

“Too Much Singing:” Christianity and the Limitations of Nonviolence in the Ghetto**By Laurie Lahey**DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v1i1.18>**Abstract**

This essay considers the impact of Christianity on radical organizing in Camden, New Jersey during the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, as the ghetto emerged as a conflicted site of revolutionary activity and material demolition, incipient interracial cooperation between African Americans and white clergy developed by virtue of a common language about poverty, which simultaneously politicized Puerto Ricans. Camden, New Jersey—at any given time, the poorest, “most dangerous” city in the richest, most racially segregated state in the nation—provides a unique opportunity to consider how civil rights activism evolved in a secondary city.¹ This essay complicates the discussion of the civil rights movement by demonstrating Protestant churches’ collaboration in a movement that would become dominated by Black Power politics in the late-1960s and 1970s. This essay situates the rise of ecumenical Protestant leadership in Camden within substantial ideological transitions in the city’s growing minority population. This study considers how, while Camden activists lamented the lack of community involvement in social protest during the first half of the 1960s, these years were significant as tenuous relationships, galvanized by the racially ambiguous War on Poverty, formed between community leaders and religious organizations.

¹ These statistics vary annually; however, Camden and New Jersey are consistently at the top of the lists. See: Deborah Hirsch, “Report Ranks Camden Most Dangerous U.S. City,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), November 23, 2009; Bob Braun, “Bringing New Jersey’s Racial Segregation into the Open,” *The Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ), May 19, 2011; Kareem Fahim, “Rethinking Revitalization in Crumbling Camden, New Challenges for a Recovery Plan,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2006; Geoff Mulvihill, “New Jersey is Richest State but Has Some of the Poorest Cities,” *Press of Atlantic City* (Atlantic City, NJ), August 29, 2006.

The air was thick that June night in 1963 when Malcolm X came to Camden Convention Hall. The audience of 1000, which included boxing star Cassius Clay, went “bezerk” when Malcolm began with the declaration, “I understand there are white people in here, but I can’t see them!”² The spectators sat, mesmerized, for the next ninety minutes as Malcolm lashed out at the NAACP, the Supreme Court, the government, and Christianity.³ Those who could not get a seat listened to the loudspeakers outside, which reverberated for blocks as Malcolm blasted the crowd for its complacency:

Anytime you’re living in the 20th century walking around singing “We Shall Overcome,” the government has failed you. This is part of what’s wrong with you; you do too much singing! Today it is time to stop singing and start swinging!⁴

That evening Malcolm X focused on three major themes: the separation of the races; the inevitability of a violent revolution; and Christianity’s inefficacy as an institutional or philosophical platform for either.

In charting shifting community organization during the classical phase of the civil rights movement, this essay considers how Christianity did, in fact, become an improbable facilitator of Malcolm’s message in Camden. In this period, while the ghetto emerged as a conflicted site of revolutionary activity and material demolition, incipient interracial cooperation between African Americans and white clergy developed by virtue of a common language about poverty, which simultaneously politicized Puerto Ricans.

In the past twenty years historians have expanded the traditional parameters of civil rights movement historiography to demonstrate that race-based discrimination, unfair labor practices,

² Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011.

³ Ibid, United States Government Memorandum, United States Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Newark, NJ July 17, 1963; “Separation of Races Urged by Malcolm X,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), July 1, 1963, 17.

⁴ Malcolm X, Audio Clip, (Camden, NJ June 30, 1963), taped by James De Francesco, Hog Penny Studios, Ship Bottom, NJ; Donna Weaver, “Shipbottom Man Covered a Malcolm X Speech in 1963,” *The Press of Atlantic City* (Atlantic City, NJ), February 26, 2011.

insufficient educational opportunities, inadequate housing, and urban renewal brought about a myriad of civil rights organizations throughout the nation. Still engaged in what historian Patrick D. Jones calls the “archeological stage,” scholars have examined how the movement operated outside the South as well as beyond the 1954-1965 classical phase.⁵ This challenging and exciting work has, for the most part, excavated the terrain of major cities in the North, Midwest, and California.

This study seeks to understand what happened elsewhere. Camden, New Jersey—at any given time, the poorest, “most dangerous” city in the richest, most racially segregated state in the nation—provides a unique opportunity to consider how the movement evolved in a secondary city.⁶ This examination of Camden’s story seeks to complicate the discussion of the civil rights movement by demonstrating Protestant churches’ collaboration in a movement that would become dominated by Black Power politics in the late-1960s and 1970s. This essay situates the rise of ecumenical Protestant leadership in Camden within substantial ideological transitions in the city’s growing minority population. This study considers how, while Camden activists lamented the lack of community involvement in social protest during the first half of the 1960s, these years were significant as tenuous relationships, galvanized by the racially ambiguous War on Poverty, formed between community leaders and religious organizations.

In the months leading up to the Malcolm X’s visit, Brother George X of Muhammad’s Mosque #20 often made the short walk to St. John’s Episcopal Church to visit with Reverend Donald Griesmann. George would bring his Koran, protected by a black cover, to discuss the

⁵ Patrick D. Jones, “Coming of Age in Cleveland,” *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* January 2012, 8.

⁶ These statistics vary annually; however, Camden and New Jersey are consistently at the top of the lists. See: Deborah Hirsch, “Report Ranks Camden Most Dangerous U.S. City,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), November 23, 2009; Bob Braun, “Bringing New Jersey’s Racial Segregation into the Open,” *The Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ), May 19, 2011; Kareem Fahim, “Rethinking Revitalization in Crumbling Camden, New Challenges for a Recovery Plan,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2006; Geoff Mulvihill, “New Jersey is Richest State but Has Some of the Poorest Cities,” *Press of Atlantic City* (Atlantic City, NJ), August 29, 2006.

problems he and Griesmann shared in South Camden, where they both preached. As he planned Malcolm X's visit, George, an African American, petitioned Griesmann, who was white, for his support. Griesmann, already engaged in the affairs of the black and Puerto Rican community, backed the rally and was one of the few whites in attendance.⁷ While Malcolm's sermon took the crowd through the ups and downs of the black community and blamed the Christian churches for being unable to achieve social justice, the circumstances surrounding the rally belied a growing separation between rhetoric and practice that would punctuate the next decade of activism in Camden.

Although Brother George X was responsible for Malcolm's visit, he fades from the historical record after the mid-1960s.⁸ Perhaps this is because, while Malcolm's visit resonated with the community, it did not produce any sustained indigenous organization. However, Donald Griesmann, who would spend much of the 1960s and 1970s cultivating community activism, viewed Malcolm X's visit as "one of the sparks" that led to Camden citizens' activism: "It was a great, great, great beginning unifying people...that produced some sparks that began to fly in Camden."⁹

The mid-1960s witnessed a shifting tide toward radicalism in Camden consistent with activism throughout the urban North. Dr. Peniel Joseph points to several key events that coalesced into a perceptible change in the attitudes of inner-city minorities by 1966:

First, the August 1965 riots in the Watts section of Los Angeles had come to signify the end of the civil rights era, punctuated by Martin Luther King being heckled by inner-city residents immune to his eloquent pleas for nonviolence. Second, King's efforts in Chicago, where his advocacy of open housing and slum clearance produced limited results, were interpreted as a harbinger of both the coming wave of black militancy and the purported shift to the north of the civil rights struggle. Finally, Stokely Carmichael's

⁷ Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011.

⁸ United States Government Memorandum United States Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Newark, NJ July 17, 1963; *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 272.

⁹ Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011.

election as SNCC chairman, barely a month before his signature moment during the Meredith march, came to be regarded as the unofficial prelude to black power's national rise. These three events have come to constitute the genesis of the black power era.¹⁰

Michael Friedland also highlights 1965 as an important turning point for Christians, especially white Christians, involved with the civil rights movement, calling it a "watershed year," almost as "tragic as 1968."¹¹ Friedland points to Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam in July followed by the Watts riots a month later as the moment when the "liberal comity" the movement was built on began to fade. Some liberal whites began to argue that blacks were becoming too aggressive and financial contributions to civil rights organizations grew smaller and less frequent. When white suburban mobs attacked civil rights activists, including clergy and nuns, in Chicago in the summer of 1966, the intensity of the growing "white backlash" was very clear.¹²

Important shifts took place in the "black church," as well, which were influenced by the growing militancy of the movement in pockets of the urban North. Maurice Stevens argues that as early as 1966 less conservative members of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) believed black religious leaders had to address the numbers of parishioners they were losing because the black church could not support them socially, politically, or economically as well as Black Power activism promised.¹³ From this context grew the foundation of Black Liberation Theology, a radically liberating philosophy that echoed the demands of the black power movement, but found its source of inspiration in the Bible.

¹⁰ Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History*, 96, no. 3 (December 2009): 760.

¹¹ Michael B. Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 140-41.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Maurice E. Stevens, *Troubling Beginnings: Trans(Per)Forming African-American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 55.

Yet, Black Liberation Theology did not resonate with Camden's black churches, which stood firmly in line with traditional, nonviolent tactics best represented by the NAACP. While some black ministers, such as Baptist Amos Johnson who ran the Christian Center on Line St. in North Camden, ignored their churches' directives, most ministers in Camden remained apolitical.¹⁴ Malik Chaka, director of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a U.S. foreign aid agency dedicated to global poverty, and former Camden activist formerly known as Michael Edwards, argues:

You couldn't find a black minister who had a church that participated... [there was a] total absence of the black clergy in these activities... When people talk about the role of the church in the civil rights movement, they're talking about the South... or, if they're talking about the North they're clearly weren't talking about all the ministers. For every Adam Clayton Powell, for every Paul Washington in Philadelphia, for every King or, Abernathy there were people who were accommodationists. And I think this was clearly the case in Camden. They didn't want to get on the wrong side of the power structure.¹⁵

Camden's black churches were actually quite typical. Despite the deeply intertwined and popularly remembered relationships of some black churches with the civil rights movement, particularly in the South, many black churches were not involved. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya ascribe the black church's politically ambiguous stance to its role as an "institutional supporter of double consciousness," the Du Boisian dialectical tension of being both African and American.

This argument is consistent with Chaka's assessment that black ministers had more to lose socially and politically. In aspiring to be both "African" and "American," black churches have sought a more mainstream position.¹⁶ Another reason black churches may have remained outside the campaigns for social justice in Camden is their historic struggle between "other-

¹⁴ Amos Johnson, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

¹⁵ Malik Chaka, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

¹⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 228.

worldliness” and “this-worldliness,” meaning these traditions often interpreted the Bible as instructing them to look beyond this world. According to Amos Johnson, in the 1950s and the early 1960s, black churches in Camden were more focused on the “other” world: “there was hardly any organization going on. There were beginnings of organizations, but nothing substantial.”¹⁷

In the early-1960s, two white ministers insinuated themselves into the increasingly apparent leadership void. In addition to Donald Griesmann, Presbyterian minister Sam Appel would help forge a movement for social justice that included Camden’s working class and impoverished. Malik Chaka recalls that while it was “not unheard of for black ministers to take a radical approach [in the 1950s and 1960s] ... in Camden, it was two white ministers.”¹⁸ Amos Johnson confirms that Griesmann and Appel stood at the center of interracial activism in Camden:

[for black ministers] to take up the cause like Don Griesmann or Sam Appel, or to be there at the center with me, it wasn’t happening. A lot of the guys were older and had put up with it for so long, they felt like it was the natural thing to do.”¹⁹

Samuel Appel’s church was located in East Camden, which was still predominately blue-collar and white in the mid-1960s. Sam married his wife, Jane, two days after Christmas in 1948 in New York. She was a nurse and he repaired cars. They moved to Philadelphia in the 1950s, where Sam went to college and, later, the seminary. When Sam graduated, he ran a small church and worked nights as a punch press operator. Then, in 1962 he was offered a position as chaplain at Rutgers University in Camden.²⁰

¹⁷ Amos Johnson, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

¹⁸ Malik Chaka, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

¹⁹ Amos Johnson, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

²⁰ “Jane Appel Obituary,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia PA), Aug. 10, 2010.

The following year, Appel helped found the Camden Metropolitan Ministry with the goal of involving the Presbyterian Church more deeply in the community.²¹ Appel, along with suburban ministers Larry Black and Dick Whitman, engaged in what came to be called a “mission to structures,” meaning they would “meddle” in the structures that restricted minorities: education, housing, and the police department. Most importantly, they saw it as their mission to help the city’s poor organize. The group was headquartered in a three-story building in North Camden, facing the Delaware River, on the edge of the ghetto, where many African Americans and Puerto Ricans were relocated as the city tore down slums.²² The building had previously been a saloon and a brothel. Sam named the building “The Point,” after the Thomas Carlyle poem and because it was located on Point Street.²³

According to activist Gwen Simon Gain, who would come to work closely with Appel as a fair housing field representative for South Jersey, “The Point” also indicated Appel’s critique of the Presbyterian status quo. Simon Gain claims Appel was attracted to Carlyle’s poem because it aptly described his own assessment of Christianity:

if I grasped it correctly when Sam explained it, Carlyle’s contention that the English religious community had become too distracted by arguing over inconsequential matters like theology. That the truly devout ought to concentrate instead on the only essential goals and values in life: that is, actively taking care of one another, and especially of the less fortunate, as Jesus said we should do. That was the “point” of living a truly committed existence.²⁴

Appel proudly described himself as a liberal Presbyterian. In 1964 he walked in a picket line in Greenwood, Mississippi to protest segregation and spent a night in jail. He recalled, “I

²¹ Deborah Yaffee, *Other People’s Children: The Battle for Justice and Equality in New Jersey’s Schools* (New Brunswick, NJ: 2007), 113.

²² Gwen Simon Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator: How the Hahas Came to South Jersey* (Xlibris: 2011), Kindle Locations 1963-1966. Kindle Edition.

²³ James A. Gittings. *Bread, Meat, and Raisins after the Dance*. (Palos Verdes, CA: Morgan Press, 1977), 88-89. Samuel E. Appel, *Finding the Point Again! A Report and Reflections on 25 Years of Urban Ministry in Camden, New Jersey*, November, 1988, 2. CCHS.

²⁴ Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator*, Kindle Locations 1963-1966.

saw Jesus Christ on that Mississippi picket line, and it reaffirmed my faith.”²⁵ Sam Appel would play an instrumental role in driving activism in Camden.

Three years before Appel’s arrival, on April Fools’ Day, 1959, twenty-six year old Donald Griesmann came to the city to serve as rector of St. John’s Episcopal Church. He had nearly lost his last job at Grace Church in Plainfield, NJ the previous year for a sermon he gave while his boss was on vacation, which asked the question of why there were two Episcopal Churches in the small community of Plainfield, one white, one black, and how they could begin to worship together.²⁶ Griesmann referred to his new neighborhood in South Camden as “the white hole of a donut of black and Puerto Rican residents,” and immediately became involved in community outreach.²⁷ By 1963, in addition to his work at St. John’s, Griesmann served as chaplain to the Episcopal faculty and students at Rutgers College of South Jersey, as a probation officer at the Camden County Juvenile Court, and as a member of the Board of Planned Parenthood Association of Camden County.²⁸

Griesmann’s first attempts at organizing began by giving hot chocolate to local kids through a program he called “Project Kids,” which consisted of him walking the streets alone, ringing a bell to gather the kids. Several hundred kids showed up. When he had their attention, he talked to them about the issues they faced living in Camden. Beginning in 1962, Griesmann regularly organized children from St. John’s vacation bible school—which offered classes in African American and Puerto Rican history—to march the eight blocks to City Hall in protest of various racial and class-based inequities. The children, predominately black and Puerto Rican,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Donald Griesmann, “November 12, 2008: U.S. Election Night 2008 - Flashes of My Life Came Before Me,” *Don Griesmann’s Nonprofit Blog* (blog), August 25, 2011 (9:15pm) http://dongriesmannsnonprofitblog.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html , November 12, 2008.

²⁷ Barry Rosenberg, “Fasten Your Seatbelts: You Are Now Entering Camden,” 132; Howard Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 73; Griesmann, “November 12, 2008: U.S. Election Night 2008 - Flashes of My Life Came Before Me.”

²⁸ “St. Paul’s Women’s Day Branch to Hear Guest,” *The Westfield Leader* (Westfield, NJ) Mar. 28, 1963.

ages five through fourteen, marched against slum housing, lack of recreational facilities, and decaying neighborhoods.²⁹

Eventually Griesmann turned an abandoned building into the St. John's Episcopal Community Center, which served the neighborhood with tutorial programs, recreation, camping trips, youth employment, Head Start, and other activities, seven days a week. Over three hundred children used the center every day.³⁰ While the black and Puerto Rican kids did not always get along with each other, Griesmann promoted friendships through basketball, football, and baseball teams, as well as by encouraging them "to know one another, respect one another."³¹ Additionally, he convinced local bakeries to donate leftover food, which, for some children, was the only meal they could count on each day. For example, one day a boy named Billy stole a box of donuts from the center. When Griesmann caught him, he said: "I don't want you to ever say you stole donuts from here; I'm giving them to you." He told Billy to take as much as he wanted each day.³²

Once the community center was well established, African American and Puerto Rican families began to attend St. John's Church. Griesmann started a new custom of having parishioners greet each other by folding their hands over one another's in the form of a cross: "White, black, Hispanic touched each other."³³ He also held "jazz masses" in which black jazz musicians performed religious music. In 1968 a reporter for *Philadelphia Magazine* argued that while people described Donald Griesmann as Camden's Father Groppi, the well-known white Catholic civil rights activist who worked with Black Militants in Milwaukee, "it would be more

²⁹ Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011; "Pierce Blasts the Use of Child Marchers," *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ) Aug. 25, 1966.

³⁰ Donald Griesmann, "Hi, I'm Don Griesmann," *Techsoup.org Community Forum*, accessed on August 20, 2011, <http://forums.techsoup.org/cs/community/f/19/p/129/25486.aspx>

³¹ Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Don Griesmann, "November 12, 2008: U.S. Election Night 2008 - Flashes of My Life Came Before Me."

correct to call Rev. James Groppi Milwaukee's Father Griesmann, [because] Griesmann has been at this civil rights business longer and has done considerably more."³⁴

The willingness of white, liberal Protestants--and to a lesser extent, Catholic priests-- to take up radical political positions on race is not isolated to Camden, even if the particular coalitions that emerged there are very unusual. Griesmann's and Appel's work in Camden can be contextualized within a broader shift in Protestantism in the postwar years. In his 2011 Organization of American Historians presidential address, David A. Hollinger elucidated how ecumenical Protestant churches like Griesmann's and Appel's began to congregate around the idea that "the diversity of the human species and the diminution of inequalities within it were intimately bound up with one another."³⁵ Thus, according to Hollinger, Protestants such as Griesmann and Appel are responsible for developing "a more multicultural America."³⁶

Michael Friedland, who explores the ways in which various Protestant and Catholic groups enacted this shifting ideology in his study of white clergymen's contribution to the civil rights movement, argues that 1963 marked an important turning point in religious actors' efforts in the civil rights movement. A major reason for this shift was that the widely televised police violence enacted on nonviolent protesters in Birmingham, Alabama caused many religious activists to realize a stronger institutional stance against racial discrimination was necessary. Friedland points to several examples of interfaith cooperation such as Catholic and Protestant calls for denominational unity, a fourteen month vigil at the Lincoln Memorial held by Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as pressure from religious

³⁴ Barry Rosenberg, "Fasten Your Seatbelts: You Are Now Entering Camden," 132; For more on Fr. James Groppi, see: Jones, *The Selma of the North*.

³⁵ David Hollinger, "'After Cloven Tongues of Fire': Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (July 2011).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

institutions on Congress to make legislative progress.³⁷ According to Friedman, “these ecumenical efforts showed that growing numbers of white clergymen, nuns, and lay persons, saw civil rights as a moral issue.”³⁸

This liberal spirit was probably best embodied by the principal white ecumenical organization, the National Council of Churches (NCC), a consortium of mainline Protestant churches that established the Commission on Religion and Race in 1963 to initiate a place for mainstream Protestant churches in racial conflicts. Through this commission, mainline Protestant churches played an important role in the civil rights movement by promoting the Social Gospel with a focus on race. For example, one of the many projects the NCC promoted was the “Delta Ministry,” in which NCC volunteers served the Mississippi Delta through promoting black voting, educational projects, and expanded welfare programs.³⁹

Still, while many mainline Protestants were moved to participate in civil rights activism, there was extensive internal conflict about what official stance each church should take. Many churches, including the Episcopal Church (which Griesmann represented) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) (which Appel represented) saw significant clashes, especially geographically, about how to respond. Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, white Episcopalians took a largely paternalistic approach to their African-American brethren. While the Episcopal Church officially endorsed the *Brown* decision, many southern practitioners were openly hostile to integration and many who supported it lacked the backing of their leaders and were often ostracized from their church communities.

³⁷ Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet*, 70.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 76-77.

³⁹ James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

By the late 1950s many Episcopalian theologians began stressing the importance of engaging with the world- a philosophy that culminated in the 1959 formation of the Episcopal Society of Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) in Raleigh, North Carolina. Pressure from white church leaders in the South prevented the National Council of the Episcopal Church from taking a definitive stand on the civil rights movement prior to 1963. Many southern Episcopalians who supported civil rights faced violence. Northern Episcopalians were more willing to engage in the struggle, but, according to Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., they tended to be too obtrusive and unwilling to place African Americans in the limelight.⁴⁰

Similarly, the PCUS reacted favorably to the civil rights cause in 1954, but faced internal friction, particularly from southern congregations. Throughout the 1960s, the PCUS promoted a variety of community development programs that were not necessarily specific to the civil rights movement, but did address many of the same goals. Joel L. Alvis, Jr. argues that while “Concern for and identification with civil rights issues were not absent from local churches or individuals, but these cases were the exception rather than the rule.”⁴¹

Yet, even as some ecumenical Protestant churches disseminated liberal ideas, many ministers were hesitant to immerse themselves fully in the ghetto. In his memoir, *Finding the Point Again!*, Sam Appel recalls the acceleration in Christian activism that Hollinger and Friedland unpack. However, Appel argues that while church-supported inner-city programs were founded with great enthusiasm, the problems were often too complex and the cities’ political systems too difficult to renegotiate. Often those engaged in urban ministry felt an “intense feeling of aloneness, of isolation, a feeling of foresakeness.” When Appel was assigned his

⁴⁰ Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. *Episcopalians & Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 2003); David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *The Episcopalians*, Denominations in America (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 132-133.

⁴¹ Joel L. Alvis, Jr., *Religion & Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 130-31.

position in Camden, he remembers “Many of my fellow clergy came to me after the meeting and said sadly, ‘God bless you in Camden, Sam.’ I interpreted their words and their body language as meaning it’s all yours; go to it; see you around; don’t call me, I’ll call you!”⁴² William Sloane Coffin, the Presbyterian turned United Church of Christ minister, who Warren Goldstein calls “the preeminent white voice of the changing times in mainline Protestantism” for his part in reviving the social gospel in the 1960s, is an important example of the tension many ministers experienced:

From time to time Coffin felt guilty about his failure to take up ministry in the slums. As a result, he loved telling-and retelling-the story of his old East Harlem supervisor Don Benedict confirming that he really belonged at Yale.⁴³

For all the rhetoric, marching, and protesting, it is difficult to find examples of white Protestants who stood at the center of the War on Poverty, in the ghetto, where it burned hottest.

It is also difficult to find Catholics, of any race or ethnicity, who participated in social protest in Camden in in the 1950s or early-1960s. It is curious that the Catholic Church did not take part, as it was growing rapidly in the Camden diocese in this period. Additionally it was an important center for Puerto Rican socializing, an “incubator” for the community, as activist Carmen Martinez described it. It is even more surprising, perhaps, that it would be Protestant ministers who would make changes in Camden, as Catholic priests actively encouraged parishioners to buy homes in their parishes, while many Protestants lived outside the city.⁴⁴

While there is no record of how many people in Camden identified with Catholicism in this period, we do know the Camden diocese was in the midst of remarkable growth. Between 1938 and 1956 the Catholic population in the six counties that comprised the Camden diocese

⁴² Appel, *Finding the Point Again!*, 35.

⁴³ Warren Goldstein, *William Sloane Coffin Jr.: A Holy Impatience*, 328.

⁴⁴ John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 19.

increased by one-hundred percent, from 100,000 to 200,000. The number of priests increased from 86 to 195. The fifty churches, thirty rectories, twenty convents, twenty-two elementary schools, and four high schools that were built during this period demonstrate how notable this growth was.⁴⁵

When the United States entered the Second World War, the Catholic population was largely urban and working class.⁴⁶ In Camden there were at least six Catholic churches, each with an ethnic affiliation. According to historian Charles Giglio, Bartholomew Eustace (the bishop who oversaw this shift) was aware of Camden's growing black and Puerto Rican populations, which is why he appointed Spanish-speaking priests in Camden in the 1950s to minister to this growing Catholic population. If Camden's Catholic churches were able to attract African-American parishioners, they may not have been particularly active. Records show that 80% of African-American Catholics in the urban North, most of whom converted during the Great Migration, were not active in their churches.⁴⁷

One reason for this may be that the Catholic Church was widely perceived by African Americans as racist, prompting Martin Luther King, Jr. to claim he supported John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential race *despite* Kennedy's Catholicism.⁴⁸ In his exploration of the "Catholic encounter with race," John T. McGreevy explores the rift that emerged among American Catholics in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In the 1940s Catholics were divided between those who believed the church should take a "separate-but-equal" approach to organizing parishes, meaning minorities could have their own churches, and, largely due to the

⁴⁵ *Building God's Kingdom: History of the Camden Diocese* (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall Press, 1987).

⁴⁶ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 130.

⁴⁷ McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 61.

work of Jesuit priest John LaFarge, that the church should be integrated. Evidence suggests that before white Catholics made their way out of the cities, many first moved to another city parish that was similar to what theirs had been before minorities began moving in.⁴⁹

By the 1950s, the Church's official stance was integration. However because urban Catholics had cultivated a unique relationship with their neighborhoods, which they conflated with their parish, often times the "people in the pews" resisted this policy in both the Church and in their living spaces. Urban, northern Catholics were especially worried about their property values dropping and their traditional parish-oriented communities dissolving.⁵⁰ Essentially, the Church had created neighborhoods via the parish system. Now that same institution threatened to "disintegrate" the neighborhood through integration.

McGreevy argues that "between 1964 and 1967 two distinctly Catholic visions of church, community, and authority clashed in the streets, parishes, and Catholic schools of northern cities."⁵¹ More traditional Catholics resisted the "threat" to their communities, which had been created by the church and were now threatened by that same institution. Liberal Catholics questioned the parochial structures and became involved in civil rights coalitions.⁵²

A salient example of this divisiveness is the presence of Catholics in Selma during the 1965 voter registration drives. Priests, nuns, and lay Catholics from fifty dioceses went to Selma in 1965, even though a Montgomery bishop tried to dissuade the participation of northern Catholics. The Catholics who did go to Selma were mostly from big east cities.⁵³ Amy Koehlinger argues that Catholics did not have a significant impact on the civil rights movement,

⁴⁹ John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 2, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 232-33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵¹ McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 205.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God," 221, 228, 230.

as they generally did not become involved until after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which allowed for priests and nuns to take a more active stance in social issues. However, the presence of these religious leaders, especially the white, female nuns, marching in Selma and throughout the north in sympathy protests, further highlighted the importance of racial justice for northern whites.⁵⁴ While it is possible that the presence of these nuns in the South and in cities throughout the North impacted Camden-area Catholics, there is no example in Camden of Catholic priests or nuns engaging in any social protest. White, Catholic priest Michael Doyle, who would become involved in social justice when he arrived in Camden in 1969, explains that the Catholic Churches in Camden during the 1950s and early-1960s were much more concerned with efficiency than charity.⁵⁵

While there is no record of how many, if any, Camden Puerto Ricans attended Malcolm X's rally in 1963, it is likely that younger Camden Puerto Ricans would have identified with his discourse. Despite Malcolm's solidly pro-black message, evidence suggests that he did not alienate Puerto Ricans. As Jeffery Ogbar notes, while the Nation of Islam's (NOI) "language, symbolism, and general cosmology" were centered on African Americans, the organization welcomed all people of color; therefore, "the Black Power movement demonstrated that ethnic nationalism had incredible potential for political mobilization and resistance to the oppression [non-African Americans] experienced."⁵⁶ For example, Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani points out that while older Puerto Ricans discounted Malcolm, his condemnation of white racism and advocacy of black pride resonated with young Puerto Ricans, motivating many of them to read

⁵⁴ Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ Michael Doyle, *"It's a Terrible Day...Thanks be to God"* (Camden, NJ: The Heart of Camden, Inc., 2003), 119.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Rainbow Radicalism: The Rise of Radical Ethnic Nationalism," *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, Ed. Peniel E. Joseph, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 193-194.

his *Autobiography*.⁵⁷ In the 1960s Puerto Ricans and African Americans were finding they had more in common at the same time sociologists, politicians, and other outsiders increasingly grouped them together.

When the president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party (PRNP) Pedro Albizu Campos died in April of 1965, just two months after Malcolm's assassination, he was not well known among Puerto Ricans who were too young to remember when the PRNP attempted assassination of President Truman in 1950 or when Nationalists opened fire on members of Congress in the Capitol building in 1954. However, in the late-1960s and 1970s, when Puerto Rican youth activists rediscovered Campos and lauded his resistance to U.S. colonialism, he became the "Puerto Rican Malcolm X."⁵⁸ For example, in a February 1970 article published in the Young Lords' newspaper, *Palante*, entitled "Malcolm Spoke for Puerto Ricans," the author appropriates Malcolm's messages of cultural pride and that "Power comes from the barrel of a gun" for Puerto Ricans: "Brothers and sisters, look at the awareness of our Afro-American compañeros. Our own Albizu Campos also taught us to be Boriqueño is a good thing."⁵⁹

In their study of black-Puerto Rican coalition building in New York City, Andy Diaz and Sonia Lee argue "When President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his 'War on Poverty' agenda in the summer of 1964, he inadvertently opened up the civil rights agenda to Puerto Ricans."⁶⁰ Johnson's call for "maximum feasible participation" of the poor themselves in an "unconditional war to defeat poverty," embodied the nature of blacks' and Puerto Ricans' shared problems, based in poverty. The War on Poverty was notably racially ambiguous, focusing on "poor people."

⁵⁷ Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani, "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, Eds. Andrés Torres and Jose Velazquez, (Philadelphia, PA: 1998), 38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Palante*, 2 no. 1 (February 1970).

⁶⁰ Ande Diaz and Sonia S. Lee, "'I Was the One Percenter': Many Diaz and the Beginnings of a Black-Puerto Rican Coalition," *Journal of American Ethnic History*. 26, no. 3 (Spring, 2007), 71.

The War on Poverty came together just as “poor” congealed as a social scientific classification. Previously, socioeconomic categories included lower-class, middle-class, or upper-class; there was also the working-class or “paupers” and the “criminal element.” According to Laura Briggs, in the 1960s “poor” encompassed both African Americans and Puerto Ricans, unconsciously conflating race with class.⁶¹ In some ways, such as through the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the rhetoric of War on “Poverty” encouraged a common bond among minorities, although they rarely were represented adequately.⁶²

Following Johnson’s announcement of his ambitious War on Poverty in 1964, more than half of Camden’s Puerto Rican social clubs joined together to form el Concilio de Organizaciones Hispanas de Camden (the Camden Spanish Council), with three main goals: the inclusion of three leaders of the Hispanic community in the War on Poverty in Camden; the provision of guidance to community leaders on programs related to the War on Poverty; the acquisition of an Orientation Center for Hispanics in the southern part of the city.⁶³

Donald Griesmann also saw opportunity in the War on Poverty. He embraced the newly created government programs so expeditiously that people began to call him the “one man War on Poverty.” However, a year after the initiatives were approved by Congress, Griesmann was critical of their implementation.⁶⁴ In testimony provided to the U.S. Congress in July 1965,

⁶¹ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 177-78.

⁶² Noel Cazenave. *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007); Matthew Countryman, *Up South*; Ande Diaz and Sonia S. Lee, “I Was the One Percenter,” 52-80; Malik Chaka, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010.

⁶³ Informe Annual Año Fiscal, 1964-1965, “Migrant Farm Labor in NY and NJ. The Puerto Rican Experience, 1948-1993. OGPRUS, Administrative (Reel 53), Box 2735, Folder 3, 146.

⁶⁴ Donald Griesmann Testimony, “The War on Poverty as it Affects Older Americans.” *Hearings Before the Special Committee on Aging*. United States Senate. Eighty-Ninth Congress. First Session Part 2, Newark, NJ. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), July 10, 1965, 461-462.

Griesmann made his commitment to serving the poor clear when he situated the War on Poverty firmly within his Christian worldview:

In St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 19, Verse 21, Jesus said, "For you always have the poor with you." For many people this text is regarded as a prophecy by Jesus that there will always be poor people. While the definitions of "poor" and "poverty" may be historically relative... Jesus was speaking of the financially poor, the low man on the totem pole, the underdog, the persons caught in the philosophy of poverty. Pointedly, Jesus was saying that the opportunity to overcome poverty is always with us. Finally a conscientious effort is being made.

Yet, Griesmann was dismayed by how superficially Camden's power structure included the city's poor in this "conscientious effort" to eradicate poverty, arguing that in the year following the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, "the dialog between the poor and the planners in the local situation is extremely limited."⁶⁵ Griesmann claimed the poor were afraid of the existing power structure and would not organize to challenge it. Griesmann explained that the War on Poverty did not reach the entire community:

The gaps in the War on Poverty will become more obvious in time; many are now obvious... Some of the most socially chaotic and poor families I know in Camden are untouched by the several programs initiated here, including the Job Corps, Youth Corps, Head Start, Upgrade, and so forth. The older children are either on parole or do not desire to enter the Job Corps; they are not eligible for the limited program of the Youth Corps. The younger children are not of an age for Head Start this year and while many have failed courses in school (1 has 13 failures out of 24 marks) they are not eligible for Upgrade because they were promoted in June. The parents are tired, weary, and beaten--they are poor. And the war goes on around them.⁶⁶

Griesmann worried that if the poor did not stand up to the local government, "the War on Poverty [would] be a monologue, rather than a dialogue."⁶⁷

Still, in 1965 Griesmann continued to support Mayor Alfred Pierce, despite his dissatisfaction with local government. Griesmann told Congress, "The city of Camden has a long way to go but it is making tremendous strides under the leadership of Mayor Alfred Pierce."

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

However, the next year Griesmann's support for the Mayor was muffled by stalled progress. The cleared land in the Centerville and Liberty Park neighborhoods in South Camden continued to be undeveloped--leaving many African Americans and Puerto Ricans with nowhere to go.⁶⁸ The Camden Housing Authority relocated the poorest families to the overcrowded, rundown slums, while newly constructed luxury apartment complexes, such as Northgate One and Two in North Camden, were occupied by high-income residents, and only half full.⁶⁹ Because the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) refused to grant mortgages for many of the homes in Camden, and because of the "white noose" the suburban realtors used to keep middle-income blacks in Camden, an area of high risk and poverty emerged.⁷⁰ As the minority population rose, urban renewal grew less promising. Business owners refused to buy property in Camden and jobs grew scarcer. From 1960 onward the value of property steadily decreased and by the mid-sixties the city housing authority deemed that over half of all the housing in Camden was unfit for habitation.⁷¹

The Camden Migration Division informed Puerto Ricans about the housing problem, but offered them little assistance.⁷² In 1966, the only official liaison between the community and the city on housing matters was the Camden branch of the Housing Information Service (HIS). The HIS was located in a run-down, one-room building, staffed by one person, Julia Robinson. Robinson was a young African American woman who believed the office was utterly inadequate and should be phased out rather than expanded. Even though discrimination was practiced

⁶⁸ "Centerville Area in Need of Redevelopment Study," Division of Planning, Department of Development and Planning, Hopeworks, Inc. (Camden, NJ), 2003.

⁶⁹ Charles Sharp testimony. "Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1967," 307; Sam Appel, *Finding the Point Again!*, 24.

⁷⁰ Gwen Simon Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator: How the Hahas Came to South Jersey*. Xlibris, 2011. Kindle Edition. Gwen Simon Gain, a fair housing field representative for South Jersey, indicates that many fair-housing advocates used the term "white noose" to describe the virtually all-white Camden suburbs.

⁷¹ Alex F. Schwartz, *Housing Policy in the United States*, 51.

⁷² "Monthly Activities Report of the Migration Division." The Center for Puerto Rican Studies. Migrant Farm Labor in NY and NJ, OGPRUS (Reel 60), Box 2748, Folder 29, November, 1966.

openly, Robinson claimed most families did not file complaints with the state because they were reluctant to go “where they are not wanted.”⁷³ According to Robinson no one had made progress in ameliorating the housing crisis; however she was aware that white ministers in Camden were trying.⁷⁴

Although Griesmann was critical of how War on Poverty programs were funded and executed, he took advantage of the newly created Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. The VISTA program was a domestic version of the Peace Corps, created by President Johnson’s Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. As part of the War on Poverty, volunteers supplemented efforts to fight poverty in low-income communities through a year of full-time service. Yet, the VISTA program, like so many War on Poverty initiatives, was underfunded and, therefore, did not fulfill its potential.

War on Poverty “architect” Sargent Shriver expected more than 25,000 VISTA applications by July 1, 1965, and to have about 2,000 volunteers in service. Yet Glenn Ferguson, who was drafted from the Peace Corps staff to direct VISTA, had fewer than 150 volunteers at work in twenty-two states only a few weeks in advance of the July 1 date, with only fifty-two in training. Griesmann complained to Congress, “A comparison of allotments that emerged from Congress makes VISTA look like a stepchild.” The community action projects were given \$235 million and the Job Corps was granted \$190.2 million, while VISTA’s allotment was \$4.5 million. Griesmann concluded, “Perhaps some bright Washington reporter will come up with a background story on the slighting of VISTA and answer the question of whether this idealistic project is being quietly doomed.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Barbara S. Williams, “Groups Hit Camden Renewal in Detailed Letter to Johnson,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ) Feb. 16, 1967, 4.

⁷⁴ Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator*, (Xlibris: 2011), Kindle Location 611. Kindle Edition.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Griesmann was not alone in his skeptical embrace of VISTA. According to Annelise Orleck:

some veteran community activists also bought into the program. Though they did not trust LBJ, they gambled that the rhetoric of maximal feasible participation could further a genuinely radical version of community control. In this, they drew on the work of veteran organizer Saul Alinsky, who in *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) had offered a model for building local ‘people’s organizations’ that would ‘precipitate the social crisis by action—by using power.’⁷⁶

Griesmann, who read Saul Alinsky’s work faithfully, opined with uncharacteristic optimism, “The War on Poverty holds for my neighbors and friends a hope, a desire, a way of life that is markedly different than we see daily.” Despite his critique, Griesmann welcomed several young volunteers to Camden in 1966. Their presence in the city invigorated his efforts.

When VISTA Carolyn Burton came to Camden in the mid-1960s upon graduating from Columbia University with a master’s degree in urban planning, her impression of the city was that it was “a horrible place” and that all the white people who were not too old had escaped.⁷⁷ When Burton signed up for VISTA, her options were to work in the South or in Camden. Burton, who earned her undergraduate degree at Cornell, was raised in Dallas, Texas in a conservative, Republican family. She found herself roommates with a “wild” black woman in a decaying row home on Broadway, shoveling coal into a furnace to stay warm in the winter. In a few years, she would be Don Griesmann’s wife.⁷⁸

The VISTAs reported to Griesmann at St. John’s Episcopal Community Center, where they planned marches and other forms of protest. On a daily basis, the group of five or six would go door to door throughout Camden to collect information about housing. The VISTAs also

⁷⁶ Annelise Orleck, “Introduction: The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” Eds. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty: A New Grass Roots History, 1964-1980* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 12.

⁷⁷ Carolyn Burton, interview by Laurie Lahey, July 21, 2010.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

changed light bulbs in tenement homes so they would be brighter and more secure.⁷⁹ The presence of these political organizers added “ferment” to the city.⁸⁰ According to a Malik Chaka: “for the people in power in Camden, Donald Griesmann [became] the devil incarnate.”⁸¹

With the assistance the VISTAs, Griesmann, who developed into an adept strategist, began a series of protests against unfair housing practices in the city. In 1966, no new public housing had been built in Camden in over ten years, despite the increasing numbers of impoverished blacks and Puerto Ricans. Mayor Pierce believed the best strategy was to relocate the poor to the suburbs, where, he argued, there would be more opportunities to find housing. Meanwhile, suburban realtors continued to turn away African American buyers.⁸²

Additionally, the housing projects that did exist were subject to *de facto* segregation, relegating blacks the most rundown buildings. Puerto Ricans were rarely admitted into public housing. In June 1966, Lionel Jiménez, an official at Camden’s Office on Puerto Rico, reported that only forty-two Puerto Rican families lived in public housing – forty of these families were in the same ramshackle building. Jiménez reported that roughly 780 Puerto Rican families were eligible for low-income housing but were not able to obtain it.⁸³ Reverend Herman Watts, an NAACP member, called the housing projects in Camden “as segregated as Georgia.”⁸⁴ In June, civil rights leaders and the Camden Housing Authority failed to reach an agreement about how to remedy this situation. Griesmann and the VISTAs organized approximately five hundred

⁷⁹ Donald Griesmann, interview by Laurie Lahey, February 2, 2011.

⁸⁰ Malik Chaka Interview by Laurie Lahey, 10 August 2010.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Rosenberg, “Fasten Your Seatbelts,” 132, 135; Malik Chaka, interview by Laurie Lahey, August 10, 2010; John P. Dwyer et al, *Our Town: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996); Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator*, (Xlibris: 2011), Kindle Locations 1963-1966. Kindle Edition.

⁸³ Donald Griesmann testimony. “Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1967 and Related Legislation Hearings,” Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, 301; “51 Pickets March in Protest on Housing,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), Jun.18, 1966.

⁸⁴ “Camden Segregation: A Matter of Choice?” *Courier-Post*. June 8, 1966.

demonstrators at City Hall, who carried signs with statements such as “Integrate Public Housing,” and “We Don’t Want Tokenism.”⁸⁵

In the summer of 1966, Griesmann educated the children at the Episcopal Center about the segregated housing situation and organized over two hundred of them in a march against it. Mayor Pierce censured Griesmann, claiming “It’s a shame and a tragedy that any adult, whether he wears a collar or not, has to seek the use of small children to fight his own battle.”⁸⁶ However, low-income housing remained rundown and scarce. And those most deeply affected by the problem remained uninspired to join Griesmann’s protests or challenge City Hall in any fashion. The city made the minimum effort to ensure the projects were technically integrated. For most of the city’s poor, the situation did not change. In August, Mayor Pierce gave his first address on civil rights since the housing protests when he spoke at a Greater South Camden Lions Club function. Pierce disregarded Griesmann and the other activists, calling them “so-called leaders.” Pierce argued the housing problem was the result of the doctrine of “separate but equal” in public housing, and that people segregate themselves along ethnic lines. He emphasized that “the courts are the place to resolve rights, not the streets.”⁸⁷

Griesmann grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in the Camden housing situation. Moreover, despite some success in organizing Camden’s citizens, Griesmann, who never wanted to be the face of the movement, wanted to involve more of the city’s poor in the protests. Thus, sensing the need for a more concerted approach to community organizing, Griesmann formed the Camden Civil Rights Ministerium (CCRM), an interracial coalition of clergy, CORE, and NAACP members with the goal of involving the community more deeply in

⁸⁵ “51 Pickets March in Housing Protest,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), Jun. 18, 1966.

⁸⁶ “Pierce Blasts the Use of Child Marchers,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), Aug. 25, 1966.

⁸⁷ Barbara S. Williams, “Civil Rights Tactics Hit by Pierce,” *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), August 3, 1966, 1.

the quest for social justice. Specifically, the group sought to, “incite, arouse, stir up, fire up an apathetic people who are poor and oppressed and deprived of their place in the sun.”⁸⁸

During the summer of 1966 the CCRM developed a better understanding of why the community was disinterested in protesting. That fall, Griesmann and Reverend William King, a state NAACP representative, warned the City Council that the movement might turn violent. Griesmann argued that “civil rights leaders abhor the use of violence, but the indications are that...There are people willing to follow a violent leader.” King followed this comment by adding that throughout the summer he had met people in Camden who no longer wanted to participate in peaceful demonstrations: “If we’d thrown bricks and bottles, they’d help us.” Griesmann recommended that the Housing Authority make some swift changes, such as adding black and Puerto Rican members to their committee, because violence was imminent.⁸⁹

Malcolm X concluded his speech on that June 1963 night in Camden by reminding the audience that peaceful protest would not bring about the change they desired:

Historically, revolutions are bloody. Oh, yes they are. We have never had a bloodless revolution or a non-violent revolution. You don’t have a revolution in which you love your enemy. You don’t have a revolution in which you are begging the systems of exploitation to let you into them.... Revolutions destroy systems... you’ve got a new generation of black people in this country who do not care anything what so ever about odds. They don’t want to hear you old Uncle Tom handkerchief heads talking about odds, no.⁹⁰

Yet, four years later in 1967, despite Malcolm’s rhetoric and the enthusiasm that greeted him, there was still no revolution in Camden. When activist Gwen Simon Gain attended a Camden NAACP rally, her observations confirmed that not much had changed:

⁸⁸ Sam Appel, *Finding the Point Again!*

⁸⁹ “Councilmen and Rights Chiefs Clash,” *Courier-Post*. September 23, 1966.

⁹⁰ Malcolm X, Audio Clip, (Camden, NJ June 30, 1963).

As usual with gatherings of this type, the meeting started late—at 4 p.m. instead of 3:30, and it ran until almost six. They led off with all of us standing to join in that stately NAACP anthem, “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing.” The words were provided on a program insert and I already knew the tune, so I was able to sing as loudly as anyone there, and I did. “Lift ev’ry voice and sing, Til earth and heaven ring, Ring with the harmonies of liberty...” A black man named Gloster Current came [to speak]...from the NAACP’s head office in New York. Toward the end of his address, Mr. Current was careful to mention the need for whites to be accepted as working partners with Negroes... He also stressed the fact that a lack of communication between blacks and whites was our main problem today in our attempts to solve America’s racial crisis. And based upon my own limited experiences gathered over my thirty-eight years, I could not agree with him more.⁹¹

While the Camden chapter of the NAACP continued to meet during the 1960s and 1970s, it did not alter its pro-integration, non-violence ideology as the community grew restless.

As these organizations failed to keep pace with the ghetto, the War on Poverty provided a framework for the community’s shared problems. In this vacuum, two Protestant ministers sketched the unlikely path to Camden’s revolution. Beginning in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, as much of the white public embraced the diversity-resisting ideas, Donald Griesmann and Sam Appel’s interracial and increasingly radical activism demonstrates vital intersections of religion and politics that undergird so much of the twentieth century.

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⁹¹ Gain, *Confessions of a Fair-Housing Agitator*, (Xlibris: 2011), Kindle Locations 2402-2409). Kindle Edition.

which considers interracial alliances in Camden, New Jersey's civil rights movement.