²¹ This was evidenced by the blatant racism that the National Guardsmen displayed in the firehouses they were stationed in. One group of soldiers were remembered saying “We need to go out and blow these people up,”²²² which inspired not only the firefighters but a black police officer present as well to shut them down. The firefighters remembered law enforcement as outsiders to further enhance their supposed insider status in the community.

The law enforcement’s presence and actions during the Uprising were further scrutinized by the firefighters who had served in the military themselves and were shocked at the low quality of soldiering. In one instance a firefighter repeatedly reprimanded a young soldier for charging

²²⁰ David Kinnear in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 60–61.

²²¹ Edward Wall in Stoffers, 18.

²²² William Harris in Stoffers, 48.

into the station, bayonet pointed, every time he heard a gunshot. The firefighter eventually seized the gun to ensure no one in the station was injured and the soldier's superior promptly chewed out the fireman.²²³ Another firefighter, who had armed National Guardsmen riding in the firetruck with him, was handed one of their pistols and the young soldier told him "I feel safer with you having this gun than me."²²⁴ Firefighters emphasized how the lawmen came into the city with no understanding of the community and no training to deal with the situation. This they held was in complete contrast to themselves.

While they frequently remarked on the amateurism of the law enforcement officials in respect to firearms, the firefighters' own desire to carry weapons was rarely questioned. Numerous firemen brought their own personal shotguns and pistols to work.²²⁵ The same lawmen that firefighters criticized for their sloppy gun use provided bullets and ammunition to the firefighters. The two in some ways worked together to create a larger armed presence on the streets.²²⁶ The weapons provided a sense of security to the firemen who feared for their lives. While some were veterans with extensive training, most had just as little experience with firearms as the National Guardsmen. Several firefighters attempted to train themselves and created a makeshift firing range in the basement of their station house—a space that fostered a small fire one time when the men rushed to a call.²²⁷ Firefighters recognized the risk they posed to each other and the people around them and several noted how thankful they were that no one died as a result.²²⁸ One fire chief reprimanded three fully armed firefighters responding to a call

²²³ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 26–27.

²²⁴ Edward Wall in Stoffers, 18.

²²⁵ Anthony J. Carbo, *Memoirs of a Newark, New Jersey Police Officer* (Victoria, BC, Canada: Trafford, 2004), 115–16.

²²⁶ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 26.

²²⁷ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 26.

²²⁸ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 25–26.

saying, “What are you going to do? Leave them [the guns] in the firehouse.”²²⁹ But most explained their choices as justified reactions against fear. In hindsight they recognized that it was an overreaction, but one that the threat of damage made reasonable.²³⁰ There was no similar understanding for the law enforcement men. Firefighters remembered their use of firearms as the result of aggression and racism, not fear.

But to the firefighters, the various law enforcement units mobilized around the city did serve a useful purpose: protection against the crowds. This took the form of escorts that ranged from small police cars driving ahead of firetrucks to actual tanks leading the way. In the reports of firefighters these escorts and guards made them feel more secure, but sometimes brought added risk. The common stories of National Guardsmen and Newark police blindly shooting at each other worried many of the firefighters for their own safety.²³¹ Overall the firefighters were thankful for the presence of the police and remembered feeling relieved when the city gave them escorts. Some wished that the police escorts had been initiated immediately during the Uprising rather than multiple nights in, one firefighter arguing that if they had been there earlier “we would have had a hell of a lot less injuries. Mike Moran would be enjoying his retirement today.”²³² He saw the police as an effective protective force for the firemen even if their presence agitated the community.

As firefighters were escorted through the city by lawmen, they saw firsthand just how violent the soldiers and officers could be. They recalled the same scenes of over-the-top and explicit violence that many in the black community professed in the Uprising’s aftermath. One firefighter was present for the death of a woman in her apartment building and recalled seeing

²²⁹ Anthony Masters in Stoffers, 10.

²³⁰ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 25–26.

²³¹ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 28.

²³² Joseph Redden in Stoffers, 8.

the law enforcement group fire blindly at an apartment building.²³³ Another described shock as he saw an officer shooting the side of a building with a machine gun saying “He just swept the gun back and forth. It was amazing to see this because I knew there were a lot of innocent people in there. It got so bad I think people were ready to shoot at anything that moved.”²³⁴ The firefighters remember a great deal of worry for the people inside the buildings. Even as they were shot at and had projectiles thrown at them, they kept in their minds the presence of everyone else in the apartments. They recognized those inside as their innocent neighbors. Especially for the firefighters who normally worked at fire stations in the Central Ward this became personal. One firefighter recalled an older Polish woman who lived across from his station opened her window to look out. A group of National Guard and city and state police opened fire on her apartment which he described in detail:

It sounded like a continuous roar. You couldn’t distinguish between weapons. I ran out and tried to tell them that an old woman was living there. But they couldn’t even hear me. One guy pushed me and didn’t want to listen. I thought the woman was dead. I would say without exaggeration there were a thousand rounds shot into her apartment. Now we weren’t going in there by ourselves. They left. They didn’t even check.²³⁵

Luckily the woman survived the onslaught by the police. But the immediate reaction of the law enforcement officials and their refusal to stop showed the disconnect between the firefighters and the police. While firefighters often highlighted the innocent nature of many Newarkers in their memories, police generally remembered them solely as antagonists. In former police officer Anthony Carbo’s 2006 memoir of his service, he mentioned only residents who assaulted police officers or were arrested.²³⁶ To the firefighters, however, these respectful residents were what made up the community they represented. They paid significantly less attention to the brutality

²³³ Joseph Garrity in Stoffers, 57.

²³⁴ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 31.

²³⁵ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 29.

²³⁶ Carbo, *Memoirs of a Newark, New Jersey Police Officer*.

of the lawmen against angry crowds, however. They were often more than happy to see the National Guard use their bayonets and weapons to keep crowds at bay.²³⁷ It did not matter to the firefighters if those being pushed back lived in the neighborhood. They were not seen as part of the community.

Criticism was a frequent aspect of firefighters' memory of the Uprising. They remember this aimed not just at the law enforcement officials, but at city leaders as well. In their recollections, many condemned the city for its handling of the Uprising. The two-day delay in sending in the state police and National Guard was seen by many as one of the most significant issues. Mayor Addonizio and Governor Hughes received the blame. One firefighter described that they "were both grandstanding. Hughes wanted Addonizio to cry uncle and say that Newark couldn't handle their problems."²³⁸ Though they did not agree with how the additional forces in the city acted, the firefighters saw their presence as necessary in preventing greater damage in their communities and wished they had arrived sooner. Many described the government acting in its own best interest, not for the good of the community. In the Uprising's aftermath the city appointed large numbers of black firefighters and police officers to correct the racial differences with these departments. But while firefighters agreed with the decision, they viewed it as tokenism by the city, only doing what they needed to appease voters.²³⁹ Some firefighters did praise the city's reaction during the five days saying that it did what was needed, but this was typically only for their reaction against looters, not the general public.²⁴⁰

Firefighters did offer some critiques of their own department in their memories, but these typically focused solely on logistical issues in their response to the Uprising. Many remembered

²³⁷ Edward Wall in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 17.

²³⁸ Edward Wall in Stoffers, 16.

²³⁹ Alfred Freda in Stoffers, 71–72.

²⁴⁰ William Harris in Stoffers, 49.

unclear directions from their supervisors for what to do and no clear response plan to the event until several days in.²⁴¹ Several criticized the department for not having an official plan in place even though it was clear to many that violence could break out. Several remembered individual firefighters pushing for defined response plans after the 1965 Watts Uprising and being refused by the department.²⁴² They saw themselves as looking out for their own interests and those of the community while the larger department was reluctant to act. There was no real criticism of the department's relation to its communities, however. In firefighters' memories it was either seen as a non-issue or the fault of the Newarkers, not the firefighters.

While the firefighters themselves struggled to remember a broken sense of community, it was one of the most pressing issues for the fire department in the years after the Uprising. The department was incredibly proactive in creating ways to connect the firefighters with their communities once again. They created community relations plans and a designated a Community Relations Department within several months of the Uprising. The results of these efforts were immediate according to a report from John Caufield, the director of the fire department a decade later. While fighting fires after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination the next April, neighbors actively came forward to assist firefighters in their work.²⁴³ Over the next decade, assaults on firefighters decreased by nearly 200%.²⁴⁴ The department even quickly set up a Citizen's Advisory Committee, a program which the police department resisted calls for until July of 2019.²⁴⁵ But none of these actions or even a need for them is present in the individual memories of the fire fighters. They remember the violence in the Uprising originating from outsiders. This

²⁴¹ Edward Wall in Stoffers, 16.

²⁴² Edward Wall in Stoffers, 3.

²⁴³ Caufield, "The Newark Fire Department, 1967-77," 295.

²⁴⁴ Caufield, 297.

²⁴⁵ Caufield, 297; "Historic Victory for Newark, Advocates, as Appellate Court Affirms Powers of Civilian Complaint Review Board," accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.aclu-nj.org/news/2019/06/20/historic-victory-newark-advocates-appellate-court-affirms-po>.

was a reflection not only of a distorted self-image, but of an understanding of the community that was no longer accurate. Many of the firefighters who worked during the Uprising had been on the force for more than a decade and looked back to previous relationships for their understanding of what the firefighters' place in the community was. Though some would admit that their relationships did shift over time, they still looked to the past to understand their place in the community. They failed to recognize how the Uprising had changed the city.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Frederick Charpentier in Stoffers, *Riots to Renaissance*, 72.

Chapter 4. Physical Remembrance in the Brick City

In 1982, a middle-aged Japanese-American woman began a construction project unlike anything ever seen in Newark. Descriptions included “urban folk art”, an “illegal structure, unfit for human habitation,”²⁴⁷ and “a symbol of hope and human potential.”²⁴⁸ But to its builder, Kea Tawana, it was simply an ark [Figure 4.1]. Though she claimed its location in Newark was purely coincidental, Tawana provided the city a physical iteration of its namesake, a new ark.²⁴⁹ Constructed entirely with her own hands and standing roughly three stories high, ninety feet long, and twenty feet wide, Kea’s Ark dominated the landscape from its location at a high point in Newark’s Central Ward. It was built solely from material that Tawana salvaged from vacant and demolished buildings over the course of more than a decade. The houses, churches, and businesses that were left abandoned and fell into disrepair following the Uprising provided an easy source of building materials. Every part of the Ark, from movie theater seats to Victorian era stained glass windows, was a product of the devastation inflicted on the Central Ward by the Uprising, the decades of segregation before, and in its aftermath. Even the 48-star flag flying from the boat’s top was found in a demolished schoolhouse.²⁵⁰ The Ark came to symbolize for many in the Central Ward how their neighborhood was ignored and abandoned by the city for decades. When finished, Tawana imagined the Ark would be airlifted to the ocean and sailed to Japan where she would be able to visit her mother’s grave. It was a dream to match the eccentricity and scale of the creation itself.

²⁴⁷ Camilo J. Vergara, “Letter to SPACES/Seymour Rosen,” March 24, 1987, 1, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana003.pdf>.

²⁴⁸ Didi Barrett, “Affidavit for Kea’s Ark Hearing,” April 28, 1987, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana020.pdf>.

²⁴⁹ Linda Hamalian, “Kea Tawana: Or Who Would Build a Better Ark than Noah?,” *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1987): 112.

²⁵⁰ Chip Brown, “Kea’s Improbable Ark,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1987, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-04-22-8701300910-story.html>; Vergara, “Letter to SPACES/Seymour Rosen,” March 24, 1987, 1.



Figure 4.1 Kea Tawana standing on top of her Ark from the vacant lot. The 48-star flag flies at the top and pleas to save it are painted on the side. 1987. Credit: Camilo José Vergara

The Ark attracted attention from around the world and was featured in newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Asahi Shimbun* in Japan.²⁵¹ Art historians and community members alike were entranced by the Ark's size and the messages they read in its creation. For those living in the Central Ward, it symbolized a hope for the neighborhood: that out of the empty lots and vacant buildings something good could come. As Camilo José Vergara, a New York-based photographer who spent several months documenting and working to protect the Ark, described:

Five years ago, local residents who had become accustomed to buildings being burnt, abandoned and vandalized, started to pay attention to something new and different: the rib cage of a boat beginning its slow rise over the fence on the Camden Street-side of the

²⁵¹ Phyllis Mount, "Letter to Jack Yablonsky, Newark Dept of Land Use Control," April 10, 1987, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana033.pdf>.

empty lot. ... They were able to identify with the boat in a way hardly possible with any of the new corporate building downtown.²⁵²

In 1986, four years into the building of the Ark, Sharpe James was elected Mayor of Newark and brought with him a vision of moving past what he saw as the Uprising's stain on the city's image. He championed revitalization; new homes, businesses and schools to replace the sorry state he saw the city in. In his vision, however, there was no place for symbols of the systemic issues in the city—especially Kea's Ark. James was not the first city official to oppose the boat, but he headed the calls for its destruction and in 1987, he succeeded. James saw Kea's Ark as antithetical to the progress he proclaimed in the city. Through new development, James was trying to change the image of the city, and the Ark was a monumental sized reminder of the inequality that still haunted it. When the empty plot of land that Kea's Ark sat on was bought by developers to be turned into new townhouses—which Tawana decried as poorly built “shacks”—she decided that rather than let it be demolished she would move the more than 200 ton Ark to safety in a nearby church parking lot, once again alone and by hand.²⁵³ The city would not let up in its quest to remove what it saw as a blight to Newark's image and ordered it destroyed again—this time threatening to fine the church whose lot the Ark sat in and revoke its tax exempt status.²⁵⁴

Quickly, supporters from around the country began to petition the city to save the Ark. Painted in bright white letters on the side was a plea from Tawana to her neighbors to promote the structure's preservation: “HELP! THE CITY WANTS TO DESTROY THIS ARK CALL [Phones numbers for city hall, the mayor's office, and the *Star Ledger*] TELL THEM TO STOP

²⁵² Camilo J. Vergara, “THE ARK,” March 8, 1987, 1, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana005.pdf>.

²⁵³ Hamalian, “Kea Tawana,” 110–12; Vergara, “Letter to SPACES/Seymour Rosen,” March 24, 1987.

²⁵⁴ J. W. Brown, “Letter to Kea Tawana,” April 1, 1967, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana029.pdf>.

IT!” Unfortunately, the wrong number for the paper was listed and a small clothing company in Whippany, NJ was flooded with hundreds of calls.²⁵⁵ The community of the Central Ward came together in the effort to preserve what they saw as a promise of hope against the systematic issues of inequality that the Uprising grew out of and amplified. Neighbors and reporters visited and talked with Tawana and a concert was put on to help raise more awareness [Figure 4.2].

Scholars and activists from the Museum of American Folk Art, Smithsonian National Museum of American Art, Columbia and Rutgers Universities, and SPACES (Saving + Preserving Arts + Cultural Environments) all flooded city offices with letters petitioning James and his administration to save what they saw as an irreplaceable piece of urban folk art. Frequent comparisons were made to various monuments and other pieces of folk art around the country including the statue of liberty and most commonly the Watts Towers. These hundred-foot-tall steel and concrete spires in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles were saved from demolition in the late 1950s and were an image of successful folk-art preservation. In the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Uprising, an arts center was created alongside the towers, providing new opportunities for locals in an area as devastated as Newark’s Central Ward. Supporters of Kea’s Ark saw similar possibilities for it as in Watts and described its preservation to be as much of an investment in the community as the saving of an important piece of art.²⁵⁶ This future was not what the city envisioned, however, and citing building codes and an unsafe structure it did not relent in its order for demolition.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Brown, “Kea’s Improbable Ark.”

²⁵⁶ Seymour Rosen, “Letter to Newark Mayor Sharpe James,” April 2, 1987, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana016.pdf>.

²⁵⁷ Sharpe James, “Letter to SPACES/Seymour Rosen,” April 10, 1987, SPACES Archive, <http://www.spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana014.pdf>.

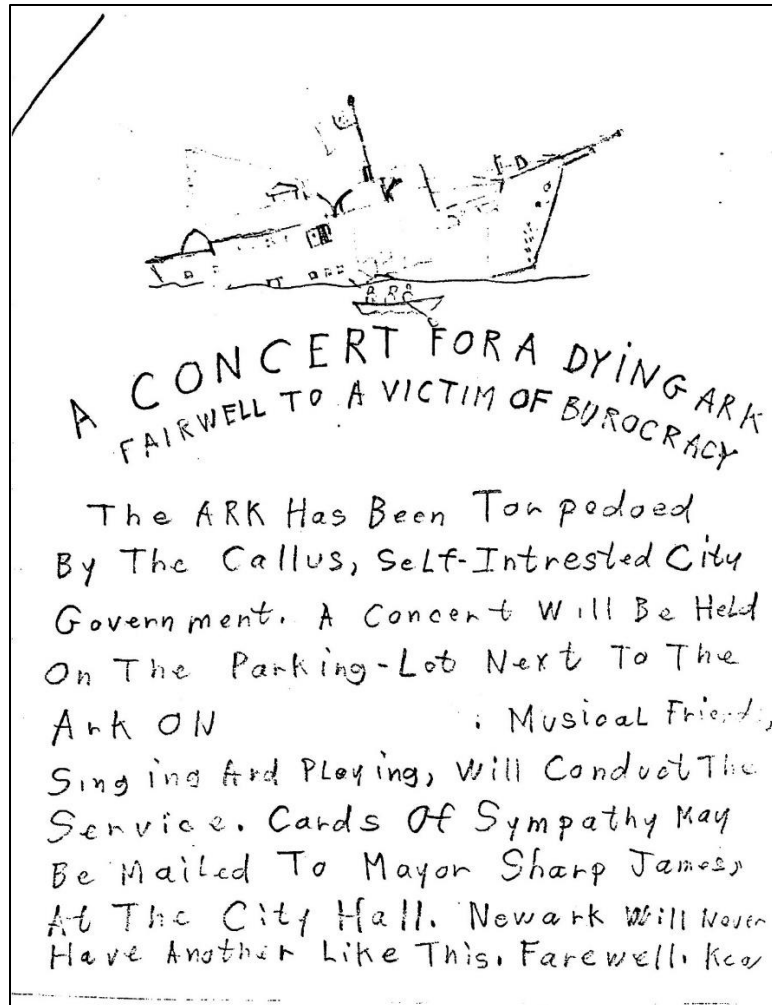


Figure 4.2 A flyer drawn by Tawana herself promoting a farewell concert for the Ark. 1987.²⁵⁸

In April 1987, Kea's Ark came down. But Tawana would not let just anyone destroy her creation and just as she built it entirely by herself, she took it apart alone, piece by piece. The battle over the Ark's fate captured the friction present in Newark in the years following the Uprising over the prominence of the event as the city moved forward. It showed a city not ready to publicly acknowledge the conditions that the Uprising was a reaction against and made visible. It was a decade before another public memorial to the Uprising was created and another

²⁵⁸ Kea Tawana, "A Concert for a Dying Ark: Fairwell to a Victim of Burocracy," 1987, Various handwritten fliers to defend Kea's Ark, SPACES Archive, <http://spacesarchives.org/assets/2015/08/03/06-v2/nj859tawana018.pdf>.

decade after that for the second. Public memorials like these two and Kea's Ark allow everyone in the city to interact with the memory of the Uprising and help define the role the community wants the event to play. But these two memorials, a stone marker and a bronze plaque, are nothing like the Ark in the memory they represent and the prominence of the Uprising they show. The monumental boat put on display the disparity present in understandings of the Uprising and the continued presence of the issues behind it while its successors obscure these issues in an attempt to present a unified vision for the city. The two modern memorials "summarize and synthesize the past into a coherent narrative"²⁵⁹ and in doing so create a narrative of the Uprising similar to what historian David Blight would call a "reconciliationist vision."²⁶⁰ They profess an understanding free of divisions and framed as the product of a unified city. They detach the memory of the Uprising from its context both in its origins and in its aftermath. This distorted vision of the Uprising is reflected in every part of the memorials' designs, from their shape to their text and location. The memorials have become sites for Newarkers to actively and deliberately express their memory of the Uprising and its effects. But the drive to express memory so actively comes from a recognition that Newark is not unified in its understanding of the Uprising's continuing role regardless of the visions that the monuments profess.

The first public memorial to the Uprising after the Ark was a granite marker dedicated in 1987 [Figure 4.3]. Standing under three feet tall, it is an unassuming reminder of the city's past placed alone in a small triangular park sandwiched between busy roads. With flowers planted

²⁵⁹ Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 5.

²⁶⁰ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

around it and occasionally left at its base, the monument resembles a tombstone more than anything else. The only sign of its role as a memorial are the words engraved on its face:

“Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Newark Riot of 1967. We will forever remember the names of those whose lives were lost. [The 26 dead are listed—see below] Dedicated by the residents of the City of Newark July 11, 1997.”



Figure 4.3 Stone monument in Rebellion Park. 2017. Credit: Steve Hockstein/Harvard Studio²⁶¹

The stone monument functions primarily as a funerary memorial. It commemorates what for many was the most dominant feature of the Uprising—the deaths it caused. But it gives no

²⁶¹ Barry Carter, “Monument Remembers Those Who Died in the Newark Riots,” NJ.com, July 9, 2017, http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2017/07/monument_remembers_those_who_died_in_the_newark_ri.html.

attention or relevance to the events surrounding these deaths. The only part of the Uprising seen on it is the cost of life. No other aspect of the five-day-long event, good or bad, is part of the narrative created. In this way, the monument works as many politically charged funerary memorials do, to “keep the focus on the absence of victims ... rather than on the presence of survivors or even perpetrators” and “convey what was done, but not why it was done nor who did it.”²⁶² Those listed are removed from the contexts in which they lived and died. There is no mention of the conditions that triggered the Uprising, the tanks on the streets, the looting, or the fires that consumed entire city blocks. The monument avoids any controversial aspect of the Uprising. It focuses solely on the deaths to create a memory accessible to all Newarkers. It does not matter if one believes the Uprising was justified or senseless because the deaths are where these otherwise incongruous memories overlap. Calls have been made to correct the ambiguity of the monument by adding new pictures or text on the stone’s currently blank back. Farrell Lee, a homeless resident of the area, suggested that photos of the Stella Wright and Hayes Homes—two of the now-demolished major public housing projects of the time—be installed as reminders of their deliberate targeting by the police during the Uprising and the horrible living conditions that existed there.²⁶³ But today only the 26 names on the marker are presented to give any sense of what the Uprising was.

As a public monument to the Uprising it functions distinctly from the other more personal monuments and memorial common in Newark. Individual graves for the same 26 listed on the stone see visits throughout the year and on the anniversaries of their deaths.²⁶⁴ They are places

²⁶² Kathleen Hite and Cath Collins, “Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st Century Chile,” *Millennium* 38, no. 2 (December 2009): 382–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829809347537>.

²⁶³ Carter, “Monument Remembers Those Who Died in the Newark Riots.”

²⁶⁴ Reginald Roberts, “Senseless Carnage: Kin of Oldest Riot Victim Still Carry Scars,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 15, 1987.

where families and loved ones can see physical reminders of those they lost in the Uprising. Engine Eleven of the Newark Fire Department is mounted with a small plaque in memory of Fire Captain Michael Moran, a constant reminder for those riding in it of their loss.²⁶⁵ These memorials bring up the same memories as the stone monument. But they capture specific memories of the people lost, not the event itself. They certainly are memorials to the Uprising, but only through the memory of the one who is gone. The stone memory attempts to go beyond that, trying to capture the memories of the entire Uprising and using the deaths it caused as an entry point. It uses the deaths—all memorialized in their own ways across the city through clothes and pictures left behind and individual graves—to create a commonality for memory of the Uprising in Newark. The deaths are stripped of what caused them so that the monument can show a unified memory of the entire Uprising.

The failings in this construed memory of unity are common and apparent, however. While the stone may use the word ‘riot’ to describe what the Uprising was, it sits in Rebellion Park. The divisions in Newark’s memory are easily found as the question is asked, what was the Uprising? There is no straightforward answer to be found with the monument. The terms associated with two distinct understandings of the Uprising are placed alongside one another as though they do not actively contradict the other’s narrative. The monument is deliberately ambiguous in what it understands the Uprising to be, attempting to show the two narratives as part of the larger understanding it presents rather than the discrete visions they are.

Rebellion Park is located at the intersection of 15th Avenue and Springfield Avenue—exactly where reporter Ron Porambo called for a monument nearly thirty years earlier in his seminal account of the Uprising, *No Cause Indictment*.²⁶⁶ Apart from the monument, the small

²⁶⁵ Stoffers, *A View from the Firehouse*, 32.

²⁶⁶ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 3.

park features a few scattered trees and some benches—it appears as more of an afterthought of urban planning than a city managed park. No specific event during the Uprising occurred there, but the presence of the monument has made it into the primary site of memory for the Uprising. The park has come to physically embody the memory of the event it commemorates.²⁶⁷ Its location where no specific buildings were burned down nor lives were lost allows it to capture the memory of the entire Uprising, not just a specific moment or aspect. The monument does not take a notable scene from the Uprising and use the memory of that moment to represent the whole event; instead, it creates its own site for its own narrative of what happened.

The monument's focus on death is underscored by its placement along Springfield Avenue. The street is a central artery running through the Central Ward and at the time of the Uprising was home to a bustling local business district. But the street was also where more than half of those listed on the monument met their untimely end.²⁶⁸ It is this aspect of the Uprising that the monument latches onto in its location, ignoring anything else that happened on the street during or after the Uprising. Springfield Avenue has become a baseline for measuring progress and growth in the city after the Uprising. The inequality and disparity in Newark that sparked the Uprising has remained present and visible in the Central Ward, especially along Springfield Avenue. Hundreds of stores which once kept the street a bustling center of enterprise in the Central Ward never returned after the Uprising and left the area with a damaged reputation it has been attempting to counter ever since. For decades since the Uprising, Springfield Avenue has been used to contrast scenes of revitalization and decay. A *Star Ledger* article from 2007 focused on one intersection just a few blocks down from the stone monument which on one corner had a

²⁶⁷ Jay Winter, "Historians and Sites of Memory," in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 252.

²⁶⁸ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 3.

new Applebee's—the city's first nationwide family chain willing to move into the area. Opposite the new restaurant was the site of a recent shooting just months before.²⁶⁹ The struggle to move past the damage that decades of segregation and unequal systems left in Newark is as clear today on the street as it was at the time of the Uprising. Springfield Avenue continues through the Central Ward into the largely white and wealthy suburbs ringing Newark only seven miles away.²⁷⁰ It is a reminder of how close these two realities are and of the disparities that play central roles in shaping the Uprising's relevance to people's lives. No mention any of these still-present issues is made by the monument. It instead portrays them as non-existent or irrelevant to remembering the Uprising.

The park itself is a scene of the neglect that the Central Ward has continued to face in the aftermath of the Uprising. Though it sits near large revitalization efforts from recent decades, the park typically sits in a slightly overrun state with a slanted foundation for the monument and weeds poking up through the ground. The city is supposed to maintain the park, but with no parks department, it rarely happens except for special anniversaries of the Uprising.²⁷¹ Even from passersby, the park sees relatively little traffic. One resident of the area described to *The Guardian* in 2017 having walked by the stone monument daily without having noticed it, saying that “you don't come here unless you live here.”²⁷² The monument's placement in a low-trafficked location paired with a small physical footprint has resulted in the fragmentation of the Uprising's memory and its omission in official commemorations.²⁷³ The stone has been

²⁶⁹ Brad Parks, “The Hard-Won Grounds for Hope - At Springfield Avenue and Bergen Street, the Residents Are Looking Up,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 11, 2007.

²⁷⁰ Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, 3.

²⁷¹ Carter, “Monument Remembers Those Who Died in the Newark Riots.”

²⁷² Siddhartha Mitter, “The Newark Race Riots 50 Years On: Is the City in Danger of Repeating the Past?,” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2017, sec. Cities, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/11/newark-race-riots-50-years-rebellion-police-brutality>.

²⁷³ Hite and Collins, “Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st Century Chile,” 386.

frequently ignored, even by the *New York Times* who in their coverage of a later public memorial reported that “there are no public monuments to mark the [Uprising] ...”²⁷⁴ This is not to say that the monument would be any better served disconnected from the Central Ward in a heavily trafficked downtown park like Military or Washington Parks. Rather, the out-of-the-way location of the monument reflects ideas of how visible the Uprising should be for the city and works to reinforce these perceptions.

The stone monument’s omission of issues associated with the Uprising is surprising, however, considering the main group behind its creation has spent decades fighting against these same problems. The People’s Organization for Progress (P.O.P.) is a local grassroots activism group created in the 1980s to advocate for racial, social, and economic justice, which they see as at the heart of the Uprising.²⁷⁵ The Uprising, which they refer to as “a rebellion against the scourge of police brutality and oppressive racially-biased living conditions,” is often a central part of their work.²⁷⁶ They fight for continued remembrance of the event and emphasize its significance and relevance for fighting the issues they see at its root. Rarely, if ever, does the P.O.P. use ‘riot’ to describe the Uprising. They opt instead for ‘rebellion’ or in special cases, “the epic Newark Rebellion.”²⁷⁷ Their understanding of the Uprising is so focused on its role challenging inequality and oppression that the late Amiri Baraka—one of the most prominent chroniclers of this narrative—would march with the P.O.P. for modern causes against police

²⁷⁴ Andrew Jacobs, “With 40 Year Prism, Newark Surveys Deadly Riot,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/nyregion/08riots.html>.

²⁷⁵ “About: People’s Organization for Progress,” n.d., http://njpop.org/wordpress/?page_id=2.

²⁷⁶ “July 12th: Remember the Newark Rebellion,” People’s Organization for Progress, July 8, 2013, <http://njpop.org/wordpress/?p=1440>.

²⁷⁷ “P.O.P. Leads Memorial March Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Epic Newark Rebellion!,” People’s Organization for Progress, July 7, 2017, <http://njpop.org/wordpress/?p=2075>.

brutality.²⁷⁸ This narrative of the Uprising as a struggle for equality relevant today is not reflected in the monument, however. All of the issues—those that the Uprising was a reaction against, and that the P.O.P. was created to fight—are left off the monument.

Today the P.O.P. is the group most closely associated with the monument, but they were not the only ones involved in its creation. The late George “Buddy Gee” Branch—a City Councilman of the Central Ward—was instrumental and a likely force behind the vision of a unified Newark the monument presents. Along with the P.O.P., he was one of the most prominent voices for remembrance of the Uprising until he lost his seat to a young Cory Booker in 1998.²⁷⁹ Branch and the P.O.P. led the charge in 1987 for an annual public observance of the Uprising and memorial march and a decade later for a new public monument.²⁸⁰ The support of a political figure certainly aided in the creation of the monument on city land, but is also a possible answer for the monument’s ambiguity over what the Uprising was. The monument was erected during the third of Sharpe James’ five terms as mayor of Newark. James—who ordered Kea’s Ark torn down in the name of revitalization the same year the public commemorations began—had no support for projects he saw as highlighting the ‘ugly’ aspects of Newark and its history. His campaign slogan, “Newark Needs a Sharpe Change” summed up his views.²⁸¹ For James, the issues that sparked the Uprising and still existed in the city were to be fixed, not memorialized.²⁸² So for a monument to be built on city land and receive the approval of the

²⁷⁸ “Hundreds Rally in Newark for Trayvon Martin, Chanting ‘no Justice, No Peace’ By Jessica Calefati and Dan Goldberg/The Star-Ledger,” People’s Organization for Progress, July 14, 2013, <http://njpop.org/wordpress/?p=1452>.

²⁷⁹ Ronald Smothers, “A Newcomer Is the Winner In Newark’s Runoff Election,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 1998, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/10/nyregion/a-newcomer-is-the-winner-in-newark-s-runoff-election.html>.

²⁸⁰ Carter, “Monument Remembers Those Who Died in the Newark Riots.”

²⁸¹ Brad R. Tuttle, *How Newark Became Newark: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of an American City* (Rivergate Books, 2009), 220.

²⁸² Joe Conlon, *Kea’s Ark* (PCK Media, 2019).

Mayor, it would have to show Newark without the stains to its image that the Uprising and the inequality behind it made apparent. Monuments like the stone memorial can deliberately hide realities that leadership does not want seen—an effect that Sharpe was a clear influence behind.²⁸³

Although it does not align with their vision of the Uprising, the P.O.P. has still used the monument to actively remember the Uprising. The monument has become a place where they can use their memories of the Uprising to “contest their subordinate status in public.”²⁸⁴ They can challenge issues of racial and social inequality that were present in the Uprising and stretch beyond that moment, using the public space as a stage to give themselves and the Uprising both visibility and historical legitimacy.²⁸⁵ According to one local resident, people (including this author) will often park their cars nearby simply to visit the monument and take pictures—a sign that the monument has become the de facto site for remembering the event.²⁸⁶ But the much larger use of Rebellion Park and the monument is for anniversary marches which occur every year. The first of these occurred in 1987, the 20th anniversary of the Uprising, and was a small event. The march saw only about 30 people in attendance, a sign for some “of how Newark has effectively erased the riots from history.”²⁸⁷ The marches have continued annually since their conception, drawing crowds of varying sizes every years and ensuring that the memory of the Uprising does not fade away.

This inaugural march led from the 4th police precinct—where John Smith was brought after his arrest in 1967—to the Abyssinian Baptist Church a few blocks away where a small

²⁸³ Hite and Collins, “Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st Century Chile,” 380.

²⁸⁴ Winter, “Historians and Sites of Memory,” 258.

²⁸⁵ Winter, 253.

²⁸⁶ Carter, “Monument Remembers Those Who Died in the Newark Riots.”

²⁸⁷ Nick Chiles, “Vigil, March Mark Riots That Ripped City,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 13, 1987, 14.

memorial service was held, and short speeches were given.²⁸⁸ A decade later, the 1997 memorial event kept a similar route to the original with a notable addition. Participants marched from the 4th police precinct to what was then named Arbor Park for the stone monument's dedication, and on to Emmanuel Church of Christ for a memorial service.²⁸⁹ In the years since, the march has continued but now simply proceeds from the precinct building to the monument for a longer memorial service. The path has been adjusted as former reminders of the Uprising which it once passed no longer stand. Public housing units such as the Stella Wright and Hayes Homes once towered over the 4th police precinct and were memorials of the Uprising in their own right. These buildings were the main targets for National Guardsmen firing at "snipers" and preserved images of Newark's unequal housing conditions until their demolition that lasted from 1997 until 2002.²⁹⁰

Though the marches are held every year, they typically see no more than a few dozen attendees.²⁹¹ Only for the decennial anniversaries do the crowds grow to the hundreds. In 2007 and 2017, the 40th and 50th anniversaries of the Uprising, massive crowds gathered including family members of those killed during the event. The presence of John Smith's brother in 2017 drew particular attention and became the subject of a *Wall Street Journal* article in which he was pictured giving a speech outside of the same precinct his brother had been dragged to 50 years earlier [Figure 4.4].²⁹² Behind him stood a woman holding a poster with the covers from both *Life* and *Time* Magazines' reporting on the Uprising; images of Joe Bass Jr. and John Smith.

²⁸⁸ "March to Honor Riot Victims," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 11, 1987.

²⁸⁹ Michael A. Wattkis, "Newark Remembers Its Ordeal by Fire," *The Star-Ledger*, July 10, 1997, 37. It is unclear to me at least when Arbor Park was renamed Rebellion Park.

²⁹⁰ Parks, "The Hard-Won Grounds for Hope."

²⁹¹ Charisse Jones, "Years Later, Lessons from Newark Riots to Be Learned," *USA Today*, November 19, 2006, https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-11-19-riots_x.htm.

²⁹² Barry Carter, "Recalling Human Toll of a 'Rebellion' in Newark's 1967 Riots," *NJ.com*, July 14, 2017, http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2017/07/recalling_human_toll_of_a_rebellion_in_newarks_196.html.

These covers have become symbols of the context often left out of remembrances. They speak to the brutal violence that the Uprising saw and how it stretched beyond just those five days. The *Life Magazine* cover in particular has been used to call for expanded remembrance of the Uprising everywhere from protests to Cory Booker's first state-of-the-city address as Mayor in 2007. In his speech, Booker held up the magazine and told Newark that "we must remember what happened and resolve that it cannot happen ever again."²⁹³



Figure 4.4 James Smith (brother of John Smith) speaks at a memorial event in 2017 outside the 4th Police Precinct. Credit: Aristide Economopoulos | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com²⁹⁴

Booker followed through with this call in July of that year as he dedicated a new public memorial to the Uprising [Figure 4.5]. The bronze plaque features the Newark crest at its center

²⁹³ Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 256. Herman claims that the address was delivered in 2006 but as Booker was not sworn into office until July 2006 and the state-of-the-city is typically delivered in March, 2007 appears a more realistic date. Unfortunately I have not been able to confirm either.

²⁹⁴ Carter, "Recalling Human Toll of a 'Rebellion' in Newark's 1967 Riots."

and reads as follows: “On this site on July 12, 1967, there began a civil disturbance that took the lives of twenty-six people and forever changed our city. May this plaque serve as a symbol of our shared humanity and our commitment to seek justice and equality. Dedicated July 12, 2007 by the Citizens of Newark 1967 2007 Mayor Cory A. Booker and the Newark Municipal Council.” It is located on the side of the 4th police precinct where the Uprising began, just to the right of the main doors and sits under a former window, bricked shut in the Uprising’s aftermath. Today, the plaque is showing signs of wear with streaks and stains covering its surface.²⁹⁵ Similarly to the monument, it appears to have seen little care over the years.



Figure 4.5. Plaque on 4th Police Precinct, 2019. Credit: Author.

The plaque is even more ambiguous than the earlier stone monument in the memory of the Uprising it presents. It avoids using any term with a distinct narrative of what happened

²⁹⁵ Or at least upon the author’s last visit in March of 2019.

attached to it and instead uses ‘civil disturbance’. The most widely used and accepted terms for the Uprising, ‘riot’ and ‘rebellion’ are noticeably absent. There is no attempt to present both terms as valid understandings of the Uprising as the stone and its park does. Rather, the plaque ignores both terms and the issues they draw attention to. Civil disturbance, the term it uses in their place, is most commonly used to describe racial unrest around the country while ignoring the racial and economic disparities existing behind the events.²⁹⁶ Booker and his administration’s use of the term on the plaque shows a whitewashing of the Uprising that ignores the significant issues at its root. The plaque acknowledges that 26 people lost their lives, but there is no sense of what the context or effect of this was. The plaque reads more like a hollow historical marker rather than a memorial to what occurred. There is no explanation of what occurred nor any room for viewers to attach their own understanding. The plaque speaks of a “shared humanity and commitment” but gives no indication of how the issues of justice or equality are seen by many as unrelated to the Uprising.

The plaque’s dedication in 2007 was just one part of a much larger series of events designed to show the city coming together in remembrance of the Uprising. To many it appeared that Newark had reached a point where it was able to reflect openly on its past. The events that month put on by the city and local organizations ranged from a long-term museum exhibition (which would later be adapted and travel to Watts, CA and Detroit, MI), film screenings, panels of historians and activists, and of course the P.O.P.’s march. The city’s willingness to look back at its past symbolized to many historians in Newark a sense of security stemming from dwindling fears of a return to a darker past.²⁹⁷ The optimism for the future was attributed by

²⁹⁶ Grimshaw, “Three Views of Urban Violence: Civil Disturbance, Racial Revolt, Class Assault,” 110.

²⁹⁷ Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 256; Barry Carter, “Newark Leads in Efforts to Look Back 40 Years,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 11, 2007.

many to Mayor Cory Booker himself, who was seen as able to create real positive change for the city and as the first mayor to fully acknowledge and emphasize the importance of the Uprising. From July 12th-17th Booker ordered flags across the city lowered to half mast, appeared on a radio show taking call-ins from residents about the Uprising and the city, and, of course, dedicated the new public memorial for the Uprising.²⁹⁸ This was a stark comparison to his predecessor as mayor, Sharpe James, who on the same day as the plaque's dedication was formally indicted by the FBI for conspiracy and fraud during his time in office. Some saw the timing of the indictment as "an unfortunate coincidence," others declared that "The 12th of July is a bad day for Newark, the riots, the school takeover, and now this."²⁹⁹

For all of the pomp and circumstance given to the 40th anniversary and Booker's role in it, the plaque's dedication was underwhelming. Booker did not actually reveal the plaque during these 40th anniversary events; rather, he revealed a cardboard model of what the plaque might eventually look like. The ceremony that Booker created to dedicate little more than a promise of future action was complete with city officials, residents, and families of the deceased and featured various speeches and a reading of the 26 names of those lost in the Uprising.³⁰⁰ It was the official commemoration and recognition of the Uprising that many had searched for in the decades following 1967 even though the actual plaque would take more than a year to be installed.³⁰¹ Many activists and community members were quick to call out Booker and his administration for the delay. One journalist for the *Star Ledger* took a line from Booker's speech at the 2007 ceremony, "We will never forget what happened here 40 years ago," and contrasted it

²⁹⁸ "Commemoration Events," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 12, 2007; Brad Parks, "Flags to Be Lowered in Newark to Mark '67 Riot," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 12, 2007.

²⁹⁹ Jeffery C. Mays, "Some Call July 12th a Bad Day for the City," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 13, 2007. In addition to being the first day of the Riot, July 12th 1995 is when the state of New Jersey took over the city's public schools.

³⁰⁰ Kasi Addison, "40 Years on, Newark Recalls the Bloon and Pain," *Newark Star Ledger*, July 13, 2007.

³⁰¹ Jones, "Years Later, Lessons from Newark Riots to Be Learned."

with reality saying, “And while that might be true, it appears the mayor and his aides forgot about the plaque itself.”³⁰²

The plaque’s actual dedication in 2008 again missed the actual anniversary of the Uprising by a little more than a week but was spared no ounce of ceremony. Once again, city officials and community members gathered together at the 4th police precinct for speeches and a dramatic reveal of the plaque by Mayor Booker and Rutgers University Professor of History Clement Price [Figure 6].³⁰³ Price had long been a proponent of commemorating Newark’s history—called in the *Star Ledger*, “a cheerleader for all things relating to the city’s past”³⁰⁴—and the plaque was no exception. In the months following the reveal of the design for the plaque and the subsequent delay, Price made frequent phone calls to the mayor’s office checking on its status. Even before Booker had announced his own intentions to dedicate a memorial at the police precinct, Price was actively calling for the city to commemorate the Uprising at that spot.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Brad Parks, “Nearing 41 Years, and Still No Plaque: Bronze for the ’67 Riots Has Not Been Created,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 3, 2008.

³⁰³ Kasi Addison, “At Long Last, Recalling the Newark Riots: Plaque Unveiled at Uprising’s Ground Zero,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 24, 2008.

³⁰⁴ Parks, “Nearing 41 Years, and Still No Plaque.”

³⁰⁵ Mark Di Ionno, “Making a Case to Remember Newark’s Riots,” *Newark Star Ledger*, June 19, 2007.



Figure 4.6 Mayor Cory Booker revealing the plaque on the 4th Police Precinct. July 23rd, 2008.
Credit: Unknown³⁰⁶

He saw the precinct building as central to Newark’s memory of the Uprising, saying, “San Antonio wouldn’t tear down the Alamo. Newark shouldn’t tear down the 4th Precinct.”³⁰⁷ A plaque and city commemoration were the minimum of what Price called for, however. He believed that the entire building should be preserved, added to the National Register of Historic Places, and transformed into a national site “to study, exhibit and interpret the long American tradition of civil disorder.”³⁰⁸ Price’s vision would invite the city and nation to grapple with the issues that spurred the history of unrest. But the plaque’s function did none of this. The reality that Price and the city saw in the monument worked much more similarly to state-sponsored national monuments which “proclaim historic continuity, to convey national unity and stability,

³⁰⁶ From: <http://ecosoulintellectual.blogspot.com/2011/06/booker-and-newark-revitalization.html>

³⁰⁷ Di Ionno, “Making a Case to Remember Newark’s Riots.”

³⁰⁸ Di Ionno.

even if such stability hardly represented the reality of the historic moment.”³⁰⁹ The plaque gave the impression of the city coming together but this was hardly the reality. It simply presented an image of Newark that made Booker seem as though he had achieved unity in understanding the Uprising.

To accuse Cory Booker of acting in his own self-interest as mayor is nothing out of the ordinary in Newark. Especially as he left the mayor’s office early to become a senator and launched an unsuccessful 2020 presidential campaign, this has been one of the most frequent critiques of Booker—one clearly visible in his handling of the plaque. Rather than making its dedication or the dedication of its prototype part of the already existing P.O.P. march, Booker created his own ceremonies packed with his own spectators and supporters. Booker was well aware of the existence of the P.O.P. marches and as city councilman followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, George Branch, in attending them annually, but he went ahead with one focused solely on his dedication.³¹⁰ Booker’s ceremonies were not scenes of the community coming together in remembrance as the plaque described, but rather Booker creating the perception of unity in the city himself. Booker took advantage of the stage the ceremonies presented him in a way that as scholar Bradford Vivian describes, many politicians do: “Elaborate rites of public memory flourish, ..., in neoliberal form: in rhetorical adaptations of corporate marketing strategies publicizing ostensibly value-free political slogans.”³¹¹ Using the plaque, Booker created an image of the Uprising wiped of the community action against inequality the event represented for many, instead declaring unity using empty terms to make his dedication seem all the more impressive.

³⁰⁹ Hite and Collins, “Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st Century Chile,” 380–81.

³¹⁰ Parks, “Flags to Be Lowered in Newark to Mark ’67 Riot.”

³¹¹ Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again*, 87.

In what reads more like a speech to a military unit than to local politicians and residents, Booker declared at the actual plaque dedication in 2008, “My generation needs to pick up the baton, sword, plows and let us declare a new day in Newark, to declare that in our city we will make a difference.”³¹² Booker was Newark’s first mayor to not have been alive at the time of the Uprising and used the plaque’s dedication to make himself and his generation out to be those most responsible for keeping the memory of the event alive. All the while, he ignored through the plaque what for many was the most important part of remembering the Uprising—the issues behind it. This is not to minimize the impact that the plaque had for many as a sign of a bright future for Newark. The plaque has served as a constant reminder of the Uprising since its creation. As one local activist stated, it gives “future generations a sense of place when they reflect on the city’s past.”³¹³ But while the monument does provide this location, it does not give any sense of why the Uprising should be remembered and reflected on. It is a declaration that the city is past its dark history while ignoring what that history even was.

Not all receptions to the plaque or public commemorations were accepting. There were those within Newark who saw the creation of the plaque itself as an act of wrongdoing in itself. Following an article on the plaque’s delays, the *Star Ledger* published an angry op-ed asking why Newark would want to “commemorate the worst event in this city’s history.”³¹⁴ The piece goes on to describe how the plaque would only blame the police and National Guard while hailing those involved in looting and arson. Although the plaque explicitly favors neither the police nor the looters and places blame on no one, the divide in the city’s memory is still both present and expected. The unity that the plaque centers its remembrance around is just a creation

³¹² Addison, “At Long Last, Recalling the Newark Riots.”

³¹³ Addison.

³¹⁴ Julius J. Spohn, “Essex Forum,” *Newark Star Ledger*, July 20, 2008, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1220E19A14532000>.

as these divisions in the city's memory make clear. The author of the op-ed notes the stone marker as "all of the reminder that we need in this city."³¹⁵ A basic remembrance of the deaths listed on the stone is the only point that a unity of can be achieved and this is only by ignoring their contexts. Both the stone and the plaque profess an image of the city coming together to remember the Uprising in a way that does not fully align with the reality in the city.

Though created a decade apart in different contexts and by different groups, the two public monuments standing today profess similar visions of the Uprising and its significance. The monuments reflect a reluctance to acknowledge that Newark is not fully past the issues that sparked the Uprising. Rather than learning from this moment in the city's history, the monuments create ambiguous narratives of the Uprising that can give some semblance of unity in the city. This false sense of unity obscures the divisions present in the city and in its memory of the Uprising. Where Kea Tawana's monumental Ark made visible the city's friction over the Uprising's continued prominence and presence, these two monuments ignore it in favor of claiming a reconciliation that does not exist. This point of unity is certainly a goal for many, but it is not where Newark is in reality with its understanding. Those attempting to draw awareness to the divisions in Newark's memory frequently challenge this narrative of unity. Lawrence Hamm, a founder of the P.O.P. and a staunch advocate for the Uprising's significance today, is currently challenging Cory Booker for his senate seat.³¹⁶ Booker's successor in Newark's mayoral seat, Ras Baraka is likewise clear that the city is not past the Uprising nor unified in understanding it. The son of Amiri Baraka and a respected activist, poet, and educator in his own right, Ras Baraka is frequently compared to his predecessor for his focus on addressing issues more than just their images. He has called for the city to look to the Uprising as a lesson while it

³¹⁵ Spohn.

³¹⁶ As of April 2020

grows, saying, “We are a long way from 1967, but we are even further away from where we need to be to prevent it from happening again.”³¹⁷ The stone monument and bronze plaque create easily digestible and largely hollow images of the Uprising. But the memory of the event does not need to be pretty. Like Kea’s Ark, remembrance of the Uprising needs to show why the Uprising is relevant and should be remembered.

³¹⁷ Errin Haines Whack, “50 Years Later, Newark Riots Recall an Era Echoed by Black Lives Matter,” NBC News, July 7, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/50-years-later-newark-riots-recall-era-echoed-black-lives-n780856>.

Conclusion: What Makes a Renaissance?

*Newark is on fire again. But this time it's not fires of rage or rebellion.
It's fires of hope. It's fires of light.*

—Sharpe James, Newark Mayor 1986-2006³¹⁸

Now the city is getting better, but who's it getting better for? ... The Newark that we are presenting to the public -- the image of the new buildings and the performing arts centers, the art galleries, the restaurants, and all of that I personally like and it's good -- but that's only one side of the equation. And, if we don't pay attention to the other side, then we're gonna be in trouble.

—Max Herman, Sociology Professor at New Jersey City University³¹⁹

In the fall of 2009, comedian and host of *The Tonight Show* Conan O'Brien began a three-week-long feud with then-Mayor of Newark, Cory Booker. Their clash, shared across the internet and major news networks, was the result of a joke O'Brien made to his studio audience: "The Mayor of Newark, New Jersey, wants to set up a city-wide program to improve residents' health. ... The health care program would consist of a bus ticket out of Newark." This small joke—less than 30 seconds of O'Brien's hour-long show—snowballed over the next weeks as Booker and O'Brien quipped back and forth at each other over Twitter and television. The feud eventually grew to involve then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton calling for an end to the fighting, Booker flew to LA to be on the Show, and O'Brien donated \$100,000 to a Newark non-profit. In his initial video response to the joke, Booker leaned into the playful nature of the situation by claiming to ban O'Brien from the Newark International Airport. But he also made it clear that Newark was no longer a city that could be the butt of every joke. In Booker's own words, Newark was "a city on the rise."³²⁰

³¹⁸ Jessica Mazzola and Karen Yi, "Race, Riots and Reputation: Has N.J.'s Largest City Recovered?," News, NJ.com, July 2020, https://www.nj.com/essex/page/newark_riots_50th_anniversary.html#Sources.

³¹⁹ Mazzola and Yi.

³²⁰ Jon Favreau, "2020: Cory Booker on Radical Love and the Filibuster," Pod Save America, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://crooked.com/podcast/2020-cory-booker-on-radical-love-and-the-filibuster/>. For video clips of the feud see <https://isitfunnyoroffensive.com/cory-booker-conan-joke-battle-over-newark/>

In the more than 50 years since the Uprising, dozens of Newark politicians and activists have made similar claims. Talk of the city's rebirth and renaissance is common among those who hope to create real and lasting progress.³²¹ O'Brien's joke, like hundreds of others made about the city, did not mention or even allude to the Uprising. But the stigma that the city holds to this day is difficult to disentangle from the events of 1967. For many, the Uprising has left Newark with "a spurious association between blackness, danger, and urban decay."³²² Once a bastion of urban prosperity, the city now struggles to lose its title as "America's worst city," which it was awarded by *Harper's Magazine* in 1975.³²³ As Newark grows, it attempts to leave this negative association behind. But as decades of work and development have shown, that is easier said than done. In recent decades Newark has undergone significant overhauls of its public image, trying to present itself once again as a safe place to live and an economic powerhouse.

But how different is Newark today than it was in 1967? And what is this new renaissance for Newark to look like? The answers—just like memories of the Uprising itself—vary greatly and are often unclear. In many ways downtown development has successfully transformed part of the city into a bustling urban center. Businesses like Audible and Prudential attract hundreds of workers to the city. New Jersey Devils games and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center keep them there for nightlife. But these developments are largely designed to attract young white professionals. And they still leave the city every night for surrounding suburbs.³²⁴ In the early 2010s, while Cory Booker was proclaiming progress in the city, unemployment and poverty

³²¹ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 302–4.

³²² Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 245.

³²³ The Week Staff, "Saving America's 'Worst City,'" *The Week*, April 23, 2010, <https://theweek.com/articles/495062/saving-americas-worst-city>.

³²⁴ Karen Yi, "Newark Institutions Want Their Employees to Live in the City, and They're Willing to Pay You for It," News, NJ.com, April 30, 2019, <https://www.nj.com/essex/2019/04/newark-institutions-want-their-employees-to-live-in-the-city-and-theyre-willing-to-pay-you-for-it.html>.

levels were worse than in 1967.³²⁵ Though the city has received praise in recent years, especially under Mayors Cory Booker and Ras Baraka, for its work in fixing the city's perception, many of the most serious and detrimental issues remain.

The face-lift promised for Newark has often ignored the Uprising and attempted to banish it solely to the pages of history books. As sociologist Max Herman describes, "The fundamental danger, these civic leaders fear, is that the city will forever be associated with the urban unrest and that people will fail to appreciate all the good things that the city offers."³²⁶ But Newark cannot escape those five days in 1967. Ignoring the reality of the city's past will only exacerbate the problems that led to the Uprising and that continue today. As this thesis has shown, there is no single memory of the event in the city and may never be. But Newarkers have made great strides in past decades in acknowledging the divergence of its memories and having open conversations about what the Uprising means for the city. The memories of the Uprising seen throughout this thesis are only a few of the multitude that exist in Newark. But they reflect how the different memories of the event reflect radically different understandings not just of what the Uprising was, but of what kind of city Newark is and what matters most in moving forward.

Memories of the Uprising formed in its immediate aftermath reflect deep divides in the city, divisions that have not been healed. The focus on death and violence over oppression and inequality in the Uprising's aftermath shaped the ways in which people still think about the event. Amiri Baraka helped the memory of the Uprising as a rebellion and revolution gain prominence around the nation. While his memory was unique in the way he described the event, he made clear the racial and economic disparities in Newark that produced the Uprising. The firefighters' reluctance to acknowledge the changes in their community defines their memory.

³²⁵ Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 244.

³²⁶ Herman, 251.

Their vision of what Newark was and should be did not align with the realities they saw on the streets around them. But in recent decades, growing commemorations of the Uprising show the ways that memory is being raised as a central issue in the modern city. The attempts to create collective memories through memorials show that Newark is willing to acknowledge its histories as it moves forward.

The divided memory of the Uprising is by no means unique to Newark or even to the 1960s. Other cities that saw urban unrest throughout the 1960s—Watts, Detroit, and Buffalo, to name a few—and more recent occurrences of large urban uprisings—LA in 1992, Ferguson in 2014, and Baltimore in 2015—have seen similar struggles to understand their pasts.³²⁷ The issues of racial inequality and oppression that sparked the movements of the 1960s have not left American cities. The same conversations that occurred in 1967 over the Uprising's causes and justifications occurred again in relation to the Black Lives Matter Movement. People are asking, just as they did in Newark, if what happened in Baltimore and in Ferguson was a riot or a rebellion.³²⁸ There is still no clarity for these cities just as there is little in Newark. But in the confusion that remains for Newark in understanding its past, a willingness to acknowledge the inherent divisions is a beam of hope.

The Uprising permanently changed the city of Newark. That much is certain, no matter how one remembers the event. But the Uprising made clear that many were not ready or willing to acknowledge the city's serious issues. Its memory has remained a point of contention and reflects divides in what kind of city people perceive Newark to be and what kind of future it will have. In the more than 50 years since its long hot summer, Newark has begun to openly

³²⁷ Errin Haines Whack, "Newark Riots Recall an Era Echoed by Black Lives Matter," The Associated Press, July 7, 2017, <https://www.mcall.com/news/nation-world/mc-nws-newark-riots-50th-anniversary-20170707-story.html>.

³²⁸ Bates, "Is It An 'Uprising' Or A 'Riot'?"

acknowledge the divides in its memory and in the city itself—necessary steps in its journey of rebirth.

Appendix

1. *Black People!*

What about that bad short you saw last week on Frelinghuysen, or those stoves and refrigerators, record players, shotguns, in Sears, Bamberger's, Klein's, Hahnes', Chase, and the smaller josh enterprises? What about that bad jewelry, on Washington Street, and those couple of shops on Springfield? You know how to get it, you can get it, no money down, no money never, money don't grow on trees no way, only whitey's got it, makes it with a machine to control you you can't steal nothin from a white man, he's already stole it he owes you everything you want, even his life. All the stores will open if you will say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up! Or: Smash the window at night (these are magic actions) smash the windows daytime, anytime, together, lets smash the window drag the shit from in there. No money down. No time to pay. Just take what you want. The magic dance in the street. Run up and down Broad Street niggers take the shit you want. Take their lives if need be, but get what you want what you need. Dance up and down the streets, turn all the music up, run through the streets with music, beautiful radios on Market Street, they are brought here especially for you. Our brothers are moving all over, smashing at jellywhite faces. We must make our own World, man, our own world, and we can not do this unless the white man is dead. Let's get together and kill him my man, let's gather the fruit of the sun, let's make a world we want black children to grow and learn in do not let your children when they grow look in your face and curse you by pitying your tomish ways.

– Amiri Baraka, *Evergreen Review*, December 1967

2. *Black Art*

Poems are bullshit unless they are
Teeth or trees or lemons piled
On a step. Or black ladies dying
Of men leaving nickel hearts
Beating them down. Fuck poems
And they are useful, would they shoot
Come at you, love what you are,
Breathe like wrestlers, or shudder
Strangely after peeing. We want live
Words of the hip world live flesh &
Coursing blood. Hearts Brains
Souls splintering fire. We want poems
Like fists beating niggers out of Jocks
Or dagger poems in the slimy bellies
Of the owner-jews. Black poems to
Smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches
Whose brains are red jelly stuck
Between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking

Whores! we want "poems that kill."
 Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
 Guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
 And take their weapons leaving them dead
 With tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff
 Poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite
 Politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
 Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh
 . . .rrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . . Setting fire and death to
 Whities ass. Look at the Liberal
 Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat
 & puke himself into eternity . . . rrrrrrr
 There's a negroleader pinned to
 A bar stool in Sardi's eyeballs melting
 In hot flame Another negroleader
 On the steps of the white house one
 Kneeling between the sheriff's thighs
 Negotiating coolly for his people.
 Aggh . . . stumbles across the room . . .
 Put it on him, poem! Strip him naked
 To the world! Another bad poem cracking
 Steel knuckles in a jewlady's mouth
 Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green berets
 Clean out the world for virtue and love,
 Let there be no love poems written
 Until love can exist freely and
 Cleanly. Let Black people understand
 That they are the lovers and the sons
 Of warriors and sons
 Of warriors Are poems & poets &
 All the loveliness here in the world

We want a black poem. And a
 Black World.
 Let the world be a Black Poem
 And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
 Silently
 Or LOUD

– Amiri Baraka, 1965

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