

Power! (1966-1968)

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: This country knows what power is, it knows it very well, and it knows what black power is because it deprived black people of it for 400 years. We are on the move for our liberation. We have been tired of trying to prove things to white people. We are tired of trying to explain to white people that we're not going to hurt them. We are concerned with getting the things we want, the things that we have to have to be able to function.

NARRATOR: By 1967, the Freedom Movement was changing course.

FLOYD McKISSICK: Black people seek power and they must have power to change the conditions under which they live.

NARRATOR: Across the nation, black men and women struggled for control of their lives through the ballot box, on the street, in the schools. The call for power challenged the established relationship between blacks and whites in America.

CARL STOKES: Are the people in Cleveland willing to vote for a candidate for mayor who has the best qualifications, who has the best program, who has the philosophy of government and its relationship with people, but whose skin does happen to be black?

NARRATOR: Fifteen million black Americans lived in the cities; yet in 1967, no major city had ever elected a black mayor.

Determined to break with that past, the black community in Cleveland, Ohio, launched a voter registration campaign to support Carl Stokes.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: Well, we thought a black mayor could do as well as some of the white mayors had done, and we certainly thought it would be an improvement in police/citizen relations because at that time they weren't too good. And we thought maybe he could do something about housing. We thought he would have the interest of the blacks more at heart, which the white mayors didn't seem to have particularly.

NARRATOR: Two years earlier, Carl Stokes, an Ohio state legislator, had run for mayor and lost by a narrow margin. White supporters had not supported a black candidate. Now, some were saying he might save the city from the unrest erupting in other urban areas. Cleveland had seen the fires, a violent uprising in the black neighborhood of Huff that had claimed four lives and destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses. In the Democratic primary, Ralph Loker the incumbent mayor, was Stokes' major opponent.

RALPH LOCHER: We can't solve our problem so long as we have disrespect for law, so long as we have anarchy and so long as we thumb our nose at law and order. With that in mind, this council and this administration has added 234 additional police to our force, and we've said to the hoodlum, "We're going to run you out of town and we're going to have law and order in this city."

NARRATOR: Mayor Locher sought to reassure the city there would be no repeat of the disturbances in Huff. Loker's administration was also marked by industrial decline and rising unemployment. Housing for one-third of Cleveland's residents were considered substandard. But for some, these were not the major issues of the campaign.

REPORTER: This election seems to have a lot more interest than a lot of elections in recent years. Why do you think so?

WOMAN: You know, I guess it's the racial, the racial point.

REPORTER: What is there about Loker that, you know --?

WOMAN: Well, I like what he's done and just like he said, I think he'll find the mistakes he's made and won't make them again.

REPORTER: Well, why wouldn't give Stokes a chance?

WOMAN: Well, I guess it's the idea of having a colored guy in.

CARL STOKES: The realities of being elected mayor of the city of Cleveland, which was 35 percent black at that time and 65 percent white and white, eastern European ethnics, was that you couldn't run a civil rights campaign here, you had to run a straight political in which you blurred or eliminated the racial distinctions as much as you could.

MAN: Do you feel like you're making any progress with it?

CARL STOKES: I wouldn't be out here tonight if I didn't believe that. I hope I made it with you, for instance.

WOMAN: Good luck. Good luck. I wanted to tell the gentleman in back that all of us ladies, we pick our lipsticks by color, sometimes our dresses, but we don't vote that we, we study the candidates.

CARL STOKES: I believe that.

CHARLES BUTTS: Civil rights was a movement where people believed that they could change the way people were treated. And in the Stokes campaign, while it was a political campaign, it had a candidate and became a campaign that stood for that kind of change.

NARRATOR: Cleveland was just over one-third black. Stokes needed to win white support and increase voter turnout in the black ward.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: We knew we had the votes, but we had to get them out. It's one thing to have them, but to have them just sit there. So we organized block by block.

NARRATOR: By late summer, the registration drive had added 30,000 black voters to the rolls. But with the primary only weeks away, campaign workers in the black neighborhoods found they had another battle to win.

THOMPSON GAINES: There was a certain segment of people who had this negative attitude, they felt -- This just can't be. The people just won't elect a black man.

CARL STOKES: We were in a motorcade coming down East 55th Street, and my wife Shirley and I are sitting on the back seat of the convertible. And a little black kid that was maybe eight years old, probably, came up to us as we were stopped at a traffic signal and he said, "Are you Carl Stokes?" And I said, "Yes." And he just gave a little leap in the air and ran down the street clapping his hands saying, "He's colored, he's colored, he's colored, he's colored." I thought that sort of caught a sense of pride that I felt as I went through the black areas of the city of Cleveland.

Don't vote for me because I'm a Negro, but God knows, don't vote against me because I'm a Negro. We ain't what we want to be, and Lord, we ain't what we're going to be. But great God, we sure ain't what we was, Lord.

NARRATOR: On primary election day, blacks voted in record numbers. Stokes supporters knew that victory was within reach.

CHARLES BUTTS: We went back to the campaign headquarters but it was a very difficult job even getting close to it. The campaign headquarters that I had opened months before as an empty, barren place was now just surrounded by people far out into the street, and there was dancing in the street on Superior Avenue.

NARRATOR: Stokes' primary victory was clear cut; 96 percent support in the black community and 52 percent support city-wide. But the campaign was far from over.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: We had stressed so much that you must vote for Carl in the primary and you won't get a second chance. Now, if you don't put him on the ballot, you can forget the whole deal. So they went out and voted for him, I think that was October the 3rd. Okay, we said, "Now, we got to get them back to the polls again November 7th." So we had telephone banks going and we would call them and we would visit them, we'd have the block captains go see them, the block supervisors. And they'd tell us, "Already voted for him." We said, "Oh my God, we got to do a voter education campaign." They said, "Yes, but you just put him on the ticket, you've got to go back again and vote to be sure that he's the mayor." And that was a job.

WOMAN AT CHURCH RALLY: We got to get out and knock on these doors. We got to bring the ones that never get out and never think about what is going to become of the city. That's a few of us have to get out and bring the ... (inaudible) committee of one and get the vote out for Carl Stokes, and then we can sing, "We're Going to Walk Together, Children, We're Going to ... (inaudible) Children," and we are going to have our mayor down there that's going to reach for everybody's children. Let's go on and work for Carl Stokes.

NARRATOR: In Cleveland, 80 percent of the voters were Democrats. Winning the Democratic primary usually meant certain election. But white voters were moving to the Republican candidate, Seth Taft.

SETH TAFT: So right after the primary, we just had thousands of people marching into our headquarters saying, "We want to campaign for you, we think you're the great guy." They'd never heard of me before. So it made a very uncomfortable situation, I can assure you, when a whole batch of people rush into your headquarters and want to work in your campaign when you don't like their motive. We fired a whole batch of them that went out and campaigned saying, "Hey, you wouldn't want a black mayor of this city, would you?" And we got rid of everybody we could of that sort. Frankly, both of us ran, I think, a very much affirmative, non-rationally oriented campaign, but the racial issue was like one postage stamp thickness below the surface.

NARRATOR: Stokes brought the issue into the open during a candidates debate at a white, west side high school.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: Well, there were very few blacks over there to start out with, I think just a handful of us from the campaign. And blacks didn't go on the west side too much. I mean, they never did feel too welcome. And Stokes introduced the matter of race into the campaign.

CARL STOKES: Well, I am going to be brutally frank with you, and equally frank with Seth Taft. The personal analysis of Seth Taft is that Seth Taft may win in the November 7th election, but only for one reason. And that reason is that his skin happens to be white.

SETH TAFT: The whole place went kabooey, you couldn't hear a thing for five minutes. And Carl was trying to say, "Hey, hey, hey," to get attention and so forth, but he lost the audience. Now, that audience was a west side audience and it was 90 percent white.

CARL STOKES: Seth himself has attempted to bypass this so-called black-white issue. But in practically every public utterance he has made during this campaign, he not so subtly points out that, "Carl Stokes has more experience than Seth Taft at being a Negro," which is true. And he goes on to say that, "Seth Taft has had more experience at being white." Well now, if this is not some kind of subtle appeal, then why continually bring it up?

SETH TAFT: Well, well, well.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: Yeah, I guess it took Seth quite by surprise, and he said, "Well, well, well. I guess if you don't vote for Carl Stokes you're a racist," and our hearts just sank because that was his very best remark of the whole night. And I'm sure that by Carl introducing this into the campaign caught him by surprise, but he certainly rose to the occasion, you can believe that. And it scared us to death.

SETH TAFT: It seems that the race issue is with us. Now it appears that if I say something on this subject, it's racism. If Carl Stokes says something about it, it's fair play.

NARRATOR: The debate was a turning point. Opinion polls showed large numbers of undecided white voters moving to Taft. With 15 days left to campaign, Taft reached out to the white west side.

SETH TAFT: Hello there, sir. I'm Seth Taft, how are you?

POLLSTER: For whom did you intend to vote for?

WOMAN: Taft.

POLLSTER: What do you feel the major political issue is? Race, crime, urban renewal?

WOMAN: I'd say crime.

POLLSTER: Crime?

SLOVAK MAN FOR TAFT: And I want you to know that all the Slovak people are for Seth Taft for mayor in this town, and this is the way they say it in Slovak. (speaking Slovakian)

NARRATOR: Stokes struggled to hold on to his white support, but as he continued to slip in the polls, he returned to the black community to make his appeal.

CARL STOKES: The thing upon which I have depended has been that if you show people that you have the qualification, that then you're not going to be penalized just because you happen to be a Negro.

WOMAN FOR STOKES: Mr. Stokes, he knows more about what we need, he can do more for us, and he's going to do it. And I think he's going to get it. Because we have worked awfully hard.

THOMPSON GAINES: We never gave up hope because I guess we were very loose in this endeavor because Carl B. Stokes had brought more unity amongst the people of Cleveland than I had ever witnessed. And losing really wasn't part of my thought at the time.

SETH TAFT: We were ahead in what had come in so far, and so the guys were getting me practiced up on an acceptance speech, or whatever we might call it, and then somebody came in with a list of what precincts had not reported. And as soon as I saw that, it was all over because the precincts that hadn't been reported at that moment were precincts in the black community.

NARRATOR: At five a.m., the final tally was announced. By a narrow margin, Carl Stokes had been elected mayor of America's 10th largest city.

REPORTER: How's it feel?

CARL STOKES: It's a wonderful moment. Never has one man owed so much to so many. Those of us who are Polish, Hungarian, Croatian, Romanian, Negroes, German, Irish, Jewish -- Yeah! Yes, sir, and I can find no more fitting way to end this appeal by saying to all of you in the most serious and in the most meaningful way that I can, that truly never before have I ever known the full meaning of the words God bless America. Thanks a lot.

GERALDINE WILLIAMS: Oh yes, it was a first. We had done something that hadn't been done any place in the country before. And since folks laughed at us in '65 and we pulled it off in '67, I guess we felt pretty smug about it. Yeah, we were very happy about it. And we said if it can be done here, it can be done in other places.

NARRATOR: In Cleveland, the power of the vote had put a black man in charge of city government. Two months later Gary, Indiana, inaugurated its first black mayor, Richard Hatcher. In Oakland, California, the search for power began on the streets. Blacks had little say in how their community was run; in particular, many questioned the role of the police.

HUEY NEWTON: The police throughout the black communities in the country were really the government. We had more contact with the police than we did the city council. The police were universally disliked.

NARRATOR: The size of the mostly white police force were increasing, so were complaints of police brutality. Influenced by freedom struggles in the South and in third world nations, in 1966, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, a symbol taken from a Lowndes County, Alabama, political organization. Armed with law books and with guns, the Black Panthers monitored the actions of the police in the black community.

BOBBY SEALE: I remember one of these first events when we got out of the car. We saw a policeman making an arrest of some kind, about 20 or 30 people in the community standing to the side watching. And the black folks, one of them said, "Hey, who are these people? Hey man, these guys are -- Hey man, I'm going to move out of here, these guys got guns and stuff like that."

RICHARD JENSEN: They were out looking at what the police were doing. We had officers stopping a car, and then we would have a carload full of these Black Panther people pull up behind them and watch them and see what they were doing. They were looking at what the police were doing.

HUEY NEWTON: We would follow the police around, and when the police would arrest or detain someone, we'd read their rights to them. And it came down to some point when the policemen says, "What are you doing with those guys?" And Huey says, "Well, we got to defend ourselves and to observe you and the police." "You have no right to observe me," and Huey was all this law -- Because he'd been in night law school at the time. "California Supreme Court ruling states that everyone has the right to observe a police officer carrying out his duty as long as they stand a reasonable distance away, and a reasonable distance was constituted in that particular California Supreme Court ruling as eight to ten feet. I'm standing approximately 22 feet from you, I will observe you carrying out your duties whether you like it or not." And the black community is saying, "Well, go get on and tell it."

NARRATOR: The boldness of the Panther actions attracted young blacks, many in their teens. Carrying loaded firearms in public was a well protected legal right in California. But with the emergence of the Black Panthers, state officials introduced legislation to outlaw carrying loaded firearms within city limits. May 1967, in protest the Panthers traveled to Sacramento, the state capital.

BOBBY SEALE: We arrived there, all these black men and women, 24 males and 6 females, with guns and Ronald Reagan, then the governor, was on the lawn with 200 future leaders of America, you know, 12 and 13 and 14 year old kids. And these kids started this session on the lawn and coming to see us. And these young white kids thought we were a gun club.

NARRATOR: Knowing the media would be there, the group of men and women then entered the capitol building.

REPORTER: They're heavily armed, whether their weapons are loaded or not, nobody seems to know.

PANTHER: Wait a minute. Am I under arrest? Am I under arrest? Am I under arrest? Take your hands off me if I'm not under arrest. If I'm under arrest, I'll come, if I'm not don't put your hands on me. Is this the way the racist government works? Don't let a man exercise his constitutional right? I'd like to make a statement now with this respect. Statement of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. On the ... (inaudible) now pending before the California legislature, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense calls upon the American people in general and the black people in particular, to take full note of the racist California legislature which is now considering legislation aimed at keeping the black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder and repression of black people.

NARRATOR: A nation that had grown used to the nonviolent civil rights movement was now confronted with new images of black protest. Later, at a Sacramento service station, news cameras documented the continuing debate over law and gun.

PANTHER: Ain't no sawed off, that's a ride shotgun, just like yours.

BOBBY HUTTON: Do you all know the constitutional rights?

POLICE OFFICER: Sure we do. We're well aware of the constitutional right --

BOBBY HUTTON: You have no right to take my gun away from me. You breakin' the constitutional rights.

REPORTER: The pamphlet says that the Black Panther Party for Self Defense calls on the American people in general to take careful note of the racist California legislature. Why do you believe the legislature is racist?

EMORY DOUGLAS: Don't you know? You're a part of it and obviously this is a white system. This is obviously where we at.

REPORTER: Do you believe everything that's in that pamphlet?

EMORY DOUGLAS: The pamphlet speaks for itself.

It was like being a part of a movement that had seen on TV and now being able to participate and share that movement. When you heard talk about Malcolm, seen Malcolm on TV at that time, you had heard and talked about Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown and SNCC and what have you, and all the different things were happening. And to become a part of a movement that had encompassed all these different concepts and ideals in its own creative way, it brought a sense of pride. But there's also -- There was the doubts and fear of whether you were going to survive or exist, but which became a part of your makeup and you went on, took care of business the way you had to.

NARRATOR: The Panthers had not violated California gun law. They were charged instead with disturbing the peace. Six Panthers, including Bobby Seale, were convicted.

CHARLES O'BRIEN: Well, the Chief Deputy Attorney General, we'd had -- I'd had experience in the Department of Justice in the State of California, had experience in the 1960s prior to this time, with a variety of nut groups, both extreme left and extreme right, who were running around with guns thinking they could solve the problems of California and the world through direct ... (inaudible) and action. And we were and had been well informed and in some cases had surveillance upon extreme groups that carried weapons. When these characters came along, we thought they were another irritating part of the bouillabaisse that was starting to bubble all over California. We needed them like a severe case of bad disease.

NARRATOR: The Black Panther Party style and dramatic actions captured the attention of the media, yet the Panthers often disagreed with the way they were portrayed.

BOBBY SEALE: Examiner made a report back here in last Sunday's paper that we were anti-white, that we hold no bones, this is a quote, "hold no bones about being anti-white." We insist this is a bold faced lie. We don't hate nobody because of their color, we hate oppression. We hate murder of black people in our communities. We hate the gross unemployment that exists in our communities. We hate black men being taken off into the military service to be fighting for the racist, decadent American promising us freedom.

NARRATOR: To present their story and their program for social change, the Black Panthers created a national newspaper. Language and art were important tools of the new party.

HUEY NEWTON: I knew that images had to be changed. I know sociologically that words, the power of the word, words stigmatize people and we felt that the police needed the label, a label other than that fear image that they carried in the community. So we used the pig as a rather low lived animal in order to identify the police and it worked.

NARRATOR: Some feared the reaction that the Panther stance might provoke.

EMORY DOUGLAS: My parents or the neighbors were kind of reluctant, kind of standoffish in their attitudes towards the Black Panther Party. Because here you had a new dynamic kind of organization coming out doing things that never had been done in the history of this country before. Carrying guns, standing up to the police, standing up to the power structure.

NARRATOR: Eldridge Cleaver, who had gained fame from his writings in prison, was the chief spokesman for the party.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER: And we feel that the police must be brought under control by any means necessary, including through force of arms. We have never bit our tongue about that, we say it now loud and clear. We will always say it, we're not afraid to say it, that these racist Gestapo pigs have to stop brutalizing our community or we're going to take up guns, we're going to drive them out.

RICHARD JENSEN: We were advised by our sergeants and lieutenants and captains that the Panthers were armed and violent and were going to be aggressive in their behavior towards us. We were advised to be aware of that.

NARRATOR: As the Black Panther Party grew, so did tensions with police. In October of 1967, a year after the party's formation, Huey Newton was shot in the stomach in a confrontation with police. Police officer Herbert Haines was also seriously wounded. Officer John Fry died from gunshots believed to be from a police revolver. With the death of a policeman, government pressures on the young organization intensified. Newton was charged with first degree murder. He maintained he had been framed.

HUEY NEWTON: In America, black people are treated very much as are the Vietnamese people, or any other colonized people because we're used, we're brutalized, the police in our community occupy our area of our community as a foreign troop occupies territory.

CHARLES O'BRIEN: The Panthers seemed to be in deliberate, open, provocative confrontation with the police departments in their early periods. They used revolutionary language, provocative language and seemed to be deliberately seeking to confront established authority particularly police authority. But then we observed that they seemed to have a social side, a concept of doing something beyond these angry confrontations.

NARRATOR: The Panthers called themselves a revolutionary organization. The ten point program was their blueprint for change.

BOBBY SEALE: And we wrote out this program. We want power to determine our own destiny in our own black communities, immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, was point number seven. The right to have juries of our peers in the courts, what have you. We summed it up, we wanted land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

NARRATOR: The Black Panthers distributed free food and later developed a free breakfast program for children.

TEACHER: Good morning.

CLASS: Good morning.

TEACHER: I can't hear you, good morning.

CLASS: Good morning.

BLACK PANTHER PARTY MEMBER: The idea was obviously twofold for the specific purpose of serving those people who were directly benefited by our programs. But also secondarily, to influence the minds of people to understand not only that the Black Panther party was providing them this, but more importantly, that if they could get food, that maybe they would want clothing, maybe they'd want housing, maybe they'd want land and maybe they would ultimately want some abstract thing called freedom.

NARRATOR: Around the country, particularly in urban areas, young black men and women formed local chapters.

HUEY NEWTON: The party grew much too rapidly because many of the young people were very enthusiastic about the guns and about the berets, but they knew little about the community programs that were really our reason for existing.

NARRATOR: The growing party still faced the dilemma of having its leader, Huey Newton, in prison. Court proceedings attracted national attention, bringing support to the Panthers from an alliance of white and black political organizations.

REPORTER: You're obviously in good spirits, Huey, why?

HUEY NEWTON: Because I have the people behind me and the people are my strength.

NARRATOR: February 17th, 1968, Stokely Carmichael, James Foreman, H. Rap Brown, leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee now joined forces with the Black Panther Party in their call for revolution.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: And so in talking about Brother Huey Newton tonight, we have to talk about the struggle of black people, not only in the United States but in the world today and how he becomes part and parcel of that struggle, how we move on so that our people will survive America.

H. R. BROWN: There is no in between. You're either free or you're a slave. There's no such thing as second class citizenship. The only politics in this country that's relevant to black people today is the politics of revolution, none other.

NARRATOR: April 6, 1968, a gun battle on the streets of West Oakland. Five men were wounded, three police officers and two Panthers. A third Panther, Bobby Hutton, aged 17, was shot to death.

BOBBY SEALE: Black people are now to organize in a fashion where we have maximum retaliation against all forms of racist, police brutality and attacks.

REPORTER: What changes have there been in the Black Panther Party since the gun fight last weekend?

BOBBY SEALE: What you mean what changes? We have a black man that's dead, murdered by pigs, that's the change.

ELAINE BROWN: Here was a man who was saying this, and we are willing to take charge of our lives, we are willing to stand up, we are willing -- I mean, there was the appeal that Malcolm had in many ways that a certain subjective appeal to my psyche and to my emotional need to say, "Yes, there were men in this world who cared, black men, who cared about the community and wanted to do something and were willing to take it to the last degree."

NARRATOR: In the fall of 1968, two years after the party's founding, Huey Newton was convicted of manslaughter in the death of Police Officer Frey, a conviction which was later overturned. With chapters in 25 cities, government surveillance was increasing. The member of the Black Panther Party had reached several thousand and was growing.

BOBBY SEALE: It was a battle, it was a struggle and I think we ... (inaudible) ourselves in, in the sense that we began to get millions of black folks to really look at where were coming from in our stand against the power structure. Now, a lot of people call a revolution a confrontation. Really, what ... (inaudible) our revolution was a need to revolve more political power and economic power back into the hands of the people. That's really what a revolution is.

NARRATOR: The Black Panthers continued their struggle working outside the system. In Brooklyn, New York, black and Latino parents challenged the established order working within the system. They demanded the power to run their neighborhood schools, to improve their children's future.

MOTHER: The children are ready to work. They come to school to work, and when they get to school, the teachers, they don't know what to do. The first thing they say, "We don't understand the children." Well, if they would try to understand the children, these problems wouldn't exist. The children are not stupid. They know, they know when the teachers are there to help them.

REV. C. HERBERT OLIVER: When my family moved here from Birmingham in 1965, they came from totally segregated schools. The children were all black, the teachers were all black, the principals were all black. One of my sons was above the national average in mathematics, but when he came to the schools here in Brooklyn, within one year, he was flunking math. And I went to the school to find out why. The teacher said my son was doing fine. I said, "He's not bringing home assignments and he's flunking math and he came here from Alabama and he was ahead of the national average and you're telling me he's doing fine. Something is wrong."

NARRATOR: In New York City, only half of the children in black and Latino neighborhoods finished high school. To make the schools work for their children, parents in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn planned to take charge. In the beginning, city officials were hopeful.

JOHN LINDSAY: This decentralization plan does for our city schools in New York exactly what any stable, good school in any suburb has, which is to involve the parents sufficiently so they have a stake in the whole process of schools. And that's all we seek to do.

NARRATOR: In 1967 with support from the Ford Foundation, the city made Ocean Hill-Brownsville an experimental district. An interracial governing board elected by the community chose educator Rhody McCoy to lead the experiment. He became the first black superintendent in New York City.

RHODY McCOY: The black people in this community have assumed the responsibility for their schools to try to improve and set the stage for quality education in an urban setting. This was what the experiment was designed to do, and this is the reason that the parents became involved.

RHODY McCOY: It was a joy to go to a board meeting. Not only were the board members present, but the community folk were sitting around. And they had as much input as the board members. And it was always on a positive note. How do we help the youngsters?

NARRATOR: Before the experiment, four out of five teachers in the district were white. Now, younger teachers, a number of them black, transferred to Ocean Hill-Brownsville. The students, 95 percent black and Latino, responded.

KARIMA JORDAN: You felt more accepted. You weren't the outsider in your own school. They were a part of your environment. I mean, they were black, you can identify with them and they can identify with you. Just as simple as that, there's no big mystery.

NARRATOR: At first, the newly formed teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers, supported the experiment. But with administrative decisions now being made by the community, the teachers were worried.

SANDRA FELDMAN: It was supposed to be an experiment and an involvement of teachers and parents. And suddenly, decisions started to get made and no one knew how they were made and when they were made. So it was a lot of wariness on the part of teachers.

NARRATOR: Albert Shanker, the UFT president, questioned where decentralization of the schools might lead.

ALBERT SHANKER: Under the new proposal, teachers and supervisors would be hired on the basis of interview by local people, and this would mean that New York City would be faced with the same problem that a lot of other areas are; namely, where local people don't want whites, there won't be any whites teaching. Where they don't want any blacks, there won't be any blacks. And where they don't want Jews or Italians or Irish or anybody else, we will essentially develop within New York City a series of school systems that are more segregated than the school system is at the present time. And I say that that is the beginning of the destruction of our school system.

NARRATOR: Through the 1967-1968 school year, the community board worked to assemble an integrated teaching staff. Some tenure teachers resisted neighborhood control of schools. The community board faced a dilemma.

JOHN POWIS: In May, the local board had its regular meeting. I guess we were having meetings at that point about every two weeks. And on the agenda that night, McCoy had put an item, the transfer of 13 teachers and also some assistant principals, I guess there was five or six of them.

RHODY McCOY: And we sat down and talked to the governing board members of the school and the principal of the school, and we came to the conclusion that these people were not going to work well in the system. And they had also demonstrated that they were opposed to the experiment.

DOLORES TORRES: We were asking teachers to make an extra effort to get along with our kids, to teach our kids, if there was any problem, to possibly visit in the homes. Well, the union, this wasn't in their contract, they didn't have to do any of these things.

REV. C HERBERT OLIVER: There was discussion, there was disagreement, there was a vote.

JOHN POWIS: And we finally came to the conclusion so that we could have a demonstration district, this was like eight months after it had begun, that some of these people would have to be transferred, would have to go. But again, transferring teachers from one district to another, with the Board of Education, was something that was very ordinary. If a teacher was having problems, you would simply call up the superintendent of schools down at Livingston Street, and the person would be transferred. No questions were asked. But when McCoy tried to do it, of course that created the scene of the century.

NARRATOR: The teachers argued that the transfers were illegal. The city agreed. The dismissed teachers attempted to return to junior high school 271, but community members refused to let them in.

MRS. ROOKE: Mr. Nauman, Mr. Goldberg and Mr., Mr. now what you want here? You received a letter from the governing board, right? This is the parents and the community, so you let your Albert Shanker continue running your lives and keep on making it! You're not coming in this school.

DOLORES TORRES: Well, there's 19, there's all many more, but we figured we'd start slowly. These 19 have been knocking the program, have been causing trouble in the schools. We have people that are telling the black children that the Puerto Ricans are against them, and the Puerto Ricans are against the blacks. We have to take steps to keep these people out, to make sure these people are not allowed in to mis-educate our kids. Because if we allow this, then we're condoning it because we're paying their salaries.

REPORTER: You're sabotaging the classes. Now, I tried to find out what she meant by that. Do you know?

FRED NAUMAN: The charges that were made previously, or the statement that's been made previously is that you're sabotaging the project. Now, if that means questioning some of the actions of the governing board, then we must be guilty for this. We have not been in complete agreement with everything we've done. Obviously, we're not in agreement with what they've done now. At no time had anybody mentioned there was a problem with my service, or for that matter, with any of the people who were named, or certainly the majority of them, I didn't know them all. But here was this letter that ordered me out. So all I can say is I was dumbfounded.

NARRATOR: Three hundred and fifty union teachers walked out of Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools to support the dismissed teachers. The community vowed to keep the schools open and maintain control.

RHODY McCoy: So at one point, the issue was just removing those teachers from our conflict. And now the basic issue has to do with total community control over the schools.

REPORTER: What does that mean, Mr. McCoy?

RHODY McCoy: It means control over the schools; personnel, finance, everything.

REPORTER: Hiring, firing?

RHODY McCoy: Absolutely.

NARRATOR: September, 1968, a year school year. The local board refused to take back the dismissed teachers. The teachers union called a city-wide strike. In the city of New York, education stopped for one million children. But in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, many teachers, black and white, crossed the picket lines in defiance of the union.

MAN: I came into the district because I want to be accountable to the community. If I'm not doing a job, then I want them to kick me out. See, this is the only way that we're going to bring about any change. We have to be accountable to someone. And in the New York City school system, there's no problem, nobody gets fired.

MAN: Well, the strike was a unifying factor in the black community. Groups that had previously been at each others throat found themselves together at rallies and meetings surrounding Ocean Hill. It was an issue that whether you were CORE or the NAACP or the Urban League, or the Black Panther Party, or Republic of New Africa, you could rally around this community issue. Everybody understood the importance of black children receiving a quality education.

MAN: During the strike of 1968, during the fall, probably the place that I spent most of my time was in front of 271. And the scene that I remember there most, and I've often thought of it, is a scene of children coming to school with their books, very intent. And I think they also understood the -- Just what was all going on here.

WOMAN: We came in from the Howard Avenue side, and we had to go through barricades to get to the school. And we'd look up and on the roof tops across the street from the school, the cops were with the helmet gear and the playground was converted into a precinct. And walking up to the school, you have just mass confusion. There are the community people out there, you have the UFT, you were just amazed. You couldn't believe this was happening. You know, and you just went to school.

NARRATOR: The teachers who remained in the classroom looked for new ways to teach the basic skills. Some also brought a new cultural awareness.

WOMAN: And today we're going to talk about the ... (inaudible) culture of west Africa. If we could trace our ancestral line back, most of us would go back to ... (inaudible) tribe.

KARIMA JORDAN: What the black teachers did do was to broaden us, our perspective of looking at things. We were no longer members of a small community called Ocean Hill-Brownsville, we were broadened to W. E. B. Dubois, his readings, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, H. Rap Brown, Mao Tse-tung, the Red Book. I mean, we became international. And it was a good thing because black people are the third world, the third world is much larger than European history.

NARRATOR: Outside of New York City schools, the battle was escalating. Community members questioned the union's commitment to the children. Union leaders charged extremists had taken over the experiment.

ALBERT SHANKER: I think the public sees what's going on and every single parent in the city of New York understands that if Mr. McCoy and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board succeed that they will be next. That there will be people in their own communities who will see this as a model of success and move in and take over these institutions.

NARRATOR: The city ordered the community board to allow the union teachers to return. Neighborhood leaders declared the community would decide.

SONNY CARSON: The community has said it already. They don't want them there, so that means they're not coming in.

REPORTER: Is that because they're white?

SONNY CARSON: I don't know, you'd have to ask the governing board. If it was left up to me, they wouldn't be let in simply because they're white, right.

REPORTER: You would keep them out just because they were white. Why is that?

SONNY CARSON: I certainly would.

REPORTER: Why?

SONNY CARSON: Because I don't think that any white person is interested in giving black children an education. That's my particular feeling.

REPORTER: What if they persist and try to get in here?

SONNY CARSON: Well, by whatever means necessary, they're going to be kept out.

NARRATOR: The teachers union accused the community of anti-Semitism. In a city with a Jewish population of over one million, the charge carried enormous political weight. Although many Jewish teachers crossed picket lines and continued to teach, the accusation threatened city support of the experiment.

TEACHER: It is a well known fact that the overwhelming majority of the teachers in New York City are of the Jewish faith. We have become the butt of their resentment and I think there's but one simple step from resenting white people to resenting Jewish people since most of the teachers are Jewish.

FRED NAUMAN: I didn't feel then, I don't feel now, that anti-Semitism was a major part of that situation. It was a black-white confrontation. A lot of the teachers involved were Jewish, though some people drew that conclusion from the start.

REPORTER: Reverend Oliver, what about the business of anti-Semitism, and what kind of scars do you think this is going to leave?

REV. C. HERBERT OLIVER: Yes, there will be scars left, it seems, because so many untruths floating around. But people must -- The teachers must realize that the communities must be heard. The people of the community must be heard, and it apparently does not sit well with them to have to reckon with the local communities, but they will have to. And it's unfortunate that scars must come, but we have had 300 years of scars, and it's about time those scars were healing.

NARRATOR: The community board refused to give up control of the classrooms.

REV. MAY: All of the people who care about children are here. The teachers are here, white and black teachers are here. There are some white teachers who are supporting us. We are grateful to all of our friends and all people who believe in fairness to black and white people. Come in children, come in children.

NARRATOR: October, 1968. Fearing a continuation of the city-wide strikes, the New York City Board of Education suspended the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community board.

BERNARD DONOVAN: Mr. McCoy has indicated to me clearly that he intends to obey the directions of the suspended Ocean Hill-Brownsville school board and not those of the Board of Education or the Superintendent of Schools. It is necessary, therefore, for me to relieve Mr. McCoy of his duties.

NARRATOR: Confrontations broke out in other New York neighborhoods as blacks and Latinos protested the city's withdrawal of support for community control of schools.

MAN: This is a struggle against educational colonialism. They took over the school again.

MAN: We were here, these were our people trying to run our schools. Now in defiance of that, the white community has said you got to cool it man until we can give it to you. They're not going to give us a darn thing, we're going to take what belongs to us. We're going to take what belongs to us.

NARRATOR: The city and the teachers union agreed, the experiment must end. The community board's power was taken away. But in the neighborhoods, many were moved by the struggle of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community. From New York's five boroughs, thousands marched to city hall in support of community control of schools.

MAN: There was a lot of disappointment on the part of all of us, and I think we felt extremely bad. We had put an awful lot of effort into this. But I think this was a period -- The '60s were such an incredibly interesting period that I think we realized also that something really good had happened.

MAN: You have to understand that these were community people who were disenfranchised with the system, who were nameless and faceless, who had never been incorporated and included even though their children were mandated to go to school. For them to take on that responsibility was tremendous.

NARRATOR: The demonstrators then headed across the Brooklyn Bridge to march to Board of Education headquarters in support of the community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

WOMAN: There was a lot of people yelling black power, black power, power to the people. Power to the people I liked because I think that what we were going through, any poor neighborhood, regardless of the ethnic makeup, is ... (inaudible) the same thing. I liked power to the people. People really needed to have some power, and we really needed, as the school board, to have power.

NARRATOR: It was 1968, communities across America, each choosing different paths, organized in the struggle for power. Power to the people was a promise as old as the nation. Now, new voices demanded that the promise be fulfilled.