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"Stand on Your Feet, Black Boy!": Leon Sullivan, Black Power, Job Training, and the War on Poverty

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“Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!”
Leon Sullivan, Black Power, Job Training, and the War on Poverty

Eric Augenbraun

2009–2010 Penn Humanities Forum
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Introduction

In January of 1964, the Reverend Leon Howard Sullivan – minister at the historic Zion Baptist Church and well-known civil rights advocate – hosted the grand opening of his startup job training and adult education center in an abandoned North Philadelphia police station. Touted by some as the first black-run program of its kind, the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) was born in the midst of the raging Civil Rights struggle and at the dawn of both the Black Power era and President Johnson’s War on Poverty as Sullivan’s own answer to the pressing questions of urban poverty and unemployment. In addition to more typical manpower training courses, OIC offered classes in remedial education (reading, writing, and mathematics), grooming, speech, and, interestingly, black history.ⁱ

Sullivan was himself a fascinating figure, with an interesting political history. Born to a poor family in Jim Crow West Virginia in the early 1920s, he migrated to Harlem in the 40s to become understudy to the renowned Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr. at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. In New York, he quickly became involved in the burgeoning protest movement for civil rights spearheaded by leaders like A. Philip Randolph. Upon arriving in Philadelphia in 1950 to head the Zion Baptist Church, Sullivan secured his reputation as a champion of civil rights by leading the “selective patronage” movement against local businesses that practiced hiring discrimination. The early 1960s, however, marked a shift in his political approach to a strain of the emergent politics of Black Power that emphasized black capitalism, self-help, and individualist solutions to poverty – OIC came to embody this shift.ⁱⁱ Aided largely by federal funds from the Department of Labor and later the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) as

well as private grants from organizations such as the Ford Foundation, within ten years of opening, OIC had grown into a national operation with branches in cities across the country.

At the same time, through his position at the Zion Baptist Church, Sullivan developed a unique community investment scheme known as the “10-36 Plan.” The goal was to foster the growth of black economic power by pooling the wealth of Philadelphia’s black population and undertaking a number of economic development projects. In its heyday, the 10-36 Plan financed several of black-owned and operated residential, commercial, and industrial projects. The Plan thus serves as an illustrative example of a practical application of Black Capitalism, which attained significant popularity during the Black Power era. Blessed with a long life that spanned a key era in American history, Sullivan, moreover, gives us a window through which to examine the substance and trajectory of twentieth century black politics.

The title “Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” is also the title of a chapter of Leon Sullivan's 1969 memoir *Build Brother Build*. Described in detail in chapter one, the quote is drawn from a confrontation between the young Sullivan and a white lunch counter owner in Charleston, West Virginia. Sullivan describes the experience of being told to “stand on his feet” by the store owner after unwittingly violating the racial code of Jim Crow as an epiphanic moment in his childhood. It was then, he said, that he determined to dedicate his life to fighting discrimination and bettering his race. The phrase “Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” thus holds a poignant double meaning that both references a scarring moment in Sullivan's childhood and encapsulates the work to which he gave his life in a concise motivational phrase.

A Web of Institutions

As one of the centerpieces of President Johnson's "Great Society" – which sought to combine anti-poverty, civil rights, and social service policies with a program of liberal economic development – the War on Poverty emerged in the crucible of the 1960s as the federal government's most significant commitment to social welfare since the New Deal. The prominence of education and job training programs in the War on Poverty flowed from what had become common sense assumptions, emerging out of the post-WWII social scientific milieu, about the roots of poverty. If, as this common sense held, personal defects and a "culture of poverty" left the poor unqualified and unprepared for employment, then it followed that education for children and job training for adults could begin to correct the problems of unemployment and poverty. This narrative avoided a critique of structural inequality and American capitalism rooted in political economy and instead defined poverty as a form of individual pathology – it was not the creation of jobs that was necessary, it was the creation of individuals fit to fill them.ⁱⁱⁱ Hence, in addition to creating its own programs like VISTA, Head Start, and the Job Corps, the Office of Economic Opportunity offered financial assistance to programs like OIC, developed in response to local needs.

Owing to a similar strategic approach to solving the problems of urban poverty and racial inequality, the Ford Foundation proved to be one of the most significant financiers of groups and programs that embraced some strain of Black Power thought. As Robert L. Allen observantly noted in 1969, the Ford Foundation was "the most important, though least publicized, organization manipulating the militant black movement."^{iv} Although neither Sullivan nor his project could easily be characterized as "militant,"

Allen's remark suggests the degree to which the Ford Foundation was engaged in 1960s urban black politics. Established in 1936 by Henry Ford's son, Edsel, the foundation quickly grew into one of the world's largest philanthropic organizations and threw its weight and resources behind social scientific research and social policy. The foundation's public affairs program was developed primarily to address the problems that beset urban (often poor blacks and immigrants) populations in the post-war period. Indeed, in the midst of the tumult of the 1960s, the foundation moved to tackle the intensifying urban crisis and blacks' demands for civil rights.^v Wedded to a vision of cultural pluralism, the foundation aimed to incorporate poor blacks into American liberal democracy and capitalism by funding programs like OIC, which prioritized the "economic and educational advancement of disadvantaged minority groups."^{vi} In Philadelphia, then, Leon Sullivan, OEO, and the Ford Foundation converged around OIC. A central aim of "Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!" is to explore this relationship and to attempt to ascertain what it can tell us about the political substance of each of these individuals, organizations, and institutions.

The Black Power Tradition?

The Black Power era began in the years following the passage of the Voting Rights and the Civil Rights Acts. While the Civil Rights Movement and its strategies of interracial unity and non-violent protest had succeed in winning these significant legislative victories and bringing about the legal end of Jim Crow, a number of blacks who had been active in the movement expressed discontent with the ongoing realities of discrimination, unemployment, inequality, and poverty that many blacks still faced. Some began to advocate more radical political solutions that generally rejected the liberal interracialism

of the Civil Rights movement. The term “Black Power,” however, came to be applied to a diversity of post-segregation black political tendencies. Black Power, in fact, was comprised of a broad range of different strains, including the third-world Marxism of groups like the Black Panthers, the cultural nationalism of Ron Karenga’s US, calls for “community control” of urban institutions, black political power, and black capitalism.

There is a tendency in scholarship on the history of African American politics to view various manifestations of Black Nationalist and Black Power sensibilities throughout history as iterations of a common political orientation united in a “tradition.” This interpretive stance had led scholars such as Sterling Stuckey, Manning Marable, and William Van Deburg to define “Black Nationalism” broadly enough to include such diverse figures as David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Louis Farrakhan under the same rubric.^{vii} This transhistorical narrative assumes Black Nationalism is not bound by social, political, or economic context and, in turn, severs its link to historical specificity. Thus, figures separated by nearly two centuries can be thought to be the torchbearers of a common politics – the ways the world in which they lived shaped their politics is of less importance.

Peniel E. Joseph takes a similar interpretive approach in his recent study of Black Power in the 1960s and 70s, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2006). While it provides a useful snapshot of several central figures and organizations of the Black Power era, the book is limited by Joseph’s failure to connect the study of Black Power to an examination of its relationship to the mechanisms of state power, public policy, and other institutional forces. Black Power is presented here as an insular political phenomenon, hermetically sealed-off from developments in

American politics and currents of political thought. Moreover, his reluctance to treat the politics of his subjects to rigorous analysis at once minimizes the differences between them and reinforces perceptions about Black Power as monolithic. Rather, I argue that Leon Sullivan and OIC provide us with an excellent opportunity to explore the substance of one particular strain of Black Power through its relationship to both public and private institutions as well local politics in Philadelphia. Moreover, Sullivan provides the occasion to examine the history of his form of Black Power in relation to broader trends in American political thought and in the context of the simultaneous elaboration of other currents in Black Power thought.

“Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” coheres around several central concerns. In exploring the relationship between OIC, the OEO, and the Ford Foundation, I argue that the common assumptions about poverty, strategies for overcoming it, and conceptions of black political activity that underlaid these organizations can, in turn, explain their marriage. Furthermore, if we proceed from the view that OIC was at least in part an expression of Sullivan's notion of Black Power, the task then becomes examining the history of his political thought and situating him in the context of the eras of Civil Rights and Black Power as a node of Black Power thought.

In so doing, I argue that Sullivan's brand of corporate Black Power reflected and refracted the social, economic, and political common sense of the era. I also contend that his understanding of the status and appropriate shape of black politics as well as his own class position conditioned his understanding of Black Power and the development of OIC's program. I hope that “Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” can add to the growing body of scholarship that has detailed the engagement of the federal government (through

OEO) and the Ford Foundation with urban Black Power activists of various stripes in the 1960s. The broader purpose of “Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” then is to illustrate, first, that Black Power was hardly a monolith and, second, that far from being an insular political trend among blacks existing independent of history, the emergence of Black Power was instead contingent upon wider developments in the ideological world in which it was embedded.

In recent years, there has been a flowering of secondary historical literature on 1960s Philadelphia that has engaged Sullivan and OIC to varying degrees. Matthew J. Countryman’s excellent study, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (2006), is perhaps the most complete history of Philadelphia between 1950 and 1980 to date. As Countryman shows, as southern blacks were struggling against Jim Crow, Philadelphia became known as a northern hotbed of Civil Rights and Black Power activism. Local blacks in the city employed various strategies to challenge the myriad problems that confronted the post-war city’s sizable black population – joblessness associated with deindustrialization, substandard education, discrimination, and police brutality chief among them. While Sullivan plays an important role in Countryman’s narrative, the expansive scope of *Up South* understandably limits the depth with which he can treat Sullivan and OIC. Similarly, in Thomas Sugrue’s sweeping new study, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (2008), Sullivan is one of many interesting figures on the front lines of the Northern fight for Civil Rights. Nevertheless, both books are invaluable for gaining a sense of the context in Philadelphia and in the North more broadly in which Sullivan operated.

Guian McKee’s *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization*

in Philadelphia (2008) offers perhaps the most detailed account of OIC's early history in 1960s Philadelphia. In many ways, McKee's study builds on the work of Countryman by linking post-WWII economic developments to the jobs crisis that disproportionately affected the city's black population. Naturally, Sullivan figures heavily in McKee's account. McKee shows how OIC emerged initially as Sullivan's direct response to these local conditions and traces its efficacy in relation to other attempts to overcome unemployment while maintaining a commitment to the liberal state. As such, McKee's study is not primarily concerned with the intellectual basis of OIC in Sullivan's political thought and as an expression of the politics of corporate Black Power. Furthermore, situating OIC and Sullivan's brand of Black Power in both the broader histories of African American political development and American political thought falls somewhat outside of the scope of McKee's book.^{viii}

There is a wealth of scholarly literature that has documented the intellectual underpinnings of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Michael B. Katz's, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (1989), historicizes the notion of "the poor" and shows how perceptions of poverty as a set of heritable cultural practices led OEO strategists to devise programs that would attempt to correct these deficiencies. The Community Action Program embodied this logic, argues Katz, famously stipulating that the antipoverty programs it funded involve the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor. To involve the poor themselves in crafting solutions to poverty was to begin to break down the "culture of poverty." Allen J. Matusow's, *The Unraveling of America* (1985) includes a political history of the War on Poverty within his broader discussion of 1960s liberalism and its confrontation with the social

movements of the decade. Matusow also shows how Community Action differed from city to city depending, in large part, on the relative strength of local governments, business interests, and activist organizations.^{ix} Both studies are excellent historical accounts of the broader intellectual and political world in which Sullivan lived and are useful for understanding the ideological basis of the War on Poverty – which, early on, provided OIC with its largest source of funding.

Finally, Alice O'Connor has done pathbreaking work on the Ford Foundation's involvement in social research and policy. Like Katz, her book, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (2001), is a survey of changing views of poverty as well as public and private responses to it over the last century. Unlike Katz, however, O'Connor shows that through the 1950s and 60s, the Ford Foundation was in the vanguard of institutions attempting to address the urban crisis. Her 1996 essay, "Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight Against Poverty: The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program" shows that the programs with which the foundation experimented through the 50s and early 60s laid important groundwork for what was to follow with the War on Poverty. A recent essay by Karen Ferguson, "Organizing the Ghetto: The Ford Foundation, CORE, and White Power in the Black Power Era, 1967-1969" (2007), uses the foundation's 1967 grant to Cleveland's Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for the creation of a "Target City" – a leadership training and voter registration project – to underline common understandings of the "black community," race, and ethnic pluralism held by both groups. Although CORE could be said to have represented a different strain of Black Power than Sullivan, Ferguson's essay exemplifies what "Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!," in part, attempts

to do in finding common ideological ground between OIC and the Ford Foundation that can help explain their union.

“Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” is essentially part intellectual history, part social history, and part a history of institutions. In interrogating Sullivan’s political thought, I am indebted to the approach of Adolph Reed Jr. in *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (1997). Reed stresses the need to reconstruct the discursive circles and the broader historical context in which past figures were embedded in order to better understand their thought.^x This study also draws on the important work done in recent years by scholars of the history of black politics, Dean E. Robinson and Cedric Johnson in *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (2001) and *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (2007), respectively. They have both persuasively disentangled the substance of the politics of Black Power and placed the phenomenon within the history of black political development.

When I first conceived of this project, I initially intended to focus centrally on the relationship of OIC to its largest sources of funding. While this discussion still comprises the entirety of chapter three and the majority of the concluding section, as I explored the vast array of sources on the program and began the writing process, I found it increasingly difficult to adequately understand – much less describe – the origins and political contours of OIC without first examining Sullivan’s long history of engagement in struggles for Civil Rights and racial uplift. What began as one chapter tracing Sullivan’s personal and political history from his upbringing up to the Black Power era and his establishment of OIC in time became two chapters. Thus, chapter one follows

Sullivan from his upbringing in Jim Crow West Virginia to his stay in Harlem to his early years in Philadelphia. I argue that experiences and contacts made before his arrival in Philadelphia fundamentally shaped his political thought and subsequent political engagement, from the Selective Patronage Movement, to the 10-36 Plan, to OIC. Chapter two reads Sullivan in relationship to other prominent thinkers during the Black Power era. Despite the manifold forms Black Power took, I attempt to link the common ideological threads that ran through several manifestations of this politics, illuminating the conservative implications held therein. Moreover, I illustrate the ways Sullivan's shift from "protest to preparation" – exemplified by his establishment of OIC and the 10-36 Plan – coincided with a much broader turn in post-segregation black politics and thought. Lastly, this chapter interrogates the substance of corporate Black Power using the 10-36 Plan as a case study.

Finally, as a native Philadelphian, this subject is of great personal importance to me. I have long been interested in the history of black Philadelphia—particularly twentieth century black politics in the city. While I was only vaguely aware of Sullivan—sometimes passing Progress Plaza on my way to high school—I rediscovered him while researching an essay on the history of the Community Action Program in Philadelphia. As I became immersed in the research for this project, I was struck by the sheer number of people who, when I described my topic, could cite some personal connection to either Sullivan or one (or more) of his programs. It is clear that few figures in the history of the City of Brotherly Love can rival Sullivan in stature, yet until recently he has remained understudied in the historical literature. Therefore, it is clear to me that with an understanding of Sullivan's history we can gain a fuller appreciation for the histories of

Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia—and, perhaps, the United States at large.

Chapter One

That was my first real confrontation with bigotry, prejudice and discrimination. I stood on my feet; and at that moment as I stood there, glaring back at the big man's burning eyes, I decided that I would stand on my feet against this kind of thing as long as I lived.

—Leon Sullivan, 1969

Leon Howard Sullivan was born in Charleston, West Virginia on October 16, 1922 in a small back-alley flat. Being on the wrong side of the Mason-Dixon line, black life in Charleston was constrained by the rigid racial strictures of the Jim Crow system. In addition to the second-class social standing it afforded blacks, life under Jim Crow all but ensured them a life of economic hardship. Sullivan, who described his earliest childhood memory as “sailing a small homemade boat in a mud puddle,” was certainly no exception.^{xi} The lasting memories of the racism and economic squalor of his formative years likely motivated Sullivan’s lifelong commitment to the causes of Civil Rights and economic opportunity for blacks. Upon migrating to the north as a young man, he would come of age politically at the high point of black protest and activism in the middle of the twentieth century. In the north, Sullivan would cross paths with several luminaries of the Civil Rights era, ultimately earning himself the reputation as a stalwart of Civil Rights in both his adopted home of Philadelphia and across the United States. Moreover, the establishment of perhaps his most significant undertaking – the Opportunities Industrialization Center – at the dawn of the Black Power era in 1964, represented a practical application of Sullivan’s own unique strain of Black Power thought.

This chapter will thus trace Sullivan’s personal, political, and intellectual history from his beginnings to the founding of OIC in an effort to better understand the ideological origins of the program. In tracking Sullivan’s journey from the Jim Crow

south to the urban north, this chapter will pay particular attention to the context in which his political ideas were shaped. In 1940s Harlem, for instance, Sullivan's first stop after leaving the South, he developed important relationships with renowned Civil Rights leaders Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and A. Philip Randolph and became involved in the burgeoning northern protest movement, of which Harlem was an epicenter. This experience would have a significant impact on the subsequent development of his political thought. In situating Sullivan among other important thinkers at the time, I will attempt to make sense of his political thought as it related to that of his contemporaries. Among the questions that this chapter will attempt to answer are: Where did Sullivan's thought on strategies for achieving Civil Rights and fighting poverty fit within a web of discourse on that topic in black politics and American political thought more broadly? In what ways did Sullivan's thought overlap with or diverge from that of his contemporaries? How was Sullivan's approach to the politics of Civil Rights and anti-poverty influenced by his own class position?

Beginnings

Sullivan was raised in an impoverished black section of Charleston by his grandmother, who he credited with instilling in him both a belief in God and a sense of self-discipline. Like many children, in his youth, Sullivan was unaware of race and the vast social and economic barriers that separated Charleston's white and black residents. At the age of ten, however, he had an experience that would alert him to the injustice of segregation and sear a lasting memory into his mind. When Sullivan was in downtown Charleston visiting his mother who worked as an elevator operator, he went into a nearby drugstore to purchase a soda. Not cognizant of the strict racial code that barred blacks from sitting

at the same lunch counters as whites, Sullivan took a seat on a stool in the front of the store and was scolded by the white owner. “Black boy, stand on your feet,” he said. “You can’t sit down here.” Sullivan would later describe the impact that this experience had on him: “That was my first real confrontation with bigotry, prejudice and discrimination. I stood on my feet; and at that moment as I stood there, glaring back at the big man’s burning eyes, I decided that I would stand on my feet against this kind of thing as long as I lived.”^{xii} The ten-year-old Sullivan would thus begin a “personal crusade against racial injustice” in Charleston. Well versed in the Constitution thanks to his elementary school history class, he entered a local “Greasy Spoon” diner and sat down at the counter. Upon being confronted by the owner, Sullivan stood and recited the entire preamble. Sullivan’s one-man sit-in was a success. “Son, you can come in here and sit down and eat anytime you want to,” the owner replied. “Anybody who can remember stuff like that deserves to be treated right.”^{xiii}

Through his adolescence Sullivan experienced rapid physical growth and by the age of thirteen he was already over six feet tall. Eventually measuring in at over six feet five inches tall, his physical gifts earned him an athletic scholarship in both basketball and football at the nearby West Virginia State College. At West Virginia State – a small all-black college established in 1891 by a land-grant – Sullivan involved himself in a number of activities beyond sports, including student council, the literary society, black history groups, the student newspaper, and the John Dewey Society. He would later note the important role that schools like West Virginia State, despite substandard academic facilities, played in the development of a cadre of middle-class leadership that was central to the strategy of the emergent Civil Rights Movement: “These schools performed a miracle

of preparation for social and racial change as far as the development of American black leadership was concerned.”^{xiv} Amidst the heightened political consciousness of college, Sullivan himself became equipped for the possibility of a future devoted to the struggle for racial justice:

Always, the central theme on the campuses was opportunity for black people. That major concern prevailed in bull sessions in the dormitories, in the fraternity rooms, and wherever else students assembled to discuss problems of the day. Central to every student’s thinking at West Virginia State during my stay there was what we might do when we got out of school to help our people.^{xv}

Moreover, as we will see, this orientation towards “helping our people” – indicative of a politics of racial uplift – informed much of his political work in 1960s Philadelphia.

While in college, Sullivan also began to become more deeply involved in the black church. Having been raised by his devoutly religious grandmother but also likely sensing the possibility that a career in the clergy could raise him out of poverty, he began preaching to a youth group in a Huntington, West Virginia church. Still in college, Sullivan became friends with the young pastor of the First Baptist Church in his hometown of Charleston who acted as his scriptural mentor, ordained him, and later secured appointments at two churches for him. Although the positions paid very little (if at all), they provided him with an opportunity to sharpen his oratorical skills and establish himself within the religious black community. Finally, in his last year of college in 1943, Sullivan had a fortuitous meeting with the famed minister of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Powell, who was in West Virginia to attend a NAACP rally in Charleston, made a stop at Sullivan’s First Baptist Church where he took notice of the towering young minister. Impressed by Sullivan, Powell invited him to New York and offered to help Sullivan if he came. With

this enticing offer on the table, Sullivan applied and was accepted with a scholarship to the Union Theological Seminary, also in Harlem. Not long after, he was on a train north with “less than thirty dollars in [his] pocket” and a bag, tied with a rope, holding all of his belongings.^{xvi} Harlem, an epicenter of black culture and politics since the turn of the twentieth century, would have a profound influence on the development of his political thought.

Sullivan in New York

The Great Migration in the early decades of the twentieth century saw hundreds of thousands of southern blacks escape the social and economic oppression of Jim Crow for new employment opportunities in northern industry. Blacks resettled in a number of northern industrial cities, including major urban centers like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. For blacks in New York, Harlem emerged as a primary destination. In addition to the cultural flowering that occurred there in the 1920s, commonly known as the “Harlem Renaissance,” Harlem was also a hotbed of black radical politics and Civil Rights protest. Active in Harlem at overlapping periods were a range of political parties and organizations including the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Nation of Islam, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters among others. Most blacks that took advantage of the vastly different political possibilities afforded by the north in the period between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II could cite some contact with a number of these organizations. Blacks in Harlem were especially hard-hit by the Great Depression. Taking advantage of the economic and political tensions exacerbated by the Depression, thousands of blacks turned to political activity. Street corners, on any given day, could

turn into debate halls with members of the CP and the UNIA holding forth on the merits of socialism and the need for class solidarity versus the necessity of racial unity, respectively. It was into a Harlem undergoing a second wartime job boom with this long history of political agitation and the memory of the Depression still fresh that Sullivan stepped, a country boy, in 1943 to begin his apprenticeship under Adam Clayton Powell.

Powell assumed the pastorate of the Abyssinian Baptist Church from his father, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., in 1937. Through the depression years, Powell was deeply involved in protest politics that blended Civil Rights with economic rights. Despite his background in the church, Powell's political involvement saw him cross paths on numerous occasions with the Communist Party. After establishing a branch in Harlem in the early 1920s, the Party initially struggled to attract a sizeable black membership. However, the Party was steadfast in its commitment to fighting racism, which it viewed as central to the class struggle. The Party's 1931 defense of the Scottsboro Boys – nine young black men who were accused and convicted by an all-white jury of raping two white women on an Alabama train – dramatized this commitment to antiracism and endeared it to many blacks. Furthermore, when the Communist International enacted its Popular Front policy in 1934 – which, with the rise of fascism, reversed the U.S. Party's previous, more sectarian, approach to organizing in favor of creating broad alliances with other left-wing, labor, and middle-class liberal organizations – the Harlem branch became more deeply involved in the day-to-day politics of the neighborhood. During this high-point of the Party's influence, Powell found himself in line with the Communists on a number of issues that effected black Harlemites. Among the major struggles on which Powell found himself in coalition with the Party through the 1930s were rent strikes for

relief and housing organized by the Consolidated Tenants League and the formation of the New York Coordinating Committee for Employment (of which Powell was chairman) which, with union support, aimed to use protest to force discriminating private companies and public utilities to hire black workers facing rampant unemployment during the Depression. Powell's involvement in a 1934 boycott of Blumstein's department store, on the other hand, put a strain on his relationship with the Party. The boycott, which foreshadowed the tactics employed by Sullivan in Philadelphia nearly three decades later, sought to force the store to hire black salespeople by appealing to cross-class racial unity. The Party, meanwhile, while not opposing it, found itself at odds with the movement's strategy of pitting black workers against white workers and struggled to influence it from within. Though a lifelong Democrat, Powell's work with the Party nonetheless shaped his approach to Civil Rights strategy and tactics and sharpened his abilities as an organizer. As he would later write, Communists "fought vigorously, courageously, and persistently for the rights of the Negro people through the years of the Depression."^{xvii}

Upon Sullivan's arrival in New York, Powell helped him secure temporary employment as a coinbox collector with Bell Telephone as he got his bearings amid the hustle and bustle of the big city. Coming from a rural southern town – as so many blacks before him had – New York must have been quite overwhelming for the young Sullivan. "He was a real West Virginia mountaineer—tall and gangly and scared to death because he'd never been in the big city before," Powell recalled. "I told him, 'You look like you never put on shoes before,' but I had faith in him. People liked him. He had a very winsome personality, and the number one thing you felt about him was his integrity. I wanted to make him a preacher—a man who wouldn't be afraid of a big crowd."^{xviii}

Shortly after Sullivan's arrival and after delivering a preliminary Sunday sermon, he received Powell's seal of approval and was installed as an assistant pastor at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. In the meantime, while attending the Union Theological Seminary, Sullivan gained a firm grounding in the social gospel, which informed several of his future political endeavors and undergirded the religious wing of the Civil Rights Movement.^{xix}

By the time Sullivan arrived in Harlem, Powell had already been a member of the New York City Council for two years and had Congressional aspirations. Indeed, Sullivan assisted Powell on his successful run for the 18th district seat in the House of Representatives, which he ultimately held for twenty-six years.^{xx} At the same time, Sullivan felt the pull of the thriving black protest movement hard to resist. Sullivan attended a meeting for Randolph's March on Washington Movement that he saw advertised at the Harlem YMCA. The two developed a friendship and Sullivan became active within Randolph's political circle. Later he recalled the impact that Randolph's tutelage had on him: "It was from him that I learned much of the art of massive community organization, and he taught me the meaning of nonviolent direct action."^{xxi} By the 1940s Randolph had developed a reputation as an elder statesman in the fight against racial inequality. Born in 1889 and, like Sullivan, raised south of the Mason-Dixon line under Jim Crow, Randolph left his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida in 1911 and settled in Harlem. Intelligent and well-read, Randolph was attracted to the working-class radicalism of the Socialist Party, of which he became a member, and founded *The Messenger* magazine which merged his concerns for radical trade unionism, racial equality, and anti-imperialism. He was best known for heading the twelve-year struggle

of Pullman train car porters to receive recognition for their union, the all-black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and to negotiate a contract with the Pullman Company. Among his lasting contributions to the subsequent history of the Civil Rights Movement was his insistence on the interconnectedness of race and class – that the struggle for Civil Rights was dependent on blacks entry into the economic mainstream where institutionally grounded labor unions could lead the fight. Furthermore, his use of militant, non-violent protest contrasted with older tactics like self-help, racial uplift, and moral suasion, and provided a blueprint for a generation of young activists that came of age during the struggles of the 1950s and 60s.^{xxii}

In 1941, two years before Sullivan arrived in Harlem, Randolph was at the head of plans to organize a mass march on Washington, D.C. against employment discrimination in the armed forces and defense industries. The threat of disruption proved to be enough, as Roosevelt relented to Randolph's demands a week before the march and signed Executive Order 8802, creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Despite this victory, Randolph hoped to parlay the momentum from the potential mobilization for the march into a sustained political force with the establishment of the March on Washington Movement. Randolph laid out the aim of the movement in a 1942 speech: "Our first job then is to actually organize millions of Negroes, and build them into block systems with captains so that they may be summoned into physical motion. Without this type of organization, Negroes will never develop mass power which is the most effective weapon a minority can wield."^{xxiii} At the age of twenty-one, Sullivan was elected as the president of the movement only a short time after becoming involved in it. Within the movement, he also met and worked closely with Bayard Rustin with whom, as

we will see, later developments in his political thought shared interesting similarities and differences. Sullivan's later work in Philadelphia carried clear emblems of things learned during his time under Randolph. In particular, the emphasis of the "Selective Patronage" movement and OIC on the relationship between jobs and Civil Rights can likely be attributed, in part, to Randolph's influence. Moreover, what he saw as Randolph's style of leadership also left an impression on him. "Marcus Garvey was the pioneer preacher in America of black pride and black determination," Sullivan reflected at the height of the Black Power era, "but Mr. Randolph was the leading contemporary exponent of the philosophy of black leadership for black people."^{xxiv} Perhaps misreading the relationship of Randolph to the thousands of blacks for whom he provided leadership, by the 1960s, Sullivan had come to embrace his own position as a "race leader" and may have read into him a support for cross-class intraracial solidarity that he did not hold during his time.

Sullivan's community engagement while in New York extended well beyond the black protest movement. He took a particular interest in the issue of juvenile delinquency, which emerged after the Second World War as a topic for social scientific inquiry and public policy intervention. "With the coming of the Second World War the problem of the 'latchkey children' became acute in Harlem," wrote Sullivan. "Daddy was off to the war, or working on staggered shifts, and Mama was working too—or, if not working, often out somewhere anyway. To a large measure, that period marked the beginning of the juvenile problem on a disturbing scale in America." Through the church, Sullivan developed a program to involve Harlem gang members in athletic activities. A speech he delivered on the subject at a community rally attracted the attention of New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. "It is not juvenile delinquency that is a problem," Sullivan

proclaimed, “but adult delinquency.” LaGuardia was impressed enough by Sullivan to grant him advisory powers in recruiting black police for Harlem.^{xxv} Meanwhile, Sullivan’s concern with juvenile delinquency foreshadowed his work on the issue upon arriving in Philadelphia. Furthermore, it betrayed an individualized, anti-structural, analysis of social ills that underlaid the program of OIC.

Worried that because of his frenetic level of activity in the city he was “losing touch with God,” Sullivan and his wife Grace – who he married in 1945 – decided to leave New York. They settled in the New Jersey suburb of South Orange where Sullivan became the pastor of a small Baptist church. Over the next five years, he continued to commute to New York to complete his studies at the Union Theological Seminary and later earned a master’s degree in religion at Columbia University. Adequately humbled by his time in New Jersey, in 1950 he was “intellectually, psychologically, and most of all spiritually,...ready to move on” to Philadelphia where he remained for much of the rest of his life.^{xxvi}

Philadelphia: The Early Years

Sullivan was appointed pastor of the historic Zion Baptist Church upon his arrival in Philadelphia in 1950. Founded in 1882 as the first black Baptist church in North Philadelphia, Zion Baptist had developed a reputation for being active in the surrounding community. With one of the largest black populations in the north, Philadelphia had a long history of Civil Rights agitation prior to Sullivan’s arrival – including the presence of both liberal and radical organizations. A notable watershed moment for the city’s movement came in 1951 with the passage of a new home rule charter. In addition to granting additional power to the mayor while reducing the power of the city council, the

charter shattered the deeply entrenched patronage system by establishing a civil service board for municipal jobs. Moreover, the charter banned racial discrimination in city jobs, services, and contracts. Despite this victory, however, conditions for the vast majority of Philadelphia's blacks remained largely unchanged. Post-war deindustrialization saw a precipitous decline in the city's manufacturing economy and a shift towards service-sector work. Black unemployment rose through the 1950s as private industries refused to hire them. Working and middle class whites, meanwhile, left city limits for racially homogenous suburbs aided by exclusionary home-owner's loans and restrictive covenants as blacks remained confined to poverty stricken ghettos, especially including Zion Baptist's home of North Philadelphia.^{xxvii}

Sullivan quickly realized that he had his work cut out for him. "I had never seen so many dilapidated houses, row upon row, in my life," he wrote of his first tour of the neighborhood. "Harlem was bad enough, but North Philadelphia, where I rode that day, beat Harlem in housing decay. Buildings were deteriorating everywhere, and trash and garbage littered the streets." The sight of children lingering on street corners convinced him of the necessity for continuing his work on juvenile delinquency and the related tasks of crime prevention and fighting drug addiction.^{xxviii} His solutions to these problems continued to draw on a nascent sensibility of self-help and racial uplift that became evident in his earlier anti-delinquency work in Harlem and likely derived from the moralist approach to social justice inherent in his understanding of the social gospel.

Sullivan thus organized the Citizens Committee Against Juvenile Delinquency and Its Causes (CCAJD) in 1953 "to focus the common effort of the citizen, the police, and the court on the causes of juvenile delinquency." CCAJD divided North Philadelphia

into block organizations and held meetings in which citizens' areas of concern were identified. In particular, the CCAJD focused on maintaining homes to prevent physical decay, developing better relationships with local police, closing unruly bars (or "taprooms"), and monitoring youth. For his efforts, Sullivan earned national recognition when he won the Young Man of the Year award from the National Junior Chamber of Congress in 1955. Much like OIC, which eschewed a structural analysis of poverty for individualized solutions in the realms of training and education, CCAJD avoided a critique of the structural roots of delinquency. As historian Matthew Countryman has rightly noted, "CCAJD's analysis of juvenile delinquency in the black community drew on a long tradition of black elite anxieties about the behaviors of the black urban poor."^{xxix} This conservative stance is evidenced by the group's 1957 program, which stated that "first and foremost among the causes of Juvenile Delinquency and Crime is a breakdown of the home life." Further, it argued that "bars and taprooms [were] pulling into [our] communities that low and cheap element of our population...[whose] vulgar language and obscene conduct...corrupt the morals of our children." Hence, the CCAJD became well known for leading pickets against disorderly taprooms. Additionally, Sullivan and CCAJD believed youth crime stemmed from a lack of self-respect on the part of youth themselves. The solution, in turn, was to educate them in black history. As the 1957 program suggested, seizing on logic identical to that used later by Sullivan to justify the black history component of OIC's program, "We feel that a knowledge of Negro history by white and Negro children is vital...Without such a knowledge no group can be proud of itself and there will be an absence of respect for that group by others." Finally, as Countryman has also argued, the strategy embodied by CCAJD had more to

do with Bookerite self-help politics than it did with the more popular civil rights liberalism of the era.^{xxx} In any case, within CCAJD lied a kernel of the logic on which OIC was built.

Sullivan abdicated his position as CCAJD president in 1957 and shifted his attention to youth employment opportunities. From the basement of Zion Baptist Church he ran an employment office for black youth. Although the program enjoyed moderate success, Sullivan quickly found that the race of the boys and girls who visited his agency proved to be their biggest hindrance in gaining employment. The triumphs of liberal advocates of Civil Rights in the city before the 1950s, though significant, had not rid the city of employment discrimination in private business. In the South, meanwhile, the movement against Jim Crow had gained momentum, its leadership comprised in large part by members of the clergy. From his perch at Zion Baptist, Sullivan eagerly sought to lend his support. In April of 1957, Sullivan played host to the inaugural meeting of the Philadelphia Committee of the May 17 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. The pilgrimage was organized by Martin Luther King and A. Philip Randolph to pressure the president and congress into supporting voting rights and school desegregation. Sullivan's former colleague in the March on Washington Movement, Bayard Rustin, delivered the meeting's opening address. Rustin's speech highlighted the headway the southern movement had made, particularly with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and underscored the importance of the black church to the movement: "The dynamic, militant action of Negroes must be developed in the churches."^{xxxi} To lend solidarity to the southern lunch counter sit-ins, Sullivan participated in a string of protests against local five and ten-cent stores. It was then that he had the idea to direct the militancy of the southern movement

towards problems endemic to Philadelphia – namely, the ongoing discrimination against blacks in the city’s private industries.

In the summer of 1960, Sullivan brought together black clergy from around the city into a loose confederation called the “400 Ministers.” Their plan was to wield their collective strength as leaders among Philadelphia’s black population to force local businesses that practiced discriminatory hiring or were sluggish in hiring blacks to change their ways. “Selective Patronage” – as the campaign was called – had clear links to the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns that swept a number of northern black communities in the 30s and 40s – the legacy of which likely rubbed off on Sullivan during his time in Harlem. The 400 Ministers aimed to harness the power of Philadelphia’s black population as consumers by organizing mass boycotts of targeted businesses. To prevent the personal ambitions of the ministers from interfering with the organization’s goals, the 400 adopted an intentionally decentralized leadership structure. “There was never a formal organization,” Sullivan wrote. “No minutes were kept and there was no treasurer, no elected leader—not even a specific meeting place...Strangely, its disorganization was its greatest strength. No one had to fight about who would be boss.”^{xxxii} A rotating “priority committee” pinpointed a target – or “company for visitation” – and selected a spokesperson and a “visitation team” for recommendation to the general body. The campaign employed a strategy of gradual escalation structured around a series of deadlines. Members of the “visitation team” first attempted to contact executives of the targeted company to arrange a meeting. If the company failed to honor the request for a meeting in the allotted time, the ministers returned to their respective congregations and enacted Selective Patronage – urging the congregants to spread the

word not to purchase the boycotted company's products. Until the company agreed to the ministers' demand for a meeting and began in earnest to create the recommended number of positions for black workers, black Philadelphians continued to withhold their money.^{xxxiii}

The first target was Tasty Baking Company, maker of the ubiquitous Philadelphia snack, Tastykakes. Sullivan was appointed the spokesman of the campaign. At the time, Tasty Baking already employed a number of blacks in lower-level positions—their higher-level positions of “dignity and responsibility”, however, remained lily white. Sullivan and the 400 Ministers' demands for the company thus included hiring two black women to the clerical staff, assignment of permanent routes to black substitute “driver-salesmen,” and a commitment to hire more black “driver-salesmen”. The driver-salesman position was particularly valuable as it offered commissions on the sales that drivers were able to make to local vendors. Tasty Baking, though, proved hostile to their demands. After initial negotiations broke down in June of 1960, the 400 Ministers declared a boycott of all of the company's products. Owing to the popularity of Tastykakes as an inexpensive treat for the city's black working population and, in turn, their profitability to local corner grocery store made the campaign a true test of the ability of working and middle class Philadelphia blacks to unite in common cause. “People want to see whether the Negro community will be strong enough to stand together in a cause that we know is right,” declared one source.^{xxxiv}

Tastykake refused to submit to the Ministers' demands without a fight. In the pages of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the company offered a defense of its hiring policies. A set of ads and an article by a *Tribune* reporter who toured the Tastykake factory

underlined the range of positions blacks held in the company and reiterated their policy of “training and hiring from within, rather than employing new people.” Tastykake also enlisted the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations to investigate the legality of Selective Patronage, though CHR was unable to find any evidence of wrongdoing. Finally, aside from the black-run *Tribune*, the more widely circulated papers among the city’s white population like the *Bulletin* and the *Inquirer* carried no coverage of the ongoing boycott. Nevertheless, the 400 Ministers’ efforts to unite Philadelphia blacks were successful. Black-owned grocery stores around the city refused to sell Tastykake products and many displayed storefront signs announcing their participation in the boycott. Word of mouth was also vital to the success of Selective Patronage as churchgoing blacks recruited non-churchgoers into the movement. By August of that summer, after only two months under Selective Patronage, Tastybaking was forced to relent, meeting all of the Ministers’ demands. The 400 Ministers’ first attempt at Selective Patronage was a success.^{xxxv}

With the Tastykake victory, the 400 Ministers urged the community to be ready for additional boycotts as they continued to work towards their goal of opening Philadelphia’s private job market to blacks. Fearing similar campaigns directed at their own companies, several local businesses, when approached by the Ministers, immediately heeded their demands, thus avoiding the full wrath of Selective Patronage. In other cases, companies proved equally stubborn. During the winter following the Tastykake campaign, for example, the Ministers launched a protracted boycott of Sun Oil Company that was only resolved when they threatened national action. Indeed, as word of Selective Patronage in Philadelphia quickly spread to black populations around the

country, national action would have been a reality. Among the other notable companies targeted by the twenty-nine total Selective Patronage campaigns between 1959 and 1963 were Pepsi-Cola, Gulf Oil, Breyers Ice Cream, and the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. Sullivan later estimated that more than 2,000 jobs were opened as a direct result of the campaigns. So impressive were the Ministers' successes that selective patronage took a more central role in the strategy of the national Civil Rights Movement. In 1962, Sullivan was invited by Martin Luther King to Atlanta to brief the city's black clergy on the use of the strategy. That same year, King and Ralph Abernathy employed the strategy in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's "Operation Breadbasket."^{xxxvi}

In some ways, Selective Patronage represented a rejection of the logic of Civil Rights liberalism. Rather than embracing interracialism, the campaign presaged the Black Power era's emphasis on intraracial unity. In particular, the success of Selective Patronage was contingent on the willingness of the black working, middle, and elite classes to stand in solidarity. Strategically, as well, the movement foreshadowed some strains of Black Power in its focus on black economic strength—for example, the calls to "Buy Black" that began to sound in the mid-60s. For Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) founder Max Stanford, Selective Patronage was vindication for the view "that the black masses," writes Countryman, "not civil rights liberals, were the key to black liberation."^{xxxvii} Despite the widely-held perception that Selective Patronage represented a new stage in black political development, however, at its core it drew on a long standing trend of insider negotiation in black politics. This strain of politics, which dates back to the turn of the century and Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee machine, holds that the working black "masses" are mute and, often in dealings with white elites, require black elites to speak

on their behalf. Indeed, a staple of Selective Patronage was the negotiation with white executives on behalf of working-class blacks by the 400 Ministers. Of course, this form of elite brokerage certainly fit comfortably with Sullivan's vision of racial uplift, and characterized his politics for years to come. Finally, Selective Patronage tacitly eschewed public policy as a remedy for racial injustice. As Sullivan wrote of his initial efforts to alert public officials to the reality of hiring discrimination

Philadelphia had a Commission on Human Relations, but it seemed helpless. It had no enforcement powers. I wrote to the mayor, pleading with him to do something about the situation, but nothing happened. I asked the governor to do something about the situation, but nothing happened. I wrote to the President of the United States, urging him to do something about it, but nothing happened.^{xxxviii}

Instead of a movement directed at the state with the intent of influencing public institutions and policy, Selective Patronage directly confronted individual companies. As Sullivan discovered, this narrow focus could, in reality, only have a limited effect on addressing the structural roots of the poverty in which many black Philadelphians found themselves. OIC, then, was born as an earnest, if misguided, attempt to do the work Selective Patronage had left unfinished.

Chapter Two

The day has come when we must do more than protest—we must now also PREPARE and PRODUCE!

—Leon Sullivan, 1964

We have to get private enterprise into the ghetto. But at the same time we have to get the people of the ghetto into private enterprise—as workers, as managers, as owners.

—Richard Nixon, 1968

With the passage of the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts in the mid-1960s and the dual realities of post-War deindustrialization and white suburbanization, a number of former Civil Rights activists and thinkers unhappy with the pace and shape of reform that resulted from their efforts came to embrace the nebulous politics of Black Power. In this chapter I argue that, in the wake of the Selective Patronage movement, the creation of the adult education and manpower-training program, OIC – in particular the principles on which it was based – signified a similar shift in Sullivan’s political thought. By the mid-1960s, Sullivan, too, had adopted both the rhetoric and the logic of the Black Power era. Instead of viewing Black Power as the coherent, next logical step in the history of black political development, however, political scientist Cedric Johnson argues that it is better understood “as a historical debate over the character and address of post-Jim Crow race advancement projects.”^{xxxix} With OIC and his unique brand of Black Power, Sullivan too inserted himself into this debate.

As a politics, Black Power ran the gamut from the left wing to the right wing, while Sullivan’s amalgam of self-help, racial uplift, and black capitalism put him firmly within the movement’s right wing. Indeed, contemporaneous to the development of OIC, Sullivan, beginning with his congregation at the Zion Baptist Church in the

predominantly black North Philadelphia, embarked on a program of black investment, economic development, and property ownership – “Community Capitalism” as he later termed it. Perhaps nothing better illustrated the conservative implications of this model of Black Power than Richard Nixon’s endorsement of black capitalism during the 1968 presidential race. In the midst of the urban unrest that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Nixon’s “Bridges to Human Dignity” speeches offered support for black economic power as a solution to the impoverished plight of urban blacks: “To have human rights, people need property rights...the economic power that comes from economic power...What most of the militants are asking is to be included as owners, as entrepreneurs, to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action,” he argued, connecting the fate of blacks to their access to capital. “And this is precisely what the central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward more black ownership, for from this can flow the rest—black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and, yes, black power, in the best, the constructive sense of that often misapplied term.”^{xl} Further illustrating the rightward slant of his politics, Sullivan later reflected positively on Nixon’s presidency: “Don’t underestimate Richard Nixon,” he said. “In terms of black enterprise, he did more than any president.”^{xli} This chapter, then, will attempt to make sense of Sullivan’s node of Black Power – and the right wing of Black Power more generally – using his foray into black capitalism as a case study. I will also place Sullivan and OIC within the context of the Black Power era, reading him in relation to important strains of thought within the movement.

Although at the time Black Power was only vaguely defined, past scholarship on the phenomenon has tended to view it as monolithic, its adherents an undifferentiated

mass. Similarly, some scholarship has failed to examine its relationship to the state, public policy, and other institutions. The internal dynamics of the movement are obscured by a failure to treat Black Power politics to a rigorous analysis. While Sullivan embraced a unique form of Black Power, this chapter will examine the relationship of his politics to those of other Black Power thinkers of all stripes. Finally, in contrast to scholarly portrayals of Black Power as a hermetic politics arising independently of developments in American politics, many strains of Black Power in fact adopted the assumptions of the social science of the era. Using mainstream American social science and federal anti-poverty policy to illustrate the ways Black Power thought converged with broader currents in American political thought, I will lay the groundwork for the discussion in subsequent chapters of OIC as an expression of Sullivan's understanding of poverty and strategies for its amelioration.

Leon Sullivan and Black Power Thought

Although the Selective Patronage movement had successfully opened a large portion of the Philadelphia job market to blacks, a new problem soon arose. Many of these recently opened jobs were going unfilled due to a lack of the requisite skills among the city's poor and working class blacks, Sullivan argued. Similarly, many blacks who did obtain new jobs found themselves quickly overwhelmed and, in some cases, quickly fired. "I could see," Sullivan often wrote, "that integration without preparation was frustration." OIC was thus established in early 1964, in part, to bridge this gap in training. As chapter three illustrates more fully, OIC emerged in the context of the federal government's "War on Poverty" and drew significantly on the intellectual and financial resources of the institutions and social science associated with the era.^{xlii}

For Sullivan, OIC also represented a shift away from the militant protest of the Civil Rights Movement towards a program of self-help and economic uplift, beginning with job training and education. As he wrote in 1968:

the nature of the problem at this point, is as much economic as racial. The next great thrust, therefore, in my opinion, must be directed towards the alleviation of economic barriers that prohibit individuals from moving forward into the mainstream of national life. For we cannot expect to integrate the suburbs with relief checks. People therefore, trapped in the ghettos, have to develop, at this point, an economic capability with Skill Power and Green Power, to break through the economic barriers that surround them.^{xliii}

Lyndon B. Johnson poignantly captured the essence of this shift when, upon his 1967 visit to the Philadelphia OIC center, he declared that "...a movement born of protest [had] taken the next logical step—to preparation."^{xliv} The statement echoed Sullivan's own oft-repeated rhetorical flourish, and reflected his view that a new stage in the Civil Rights struggle had arrived.

Sullivan's shift from protest to preparation coincided with a broader shift in African American politics in the mid-1960s. A number of black Civil Rights activists unsatisfied with the results of efforts to achieve liberal integration by fighting for equal constitutional protection began to raise calls for political autonomy. This attitude was perhaps best expressed by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist Stokely Carmichael when he declared during a stop of the 1966 March Against Fear that "[w]hat we gonna start saying now is 'Black Power'." Carmichael's ascension to chairman of SNCC the year before and the subsequent expulsion of whites from the organization marked the beginning of a new orientation for the group that was once in the vanguard of the interracial southern movement for integration. Over the next several years, Black Power took an increasingly central place in black political discourse.

Activists of a wide range of ideological stripes came to apply the term to a diverse array of political tendencies and organizations encompassing the full span of the political spectrum. Left wing manifestations of Black Power included, most notably, the anti-colonial third-world Marxism of organizations such as the Black Panthers and the radical trade unionism of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The center and right wing of Black Power, meanwhile, included calls for black political power as a means for enacting racially egalitarian social democratic reforms and as an end in itself (akin to other forms of ethnic politics), control of community institutions, black capitalism and economic development, and a return to African cultural practices. Despite the diversity of political orientations subsumed under the rubric of Black Power, common ideological threads nonetheless ran through many of these trends—particularly an understanding of the need for black unity and a related acceptance of the notion of an organic black “community” defined by identical interests. While interpretations of the precise meaning of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement varied, their impact on the landscape of African American political thought cannot be denied.

The year before Carmichael’s declaration of “Black Power,” another well-known Civil Rights activist announced a similar turn in black politics. In language strikingly similar to Sullivan’s “protest to preparation” apothegm, Bayard Rustin’s 1965 *Commentary* article called for a shift “From Protest to Politics” in the post-segregation era. As discussed above, Rustin earned his cut his political teeth within the same circles as Sullivan in 1940s Harlem. A one-time member of the Communist Party and lifelong pacifist, Rustin, like Sullivan, was drawn to A. Philip Randolph and helped organize the 1941 March on Washington. In the 50s, he became involved with SCLC and the southern

protest movement, culminating in his central role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington. Stephen Steinberg has suggested that, for Rustin, the March on Washington marked the beginning of the political transformation described by “From Protest to Politics.” “[W]hile the march had all the earmarks of ‘protest,’ it actually represented the ascendancy of a new brand of ‘coalition politics,’ the antithesis of the politics of confrontation that were at the core of the black protest movement.”^{xlv} Indeed, Rustin argued, after securing de jure equality through protest, the Civil Rights Movement was next “concerned not merely with removing the barriers to all opportunity but with achieving the fact of equality.”^{xlvi} For Sullivan, the fact of equality in the post-segregation era could be achieved through job training, education, and self-help. Rustin, however, was skeptical of this view, recognizing the structural limitations of previous job training efforts. “It is a double cruelty to harangue Negro youth about education and training when we do not know what jobs will be available for them,” he continued in “From Protest to Politics.”^{xlvii} Instead, he advocated black electoral politics; the formation of an interracial coalition between blacks, labor unions, liberals, and religious groups within the Democratic Party; and elite insider negotiation. Nevertheless, Rustin’s continued espousal of interracial alliances put him at odds with many of his post-segregation era contemporaries who had come to embrace some form of Black Power.^{xlvi}

Rustin’s argument in “From Protest to Politics received an unlikely endorsement from perhaps the fiercest critic of black political praxis in the Civil Rights and Black Power eras, Harold Cruse. Cruse, best known as a polemicist and playwright, shared with Sullivan and Rustin a recognition of the inadequacy of protest in post-segregation political climate. In fact, in both his controversial 1967 opus, *The Crisis of the Negro*

Intellectual and the subsequent *Rebellion or Revolution?* (1968), Cruse rejected popular protest outright, concluding that “as long as these uprisings are sporadic, the American capitalistic welfare state will absorb them and more than that, pay for the damage in the same way the government pays for the destruction caused by hurricanes and floods. Uprisings are merely another form of extreme protest action soon to be included under the heading of natural calamities.”^{xlix} In the place of protest, Cruse, like Rustin and Sullivan, advocated his own form of conventional politics that hinged on a program of elite brokerage. Unlike Rustin’s vision of black electoral participation and Sullivan’s turn to War on Poverty-backed job training, Cruse imagined a post-segregation black politics characterized by the leadership of cultural and intellectual elites. “In advanced societies it is not the race politicians or ‘rights’ leaders who create the new ideas and the new images of life and man. That role belongs to the artists and the intellectuals of each generation,” Cruse wrote.¹ Of course, this formulation was quite vague and, as Johnson notes, Cruse offered no clear definition of “intellectual” in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.^{li}

While Rustin continued to argue against the grain of many Black Power thinkers throughout the 60s for his interracial electoral coalition, Cruse joined many of his contemporaries in accepting the need for intraracial unity. The “ethnic paradigm,” as it has been called, held that the improvement of the black race required closing ranks and emulating those ethnic groups that had successfully ascended the American economic and political ladder. Thus, one popular strain of Black Power came to closely resemble the politics of ethnic pluralism described in 1961 by political scientist Robert Dahl in *Who Governs?* For Dahl, ethnic politics represented a stage of urban political development whereby immigrant populations were assimilated into the American

mainstream. Under this arrangement, class differences took a subordinate status to ethnic similarities as ethnic politicians, in exchange for votes, conferred benefits on the basis of ethnicity. Similarly, Glazer and Moynihan argued in *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) that ethnic groups also comprised political “interest groups” that did not melt together but rather competed for political and economic power.^{lii}

Perhaps the most notable proponents of Black-Power-as-ethnic-pluralism were Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. In radical-sounding language, Carmichael and Hamilton’s *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967) recapitulates the mainstream view of ethnic politics and argues for its application by blacks. “Black Power recognizes—it must recognize—the ethnic basis of American politics as well as the power-oriented nature of American politics,” they argued. Their notion of Black Power thus rested on the premise that “*Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.* By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society.” Practically, this meant that “black people must lead and run their own organizations. Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea...that black people are able to do things themselves.”^{liii} This logic underlay the decision to expel whites from SNCC under Carmichael’s leadership, but it also dovetailed nicely with calls for “community control” that arose around this time. Frustrated with the unresponsiveness of schools, social services, and anti-poverty programs, blacks in many cities (including Philadelphia) began to demand control of these institutions to ensure that they were more sensitive to the needs of the black population. With the ongoing demobilization of the movements of the 1960s, the control of War on Poverty programs like Community Action and Model Cities

by middle-class community activists became one road to black urban public officialdom that has typified black politics since the late 60s.

Leon Sullivan was one of many Black Power advocates who embraced the logic of ethnic pluralism—often referring to the political histories of urban white ethnics (usually Irish, Jews, Italians, and Germans) as a model for blacks. “Black Power’ is actually not different from all other forms of ethnic power used around the world throughout the history of mankind,” Sullivan wrote. For him, the Jews could provide a good example:

For thousands of years Jewish Power—economic, educational, cultural and political—has moved men to respect the Jew and deal with him as an equal. Much of the hatred directed towards him is the actual outgrowth of jealousy of his being able to take so little and make so much from it and somehow always manage to end up on top. The Jew may not be loved by all—is even hated by many—but he is respected by all...He has developed and wisely used Jewish Power.

To Sullivan, the persistence of racism and inequality after the formal end of segregation was at its core a matter of respect. As long as blacks in Philadelphia and around the country toiled in poverty with broken families and a shattered community, he argued, whites would continue to harbor negative views of them. The solution was unify as a race: “It is clear to me that the survival of the black man in America, and in the world, depends upon our development of our strength—our intellectual strength, our economic strength, our political strength, our moral strength—and upon the development of a spirit of unity among our own people, concentrating on basic needs.”^{liv} OIC was seen as an attempt to foster the development of this strength.

In addition to manpower training, OIC introduced what Sullivan called the “Feeder Program.” Designed for OIC applicants believed to be in need of more basic training before admittance to the general job training program, the Feeder was cited by

one Ford Foundation staffer as “the backbone of the OIC effort.” As chapter three shows more fully, the Feeder offered courses in remedial math, reading, and writing as well as grooming, speech, hygiene, and minority history. The underlying rationale for the program shared certain features with arguments about the roots of poverty raised by both Black Power advocates and mainstream social scientists. For instance, Sullivan believed that poverty could be traced back to a lack of self-confidence and self-respect on the part of poor blacks. “You have been brainwashed for more than 100 years into believing you are inferior,” Sullivan declared in a speech to a group of OIC enrollees. “We are going to wipe that brainwashing away.”^{lv} By teaching enrollees about the historic accomplishments of African and African Americans, it was argued, this self-confidence and self-respect could be restored:

The primary aim in teaching minority history is to provide the individual with sufficient knowledge of his background to increase his pride and self-respect and develop self-reliance. It has been demonstrated by OICs throughout the country that an individual who has developed respect for himself through this kind of training in self identification has no need to hate another person anymore. A man learns something about himself in studying his people’s past.^{lvi}

Sullivan’s formulation echoed arguments emanating from the cultural nationalist corner of the Black Power movement. To groups like Ron Karenga’s US and the Nation of Islam, the black identity had been crippled by slavery. Blacks had been stripped of their African cultural practices and, in turn, their past on the other side of the Atlantic. For Karenga, the answer was an emphasis on African history, a rejection of integration, and a return to “African” cultural practices. Karenga, who is perhaps best known for inventing the holiday of Kwanzaa, developed a set of ostensibly African principles known as Kuwaida through which American blacks could reconnect with their African roots. An important corollary of this view was the notion that the black family structure

had been damaged by the experience of slavery. As a result, blacks were unable to adapt to the economic climate of the city. Sullivan was one of a number of Black Power era thinkers to rehearse this narrative: “There we were—largely with no family background to build on, because the development of the family was not encouraged during the slavery period—cut loose without moorings.”^{lvii} The prevalence of this trope in black political thought reflects the ways black power was not an insular political phenomenon but instead was influenced significantly by wider currents in the American political discourse. Future Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for example, rose to prominence in 1965 for his controversial report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, released during his tenure as Assistant Secretary of Labor, in which he arrived at a similar conclusion about the state of the black family. The black family, according to Moynihan, was mired in a self-perpetuating “tangle of pathology.” Slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing poverty had rendered the black family into a matriarchal structure. This arrangement “seriously retards the progress of the groups as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well,” Moynihan wrote.^{lviii} In effect, the Moynihan Report ascribed blacks’ poverty to a set of destructive cultural practices. Thus, it followed that what was needed was not a program aimed at the political-economic roots of poverty, but a program aimed at changing the behavior of poor people themselves.

Despite outrage over the Moynihan Report among some blacks and members of the left, a number of Black Power advocates, including Sullivan, implicitly reiterated Moynihan’s assumptions. For some, the complement of the notion that the matriarchal structure of the black family was the cause of urban poverty was to emphasize the need

for black men to assert their “manhood.” Organizations like US and the Nation of Islam, moreover, accompanied these calls for black manhood with the subjugation of women within their ranks. Even Stokely Carmichael was reported to have stated that the best position for women within SNCC was “prone.” OIC invested heavily in this gendered logic. The Feeder Program featured a course called “Male Orientation” which was intended to provide counseling for men—mostly middle or high school dropouts—returning to a classroom setting. Participants were challenged to “improve their earning capacities and to assert their masculinity as family breadwinners.”^{lix} Like the Nation of Islam, OIC appropriated a middle-class conception of family life that imagined the male as the main provider and the woman as performing primarily domestic duties in the household.

The argument that poverty was a direct result of the behavioral deficiencies of blacks themselves carried particular currency with Sullivan. Indeed, it represented the fundamental assumption at the core of the Feeder Program’s strategy. Courses like speech, grooming, and hygiene aimed to correct these behavioral shortcomings and prepare blacks to gain and maintain employment. Sullivan was hardly alone in his approach. Nathan Wright, chairman of the 1967 Newark Black Power Conference, offered a conservative picture of Black Power that combined black capitalism, ethnic pluralism, and community control. Wright joined Sullivan in attributing urban poverty and unrest to the failings of blacks: “The Root of our problem in the United States is not prejudices of the white community against the black community, it is the faulty power dynamics exercised by black people...” Further, he went on to describe poverty in similar terms to those of Moynihan: “The immediate cause of our so-called riots in white

oppression. The basic cause is pathology in the experience of black people.” For Wright, the elimination of poverty could be achieved through the “administration and control by black men of urban anti-poverty programs.”^{lx} As subsequent chapters will show, these assumptions about the roots of poverty aligned programs like OIC with federal anti-poverty efforts—namely by providing a cheap, politically expedient anti-poverty strategy that did not pose a threat to American capitalism. OIC, which sought to fight poverty by changing individuals, was ideologically congruent with the underlying theoretical and strategic imperatives of the War on Poverty. This ensured the availability to OIC of significant financial resources from a range of government, corporate, and philanthropic sources and allowed for the institutionalization of Sullivan’s brand of Black Power.

Sullivan and Black Capitalism: The Progress Movement

In addition to the lack of basic education and job skills that Sullivan recognized as a root cause of the ongoing unemployment and poverty in which many Philadelphia blacks found themselves mired in the years after the Selective Patronage movement, he also noted the historic gulf in property ownership that existed between whites and blacks. Slavery and Jim Crow had left blacks and whites on an unequal economic playing field in the capitalist marketplace, he argued: “In 1865...black men started with virtually nothing to build on. We had no inheritance, no property, no wealth, no knowledge of business, no banking resources to draw upon, and no name, and all these years we have continued in our roles largely as consumers and laborers.” Thus, by the 1960s, when there were “six million profit-making business corporations across America,” blacks held “no more than one-half of one percent (point five percent) of the business and entrepreneurial [sic] wealth of the country” despite making up twelve percent of the American population.^{lxi} In

Philadelphia, black businesses displayed many of the weaknesses that they did nationally. A 1964 Drexel Institute of Technology study showed that of the more than 4,000 businesses owned by blacks, only twenty-seven were in either wholesaling or manufacturing. Of these twenty-seven businesses, moreover, more than half were in the beauty product industry while more than 46 percent of the remaining black-owned businesses were hairdressers, barbershops, or restaurants cited by the report as being “extremely marginal in profit-making, stability, and physical conditions.”^{xii}

The solution for Sullivan lied in a program of “racial economic emancipation.” “In this need all concur—the black militant, the black moderate, and the black conservative,” he wrote, alluding to the centrality that economic questions had assumed within Black Power. However, Sullivan’s vision of “racial economic emancipation” did not rest on calls associated with the left wing of Black Power to improve the economic status of blacks by fundamentally reorganizing the capitalist system. Indeed, he was steadfast in his support for the profit system: “I believe in the enterprise system,” he stated in 1971, “but I work on that system to get out of it what I can for black people.”^{xiii} Rather, he argued for building the economic strength of blacks within the system by keeping “some of the money at home instead of seeing it all flow out, week after week, into the suburbs, making the wealthy wealthier from the earnings of black folks.” He was also careful to distance himself from nationalist strains of Black Power that sought “the creation of a black economy or black nationalization,” instead suggesting that blacks “become partners at the helm of the national economy.” Finally, Sullivan saw his engagement in black economic development as augmenting the work already being done by OIC. For the logic of OIC’s skills training approach to hold, it depended on the

availability of jobs for recent graduates. Promoting black enterprise, in turn, was seen as a method of job creation in the black community. As Sullivan wrote, “Black men must not only train for jobs but create jobs and add to the American economy.”^{lxiv}

In the summer of 1962, in a sermon delivered before his congregation at the Zion Baptist Church, Sullivan proposed a model for pooling the modest resources of fifty church members into an “investment cooperative program” to create a base of capital large enough to begin to establish black-owned businesses. Dubbed the “10-36-50 Plan,” the scheme called for these fifty congregants each to donate \$10 per month over the course of thirty-six months. Of the \$360 donated by each member at the end of the three year period, the first \$160 was placed in a not-for-profit charitable trust, called the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust, designed to provide “better housing, job training, cleaner communities, high school tutorial services,” and scholarships for Philadelphia blacks. The remaining \$200 purchased a single share of stock in the for-profit branch of the enterprise, later titled the Zion Investment Associates (ZIA). So overwhelming was the response to the program that it necessitated a name change. The “10-36-50 Plan” became simply the “10-36 Plan” (and as it expanded, the “Progress Movement”) as the first call for the program attracted 227 investors. In 1965, at the conclusion of the first three-year investment cycle, an additional 450 people signed up for the program. By 1968, 3,300 more people had subscribed, and three years later the number of subscribers had grown large enough to outpace the administrative capacities of the program, requiring a 3,000-person waiting list.^{lxv}

For the first few years, the 10-36 Plan operated strictly as a savings program, aiming to establish a firm capital base with which to eventually begin investing in

economic development projects. The first such opportunity came in 1964 when a couple from Sullivan's congregation was denied an apartment in an all-white building. The ZIA, in turn, responded by purchasing the entire building for \$75,000. "If in the future there were those who did not want us to rent an apartment because of the color of our skins," Sullivan later wrote, "we would not argue about how to get into the apartment, or run to the Commission on Human Relations for help, but would be in a position to buy the place."^{lxvi} More than just a money-making scheme, Sullivan clearly conceived of the 10-36 Plan as a continuation of the civil rights work that had been accomplished by Selective Patronage and the work that was in progress with OIC. Like the Selective Patronage movement, the 10-36 Plan did not target the state or public policy as guarantors of Civil Rights, and like OIC, it eschewed mass political mobilization and protest in its direct delivery of services to the black population.

Following the purchase of the apartment building, the 10-36 Plan turned to construction and property development. In 1965, the Zion Non-Profit broke ground in North Philadelphia on what would become a ninety-six unit, \$1-million garden-style apartment complex. Zion Gardens was built with funding from both the 10-36 Plan and a low-interest Department of Housing and Urban Development loan meant to spur the construction of middle-income housing. When it was completed in 1966, the apartment complex was the "first of its kind and size developed and owned by black people in Philadelphia's history." All ninety-six units were quickly filled and a 400-family waiting list was required. Zion Gardens again illustrated a core aim of the 10-36 Plan by providing an affordable service to the black community and a profit to program shareholders.^{lxvii}

With the success of Zion Gardens, Sullivan and the ZIA quickly began work on their next endeavor. In 1967, 10-36 Plan funds purchased a four-acre plot of land on Broad Street, the city's central thoroughfare, which had been cleared by urban renewal and was adjacent to Temple University's North Philadelphia campus. That same year, construction began on a \$1.7 million shopping center known as "Progress Plaza." Of the sixteen stores that opened with the plaza in 1968, ten of them were fully black-owned and run. However, Sullivan was able to capitalize the project, in part, with a loan from the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company that stipulated that the shopping center also lease to chain stores to provide it with long-term stability. Although it contradicted Sullivan's hope of organizing a fully black-owned commercial center, he nevertheless ensured that, in exchange for a foothold in the North Philadelphia market, these chain stores employed black management, maintained majority black staffs, and delivered a fraction of their profits to the 10-36 fund. Among the businesses that Progress Plaza initially attracted were a Bell Telephone office, a Marriott restaurant, a Florsheim shoe store, and branches of the Pennsylvania Savings Fund Society, the Mutual Life Insurance Company, and First Pennsylvania Bank. Most significantly, A&P Supermarkets signed a \$1 million, twenty-year lease to open a grocery store in the shopping center. Serving a largely poor and black North Philadelphia population that had long been without access to inexpensive groceries of high quality, the supermarket quickly proved to be Progress Plaza's central attraction and by 1974 it was listed among the chain's top five most profitable locations in the Delaware Valley area.^{lxviii}

Despite fits and starts, the shopping center was able to establish consistent profitability by the mid-1970s. Smaller, less profitable stores were replaced and

customers – as many as 35 percent of them white – were drawn from the surrounding neighborhood as well as the nearby Temple University. All the while, Progress Plaza was able to maintain at least ten black-owned stores and 150 employees. Impressed with the successes of the Progress Movement in the fields of real estate development and commerce, in 1969 the Ford Foundation, which had long maintained an association with Sullivan-related projects, granted the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust \$400,000 for the construction and development of an entrepreneurial training program at Progress Plaza. Shortly thereafter, the Foundation granted an additional \$212,000 for the creation of the National Economic Development Center. Directed by former OIC official Gus Roman, the NEDC was designed to export Sullivan’s model of black capitalism to cities across the country by developing a cadre of black business leaders.^{lxix}

The Ford Foundation’s support for these programs is unsurprising given its active engagement in urban black affairs throughout the 1960s. As historians Alice O’Connor and Karen Ferguson have shown, in the context of the post-WWII urban crisis and increasing black political unrest, the Foundation sought to direct black political participation away from what it saw as increasingly radical forms of activity while incorporating blacks into the American economic mainstream. Central to the Ford Foundation’s urban strategy, writes Ferguson, was “the creation of indigenous, grassroots leaders who could organize and control the urban black masses and with whom it could barter.” In the 1960s, this meant engaging with Black Power advocates of various stripes. In Cleveland, for example, through its Gray Areas Project, the Foundation threw its support behind the Congress of Racial Equality’s (CORE) grassroots mayoral campaign for Carl Stokes in 1967. Under the leadership of Floyd McKissick, CORE, like SNCC,

had turned to a form of Black Power that emphasized “community control” and black economic power. In Philadelphia, the Foundation’s support of OIC, NEDC, and the entrepreneurial training program served dual purposes. First, job training programs like OIC funneled poor young blacks into what was seen as constructive activities and took them off of the streets where they were seen as more likely to take part in the urban riots that swept many American cities in the 1960s. Second, in training a new class of black businesspeople, programs like NEDC met the Ford Foundation’s need to develop middle-class black leadership that did not threaten the economic status quo. Despite writing from within the paradigm of Black Power himself, by as early as 1969, activist Robert L. Allen had astutely noted the co-optive influence of the Foundation within urban black politics. “Working directly or indirectly through...national and local groups,” he wrote, “the Foundation hopes to channel and control the black liberation movement and forestall future urban revolts.”^{lxx}

Riding a wave of momentum following the successful completion of Zion Gardens and Progress Plaza, in the summer of 1968 the Progress Movement began work on what was perhaps its most ambitious undertaking. Sullivan set his sights on the creation of black-owned and operated major manufacturing firms both to address the historic absence of blacks in the field and as a direct intervention in the realm of job-creation. With the space race captivating the public imagination, he first turned to the aerospace industry. “[I]f white folks could go to the moon, black folks could too,” he said. “When the first landing on the moon came, I wanted something there that the black man had made.”^{lxxi} In April of 1968, the same month as Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination and Richard Nixon’s “Bridges to Human Dignity” speech, Sullivan met

with General Electric Missile and Space Division vice president Mark Morton to discuss the possibility of establishing an aerospace subcontracting firm. Although he was initially surprised by the proposal, Morton floated the idea to the GE executive board and just ten weeks later, the newly incorporated “Progress Aerospace Enterprises” (PAE) already had a \$2.5 million contract with GE to manufacture “electronic and mechanical component parts for complex systems” to be used by the space program. Thirty-nine-year-old Benjamin Sallard, a black former production manager for GE, was hand-chosen by Sullivan to be general manager and an abandoned North Philadelphia factory was purchased with financing from First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Co. and the ZIA to house the project. An additional \$500,000 grant was provided by the Department of Labor to train one hundred “hard core” unemployed blacks to work in the plant.^{lxxii}

That same summer, ZIA launched another manufacturing enterprise, this time in the textile industry. Progress Garment Manufacturing Company (PGM) was incorporated in August of 1968 and was based in the same factory as PAE. Initially employing sixteen employees, that number grew to one hundred within PGM’s first year of operation. The Singer Corporation provided equipment while the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union offered help in readying the plant for production. Soon, PGM had secured a contract with the Villager Corporation, “one of the largest makers of women’s garments in America,” to manufacture several hundred thousand garments.^{lxxiii}

For both firms, early signs pointed to success. In addition to its contract with Villager, PGM also inked a deal with Sears-Roebuck to produce skirts. So bright was the outlook that PGM went into business for itself. By late 1968, ZIA’s own women’s clothing line, “Ten Thirty-Six Fashions by Progress,” was inaugurated and a “Progress

Store” was opened that year to act as a retailer for the line. Meanwhile, within its first year of operation, PAE had signed deals with NASA and the Air Force to make cables and helicopter engine harnesses, respectively. By 1970, it had new contracts with such companies as Boeing, Philco-Ford, and Westinghouse. Sullivan and those involved with PAE touted their efforts as a source of self-respect for poor blacks: “People in the ghetto never believe there were enough qualified Negro People to run an aerospace company,” Benjamin Sallard declared. “So it gives them pride to see us.” Finally, meeting Sullivan’s desire for PAE and PGM to employ primarily black workers, both drew large numbers of employees from OIC training centers.^{lxxiv} In their first years of operation, the status of these ventures seemed to validate Sullivan’s vision of achieving racial uplift through black capitalism.

Problems soon arose, however. PGM was forced to halt production in 1970 due to the “loss of [its] prime customer and consultant, the effects of the overall weak market conditions and the lack of new contracts.” Despite securing several new contracts in 1971, PGM was unable to sustain profitability in the garment industry and reconstituted itself as Progress Products Company (PPC), producing commercial electronics. Both PAE and PGM were hampered by an overdependence on large individual contracts that subjected them to the vagaries of the market. General Electric, for example, in 1970 accounted for nearly 83 percent of PAE’s business. Moreover, “approximately 99% of PAE’s business [was] directly or indirectly related to government contracts.”^{lxxv} Several contradictions further haunted PAE. First, a strike by PAE workers who had organized in 1973 for representation by the Teamsters Union illustrated that the imperatives of capitalism were did not necessarily harmonize with Sullivan’s vision of harnessing

economic development for the betterment of the race as a whole. Second, as Guian McKee notes, it was increasingly difficult to reconcile PAE's many defense-related contracts with the reality of many young black men being sent to die in the dubious war in Vietnam. As losses mounted, both PAE and PPC fell into debt and, in turn, could not win new contracts. In 1980, PAE was forced to disband. ZIA lived on, albeit in a diminished capacity, but the effort ultimately fell short of Sullivan's goal.^{lxxvi}

The Progress Movement followed a long history black economic undertakings for the ostensible betterment of the race, including Isaiah Montgomery's late nineteenth-century cotton plantation in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Machine, and Marcus Garvey's nationalist investment schemes. Nor was the Progress Movement the only one of its kind in the 1960s. In New York City, a black neurosurgeon named Dr. Thomas W. Matthew founded the National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization, or "NEGRO", on nearly identical principles to the 10-36 Plan. Using investments from the black population, NEGRO established paint, chemical, and textile factories, job training programs, and other economic development ventures.^{lxxvii} It is nevertheless doubtful that replicating a system that has historically enriched the few at the expense of the many could truly better the lot of working and poor black Philadelphians. Along with OIC, the Progress Movement aptly typifies the conservative, post-Civil Rights turn in Sullivan's political thought.

Against the backdrop of riots in a number of major U.S. cities, Black Power activists of a range of different stripes came together in a pair of conferences that attempted to establish an agenda for post-segregation black politics. Ultimately the conferences in

Newark and Philadelphia in 1967 and 1968, respectively, revealed both the deep internal divides within Black Power and the conservative implications of the politics. Behind the first conference was Leon Sullivan's former mentor Adam Clayton Powell. By the mid-1960s, Powell had come to embrace the rhetoric of Black Power. In fact, Powell predated even Stokely Carmichael in his use of the term "Black Power." In a speech the congressman frequently delivered from 1965 onward, he described the substance of his version of Black Power. Despite a call for racial unity, Powell's "Black Position Paper" resembled other conservative forms of Black Power in its support for black capitalism, Democratic Party electoralism, ethnic pluralism, and self help.^{lxxviii} In 1966, Powell organized a planning meeting for the 1967 Newark Black Power Conference. He was unable to attend the Newark Conference, however, as he had been charged with corruption that same year and was forced to flee the country.

The Newark Conference came on the heels of a deadly riot that struck the city in the summer of 1967. In Powell's absence, Nathan Wright chaired the conference, which attracted leadership from more than 250 organizations, spanning the political spectrum. Among the organizations represented at the conference were the NAACP, CORE, Better Business Investors, the Revolutionary Action Movement, US, the Nation of Islam, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Urban League. As one attendee stated, "[t]he speeches, clothing and variety of visions and commitments showed that every strain of black radicalism was represented at this meeting...The entire scene was filled with a sense of angry, outraged determination, and sometimes one could sense an air of millenarian expectation."^{lxxix} Still, the conference was able to produce little in the form of a plan for concrete political action. Instead, the *Black Power Manifesto* drafted by the conference

included a disparate array of issues that reflected the difficulty of reconciling the radical and reform-oriented understandings of Black Power represented there. From the Sullivan-inspired proposal to “initiate programs to facilitate upgrading of black workers at all levels of industries by mobilizing selective buying campaigns in all black communities” to the goal of “elect[ing] 12 more black Congressmen in 1968” to “establish[ing] a guaranteed income for all people,” the document attempted to balance the concerns of all those present.^{lxxx}

The following year’s conference was held at Benjamin Franklin High School in North Philadelphia, not far from the first OIC training center. Nathan Wright again chaired the conference, and the discussion spanned a similarly wide array of topics to the 1967 conference—including sections on economics, culture, history, and politics. The section on politics proved to be the most active, with several resolutions drafted calling for the creation of a national black political party to be present “in every Black community for the development of radical social change and for the liberation and survival of Black people.” The concrete program of the party was left unspecified, however, aside from the vague call for racial unity. According to the proposal, the party would “be capable of having a mass-base of on-going activities which would seek the total empowerment of the Black community.”^{lxxxi} Nothing better illustrated the increasingly rightward tilt of Black Power than the Clairol Company’s sponsorship of the conference. As Robert Allen pointed out, invitations to the conference were printed on the company’s stationery and included a speech from the Clairol president in which he endorsed black “ownership of apartments, ownership of homes, ownership of businesses, as well as equitable treatment for all people.” Capitalism provided the true route to Black

Power, he argued: “Only business can create the economic viability for equity. And only the businessman can make equity an acceptable social pattern in this country.”^{lxxxii} Clairol’s sponsorship was likely also a strategic move as black customers comprised a large portion of the company’s profits and, as illustrated by the Drexel University report described in the above section on the Progress Movement, hairdressers represented a substantial segment of black-owned businesses in the United States.

The Black Power conferences of the 1960s revealed the full depth of the fissure in Black Power—and, to some extent, black politics more generally. By the late 60s, it had become evident that the elite-driven right wing of Black Power had emerged triumphant in the battle to determine the shape of post-segregation black politics, which in most cases resembled conventional forms of politics—brokerage, institutional access, corporate power, and electoral politics chief among them. Calls for “community control” of public services and anti-poverty programs or self-help and “black capitalism,” for example, often resulted in the emergence of a class of black elected officers and executives, respectively. For Leon Sullivan, OIC led to a foray into community capitalism and eventually his appointment to the board of General Motors. Yet, whether Black Power led to public officialdom or to the boardroom for black elites, in both cases it represented a turn away from the mobilization of the preceding two decades. In the meantime, the left wing of Black Power itself turned away from mobilization, replacing concrete social critique and mass organizing around a set of tangible goals rooted in political economy with a demand for ideological purity and a retreat to dogma.

From his beginnings in the Harlem milieu of Civil Rights protest to his turn to political quietism and self-help and job training, Sullivan provides us with one glimpse

into this story of twentieth century black politics. Furthermore, Sullivan exemplified the story of the triumphant right wing of Black Power. As the riots of the 60s shook a number of major U.S. cities, including Philadelphia, Sullivan offered a defiant alternative to the call of the era—to cries of “burn baby burn” he replied “build brother build.” In a sense, this pithily captures Sullivan’s shift from protest to job training with the establishment of OIC. OIC’s success can also help us better understand one path to the institutionalization of Black Power. OIC’s appropriation of victim blaming tropes about the roots of poverty that comprised the mainstream American commonsense and undergirded the War on Poverty garnered it significant financial support from both public and private sources. Similarly, Sullivan’s understandings of poverty and politics illustrate the ways Black Power related to broader currents in American political thought. This chapter has aimed to situate Sullivan and OIC within the history of twentieth-century black politics and thought. Subsequent chapters will more closely examine the program of OIC and its relationship to its major sources of funding.

Chapter Three

We had to be just as militant in getting our people ready for the jobs as we were in opening up the jobs for them.

—Leon Sullivan, 1969

On January 26th, 1964, just less than three weeks after President Lyndon B. Johnson declared “unconditional war on poverty in America,” Leon Sullivan declared a war on poverty of his own. Before a crowd of 8,000 Philadelphians, the first Opportunities Industrialization Center was opened in what was once an abandoned police station at 19th and Oxford streets in North Philadelphia. “[The Center] represents an important new dimension in the struggle for civil rights,” Sullivan said. “The day has come when we must do more than protest—we must now also PREPARE and PRODUCE!”^{lxxxiii} This and an oft-repeated slogan by Sullivan, “integration without preparation is frustration,” both reflected the view that while Selective Patronage had been successful in opening many jobs that were previously inaccessible to blacks, blacks did not have the requisite skills to hold those jobs.^{lxxxiv} The response to OIC was immediate. By the time of the January dedication, nearly 1,000 people (90 percent of them black) had already submitted applications for Sullivan’s unique grassroots adult education and job training center. After nearly a year of development, planning, and fundraising, the next phase of Sullivan’s effort to open Philadelphia’s job market to blacks – beginning with the Selective Patronage campaign – was finally underway.^{lxxxv}

In many ways, OIC resembled a typical manpower training program—within its first year it was offering courses in power sewing machine operation, machine tool operation, restaurant practices, sheet metal work, drafting, and electronics. By the summer of its first year, however, an influx of nearly 5,000 applicants—many of whom

lacked a high school education—necessitated expansion. Sullivan’s answer was to propose the creation of a “Feeder Program.” The Feeder implemented a system of remedial education with (among other things) basic mathematics, reading, and writing classes. In addition, it offered less conventional lessons in grooming, hygiene, and speech therapy. Perhaps the most unique facet of the Feeder Program though was its focus on minority history. With the dual goals of improving enrollees’ self-confidence and preparing them for the demands of the workplace, the Feeder quickly became OIC’s most identifiable program.^{lxxxvi} This chapter will thus examine the development and early history of OIC as the institutional expression of Sullivan’s political thought—particularly his conception of the roots of poverty and strategies for its amelioration.

The first few years of OIC were characterized by the development and perfection of the training and education programs, a constant quest for funding from a diverse array of sources, and its steady expansion across Philadelphia and later across the United States. Despite advocating a philosophy of self-help for enrollees, OIC was entirely dependent on donations and outside sources of funding. A mix of individual and corporate donations as well as larger funding grants from both public and private institutions comprised OIC’s primary base of financial support.^{lxxxvii} Specific attention will be paid in this chapter to OIC’s relationship to two of its largest sources of funding—the Ford Foundation and the Office of Economic Opportunity. Chapter 3 has discussed the overlapping ideological commitments that underlay the similar anti-poverty strategies embraced by these institutions. This chapter will continue to examine the practical, on the ground, connections between OIC and these institutions.

Finally, although it emerged and operated contemporaneously with the War on

Poverty in Philadelphia, OIC enjoyed a quite different fate than the Office of Economic Opportunity's flagship anti-poverty program, the Community Action Program. Devised as a way to give local communities the authority to fashion solutions to poverty tailored to their specific circumstances, the only requirement of the program was that it included the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor themselves. While Community Action in Philadelphia was ultimately racked by internal conflict, allegations of corruption, and utter ineffectuality, however, OIC flourished. While Community Action ended with President Johnson's term in office, OIC continued to expand through Nixon's presidency and still exists today. Despite accepting significant War on Poverty funding, OIC was able to avoid many of the problems that hampered Community Action.^{lxxxviii} How are we to make sense of this difference? What can the very different fates of these two programs illuminate about their different approaches to anti-poverty? How did the relationship of each program to City Hall influence their respective fates? Looking at CAP in relationship to OIC can give us a more complete picture of the scope and direction of anti-poverty in Philadelphia.

Founding OIC

After discovering the old 33rd district police station at 19th and Oxford, Sullivan went about securing perhaps his most significant early donation. Sullivan lobbied City Councilman Thomas McIntosh to submit a proposal to the Council to turn the station over to OIC, and in August of 1963 the proposal was accepted. The building was turned over to OIC for a symbolic sum of one dollar per year.^{lxxxix} While this was certainly a boon, it was only half the battle. Sullivan described the condition of the building – which had stood idle for four years – as "most disheartening. There were only a few windows in

the whole building and they were on the third floor. All of the window frames in the basement needed to be replaced. There was deep water everywhere and gaping holes in the floors. It was wet, dark, dirty, and dingy.” Sullivan appraised the cost of renovations at \$50,000, which was provided by an opportune anonymous donation.^{xc}

Once renovated, however, the center needed equipment on which to train enrollees. Here, local industry— including such diverse companies as Philco, General Electric, Budd, Bell Telephone, Smith, Kline and French, Gas Works, Sharpless Corporation, and IBM—came to the rescue by providing more than \$80,000 (tax deductible) worth of machinery. This early corporate support foreshadowed a key, long-standing relationship between OIC and industry. Sullivan, who during the Selective Patronage campaign represented the threat of militant protest against local corporations, now came to them with the promise of a public relations coup. Moreover, with the looming threat of urban riots, the most recent of which occurred in August of 1964, investing in OIC appeared a viable alternative. As Sullivan was fond of saying, “Some who sound the cry of “Black Power!” have their B’s mixed up. Instead of “Burn, Baby, Burn,” it should be “BUILD, BROTHER, BUILD.” Preliminary fundraising efforts also saw OIC enact its principle of “community support”. In early 1964, Sullivan launched a \$100,000 fundraiser in the local community. A group called the “Opportunities Women” raised more than half of the \$100,000 goal through small individual donations while local black-owned businesses provided the other half.^{xcii}

Nevertheless, OIC still found itself in a financial pinch in early 1964. Forced several times to use Zion Baptist Church funds to keep OIC running, Sullivan took out a loan on his home. Relief finally came in March with a timely \$200,000 grant from the

Ford Foundation—the Center’s largest single grant, and the beginning of an important relationship between the two organizations. The grant was administered through the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement (PCCA), a local Ford Foundation Grey Areas project.^{xcii} Founded in 1960, the PCCA’s aims anticipated the arguments of the Moynihan Report: “The major thrust of PCCA’s program is toward strengthening the individual and the family unit so that they might participate more fully in the life off the community.” PCCA sought to accomplish this in part by serving “as a resource for channeling funds to agencies and institutions to develop and implement social action programs in the Philadelphia community,” as well as streamlining the provision of public services, and promoting institutional change through research.^{xciii}

The council, which was comprised of a mixture of social scientists, social service employees, and city officials, came under fire from Philadelphia NAACP President Cecil B. Moore in 1963 for its alleged insensitivity to the needs and concerns of the city’s black population. Although he declined a seat on the PCCA in the next round of board appointments, Sullivan was successful in getting OIC included in the council’s next funding proposal to Ford. As Guian McKee has argued, “Such a relationship satisfied each organization’s most crucial need: OIC’s for immediate financial support and PCCA’s for legitimacy in the African American community.”^{xciv} Some in the Ford Foundation, however, had grown weary of PAAC and began to question the likelihood that it could succeed at its stated goals. Luckily, OIC found a valuable ally in Grey Areas program director Paul Ylvisaker—executive secretary to former Philadelphia mayor Joseph Clark—who stood behind Sullivan’s project and was almost single-handedly responsible for having the grant approved.^{xcv}

The Program

With a stable source of funding finally in place, OIC could at last turn its attention to the matter at hand. Even before its grand opening in January, OIC had been inundated with applications—only a fraction of which the still small program could accommodate. OIC’s first few years saw Sullivan and administrator Thomas Ritter develop a comprehensive program for recruiting, selecting, training, and placing enrollees. Upon learning of the program (usually through word-of-mouth), applicants were given a series of intake exams and interviews to determine their field of study. If accepted, students were trained for anywhere from two months to two years in the skill that most closely matched the interests and strengths as determined in the intake process—it was not unusual, however, for students to leave early in order to accept jobs as they became available. Meanwhile, the cooperation of local businesses and a staff of technical advisors were expected to ensure the availability of employment opportunities and a smooth transition into those positions for newly qualified graduates. Initial returns for the program were encouraging: of the first seventy-two OIC graduates, sixty-seven of them had been placed in jobs.^{xcvi}

In addition to the backlog of applications that had accumulated by the end of OIC’s first summer, Sullivan took note of two common problems shared by many OIC students and applicants. First, because most had only a middle-school education, they lacked the basic education necessary to gain and hold employment. Second, stemming from this lack of education, Sullivan cited a pervasive lack of self-confidence and self-respect among new OIC trainees. Thus, the “Feeder Program” was established in September of 1964 in an abandoned North Philadelphia synagogue to offer basic education and pre-vocational training to an ever-growing pool of OIC applicants. On

October 14th, before a crowd of more than 700, baseball legend Jackie Robinson gave an inspirational speech at the Feeder's first event in which he paralleled OIC to baseball, telling trainees that they were in "the spring training of life."^{xcvii}

Dubbed by Sullivan, perhaps hyperbolically, as "the first prevocational school of its kind in the history of the world," and cited by one anti-poverty official as "the backbone of the OIC effort," the Feeder became the most recognizable feature of OIC.^{xcviii} Furthermore, as Sullivan and Ritter continued to develop their "whole man" approach to job training—developing trainees' attitudes and motivation in addition to their job skills—the Feeder, naturally, took an increasingly central role in OIC's program.^{xcix} The Feeder hence became a mandatory prerequisite to entering the OIC job training program, and, depending on the enrollee's needs, could last anywhere from two weeks to three months. The core curriculum included courses in math, reading, and writing which were designed to bring trainees to an educational level at which they could complete a job training course and maintain a job after graduating. To avoid the stigma attached to remedial education and in turn begin building students' self-confidence, Sullivan euphemistically termed the courses "computational arts" and "communication skills" respectively. For Spanish-speaking students, English as a second language was also offered. Meanwhile, classes in grooming and personal hygiene emphasized the importance proper dress, physical appearance, and behavior in gaining and maintaining employment. Beyond the workplace, a course in consumer education was seen as enabling students to make better use of their earnings. Throughout their time in the Feeder Program and after their graduation, students were given supportive counseling and guidance services to ease their transition from the Feeder into vocational training

programs or jobs. Finally, the physical layout of the Feeder center was organized in such a way to encourage a positive learning experience. “All Feeder Program centers are spacious and bright,” Sullivan wrote. “Color dynamics is an important part of the OIC psychology of learning. Pastel colors are widely used to overcome the effect of drab and gloomy environments from which many trainees come.”^c

Sullivan was particularly cognizant of what he saw as a sense of inferiority and negative self-image among OIC’s black trainees. “Black people—taught all their lives “White is right; brown stick around; black, get back”—had been brainwashed into inferiority,” he wrote. “The feeling had gotten into the crevices of their minds, so that they believe it without saying anything about it. Our people had an ingrained opinion that to have brains and to accomplish something great, you had to be white.”^{ci} For Sullivan, before blacks could even enter the job training program or be productive members of the economic mainstream, this negative self-image had to be erased. Sullivan saw the Feeder as an ideal opportunity to begin this process. The Feeder’s curriculum thus included a course in minority history, with a particular focus on African American history. With this, “OIC was perhaps the first national program to institutionalize the teaching of African-American history,” Sullivan claimed. This inclusion of minority history betrayed Sullivan’s commitment to a specific strain of Black Power politics and one of the more explicit examples of how this political orientation found expression in the program of OIC. If blacks remained trapped in a cycle of poverty and devoid of economic, social, and political power because of a lack of self-confidence, the logic went, then it followed that learning of the great accomplishments of blacks throughout history would instill in them a newfound sense of pride and initiative. Sullivan described the rationale as such:

“The primary aim in teaching minority history is to provide the individual with sufficient knowledge of his background to increase his pride and self-respect and develop self-reliance.” Of course, the Feeder taught the history of all minorities— including Jewish Americans, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans—with the aim of illustrating to the mostly black and Latino enrollees of the positive role of other minority groups in American history.^{cii}

Guian McKee has rightly pointed out the conservative implications of the Feeder Program: “From one perspective,” he writes, “this emphasis on self-presentation, appearance, and workplace behavior imposed middle-class norms on the minority poor while reinforcing a prevailing cultural discourse that explained poverty as the result of personal irresponsibility.”^{ciii} Moreover, he has illuminated the ways the program overlapped with and embraced much of the logic of the Moynihan Report—particularly in its association of men obtaining jobs with an assertion of their masculinity. Lastly, he has suggested, correctly, that despite OIC’s close association with the African American church and the inherent moralism in its message of self-help, the program was a largely secular venture and did not seek to inculcate religious values in its trainees. Yet McKee’s final evaluation of the Feeder somewhat misses the mark. Although it reflected the conservative position that poverty was at least in part the result of the personal deficiencies of the poor themselves, the Feeder ultimately served to “demystify the workplace” and give white employers fewer reasons not to hire black workers.^{civ} While this is certainly true, it fails to contextualize the roles of education and training as anti-poverty strategies in the 1960s. With the increasing prevalence of Oscar Lewis’s “culture of poverty” thesis and the Moynihan Report in mainstream poverty discourse, most anti-

poverty programs—especially those associated with the War on Poverty—proceeded from the view that poverty was at its root a personal problem that required individualized solutions as opposed to a structural problem deeply embedded in the fabric of American capitalism. OIC was no exception and seized on this logic. This is not to say that the Feeder Program was not a meaningful force in many trainees’ lives, but to suggest that as the wide-scaled anti-poverty program it was intended to be, it was deeply flawed.

At the end of its first year of operation, OIC received several visits from Ford Foundation staffers seeking to evaluate the progress of the program. Their perceptions of the program provide useful insight into its perceived strengths and weaknesses and can deepen our understanding of the relationship between OIC and the Foundation. Two visits by a consultant, Clifford Campbell, yielded mixed reviews. Both reports spoke favorably of Sullivan’s leadership skills and of OIC’s high status in the community. Further, he recognized the Feeder Program as one of OIC’s most valuable contributions. In what would be a recurring problem for OIC, however, he noted that the equipment provided by industry for several of the training courses was obsolete. Not wanting to bear the costs of providing new equipment to the program but also wanting to receive the valuable tax credits for the donations, local businesses provided only old and out-of-date machinery. Unfortunately, for the purposes of training enrollees in skills applicable to the current job market, the equipment was useless. Lastly, Campbell noted Sullivan’s desire—and perhaps need—to expand the program without an adequate system for accounting in place. Campbell nevertheless suggested the Ford Foundation continue its relationship with OIC.^{cv}

A second assessment by two more analysts was much less positive. In their memo

to Gray Areas director Paul Ylvisaker following their visit, Edward Meade and Marvin Feldman came to the “conclusion that the potential for any degree of quality in vocational and technical education at OIC is remote, if not impossible. Were we to make a judgment solely on the educational grounds our recommendation would be to *get out now*.”^{cvi} Recognizing that it was on the verge of securing significant federal support, however, they understood that OIC would continue to exist regardless of the Foundation’s support and offered suggestions for reorganizing the program. While giving a favorable appraisal of the Feeder Program, they recommended that the vocational training program be scrapped and that it function as “a ‘first stop house’ for members of the Negro community needing guidance and counseling to bridge the public agencies with OIC.” Rather than continue with its unwieldy and ineffective vocational training, they proposed that the bulk of this function be turned over by Sullivan to the John F. Kennedy Center and that OIC scale back its job training to do training for a few specific, federally recognized industries.^{cvi} A later memo from Feldman to Ylvisaker reiterated the view that OIC could be an effective job training program if its scope was limited: “Training for specific industries is the real strength of OIC.”^{cvi} Ylvisaker, who had developed a cordial relationship with Sullivan, was clearly instrumental in once again securing the Ford Foundation’s support for OIC. This decision for the Foundation to maintain its association with OIC was just the beginning of a busy 1965 for Sullivan and his program.

OIC and the OEO

President Johnson’s “unconditional war on poverty” was officially put into action with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in the summer of 1964. The Office of Economic Opportunity was created to be the administrative body of the War on Poverty

and Sargent Shriver—brother-in-law of John F. Kennedy—was appointed its director. Among the programs assigned to the OEO’s purview were the Job Corps, VISTA, Head Start, and the Community Action Program. Of these sub-agencies, CAP was the largest, receiving \$300 million of the \$800 million allocated by congress for the War on Poverty.^{cix} CAP too would have the most controversial legacy of the OEO’s programs. Drawing on the programs to combat juvenile delinquency developed under the Kennedy administration, CAP encouraged the creation of local Community Action Agencies (CAA) to develop programs for fighting poverty tailored to local needs. These CAAs would then apply to the OEO for funding. Much like those of the PCCA, the basic principles of the CAAs were “to provide new services to the poor; to coordinate all federal, state, and local programs dealing with the poor; and to promote institutional change in the interests of the poor.”^{cx} Perhaps the most memorable aspect of CAP, of course, was the requirement that CAAs “be developed and administered with the maximum feasible participation of the members of the groups and residents of the areas served.”^{cx}

The precise meaning of “maximum feasible participation” became a point of serious contestation. The shape community action took in any given city depended largely upon the relative strength of the political forces operating in those cities—city government, local businesses, and grassroots organizations, for instance. In Philadelphia, Mayor Tate moved early to secure control of the city’s CAP to ensure that local civil rights organizations or black power activists could not wield it for purposes detrimental to his administration. Philadelphia was among the first cities to submit a proposal to the OEO for a CAA, indicating that Tate likely understood the program’s potential to unsettle

the political balance of power in the city. Tate assembled a hand-picked task force of local elites and public officials to draft and administer the city's War on Poverty.^{cxii} Many expressed concern with the lack of representation of the poor on the task force. "The Economic Opportunities Act has written into it the condition that there 'must be citizen participation' in the local policy making, planning and administration," wrote a reader of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. "Yet there is only one Negro on the Task Force. There seems to be no indication that Mr. Tate intends to have any other Negroes anywhere in this top policy, planning and administrative body."^{cxiii} The OEO agreed and forced Tate to restructure his plan in order to be eligible for funds.^{cxiv}

In the same month, Tate submitted an alternate proposal for the creation of the Philadelphia Anti-Poverty Action Committee (PAAC) – a board of thirty-one members of the city's business, religious, and civil rights communities including twelve "representatives of the poor" elected directly by the city's poor population. Charles Bowser, a 34-year-old black attorney, was selected by a five-person committee to be the chairman of PAAC, while Samuel Evans, a black 64-year-old concert promoter and close ally to Tate, was appointed vice-chairman.^{cxv} Citywide elections were held on May 26, 1965 for all city residents making less than \$3,000 annually to select representatives to sit on twelve twelve-person Community Action Councils located in designated "pockets of poverty." From each council, one representative was selected to sit on the PAAC. Despite a modest turnout, OEO was satisfied with the results of the election and funds began to roll in—more than six million dollars for a range of local anti-poverty programs.^{cxvi} It was not long before Evans and Bowser became the targets of criticism for attempting to limit the influence of the representatives of the poor: "The emphasis seems to be on

control rather than liberation of people in poverty areas,” said Norval Reece of Americans for Democratic Action. “We were elected as stooges,” charged CAC member Eulalia Horan. “The program is politically controlled from city hall.”^{cxvii} At the same time, activists, CAC members, and the OEO accused Sam Evans of running Community Action as a patronage machine for the city’s Democratic Party. By the summer of 1966, 118 CAC members and 142 of their relatives were employed in the anti-poverty program or city government. By dangling jobs in exchange for votes of the representatives of the poor on PAAC and in CACs as well as offering OEO funds to already existing welfare agencies sitting on PAAC, Evans was able to steer the program in precisely the direction he wanted. Over the next year, local CACs atrophied, as did the PAAC, and the OEO’s support for the Philadelphia War on Poverty waned. In the end, Philadelphia’s attempt at Community Action fell well short of its stated goal of involving the poor in developing effective anti-poverty strategies.^{cxviii}

Meanwhile, OIC continued to experience growth and success. Several large federal grants—\$452,000 from the Office of Manpower Automation and Training and \$458,000 from the Department of Labor, in particular—foreshadowed OIC’s involvement with the OEO. Then, with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, Sullivan submitted a proposal along with that of the PAAC for nearly two million dollars in OEO funding. With the six million dollar grant awarded to the city in the summer of 1965, more than \$1.7 million was awarded to OIC.^{cxix} Despite being funded under the umbrella of the Philadelphia War on Poverty, however, OIC was never swept into the fray that engulfed PAAC. Indeed, while the OEO called the PAAC staff “ineffective” and stated that “PAAC has not operated or encouraged an open community action program,”

it offered nothing but praise for OIC:

OIC is an example of an imaginative effort to mobilize community resources in the development of manpower training and employment opportunities. It is felt that OIC should be supported in its forthcoming funding requests. Certain activities currently operated or planned by OIC should programmatically be planned in close cooperation with PAAC.^{cxx}

Yet it was precisely OIC's ability to keep the PAAC at arms length that allowed for its success as PAAC floundered. Although Sullivan publicly spoke in favor of the War on Poverty and the PAAC in specific, they had little more than a symbolic relationship in practice. Furthermore, OIC's autonomy and the unity of vision of Sullivan and its directors ensured that it would remain free of the political conflicts that typified PAAC. Finally, OIC's outward rejection of the protest politics that were so central to securing the gains of the Civil Rights Movement in favor of individualized anti-poverty strategies made it uncontroversial to local business and government. Where the Community Action Program offered the faint possibility of an institutional in-road for local activists to mobilize the poor to reshape the structures of power in major urban centers, OIC served to politically demobilize the poor and leave those structures of power fully intact.

Philadelphia and Beyond: The Expansion of OIC

On July 17th, 1965, a catastrophic fire destroyed the North Philadelphia Feeder center and with it the counseling records of all the trainees to date. Fortunately for Sullivan and OIC, this would be one of only a few setbacks for the program over the next few years. By the time of the fire, plans were already in place to expand OIC to cities across the country. Within Philadelphia, meanwhile, several new OIC branches had opened to accommodate the backlog of applications and to reach corners of the city not serviced by the North Philadelphia branch. A center in West Philadelphia was made possible by a generous gift

from an anonymous Bucks County farmer who gave Sullivan the use of a seven story building in December of 1964 for the symbolic annual cost of “[o]ne slice of black bread and one cup of black coffee (without sugar)...” 1965 saw ever further expansion with the establishment of a centers in the Germantown section of the city and South Philadelphia, respectively.^{cxxi}

Also in 1965, Sullivan secured a \$50,000 grant from the Stern Family Fund to develop a plan for aiding the formation of new OIC centers in a number of different cities. Sullivan proposed the creation of the “Opportunities Extension Institute” to systematize the expansion process, particularly by “seek[ing] out and indoctrinat[ing] responsible local leaders in other communities.” After identifying interested individuals, the proposal outlined a plan for inviting them to visit the Philadelphia center to be given a step-by-step course in establishing their own programs in their respective cities.^{cxxii} Stemming from his deeply held belief in self-help, Sullivan stressed the importance of local leaders taking full ownership of their programs: “...an OIC belongs to the community that establishes it...An Opportunities Industrialization Center must grow out of a community’s own authentic leadership.”^{cxxiii} By 1968, Sullivan boasted of OIC branches in seventy-five cities across the country—everywhere from Menlo Park, California to Washington, D.C. to Seattle, Washington. The expansion of OIC to such a diverse array of cities necessitated the formation of the OIC National Institute in 1966 to coordinate between branches and to supervise the expansion process. Like the Philadelphia OIC, these new branches relied on a variety of private and public sources of funding—three federal agencies in particular, the OEO, the DOL, and the Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare, were by far the most significant contributors.^{cxxiv}

With the emergence of OIC into a national operation, so grew Sullivan's reputation. Profiles in *Reader's Digest*, *Look*, and *Ebony* as well as articles in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* introduced millions to the Reverend and his project. Immediately, the OIC office and Sullivan's mailbox were inundated with letters from around the country. Some offered words of congratulations while many wrote to lobby Sullivan to extend OIC to their cities. Two 1968 letters—one from an administrative assistant to the Ft. Lauderdale City Manager and another from State Representative Curtis Lawson of Tulsa, Oklahoma—inquiring about the possibility of opening OIC-affiliated centers in their respective cities illustrate that support for OIC was also strong within the ranks of city and state governments across the country.^{cxxv} Sullivan himself came to be seen as a savior by many poor people. Some wrote him directly with appeals for help. "Sir, I would like to become a nurse, a nurse's aid, or a dental assistant, given the opportunity to have a little profession, I would work hard and try to do my best," wrote Nester Nicholls of Barbados. "What you are doing in America to help the poor, the unemployed and the illiterate, we need that kind of help here in Barbados, but there is no one willing enough, and people like me are just left behind..."^{cxxvi} Another letter from a 27-year-old Detroit man was especially desperate: "I first met you in 1960 when I was in High School, you gave me my first job at the Phila. Yellow Cab co...I am going farther and farther away from life...You told me sir, if I ever needed your help you would help me because one day you would be in the position to help all Black or minority people..."^{cxxvii} Sullivan's most common response to such inquiries was to encourage the sender to apply for their local OIC if one existed or to refer them to similar vocational training centers if one did not.

Local businesses quickly came to value OIC as a source of well-trained black workers. As one executive said in 1966: “Support from the business community has become so great that failure of the OIC would mean almost as great disillusionment in the business community as in the Negro community. Therefore, the OIC simply cannot be allowed to fail.” At the same time, within the federal government there were rumors that OIC would be used as the prototype for the entire job training arm of the War on Poverty. In December of 1966, Robert Kennedy visited Philadelphia and toured the North Philadelphia Center. He praised OIC for “doing one of the most important jobs in the poverty program, providing job opportunities for the unemployed.”^{cxxviii} Then, just six months later, President Johnson himself made a surprise visit to the Center. “What I have seen here this morning with Reverend Sullivan is not just an institution, but a unique training program,” he said in a speech in front of the center. “I have seen men and women whose self-respect is beginning to burn inside them like a flame—like a furnace that will fire them all their lives.” He continued:

The Federal Government did not build this center. Neither business, nor labor, nor philanthropy, nor city officials built it. All of us are helping now, and I am proud of the part we are playing. But the spirit built this center—the spirit that wants to say “yes” to life, that wants to affirm the dignity of every man, whatever his origins, whatever his race or religion.

Finally, echoing Sullivan’s own aphorism, Johnson cited OIC as the next logical step of the Civil Rights movement: “...a movement born of protest has taken the next logical step—to preparation.”^{cxxix}

As we have seen, OIC was in very fundamental ways shaped by the ideological, political, and economic context of the War on Poverty, and through their close financial

relationship, the War on Poverty was, in turn, shaped by OIC. Similarly, Sullivan was shaped ideologically by the intellectual climates of both the War on Poverty and the Black Power era—OIC was the practical application of this ideological orientation. Although the War on Poverty ended not long after Johnson left office in 1969, OIC continued to grow throughout the Nixon administration—albeit under a much different funding arrangement. The concluding chapter will detail the history of OIC under the Nixon administration.

Conclusion

The Nixon administration presented a new set of challenges for Sullivan and OIC. Within the federal government, the tide had begun to turn against President Johnson's "Great Society" measures. Within the Nixon administration, discussions centered on ways to reorganize the funding and delivery of manpower services. Under the Great Society, funding for social programs was provided by federally specified categorical grants. These narrowly defined grants offered programs like OIC a considerable amount of latitude. Nixon's "New Federalism," aimed to replace categorical grants with block grants and give nearly full discretion to state and local governments in the allocation of these funds. Under his 1969 Manpower Training Act (MTA) "three-fourths of the funds would have been apportioned among the states, with the remainder used by the Department of Labor for national activities and incentive payments to states demonstrating 'exemplary performance'."^{xxx}

Although OIC's OEO, DOL, HEW tri-agency funding structure was unwieldy and Sullivan wished to streamline it, he nevertheless opposed Nixon's proposal. By placing funding decisions in the hands of state and local governments, MTA threatened to destabilize OIC, which by 1970 had branches in a number of states. That same year, Sullivan spoke before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty against Nixon's plan for decategorization and in support of an amendment to the Democrats' alternative bill that singled out OIC to receive direct federal funds. Nixon vetoed the new bill, but in July of 1971 he nonetheless "designated [OIC] a prime national contractor for the delivery of manpower services," granting it a \$32.6 million contract for the 1972 fiscal year.^{xxxi} With the contract, OIC became a truly national

organization—“OIC of America, Inc.” was established as the central administrative body of OIC centers around the country, as well as all other OIC-related programs.

Still, OIC’s federal contract was only active until 1973. Thus, in the intervening years Sullivan continued to lobby congress to extend OIC’s access to direct federal funds. Sullivan amassed an impressive, bi-partisan list of senators and congressmen to offer their support for the program including, ironically, Strom Thurmond, the staunch South Carolina segregationist known for his 1948 presidential run on the Dixiecrat ticket and his one-man 1957 filibuster of the Civil Rights Act. In 1973, moreover, Sullivan led a 5,000-person “Pilgrimage to Washington” to “put OIC on the minds and hearts of America.” These efforts failed to produce the desired legislation and in July of that year OIC’s contract with the government expired, prompting a major funding crisis for the program. Pennsylvania Senator Richard Schweiker introduced a bill, co-sponsored by thirty-two of his colleagues, to provide emergency funding for OIC. Although the bill stalled, the wide-ranging support for it influenced the shape of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) that emerged from the 1973 session of Congress.^{cxxxii}

CETA continued with the Nixon administration’s commitment to decategorizing funds for job training programs. The act, among other things, established “a program to provide comprehensive services through local prime sponsors”—in other words, state or local governments. CETA did include safeguards, however, to ensure that programs like OIC would not fall by wayside. Chief among them were provisions that “programs of demonstrated effectiveness” be funded and that “appropriate arrangements with community-based organizations serving the poverty community” be made. Although

CETA, in fact, increased OIC's funding a full \$12 million—from \$32 for the 1973 fiscal year to \$44 for 1974—the act created new difficulties for Sullivan's program. By contracting some of the functions of OIC centers to other programs, the newly created "manpower planning councils" forced many centers to abandon the "whole man" approach to job training. As Elton Jolly wrote: "We must be able to offer total services to the whole person if we are to help people. Lack of comprehensiveness hurts our accountability to people. OIC cannot hold other agencies accountable." Fortunately, thanks to the effectiveness of OIC's model, more than half of the 110 centers across the country maintained control of all stages of the training process. Another problem was the tendency of local governments to use CETA funds for political patronage hiring. Like Mayor Tate before him with Community Action funds, Mayor Frank Rizzo was accused of doing just this. Finally, by giving state and local governments more power in the delivery of manpower funds, CETA tended to undermine OIC's increasingly centralized structure.^{cxxxiii}

CETA did not bring about the end of OIC. It did, however, expose mounting instabilities in the organization. In 1976, Sullivan took an especially pessimistic view of the effect of CETA: "if the 1960s were the second reconstruction period," he stated, "the 1970s have become a second postreconstruction—an era when hope fades under the merciless onslaught of policies of benign neglect and a removal of State's rights adding up to a strategy of a hard-line against black folk."^{cxxxiv} Towards the end of the 1970s, OIC fell into a cycle of debt, while Sullivan took an increasingly hands-off role to focus on other commitments, including his position on the board at GM. In turn, OIC's connections with local businesses deteriorated resulting in dwindling placement rates.

Sullivan concluded in 1980 that OIC “got big too fast.”^{cxxxv} The same year, Ronald Reagan was elected president on a right wing, anti-government platform. With the termination of CETA, OIC was one of many casualties to Reagan’s onslaught on public funding for social programs. Although OIC lived on, it did so in an extremely diminished capacity.

Guian McKee has described Sullivan’s efforts with OIC and the Progress Movement as “embod[ying] a strain of postwar liberalism that directly addressed problems of economics, and in particular, the often devastating interaction of racial and employment issues.”^{cxxxvi} The goal of “Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!” has not been to refute McKee’s thesis. Rather, in viewing Sullivan in the context of post-segregation black politics and in relation mainstream American politics and thought, I have attempted to show the ways post-war liberalism and post-segregation black politics—particularly Black Power—overlapped and interacted.

Both OIC and Sullivan’s brand of Black Power have endured to the present day. OIC experienced sustained growth in its early years to become an international organization with dozens of branches still in operation. More importantly—and perhaps ironically given OIC’s decline under his administration—since the Reagan years, the commonsense about poor people that emerged as Sullivan was launching OIC has experienced a revival – attaining a near bi-partisan consensus in the halls of the U.S. federal government. Indeed, this commitment to a cultural and behaviorist understanding of poverty was recently reflected during Barack Obama’s campaign for the presidency. In one speech he blamed the behavior of absent black fathers for the poverty

that confronts inner-city black populations while in another he cited poor blacks' dietary choices as a root of the problem, notoriously exhorting: "I know some of y'all you got that cold Popeyes [fried chicken] out for breakfast. I know....You can't do that. Children have to have proper nutrition. That affects also how they study, how they learn in school."^{cxxxvii} At the same time, the growth of the black executive class in recent decades can be seen as the realization of Sullivan's vision of corporate Black Power – in 1971 Sullivan himself became the first black board member of General Motors. In light of these contemporary developments, it is my hope that "Stand On Your Feet, Black Boy!" has provided the adequate historical context to help us make better sense of these recent trends.

Abbreviations

CA	City Archives, Philadelphia
FF	Ford Foundation Archives
GPC	General Pamphlet Collection
MCF	Mayor's Correspondence and Files
OICAR	Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America Records
PCCAR	Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement Records
TUUA	Temple University Urban Archives

Notes

Introduction

ⁱ Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 110-117.

ⁱⁱ Leon H. Sullivan, *Build Brother Build: From Poverty to Economic Power* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith, 1969), 15-69.

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^{cxxxii} Anderson, 110-114; Strom Thurmond and John Tower to Richard M. Nixon, Jun. 27, 1973, OICAR, Acc. 688, Box 35, Folder 1, TUUA; “Senators and Congressmen who support OIC program,” OICAR, Acc. 688, Box 24, Folder 16, TUUA.

^{cxxxiii} Alan Zuckerman, “CETA – Purpose and Prospects,” OICAR, Acc. 688, Box 24, Folder 19, TUUA, 1-6; McKee, 177-179; Anderson, 110-134.

^{cxxxiv} Quoted in McKee, 177.

^{cxxxv} Quoted in *ibid.*, 204.

^{cxxxvi} *Ibid.*, 209.

^{cxxxvii} Lynn Sweet, “Obama tells Blacks: Shape up,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Feb. 29, 2008, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/sweet/819177,CST-NWS-sweet29.article>.

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